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Edmund Ruffin: Classic fire-eater and proslavery crusader. (Volumes I and II)

Schwartz, Harry, Ph.D.

City University of New York, 1990

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EDMUND RUFFIN: CLASSIC FIRE-EATER AND PROSLAVERY CRUSADER

by

HARRY SCHWARTZ

Volume I

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in History in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York.

1990

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Abstract

EDMUND RUFFIN: CLASSIC FIRE-EATER AND PROSLAVERY CRUSADER

by

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Adviser: Professor Edward Pessen

This dissertation is an intensive examination of Ruffin's fire-eating and proslavery ideologies. Ruffin, along with other classic fire-eaters, viewed Southern honor and interests enmeshed in a dialectic whereby submission to Northern antislavery infringements was both dishonorable and injurious. He believed that secession alone could safeguard the slaveholders' prerogatives and avert their political thralldom to the North. But Southern honor transcended Southern interests. Although he professed that disunion would be peaceful and expressed confidence that the South could handily win any war that unexpectedly erupted, Ruffin was avowedly willing to risk a calamitous civil war and the utter devastation of his beloved South to vindicate Southern honor. Yet, Ruffin repeatedly endeavored to goad the South into adopting reformist measures to preserve slavery within the Union. While some of Ruffin's reformist programs (e.g., his 1850 proposal to divide California horizontally) were disguised recipes for disunion, others (e.g., his periodic exhortations to permit slave testimony) were compatible with the Union. Ruffin's belligerent and reformist streaks persisted through the Civil War.

A similar hybrid of aggressive militancy and defensive hesitancy marked Ruffin's proslavery ideology. Ruffin unabashedly proclaimed the moral and economic superiority of slavery. He devised schemes for the banishment or enslavement of free blacks. He flirted with reopening the African slave trade. And he even appeared to advocate the enslavement of whites. Nevertheless, beneath his exaltation of the blessings of bondage lurked undercurrents of negativism and pessimism. At times, Ruffin unwittingly revealed that he deemed bondage a curse to the slave. Moreover, the very framework from which Ruffin, as well as other proslavery theoreticians, rationalized slavery--Christianity, utilitarianism, and Malthusianism--set moral and temporal limits on the "blessings" of bondage. The upshot of Ruffin's proslavery effusions was not that slavery was intrinsically desirable as a "positive good" but that the institution was preferable or less evil than what he deemed to be the only alternatives: the perpetual sloth of primitive barbarism on the one hand and the chronic toil and insecurity of modern capitalism on the other.

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Introduction

Almost four decades ago, the distinguished American historian Allan Nevins, discussing the fire-eaters' goals during the 1860 National Democratic Convention in Charleston, commented, "just how far the Southern extremists, taking their courage in their hands, wished to proceed--just how much they hoped for party schism as opening the way to national disunion--just how ready they were for war--it is impossible to say except by examining one individual after another; and difficult to say even then." [1] Nevin's perceptive observation about the fire-eaters' inner convictions in the spring of 1860 may be applied with equal cogency to a host of fundamental issues about the fire-eaters throughout the antebellum era. Were the fire-eaters flaming radicals recklessly bent on disunion as an intrinsically desirable goal even if it brought ruinous civil war? Were the fire-eaters frustrated neurotics or political opportunists? Or were they sincere ideologues who perceived the Union as a threat to their cultural ethos? Did their espousal of secession emanate from a romantic desire to unleash the latent nationalist potentialities of the Southern people or from a keen sensitivity to Southern honor and an unflinching determination to safeguard Southern interests?

Similar questions may be posed about the proslavery crusaders of the Old South. Were they guilt-ridden slaveholders overcompensating their compunctions by militant

proclamations of slavery as a positive good or class-conscious slaveholders elaborating a mature ideology? Were they alienated intellectuals seeking social integration or displaced aristocrats indulging in nostalgic fantasies? Or were the proslavery promoters chiefly pragmatic propagandists aiming to reinforce Southern orthodoxy or convert Northern skeptics?

Such issues can be explored by studying one of the Old South's premier fire-eaters and proslavery crusaders, namely Edmund Ruffin. A longtime agricultural reformer, Ruffin proselytized the slavery and secesionist causes during the 1850s in publications, speeches, and private conversations. Many of Ruffin's private letters were destroyed in the Civil War. Most of his surving correspondence is held by the Virginia Historical Society in manuscript form. The Southern Historical Collection has a microfilm copy of the same collection. The Library of Congress has both the original manuscript and a microfilm copy of Ruffin's invaluable diary, which spans from October 1856 to June 1865. William K. Scarborough has performed a valuable service in editing the bulk of Ruffin's diary.[2] Avery O. Craven and Betty L. Mitchell have written useful, though inadequate, biographies of Ruffin, which piqued my interest in this particular Southern extremist. Ruffin is a good vehicle through which to reexamine both the proslavery and secessionist ideologies. Although Ruffin was in many ways an atypical fire-eater and proslavery writer, an intensive

dissection of his life and thoughts will have significant implications for our understanding of antebellum Southern history, particularly the origins of the Civil War.

* * * * *

The term "fire-eater" is strewn across the pages of historical works on antebellum American history. The term is a synomym for Southern radicals in the era before the Civil War. But historians have disagreed on the qualifications of a fire-eater. Some historians, such as William L. Barney and William J. Cooper, have narrow visions, confining fire-eaters to those Southerners who had become committed to secession as a desirable plan of action by 1850. Accordingly, they limit the fire-eater appellation to a handful of figures like Robert Barnwell Rhett, Edmund Ruffin, William Lowndes Yancey, and John Anthony Quitman.[3] Others scholars, such as Roy F. Nichols and Avery O. Craven, have broad visions, encompassing within the fire-eater category Southerners who merely threatened secession if a Republican became president, Democrats who considered the territorial policy and political aspirations of Stephen A. Douglas a threat to Southern interests, or individuals who simply articulated a strong Southern rights position in the 1850s. These historians include as fire-eaters a variety of Union-loving Calhounists such as Robert M.T. Hunter for whom secession was a last resort, dedicated slavery expansionists such as Pierre Soulé, and even eleventh-hour disunionists like Howell Cobb.[4]

The problem of defining and classifying fire-eaters is complicated by the fact that historians occasionally append the fire-eater label to individuals who do not meet their own criteria or withhold the fire-eater designation from individuals who do. Ulrich B. Phillips, for example, defined fire-eating as persistent secessionist advocacy but included such men as Louic T. Wigfall and David L. Yulee in the fire-eater category. Conversely, Avery O. Craven's The Growth of Scuthern Nationalism viewed as radicals Southerners who threatened disunion in 1856 or 1860 if a Republican president was elected but inexplicably excluded Milledge L. Bonham.[5] Additionally, historians sometimes slip into the loose construction of fire-eating after defining the term strictly. For example, Clement Eaton, in an early essay, emphatically limited fire-eaters to those Southerners who sought a Republican presidential victory in 1856 in order to rouse the South from her lethargy. But later Eaton broadened his conception of fire-eating to strong Southern rights exponency, particularly opposition to Douglas in 1860. Conversely, David M. Potter's early book, Lincoln and His Party in the Secession Crisis, implicitly viewed fire-eaters as disunionist braggarts, who used secession as "a mere rhetorical weapon." But Potter's last book, The Impending Crisis, viewed fire-eaters as longstanding, earnest secessionists.[6]

The historical confusion partly reflects the antebellum disarray. In the prewar period, numerous Southerners

commonly somersualted back and forth from Unionist to disunionist rhetoric and from moderate to radical stances. Jefferson Davis, Albert Gallatin Brown, Robert Toombs, Herschel V. Walker, James L. Orr, James Henry Hammond, Henry A. Wise, and Roger A. Pryor are some well-known examples. Nineteenth-century Unionists did not scruple to examine the consistency or longevity of their foes' secessionist credentials before labelling them "fire-eaters." Many historians have followed the contemporary nomenclature and designated such acrobatic Southerners as fire-eaters. To clarify matters, Robert E. May has recently suggested that the broad group be called "inconsistent fire-eaters" and the narrow one "pure fire-eaters." [7] But the loose sense of fire-eaters has become deeply ingrained in the historical consciousness. And fire-eater consistency was rare. Both the narrow and broad conceptions of fire-eating are imperfect. On the one hand, the narrow view of fire-eating as a serious secessionist commitment by 1850 is marred by its very exclusivity since only a handful of nationally prominent Southerners would qualify. As May himself recognizes, there were few, if any, "pure" fire-eaters. On the other hand, the broad view of fire-eating as strong Southern rights advocacy, marked by sporadically vehement disunion threats, is flawed by its indiscriminate comprehensiveness. Any definition of radicalism which encompasses under the same rubric individuals as diverse as Edmund Ruffin and Henry Wise has limited utilty.

Under these circumstances, it seems sensible to retain both conceptions of fire-eating. What would be helpful, I believe, is for historians to define the term explicitly and adhere to their definition. To avoid confusion, I shall refer to those Southerners qualifying under the strict definition as classic, quintessential, or ultra fire-eaters. But both the broad and narrow conceptions of fire-eating should be used cautiously. The loose criterion that Southern radicalism involved making conditional secession threats should be limited to the period before Lincoln's election. Last-minute disunionists such as Howell Cobb are not appropriately classified as fire-eaters. Conversely, the strict criterion should not be made too confining. If fire-eating were defined, for instance, as the consistent agitation for unconditional secession from the 1850 crisis onwards, then no prominent Southerner would qualify. Notwithstanding their private disunion proclivities, neither Ruffin nor Quitman publicly advocated unconditional secession in the 1850 period. In the 1850s Yancey underwent distinct Unionist phases. And even the pillar of fire-eater orthodoxy, Barnwell Rhett, was silent for most of the decade. Rather, the narrow conception should view fire-eating as the relinquishment of hope of securing Southern rights within the Union by 1850 and consequent efforts to prepare the South for secession. Thus Edmund Ruffin, along with Rhett, Yancey, and Quitman, was a classic fire-eater. Whether other prominent individuals (such as

James D.B. DeBow) who are often denominated fire-eaters by historians qualify under the narrow conception of the term is a matter of intensive biographical research and quite difficult to determine, since classification partly depends upon their private views, the records of which do not fully survive.

The general histories have typically portrayed the fire-eater, especially the ultra radical, as an intransigent extremist, who was eagerly desirous and assiduously promotive of secession. Several historians have depicted the fire-eaters as secessionists per se, who yearned for disunion as a goal in itself even if slave interests could be secured in the Union. Several historians have viewed the fire-eaters as Southern nationalists, anxious to unleash the dormant potentialities of a distinct and superior people. Revisionist historians, deeming the Civil War a needless tragedy, isolate the fire-eaters as aberrant Southerners and anomalous hotheads needlessly fueling sectional flames. In revisionist accounts, the fire-eater emerges primarily as a character type, an extremist personality swept away by "blind emotionalism." Unsurprisingly, the standard revisionist writings impute sordid motives to the fire-eaters' secessionist commitment. George Fort Milton and Roy F. Nichols, for example, contend that most of the radicals were driven by political opportunism, the quest for public office in a new Southern confederacy.[8]

A more sophisticated interpretation is William L.

Barney's portrayal of the classic fire-eaters as "social and politicial outsiders," who compensated for their status declension, psychological frustration, and political isolation by adopting the agitator role. A variety of personal traumas, such as financial setbacks and the death of close relations, were added spurs to their militancy. Robert E. May, however, has recently pointed out the shortcomings of Barney's hypothesis. First, the "maladjusted outsider" description does not fit all of the ultra fire-eaters, especially Quitman. Second, many individuals who were inconsistent disunionists (e.g., Pierre Soulé) or even consistent Unionists (e.g., Sam Houston) can also be seen as "outsiders." Third, the connection between outsider status and psychological maladjustment on the one hand and political extremism on the other hand is quite tenuous. Status declension or the death of one's children, for example, could just as easily have engendered strident Unionism--out of a desire to hold unto something lost. In fact, many of the "Southern Mugwumps" William R. Taylor identifies in his book, Cavalier and Yankee, were Unionists. Barney has not shown that the fire-eaters were peculiarly beset with unusual personal frustrations which did not affect Southern moderates and conservatives, much less that the fire-eaters' secessionist quest stemmed from their psychological afflictions. Finally, May cogently argues that political extremism could hamper, rather than adavance, political careers. Quitman, for example, tempered his

radicalism during his campaigns for state and national offices.[9]

Although Barney's thesis is inadequate as an all-embracing explanation for fire-eater motivation, it is not entirely devoid of merit if qualified and refined. Many of Barney's insights apply to the classic fire-eaters in general and to Edmund Ruffin in particular: disdain for political pragmatism; voracious craving for popular acclaim; a subjective feeling of public rejection; the self-image of a persecuted prophet and martyr; the scapegoating of Yankees; and the solace of agitation for personal travails. While no mechanistic causal connection should be posited between Ruffin's private and public lives, they were hardly unrelated. Some of Ruffin's character traits and personal crises did not so much impel his adoption of the fire-eater persuasion as shape his expression of this persuasion. Southerners who shared the fire-eater ideology did not automatically become devoted disunionist crusaders for several years. Ruffin's confessed boredom, his excess of nervous energy, and his insatiable need for recognition may have spurred him to proselytize the secessionist dogma, years after his conversion to radicalism. The family tragedies Ruffin suffered in the 1850s intensified his gloomy outlook and expanded his domestic void. While Ruffin did not consciously devise secessionist agitation as an escape from his personal travails, his immersion in the secession crusade could alleviate his periodic melancholia.

Additionally, while Ruffin's political alienation--his "outsider" status--propelled neither his conversion to radicalism nor his fire-eating crusade, his disdain for politics and antipathy to the major parties left fewer roadblocks in his path to secessionism. Had Ruffin been endowed with greater oratorical abilities or a weaker conscience, he may well have become a successful politician instead of resigning summarily from the Virginia Senate in the 1820s. The enjoyment of insider status in the federal councils might have inhibited the growth of a radical persuasion. Yet even the "outsider" Ruffin discovered that he could not openly and consistently champion secession in the 1850s, especially in Virginia. On many occasions, Ruffin was forced to accommodate to the temper of his audience in order to be taken seriously. In spite of his outsider position, Ruffin had to package his secessionist programs as schemes of conditional and reformist Unionism.

The historical stereotype of the fire-eaters as frustrated and hotheaded opportunists has conduced to the relative neglect of fire-eater ideology. A major historical interpretation of the ideology of the fire-eaters is that they were Southern nationalists. In his influential Romanticism and Nationalism in the Old South, Rollin G. Osterweis viewed Southern secession as part of the nineteenth-century nationalistic movement. Southern radicals, such as Ruffin and Yancey, sought to give political expression to their nationalist consciousness by

embodying the South, which they perceived as a distinct and superior culture, in a separate nation-state. Conceding that the perception of a homogeneous South descending from Cavalier-Norman ancestry was mythological, Osterweis argued that such mythology typified contemporary European romantic nationalism. Though Osterweis designated as Southern nationalists such classic fire-eaters as Ruffin, Yancey, and Quitman, he argued that South Carolina cooperationists were the primary repositories of nationalist aspirations, as they eschewed separate state action and sought a Southern confederation. Additionally, Osterweis argued that by 1860 Carolinian states' rights separatists such as Rhett had become Southern nationalists, as they spoke of the organic differences between Northerners and Southerners which made political unity impossible and secession desirable.[10] But the evidence Osterweis cited is insufficient. The Carolinian cooperationist/separatist controversy was not a romantic disagreement about the desirability of a Southern confederation based on differential degrees of exposure to contemporary European poets but a strategic debate about how to best effect Southern independence, the desideratum of all parties. Likewise, the perceived cultural differences between the sections did not by themselves mandate separation; rather, increasing Northern power and antislavery hostility both engendered speculations of Southern distinctiveness and rendered sectional comity impossible.

Some historians, such as William R. Taylor, have upheld the unadulterated Southern nationalist interpretation--with meager evidence and unpersuasive argumentation.[11] Other historians, such as Avery O. Craven, have diluted the meaning of nationalism by identifying Southern nationalism with the pervasive belief among Southerners in the cultural superiority of their section and concomitant attempts to promote the cultural independence of the South in the 1850s.[12] But strident sectionalism was not equivalent to secessionism. Moreover, many historians use the terms "fire-eater" and "Southern nationalist" interchangeably and thereby make all fire-eaters into Southern nationalists by a sort of historical fiat. In fact, so common has this facile equation of fire-eaters and Southern nationalists become that the only full-scale published study of the fire-eaters uses the term "Southern nationalist" in its title.[13]

John McCardell's The Idea of a Southern Nation: Southern Nationalists and Southern Nationalism, 1830-1860 associates Southern nationalism with racist proslavery ideology, expansionist filibustering expeditions, agitation to revive the African slave trade, and promotion of Southern cultural self-sufficiency. But, as McCardell at times seems to realize, these themes cannot be equated with fire-eating since many moderates held such positions, while many fire-eaters rejected them. For example, the moderate Alexander H. Stephens favored slavery expansionism and filibustering engagements, whereas many South Carolina

fire-eaters such as Barnwell Rhett viewed tropical expansion as a distraction. The leading fire-eaters, Rhett, Ruffin, and Yancey, had complex and changing views on the reopening of the slave trade. Most importantly, the holding of such positions was not the essence of fire-eating. Quitman's filibustering involvement, for instance, was not an index or a simple reflex of his secessionist commitment. By focussing on tangential themes, McCardell loses sight of the main issue: the nature and extent of the fire-eaters' secessionist commitment. McCardell's book exemplifies the superficial treatment fire-eaters have received from many historians.

A more promising approach to understanding the classic fire-eaters has been indirectly suggested by recent works on slavery and Southern culture. In his comprehensive and elaborate analysis of slavery in world history, Slavery and Social Death, Orlando Patterson contends that dishonor was part of the essence of enslavement. Slavery was essentially not an economic relation of labor exploitation but a social relation of extreme domination. Slavery enhanced the honor of the powerful master and degraded the powerless slave. All societies where slavery was important developed honorific cultures.[14] Betram Wyatt-Brown, quite independently, has developed the honorific nature of antebellum Southern culture in Southern Honor and has even sketched some of the connections between "Honor and Secession" in a subsequent essay. Like Patterson,

Wyatt-Brown views Southern honor as embedded in slaveholding and personal autonomy as a main ingredient of honor.

Wyatt-Brown, moreover, views the secessionists as espousing a militant and primal brand of honor which demanded the vigorous maintenance of reputation and manhood. Southern radicals, who identified with the South, felt personally degraded by Northern antislavery. Wyatt-Brown argues that the radicals portrayed death in defense of community as honorable and submission as disgraceful. In the critical winter of 1860-1861, the radicals used the communal nature of Southern honor to persuade many Unionists to join them and to intimidate others into silence. Wyatt-Brown indicates at different points, without fully developing his insights, how the dynamics of honor, in the radicals' mind, could both accord and diverge from Southern interests. The works of Patterson and Wyatt-Brown provide a fruitful basis for an intensive exploration of Ruffin as both an ultra fire-eater and a proslavery ideologue.[15]

* * * * *

The proslavery ideology has attracted more historical attention than the secessionist ideology. Several interpretive studies have been published since William Sumner Jenkins' largely narrative account, Pro-Slavery Thought in the Old South, appeared over a half century ago. Jenkins found little distinctive in the proslavery ideology of the antebellum South; downplaying the extent and depth of the "necessary evil" apologia of the Revolutionary and

Jeffersonian eras, Jenkins viewed the "positive good" ideology as a militant and comprehensive systematization of old arguments.[16]

In marked contrast to Jenkins, the historians Louis Hartz, Charles Grier Sellers, Jr., and Ralph Morrow have argued that the antebellum South could not overcome its Christian and Revolutionary heritage, which regarded slavery as a religious, moral, and political evil. For Hartz, the proslavery ideology was an absurd attempt to engraft a feudalist ideology of social organicism upon a capitalist society. Southerners were not chivalric knights but plantation capitalists. Proslavery ideologues repeatedly betrayed themselves. The Southern chivalry discussed the profitability of slavery. The social organicists supported free trade. Specifically, the great Southern leader John C. Calhoun rejected Lockean natural rights philosophy in favor of social organicism only to outdo the founders in seeking mechanical solutions (e.g., concurrent majority) to safeguard slavery in the Union. James H. Hammond adopted hierarchic feudalism only to embrace a racism compatible with liberal democracy for Southern whites. And even that most incisive assailant of free labor capitalism, George Fitzhugh,--whom Hartz views as the most consistent and impressive of the proslavery ideologues--opted for industrializing the South. What Hartz brilliantly succeeded in showing was that the practical defense of Southern slavery was diametrically opposed to the philosophical

defense of the institution. The proslavery ideology Hartz concluded, rather simplistically, was a "fraud."[17]

Like Hartz, Sellers discussed the contradiction between the racist democratic and the feudal paternalist defense of slavery. Additionally, Sellers argued that well into the antebellum era the South was suffused with guilt over slaveholding. Sellers inferred Southern guilt from the continuing popularity of manumission, the disrepute of slave traders and overseers, and the 1850s movement to reform Southern slavery (e.g., legalization of slave marriages). A combination of guilt and political strategy, the need to combat militant abolitionism, Sellers concluded, generated the "positive good" ideology. Similarly, Ralph E. Morrow pointed to the admission by various proslavery writers that the South was not fully convinced of the morality of slaveholding. And he stressed the political and religious arguments to suggest that proslavery propagandists sought to overcome the tenacious Revolutionary and Christian legacies of their Southern audience. Also, Morrow perceptively noted--a point which requires emphasis--that the "positive good" terminology carried "profound psychological meaning."[18]

Subsequent historians have discerned neither fraud nor guilt among antebellum Southerners. Eugene D. Genovese, almost alone, views the proslavery ideology as a reflection of the precapitalist nature of Southern slave society--hierarchic, organic, paternalistic, antimaterialistic, aristocratic, and honorific. For Genovese, unfettered

capitalism, planter residency, and the early suppression of the slave trade led to the development of a uniquely patriarchal slave society in the Old South. Far from being a fraudulent imposture artificially superimposed upon an incongruous society, the positive good creed was an authentic ideological reflection of social reality, the "maturation" of the slaveholders' class consciousness. Genovese ascribes the paradoxes Hartz eagerly unraveled to the imperfect nature of Southern slavery and to intrusive capitalist relations. Political liberalism, for example, reflected the existence of the poor whites. Likewise, Southerners sought to protect slavery from a capitalist world by calling for industrialization, a retreat to provincial autarky. George Fitzhugh emerges as the quintessential proslavery philosopher, who carried the assumptions of proslavery ideology to their logical conclusion. Whereas many proslavery thinkers anticipated his moralistic critique of free labor, Fitzhugh alone recognized that the survival of slavery required the destruction of world capitalism. Whereas other proslavery ideologues jettisoned elements of classical liberalism and political economy, Fitzhugh alone directed his artillery at the underlying capitalist ethos of competitive individualism and unabashedly overthrew all of its ideological manifestations--Thomas Jefferson's liberalism, Adam Smith's economics, and the Protestant Reformation.[19]

David Donald propounded an important but quite

different interpretation of the proslavery ideology. For Donald, the proslavery ideologue was typically, like Edmund Ruffin, a frustrated, maladjusted, ambitious individual who suffered status declension. And the proslavery ideology was his ideational means of recovering his lost leadership. Donald interprets the proslavery attack on urban, commercial, democratic culture not as an authentic expression of a precapitalist culture but as a sentimental attempt to recapture a mythical, bygone era of "cohesion, unity, and grace." That proslavery defenders painted roseate pictures of slavery despite their admission of abuses indicates to Donald that the primary goal of proslavery literature was not practical defense but nostalgic indulgence. Far from representing a mature slaveholding ideology, the proslavery defense, for Donald, was a narcissistic expression of status declension by maladjusted individuals.[20]

Several other historians have also challenged Genovese's thesis. George M. Fredrickson has argued that the primary justification of slavery was not the patriarchal ideology, which portrayed blacks as children in a seigneurial family setting, but a rabid racial rationale, which depicted blacks as a separate, animalistic species. The nature of Southern society--the presence of nonslaveholding masses in a democracy--required arguments suitable with white equality. The "hard" racism of a George S. Sawyer or a Samuel A. Cartwright enabled the preservation

of a "Herrenvolk democracy." The paternalist defenses were at most limited to old conservative states such as Virginia. But even here, Fredrickson points out, paternalists like Ruffin and Fitzhugh ultimately succumbed to racism. Thus both Genovese and Fredrickson seized upon one of the proslavery strains discussed by Hartz. Whereas Genovese stressed the paternalist strain, Fredrickson dwelt upon the racial defense, consistent with democratic liberalism. What Genovese dismissed as mere politics, Fredrickson highlighted as the central proslavery rationale.[21]

If Fredrickson qualifies the paternalist elements of the proslavery ideology, Lawrence Shore dismisses them altogether. The proslavery ideology, Shore argues, increasingly gravitated to the new discipline of political economy. For Shore, the economic defense of slavery was eminently bourgeois, an ideological expression of the capitalist nature of Southern slavery. Accordingly, the quitessential slavery ideologue was not the anticapitalist paternalist George Fitzhugh but the bourgeois slaveholder Edmund Ruffin. The typical proslavery strategy, as exemplified by Ruffin, was to accept the principles of Adam Smith about the general superiority of free labor but to except the South. Such peculiar conditions as the semi-tropical climate, cotton and sugar production, and a black labor force made slavery profitable for the South alone. Far from elaborating paternalistic arguments, Southerners dwelt upon the economic benefits of slavery to

white masters. The principal economic benefit, as Ruffin argued, was to free the slaveholders from drudgery and promote their intellectual refinement. This "leisure class" argument was not a revivification of an archaic, precapitalist relic but an embodiment of the Smithian conception of the ideal bourgeois--a culturally refined businessman rather than a crass materialist. Shore thus turns Genovese on his head: the proslavery ideology was an authentic social expression--not of a slave society but of a capitalistic economy.[22]

Bertram Wyatt-Brown also perceives a shift to arguments of political economy by proslavery theorists. But whereas Shore explains the shift as necessitated by the increasingly evident superiority of the Northern economy, Wyatt-Brown contends that Southern cultural values dictated the abandonment of the previous religious defense. Wyatt-Brown argues that Southerners appealed to Northern and British "respectability" and sought integration into the nineteenth-century Western ethos. Accordingly, the proslavery defense initially resonated with progressive, optimistic evangelical themes and eschewed archaic, parochial, honorific values. Rather than discussing, much less exalting, Southern martial pursuits, for example, proslavery ideologues argued that the South had less brothels than the North. Moreover, the proslavery ideology, by a combination of missionary effort and individual conscience, promised a Christian reform of Southern slavery.

But as this evangelical defense clashed with Southern honorific values (e.g., conformity, community, and tradition), the South in the 1850s switched to political economy. Unfortunately, Wyatt-Brown did not indicate how political economy dovetailed with honor in a way Christianity did not. Perhaps, Wyatt-Brown would argue that the "leisure-class" argument was consistent with both Southern honorific and Northern capitalistic values.[23]

If Shore attempted to integrate the proslavery ideology into classical political economy, Kenneth S. Greenberg tried to integrate it into classical republicanism. Proslavery theorists, Greenberg argues, portrayed the master in republican terms as the virtual representative of his slave community. The slavery defenders never defended unrestricted power, the antithesis of liberty; they denied that Southern masters held absolute power over their slaves. Southern slavery, they insisted, was limited to labor extraction; slaveholders did not own their thralls as chattels. Moreover, proslavery writers contended that an unwritten constitution or "compact" of reciprocal obligations governed master-slave relations. In exchange for slave labor, the master was "obligated" to support his slaves throughout their lives. The legal system, public opinion, and especially economic self-interest enforced the masters' duties. Furthermore, the proslavery theorists' repeated declarations that the slaves were content with bondage, that the blacks themselves would choose slavery,

were designed to demonstrate that slavery operated with the consent--albeit tacit--of the governed! Many propagandists, Greenberg adds, used such terms as "servants" or "warantees" rather than "slaves," or else they defined slavery so loosely as to encompass limited power relationships. The proslavery ideology, Greenberg concludes, was more a defense of liberty than of bondage; the proslavery argument "was really framed as an antislavery argument." Greenberg's intriguing interpretation of the proslavery argument as covertly antislavery goes too far. After all, the popular proslavery argument that the organic master-slave relation prevented cruelty was not an attack on absolute power as such or a denial of its existence in the South but an assurance that it would be exercised benevolently. In any event, Greenberg accepts paternalism as the key proslavery defense but tries to integrate it into American republican values.[24]

Larry E. Tise places the proslavery ideology of the Old South in the context of the proslavery thought which existed in the American colonies from the start of the eighteenth century. Tise finds nothing new in the paternalistic economic arguments advanced by antebellum "positive good" ideologues. Comparisons between the plight of slaves and free laborers, for instance, had abounded in British and Caribbean eighteenth-century proslavery literature. What distinguished the "positive good" school of the Old South, Tise argues, was its adoption of the conservative political

and social ideology of New England Federalism. The Federalist repudiation of Jeffersonian liberalism was transmitted to the South by her scions' attendance of conservative Northern universities and by transplanted Northern missionaries who proselytized their creed in the South in the 1820-1835 period. Instead of seeing proslavery thought as a divisive force, Tise contends that it was a national ideology and suggests that historians exploring the causes of the Civil War search elsewhere than slavery! Indeed, whereas the articulate slaveholder was the arch proslavery theoretician for Genovese, the Northern minister becomes the prototypical proslavery ideologue for Tise. Thus, far from the dynamics of an organic slave society peculiar to the nineteenth-century South generating a unique patriarchal ethos, Tise views "positive good" thought as pervasive among British slave societies at all periods and perversely makes New England Federalism to be the bedrock of the idiosyncratic features of proslavery thought in the Old South. Unfortunately, Tise offers only circumstantial evidence to substantiate some of his contentions and misuses statistics to establish others.[25]

Perhaps the most sophisticated interpretation of the proslavery ideology, which accounts for myriad elements of the Southern creed within the nineteenth-century national experience, is Drew Gilpin Faust's A Sacred Circle. Like David Donald, Faust views the slavery defenders as suffering a sense of alienation; but she locates the source of this

alienation not in their objective class position as a displaced aristocracy but in their tenuous status as intellectuals. The proslavery ideology, Faust argues, was a bid by Southern intellectuals to boost the prestige of the life of the mind in the Old South. Unlike most historians, who seize on those elements of the variegated proslavery ideology suitable to their particular interpretations (e.g., Genovese on paternalism, Fredrickson on race, Shore on economics), Faust tries to integrate the various facets of the proslavery creed into a coherent interpretation. The religious argument, for example, expressed the intellectual's moral concerns. The scientific arguments (e.g., ethnology) emanated from the intellectual's quest for objective truth.[26]

More importantly, the racist underpinning of slavery, which denigrated the blacks because of their supposed intellectual inferiority, was not a vulgar appeal to the Southern poor whites but an attempt to elevate the prestige of the thinker. The idyllic portrayal of slavery was not a maudlin memory but a call for reform. Additionally, the antimaterialism of the proslavery defender did not reflect the organic master-slave relationship but common intellectual values. Likewise, the paternalistic creed emanated not from the peculiar precapitalist economic position of the Southern slaveholder but from pervasive American values, especially evangelical Protestantism; intellectuals of both sections believed in "stewardship,"

the assumption of social responsibility. The ambivalences and paradoxes of the proslavery ideology stemmed neither from moral compunctions nor capitalist/precapitalist tensions; rather, they illustrated the attempt by American intellectuals to reconcile traditional values with the modernization of the nineteenth century. Men like Edmund Ruffin and William Gilmore Simms emerge as the typical proslavery intellectual. Faust, interestingly enough, disparages Fitzhugh as an unoriginal thinker, who merely recapitulated the staple proslavery arguments but without any respect for the intellect. She argues that the "sacred circle" attacked Fitzhugh as an obnoxious anti-intellectual. Similarly, the circle attacked politicians who profaned the sacred ideology by exploiting it for personal gain.[27]

For all the elasticity of Faust's perception of the proslavery ideologue as an alienated intellectual, her perspective of Ruffin as merely or even primarily an intellectual is too constrictive. Ruffin was much more pragmatic and much less idealistic than the ethereal intellectual of The Sacred Circle. Ruffin was first and foremost a slaveholding planter in the Old South. Ruffin was precisely a materialistic antimaterialist. Such values reflected the Southern cultural ethos: honor based on the ownership of slaves and the accumulation of land, slaves, and wealth. Ruffin epitomized the Southern hybrid: he articulated the honorific values of a slave society and the capitalist values of a market economy. Likewise, Ruffin's

quest for political distinction was not impelled by the intellectual's mission of moral stewardship but by the slaveholding aristocrat's expectation of political honor. Interestingly, Donald was closer to the truth here than Faust. Nor was Ruffin a genuine moral crusader in behalf of intellectual values. He was indifferent, if not hostile, to the intellectual elevation of the masses. And he was conspicuously silent about ameliorating slavery. Ruffin was not in the forefront, or even the background, of the movement to reform slavery in the 1850s.

Moreover, Ruffin's proslavery effusions were not so much abstract philosophical speculations seeking the impartial truth as propapagandistic exercises to fortify the Southern economic and moral commitment to slavery. For example, Ruffin's seemingly scholarly article of 1859 which analyzed the economic impact of high slave prices had the actual but unstated purpose of reviving the African slave trade. As Shore correctly perceived, Ruffin was deeply concerned about political economy. Ruffin feared that the waning profitability of slave agriculture in the border states would make Virginian slaveholders even more vulnerable to the potent antislavery argument, voiced by Southern as well as Northern critics, that free labor was economically superior.

Both Faust and Shore misconstrue Ruffin's position on the economy of slavery. Faust claims that Ruffin, along with the other members of the quintet who composed the

"sacred circle," persistently stressed the relative costliness of slave labor in order to vindicate the moral nature of Southern slavery. Shore considers Ruffin the prototypical proslavery propagandist who conceded the superior economy and productivity of free labor in general
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but excepted the South due to peculiar circumstances. Neither historian appreciates that Ruffin's views evolved from such compromising positions in the early and mid 1850s into an unequivocal defense, both public and private, of the general economic superiority of slave labor. The flimsiness of his arguments and the transparency of his maneuvers are less important than the fact that Ruffin felt compelled to extol the economic virtues of slavery in the abstract. Ironically, it was the "anti-intellectual" Fitzhugh who most stridently repudiated materialistic capitalist values to place slavery on the highest moral plane.

Avery O. Craven and Betty L. Mitchell have written highly readable biographies of Edmund Ruffin. Craven's study is commendable for its understanding of the Old South and empathy for its subject. Mitchell's work is particularly valuable for her psychological insights into Ruffin's character. Both biographies discuss Ruffin's various roles as slaveholding planter, agricultural reformer, proslavery crusader, and fire-eating secessionist. But they are superficial. Neither work adequately analyzes Ruffin's proslavery and secessionist ideologies. Neither

captures the complexity of Ruffin's predicament. The composite portrait of Ruffin that emerges from the current biographies conforms to the prevalent stereotype of an aggressive proslavery secessionist. The portrait is not so much wrong as overdrawn. Both studies understate the discrepancy between Ruffin's private views and public posture on disunion. Ruffin's repeated presentations of conditional Unionist programs and his recurrent reformist phases have either received cursory treatment or complete neglect. However seemingly incongruous or peripheral to disunionism, reformism was a vital concern of Edmund Ruffin. Students of Ruffin have shown no appreciation of the interpretative problem posed by Ruffin's persistent reformist ventures.

Nor do Ruffin's biographers appreciate how their subject's proslavery ideology was limited by its own assumptions. Craven considers the proslavery ideology as "a web of logic which is hard to break." Neither scholar perceives the undercurrents of negativism, some of which flowed from the very nature of Ruffin's defense of slavery. Additionally, several important episodes of Ruffin' life, such as his early anti-tariff endeavors, his mature attitude towards Caribbean expansion, and his convolutions on the African slave trade receive either negligible or insufficient treatment. Given these various lacunae, it is not surprising that Ruffin's biographers have not sufficiently connected, conceptually or empirically, the

various aspects of his life, such as his disunionism, reformism, and defense of slavery, into a coherent mosaic.[29]

* * * * *

Ruffin's exposition of the proslavery ideology cannot be viewed apart from his general crusade in behalf of Southern honor and interests. He was not seeking to overcome his own conscious guilt feelings but to defend Southern honor from Northern aspersions. Ruffin elaborated a multifaceted defense of slavery, which embraced economic, patriarchal, and racist arguments. Several aspects of Ruffin's proslavery defense, most notably his contention that slavery freed Southern farmers from domestic drudgery and his portrayal of blacks as submissive and timid, were consonant with an honorific code. The Southern mystique itself, the pervasive belief in Southern cultural superiority, was an honorific expression of a slaveholding society. Ruffin's simultaneous defense of the paternalist and economic advantages of Southern slavery constituted his attempt to maintain the splendor of the all-encompassing superiority of Southern society. But it was also his attempt to assure Southerners, especially in the border states, where both moral and economic commitment to slavery was waning, of the benevolence and profitability of the peculiar institution.

Ruffin's claim that slavery <u>in general</u> was more economical than free labor was not objectively dictated by the defense of Southern honor or interests. Rather Ruffin,

here, was seeking to carry the logical implications of the "positive good" creed to their ultimate conclusion, to vindicate slavery as a good in the abstract; he tried to do in the economic sphere what his Virginian compatriot George Fitzhugh attempted in the moral sphere. Admitting that slavery was generally evil in any aspect smacked too much of the old "necessary evil" school, which Ruffin not only believed had dominated Southern thought in the early national period but to which he himself had subscribed. Ruffin's quest for ideological purity is also evident in his campaign to bar manumission and colonization, banish or enslave free blacks, and revive the African slave trade. His virulent crusade against free blacks, along with his racial rationale for Southern slavery, shows that Ruffin, no more than Fitzhugh, could separate slavery from race. Ruffin was trying to expunge all vestiges of the discredited perception of slavery as evil. Practical concerns again, however, propelled these ideological dynamics. For example, Ruffin's ambitions to replenish Virginian slavery and incite fierce sectional animosities prompted him to support, though briefly and prudently, the reopening of the foreign slave trade.

Nevertheless, beneath the bellicose posture of "positive good" ideology lurked undercurrents of negativism and pessimism. In fact, the very framework from which Ruffin justified slavery--Christianity, utilitarianism, and Malthusianism--set moral and temporal limits on the

"blessings" of slavery. Notwithstanding his rejection of Puritan dogma, Ruffin retained the core of Puritan gloom. For Southern "positive good" theorists, slavery was required as a necessary hardship by human imperfection. In Ruffin's view, slavery was required to counteract human sloth, a vice from the standpoint of Christianity as well as political economy. Likewise, the relativistic ultilitarian perspective from which Ruffin pronounced slavery preferable to the horrors of British free labor was hardly an assurance of the blessings of bondage. The upshot of comparative political economy was actually that slaves suffered less than proletarians. Indeed, at unguarded moments, Ruffin unintentionally revealed that despite his depiction of slavery as a benefit to the laboring class and a boon to the African race, he deemed bondage a curse to the slave. Finally, Malthusianism, which augured ill for the plight of the free laborer, threatened the inevitable demise of slavery, whether from economic strangulation or servile rebellion. Thus concealed beneath Ruffin's "positive-good" extremism and proslavery perpetualism lay strains of the supposedly forsaken "necessary evil" school.

Ruffin's fire-eating ideology, which he shared with the other classic Southern radicals, posited inevitable collision between Northern antislavery and Southern slavery. Ruffin was far less animated by exuberant visions of Southern glory outside the Union than he was haunted by despondent visions of Southern doom inside the Union. From

the fire-eaters' historical lenses, Northern political power was growing progressively stronger in relation to Southern and abolitionism was increasingly dominating the North. Neither the diminution of the North's antislavery nor the augmentation of the South's political power seemed practicable. Consequently, Ruffin relinquished hope of saving slavery within the Union. He believed that the South had two options: submission or secession. And Ruffin considered secession a preferable and hence desirable alternative to what he thought submission would entail: the abolition of slavery, the amalgamation of the races, and ultimately race war. Secession, Ruffin generally maintained, would be a peaceful process. Any Northern invasion that did occur would be handily repelled by the puissant Southern confederation. The desire to preserve slave institutions was thus a primary stimulus to Ruffin's secessionist quest. Ruffin calculated that secession was a matter of rational self-interest.

The impulse to defend Southern honor, however, ultimately lay behind Ruffin's disunionist yearnings. The danger of the outright abolition of slavery by the North, even after Lincoln's election, was not immediate. Honor lent Ruffin's secessionist drive its peculiar urgency and intensity. Indeed, Ruffin and the classical fire-eaters interpreted Southern interests from the framework of Southern honor. Societies, whether nations or states, were akin to individuals. Submission to oppression, whether

insult or injury, was not merely dishonorable but harmful: it bred further aggression by the assailant and submission by the victim. Conversely, resistance was consistent with interest as well as honor: resistance uplifted the will of the victim and deflated the spirit of the aggressor. Utility emanated from the very nature of honor just as disutility emanated from the very nature of dishonor. It was precisely the abject nature of submission which invited further aggression by the assailant. Similarly, the noble nature of resistance deterred further aggression against the victim. Man naturally respected strength of character and despised weakness. The penalty for submission was enslavement, the reward for resistance was liberty. Freedom was not an inalienable right, intrinsic to the human condition; it was a precious privilege earned by years of struggle. The defiant character of the Southern slaveholder was the logical corollary to the submissiveness of the Southern slave.

The abolitionists, of course, denied the legitimacy of slave property by Christian and humanistic appeals. Slaveholders could repulse--or at least answer--such criticism by economic, paternalistic, and racial appeals. But on a deeper level, the series of Northern antislavery assaults and insults, which Southerners protested but tolerated, fundamentally challenged both the Southerner's right to mastery and his claim to liberty. Ruffin and the classic fire-eaters, who assimilated the honorific ideology,

viewed Southern submission to Northern domination as "vassalage," "bondage," and "enslavement." These were not mere metaphorical flourishes. Submissionism was the unmistakable mark of the thrall. And continued submission by the victim would eventuate in the total domination by the assailant. Southern resistance to Northern aggrandizement would prove her worthy of liberty, a gift bequeathed by her proud Revolutionary forbears; Southern submission to Northern aggression--even to antislavery encroachments which stopped short of abolition--would discredit her right to mastery. Ruffin and his radical colleagues carried the logic of this dynamic to its most extreme scenario: the South had to resist the North to the death--even if such resistance brought utter ruin. While honor and interest were enmeshed in a dialectic, they were not inseparable. The classic fire-eaters were disposed to choose the honor of secession even it conflicted with Southern interests. Although Ruffin generally dismissed the possibility of civil war, he revealed at times that he preferred resistance to Yankeedom, however suicidal, to submission to Yankeedom, however comfortable. The choice of a degraded life over an honorable death had, after all, been made by the slave captive or his ancestor, who chose enslavement as a commutation over death. More than the proslavery creed, the fire-eater ideology was thus the quintessential expression of Southern honorific values.[30]

Notes

(1) Allan Nevins, The Emergence of Lincoln: Prologue to the Civil War, 1859-1861, Vol. II (New York and London, 1950), 176.

(2) Scarborough has adeptly edited the portion of Ruffin's diary which extends from October 1856 to June 1863. William K. Scarborough, The Diary of Edmund Ruffin: Toward Independence, October, 1856 - June, 1861, Vol. I (Baton Rouge, 1972) & William K. Scarborough, The Diary of Edmund Ruffin: The Years of Hope, April, 1861 - June, 1863, Vol. II (Baton Rouge, 1976).

(3) William J. Barney, The Road to Secession: A New Perspective on the Old South (New York, 1972), 85-86; William J. Cooper, Jr., The South and the Politics of Slavery 1828-1856 (Baton Rouge, 1978), 296-298.

(4) Roy F. Nichols, The Disruption of American Democracy (New York, 1948), 65, 69, 122, 165, 234-235, 257; Avery O. Craven, The Growth of Southern Nationalism, 1848-1861, Vol. VI of A History of the South, ed. by Wendell H. Stephenson and E. Merton Coulter (Baton Rouge, 1953), 293-295, 349, 383. Also see George Fort Milton, The Eve of Conflict: Stephen A. Douglas and the Needless War (n.p., 1934; N.Y., 1963), 75, 370-371, 374, 422-423; Allan Nevins, The Emergence of Lincoln: Douglas, Buchanan and Party Chaos, 1857-1859, Vol. I (New York and London, 1950), 345, 415, 425; Nevins, Lincoln, II, 175. One historian composed an ambitious list of thirty fire-eaters but did not define the term. See Emory M. Thomas, The Confederacy as a Revolutionary Experience (Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1971), 23-24, 38-42. An intermediate position is taken by J. Mills Thornton, III, Politics and Power in a Slave Society: Alabama, 1800-1860 (Baton Rouge, 1978), 239-261. Thornton includes some Calhounists but excludes Southern Rights Democrats.

(5) Ulrich B. Phillips, "The Fire-Eaters," in Ulrich B. Phillips, The Course of the South to Secession, ed. by E. Merton Coulter (New York, 1939; Gloucester, Mass., 1958), 135. Craven, Southern Nationalism, 243-245, 361.

(6) Clement Eaton, "Henry A. Wise and the Virginia Fire-Eaters of 1856," Mississippi Valley Historical Review, XXI (March, 1935), 504-505; Clement Eaton, A History of the Old South (New York, 1949), 466, 469; Clement Eaton, A History of the Southern Confederacy (New York, 1959), 2; David M. Potter, Lincoln and His Party in the Secession Crisis (New Haven, 1942), 16; David M. Potter, The Impending Crisis, 1848-1861, ed. by Donald E. Fehrenbacher (New York, 1976), 104-105.

(7) Robert E. May, "Psychobiography and Secession: The Southern Radicals as Maladjusted "Outsider"," Civil War History, XXXIV (March, 1988), 50-56.

(8) Avery O. Craven, The Coming of the Civil War (Chicago, 1942), 274-280; Craven, Southern Nationalism, 243-244, 339-340; Nichols, Disruption, 234, 289; Milton, Conflict, 478-479.

(9) Barney, Road to Secession, 86-97; May, "Psychobiography," 46-69; William R. Taylor, Cavalier and Yankee: The Old South and American National Character (New York, 1961), 55-65.

(10) Rollin G. Osterweis, Romanticism and Nationalism in the Old South (Baton Rouge, 1967), 113-116, 134-153, 207.

(11) William R. Taylor contends that the dynamics of Cavalier mythology inexorably led its exponents to embrace Southern secession. Only his adoption of the Cavalier ethos, Taylor argues, could explain how the Northern Democrat James K. Paulding became an ardent advocate of Southern secession at midcentury. But Taylor does not show that it was Paulding's subscription to the Cavalier myth which transformed him into a disunionist. Significantly, Taylor does not discuss Paulding's political ideology in general and his constitutional theory in particular. Furthermore, such prominent formulators of the Cavalier/Roundhead distinction as John Pendleton Kennedy and William Alexander Caruthers were Whig Unionists. True, Caruthers, who died prematurely of tuberculosis in 1846, could have become a secessionist had he lived longer. But Kennedy, who lived through the Civil War, not only supported the cause of the Union but backed Lincoln in the 1864 election! Clearly, there was no simple causal relation between the Cavalier ethos and disunionism--even among its literary exponents. Taylor, Cavalier, 178-258.

Additionally, Taylor tries to integrate Ruffin into his "Southern nationalist" interpretation by focussing on the fire-eater's intransigent character, bellicose militarism, and concern for Southern purity. Ruffin "was never reconciled to the defeat of the Cavalier ideal" and "became obsessed by the idea of an independent, uncontaminated South and fought against every inroad of what he regarded as Yankeeism." But recalcitrance and belligerence were not ipso facto "Southern nationalist" traits. Taylor does not show that Ruffin's quest for Southern purity antedated, much less prompted, his disunion quest. In fact, Taylor's treatment of Ruffin as a "Southern nationalist" deals solely with the 1859-1865 period and concentrates heavily on the Civil War years and Ruffins' suicide when the Virginian's hatred of the Yankee had reached a crescendo. Taylor, Cavalier, 337-339.

Similarly, Clement Eaton argued that the fire-eaters sought secession to fulfill their grandiose dream of a great Southern empire. Eaton's evidence is limited to a few South Carolinians such as Langdon Cheves and Barnwell Rhett, whose public utterances promising a roseate future for a Southern confederation may have been primarily rhetorical attempts to persuade a reluctant South to join their native state in departing from the Union. Eaton, Old South, 476-477, 504; Eaton, Southern Confederacy, 16.

(12) Craven, Southern Nationalism, passim.

(13) John McCardell, The Idea of a Southern Nation: Southern Nationalists and Southern Nationalism, 1830-1860 (New York, 1979). Also see Lester B. Baltimore, "Southern Nationalists and Southern Nationalism, 1850-1870," (Ph.D. diss., University of Missouri, 1968).

(14) Orlando Patterson, Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study (Cambridge, Mass., and London, 1982), 1-5, 10-13, 77-101. Patterson writes, "The real sweetness of mastery for the slaveholder lay not in profit, but in the lightening of the soul that comes with the realization that at one's feet is another human creature who lives and breathes only for one's self as a surrogate for one's power, as a living embodiment of one's manhood and honor."

(15) Bertram Wyatt-Brown, Southern Honor: Ethics and Behavior in the Old South (New York and Oxford, 1982); Bertram Wyatt-Brown, Yankee Saints and Southern Sinners (Baton Rouge and London, 1985), 184-213. Earlier historical works which perceived that honor was important to understand the Old South in general and secession in particular include John Hope Franklin, The Militant South, 1800-1861 (Cambridge, Mass., 1956), 34-37; & Eugene D. Genovese, The Political Economy of Slavery: Studies in the Economy and Society of the Slave South (New York, 1965), 8, 28, 34-36, 250, 269-270.

(16) William Sumner Jenkins, Pro-Slavery Thought in the Old South (Chapel Hill, 1935).

(17) Louis Hartz, The Liberal Tradition in America: An Interpretation of Political Thought Since the Revolution (New York, 1955), 145-200.

(18) Charles Grier Sellers, Jr., "The Travail of Slavery," in The Southerner as American, ed. by Charles Grier Sellers, Jr., (Chapel Hill, 1960), 40-71; Ralph E. Morrow, "The Proslavery Argument Revisited," Mississippi Valley Historical Review, XLVII (June, 1961), 79-93.

(19) Eugene D. Genovese, The World the Slaveholders

Made: Two Essays in Interpretation (New York, 1969), 95-102, 123-126, 128-131, 157-159, 167-168, 184-188, 192-194, 210-212, 237-239.

(20) David Donald, "The Proslavery Argument Reconsidered," Journal of Southern History, XXXVII (February, 1971), 3-18.

(21) George M. Fredrickson, The Black Image in the White Mind: The Debate on Afro-American Character and Destiny 1817-1914 (New York, 1971), 56-70.

(22) Lawrence Shore, Southern Capitalists: The Ideological Leadership of an Elite, 1832-1885 (Chapel Hill and London, 1986), 3-20, 200-201 notes 29-30, 203 notes 41-42.

(23) Wyatt-Brown, Saints and Sinners, 155-169; Bertram Wyatt-Brown, "Proslavery and Antislavery Intellectuals: Class Concepts and Polemical Struggle," in Antislavery Reconsidered: New Perspectives on the Abolitionists, ed. by Lewis Perry and Michael Fellman (Baton Rouge and London, 1979), 311, 321-329.

(24) Kenneth S. Greenberg, Masters and Statesmen: The Political Culture of American Slavery (Baltimore and London, 1985), 78-81, 85-102.

(25) Larry E. Tise, Proslavery: A History of the Defense of Slavery in America, 1701-1840 (Athens, Georgia and London, 1987).

(26) Drew Gilpin Faust, A Sacred Circle: The Dilemma of the Intellectual in the Old South, 1840-1860 (Baltimore and London, 1977), 113-119, 123-124.

(27) Ibid., 121-123, 126-131. Also see Drew Gilpin Faust, "A Southern Stewardship: The Intellectual and the Proslavery Argument," American Quarterly, XXXI (Spring, 1979), 63-80.

(28) Faust, Circle, 121; Shore, Capitalists, 10, 19, 26. Some historians have perceived that Ruffin argued that slave labor was generally cheaper than free labor. See Hartz, Tradition, 193; & Eric L. McKitrick, ed., Slavery Defended: The Views of the Old South (Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1963), 69.

(29) Avery O. Craven, Edmund Ruffin, Southerner: A Study in Secession (New York and London, 1932) & Betty L. Mitchell, Edmund Ruffin: A Biography (Bloomington, 1981). The quote is from Craven, Ruffin, 127. I look forward to reading a forthcoming biography of Ruffin by David

Allmendinger, Jr. His study, I understand, will be entitled Ruffin: Family and Reform in the Old South.

(30) The honorific assumptions suffusing the ideology of the classic fire-eaters were seldom expressed coherently and systematically. They must be unearthed from miscellaneous fragments in both public speeches and private writings and reconstructed by synthesis and some extrapolation. The single best source is the Charleston Mercury. For some of the more explicit enunciations of the constituent elements, see "Speech of the Hon. R.B. Rhett, Delivered at Hibernian Hall, in the City of Charleston, June 21, 1850," "Southern Retaliation," "A Letter from the Hon. R. Barnwell Rhett to Governor Adams, on the State of Public Affairs," & "The Spirit of Liberty," Charleston Mercury, July 20, 1850, June 28, 1855, Nov. 7, 1856, April 16, 1859.

Chapter One: The Making of a Proslavery Crusader and Fire-Eater

Edmund Ruffin was born on January 5, 1794 in Prince George County, Virginia. He had the good fortune of being born into the plantation aristocracy. His father, George Ruffin, was the proprietor of the "Evergreen" estate at Coggin's Point along the James River. The earliest Ruffin to enter American shores had been William Ruffin, a Scottish Protestant nobleman, who changed his name from Ruthven and fled to the Virginian tidewater in 1666 to escape the fate of his father, execution by British Catholic royalty. By a combination of entrepreneurial abilities and judicious marriages into prominent Virginian families, William and his progeny amassed land, slaves, and status in the New World. Ruffin's grandfather, also named Edmund, had achieved the modicum of political distinction becoming to a slaveholding gentleman. His political offices included county lieutenant, sheriff, representative in the Virginia House of Delegates, and member of the Virginia constitutional convention--which ratified the formation of that Union which his namesake would help shatter. Ruffin's father, George, had likewise served four years in the Virginia House of Delegates. And his 140 slaves made him the second largest slaveholder in the county. Ruffin's mother, Jane Lucas, died when her only child was very young. Edmund was raised by his stepmother, Rebecca Cocke, who gave her husband six additional children.[1]

As a scion of a wealthy planter, young Edmund was educated by private tutors. The precocious youngster had read all the works of Shakespeare by the age of ten. But the lad was particularly fascinated by the romantic novels of Sir Walter Scott, whose tales of medieval chivalry left a profound imprint upon the imagination of their impressionable reader. Tracing his lineage back to Charlamagne on his grandmother's side, the youthful Edmund identified with the heroic knights of Scott's novels and esteemed their values of Pride, Honor, and Valor.[2] At age sixteen, Ruffin entered William and Mary College. After some initial successes, Edmund's studies floundered--a victim of his youthful indifference and dissipation as well as his romantic reveries and pursuits. The neglect of his scholastic responsibilities at Williamsburg earned him a suspension. Ruffin's successful courtship of the target of his romantic yearnings, Susan Hutchings Trávis, the attractive and nubile member of a prominent local family, was doubtless sufficient compensation for his less than honorable discharge by the Williamsburg faculty.[3] The outbreak of the War of 1812 interrupted Ruffin's marital bliss. The eighteen year old Virginian patriot and romantic enlisted as a private but his company languished for six months at Norfolk without seeing action. The death of his father meanwhile had left Ruffin with the Coggin's Point estate. His interests, accordingly, turned to plantation agriculture. In this field of endeavor Ruffin would first

make his mark.[4]

Difficult times lay ahead for aspiring Virginian planters in the early republic. Two centuries of exhaustive--chiefly tobacco--farming had depleted the once fertile soils of the lower tidewater. Resident proprietors did little to improve their soils and increasingly neglected their agricultural affairs. The more ambitious farmers of the Old Dominion abandoned their impoverished lands for the fertile and virgin western soils. Ironically, only the low prices of Virginian land, a symptom of the agricultural decline, inhibited many farmers from selling their holdings and migrating westward.[5]

The nineteen year old Ruffin, a complete novice in the subject of farming, faced these unpropitious circumstances as he surveyed his Coggin's Point estate, whose low yields of six bushels of wheat and ten bushels of corn per acre were typical of the county. For several years Ruffin tried various methods to augment the productivity of his soil. Following the latest techniques promulgated by such agricultural journals as John Taylor's Arator, Ruffin dutifully drained his marshlands, plowed his fields more deeply, and applied animal and vegetable manure. But the results were disappointing. In the fall of 1817, Ruffin decided to join the westward drift. But he could not find a buyer. At this point he read Sir Humphrey Davy's Elements of Agricultural Chemistry and learned that soils containing sulphate of iron could be improved by applying carbonate of

lime. Ruffin quickly tested his fields for sulphate but found none. Perhaps vegetable rather than mineral acids were poisonong his soil. Significantly, he had not found any carbonate of lime in his soil specimens either. Also, Ruffin noticed that plants known to contain vegetable acids such as sorrel and pine grew profusely in his sterile fields. Furthermore, a small portion of his land blessed with enduring fertility was shelly and calcareous but completely devoid of pine and sorrel. Ruffin thus hypothesized that vegetable acids were present in his lands and had negated his various attempts to improve his yields.[6]

If Ruffin's diagnosis was correct, the remedy would be surprisingly simple. Beds of marl, a mixture of clay and carbonate of lime, grew abundantly in the Virginian tidewater. In February 1818 Ruffin applied marl to a small portion of his sterile land and deliberately left an identical portion free of marl. At harvest the corn crop on the land treated with marl exceeded its competitor by forty per cent. The experimenter was thrilled. With the exuberant enthusiasm of a discoverer, Ruffin reported his findings to his neighbors at the October 1818 meeting of the newly-formed Prince George County Agricultural Society. But the established planters met the young man's paeans to marl with skepticism and ridicule. Determined to vindicate his theories, Ruffin turned Coggin's Point into a model plantation. He continued to analyze soil specimens and to conduct experiments with marling his fields. Also, he

supplemented John Taylor's recommendations to his own marling technique. The results were remarkable. Over the next two decades, the joint wheat and corn output at Coggin's Point virtually trebled. Ruffin's labors were a resounding success.[7]

In 1821 the American Farmer, one of the leading agricultural journals in the country, published a revised version of the paper Ruffin had delivered to his local farming association three years earlier. In 1833 Ruffin's essay, which had grown to a prodigious 242 pages, was published in book form as An Essay on Calcareous Manures, a work destined to pass through five editions. In June of the same year, Ruffin launched his own agricultural journal, the Farmers' Register, to spread the gospel of marl. Ruffin's discovery was that naturally fertile soils, depleted by years of cultivation, could be rejuvenated by supplying calcareous matter to neutralize their vegetable acidity and make them responsive to manure fertilization. Without the prior infusion of lime, the other agricultural methods then in vogue--crop rotation, drainage, better plowing, growing clover and cowpeas, etc.--would be of no avail in the long run, if efficacious at all. Most Virginian farmers did not marl their lands as Ruffin recommended. And the use of guano would prove more important in restoring soil fertility to Virginian lands especially in the 1850s. Nevertheless, the application of marl helped slow down the migratory trend of eastern Virginia in the antebellum years. Ruffin's

discovery and popularization of the value of marl was an important achievement.[8]

Ruffin's concern for agriculture shaped his political ideology and behavior. Seeking to improve the productivity and safeguard the interests of Virginian agriculture, Ruffin spearheaded the formation of the agricultural society of Prince George County in 1818 and the organization of the United Agricultural Societies of Virginia soon thereafter. A major objective of the early agricultural association in Virginia was to rejuvenate farming in the state and to retard, if not end, westward migration by exploring and disseminating techniques of agricultural improvement. But of at least equal importance was the determination by the association to protect the political rights of farmers. Restoring the fertility of Virginian soils was pointless if the industrial sector expropriated the bulk of the profits. And such was precisely what Ruffin feared the protective tariff policy would effect.[9]

Ruffin's main political goal at this time was the reduction of the tariff to the revenue level. In 1816 Congress had passed a moderate tariff bill to protect the infant industries and to remove the national deficit which had arisen in the course of the War of 1812. The 1819 panic impelled manufacturers, chiefly centered in the Middle Atlantic States, to seek the elevation of duties to 100% on cotton and woolen textiles and sundry other commodities. The House passed the 1820 tariff bill but the Senate stymied

the measure by a single vote. Many perceptive Southerners were not comforted by their narrow margin of victory, especially as Northern manufacturing interests continued to clamor for a higher tariff even after the treasury had been filled. Virginia had been in the vanguard of the Southern anti-tariff movement from the start. And in the forefront stood Edmund Ruffin.[10]

The movement for a high protective tariff aroused Ruffin's ire. The political power held by the farmers, Ruffin claimed, did not reflect their numerical preponderance. The manufacturing and mercantile classes, concentrated in towns, Ruffin believed, had neutralized the superior numbers of the rural population, dispersed across the land. Combinations of industrialists and merchants, residing in the centers of communication and political institutions, had exerted pressure on lawmakers to enact measures promotive of their interests and to reject inimical legislation. Ruffin tried to rouse the hitherto supine farmers to imitate their manufacturing adversaries. They had to organize and lobby Congress to advance their interests. Accordingly, Ruffin played a prominent role in the formation of agricultural societies in Virginia and in drafting memorials to Congress and addresses to the public. Ruffin's ideas about the tariff merit detailed examination.[11]

A high tariff, Ruffin maintained, raised the prices of industrial products in the country and thus hurt the agricultural consumer. By discouraging the exportation of

foreign goods to the United States and by raising the prices of the foreign commodities which were, nonetheless, imported, the protective tariff compelled American consumers to buy domestic products at artificially inflated prices. Unrestrained by the fear of foreign competition, the "pampered monopolist" would charge any price he pleased for his wares. Ruffin denied the assertion by manufacturers that the tariff promoted cheaper American goods. Despite the existing import duties, Ruffin pointed out, the prices of protected goods such as saddles, hats, and boots had not fallen. The Virginian agronomist conceded, however, that at some distant day when the United States was fully populated and the tariff was removed, the abundant and cheap supply of labor would enable American manufacturers to undersell their European competitors, whose imported merchandise bore the transportation costs across the Atlantic. But while the prohibitive tariff was in operation, manufacturers would choose prices at their own discretion; their only restraint would be their unbridled greed. Agrarian consumers would not only be contributing to the opulence of the bloated manufacturer but would be subsidizing the idleness of the industrial worker. The high demand for labor, reflecting the sparsity of American population, enabled the worker to earn relatively high wages. His high income, in turn, encouraged the laborer to indulge his natural slothfulness and limit his exertions to one or two days a week. Thus, the inflated commodity prices paid by the industrious farmer

reinforced the idleness of thousands of urban workers.[12]

The tariff, Ruffin gloomily forecasted, would ruin the national economy. The United States tariff would impel retaliatory tariffs by other nations. The national treasury would shrink. Already, governmental revenue, Ruffin claimed, had declined three million dollars annually due to the high tariff. International trade would plummet. The American shipping, shipbuilding, and coasting trade would entirely cease. Vessels would rot in their harbors. And unemployed sailors would become pirates and smugglers. The farmers, of course, would especially suffer. The trade declension would be doubly disadvantageous for farmers: the government would impose a direct tax upon agriculture to compensate for the lost revenue and the retaliatory tariffs would virtually terminate the exportation of United States agricultural staples. Deprived of his former markets and subjected to taxation and inflated prices, the farmer would be economically trapped. Lacking the required capital to enable and the positive incentives to encourage agricultural reform and increased production, the farmer would watch his land prices sink. The entire nation would be ruined.[13]

Beneath the hyperbolic rhetoric against the tariff and dire warning of general economic calamity lay strong feelings of hostility towards industrialism and resentment towards manufacturers. Ruffin professed no animus towards manufacturers as such; he only opposed those manufacturers who advocated the tariff. He portrayed agriculture as a

defensive victim of aggressive manufacturing-commercial interests which sought the unfair advantage of governmental bounty. But Ruffin viewed agrarian society as inherently pure and industrial society as corrupt. His vision of the inexorable trend of population growth rendered industrialization a frightening specter, regardless of the tariff. The proliferation of laborers would so depress wages as to make the worker a miserable dependent upon the "master manufacturers." Impoverished parents will send their five-year old youngsters to the factory to supplement their meager earnings. The confinement of masses of children of both sexes in the "pestilential atmosphere" of the squalid factory will produce "infirmity of body, degradation of mind, and corruption of morals." [14]

The tariff would hasten the advent of this scenario not merely by strengthening the industrial beneficiaries of its bounty but also by converting the pastoral arcadia into a manufacturing nightmare. Tariff proponents claimed that their policy would expand the home market for agriculture; but they could not explain how this new demand for farm products would arise. The only real solution offered by tariff supporters was reducing the number of farmers. The ruin of agriculture would force many a farmer to become an industrial laborer. This proletarianization of the farmer would at once reduce the supply and increase the demand for farm goods. Ruffin was shocked by the "impudence" of the proposal: "The hardy, independent sons of our forests and

our fields are called on to consent to be starved into weavers and button makers?" [15]

He was especially galled by the stigma that such a program branded upon agriculture: "These people would really persuade us that the cultivation of the earth is no species of industry; that all our idle who neither weave nor spin, and may, of course, be fairly proscribed; their fields turned into deserts, that factories may be established; these precious seminaries of spotless virtue where the daughters of our ruined farmers, may learn industry, simplicity of manners, and purity of mind; and their sons temperance, soberness, and chastity, as practised in the best institutions of Leeds and Manchester." [16] His idyllic romanticization of agriculture coupled with his burgeoning sensitivity to honor inclined him to interpret prognostications of the historical trend of industrialization as insulting to the practitioners of the displaced pursuit. The protective tariff aroused such passions amongst farmers not only because it was perceived as an exploitative instrument by greedy manufacturers but also because it heralded the arrival of modernity: the tariff was a symbol of industrialization itself. The current internal difficulties of Virginian agriculture only intensified Ruffin's animosity: they compounded the obstacles to revivifying Virginian agriculture and made the alarming scenario of the proletarianization of the farmer plausible.

The primary objective of the tariff party, in Ruffin's mind, was not the protection of manufacturing interests per se. The existing tariff, the British domestic tax on manufacturing, and the relatively high value of American currency in relation to that of Britain afforded American manufacturers ample protection. The persistent clamor for a still higher tariff revealed the ambition to subjugate agriculture and elevate the manufacturing party to power. Farmers would be both economically and politically prostrate at the feet of the manufacturer. "While our independent yeomanry are to be thus humbled--while their proud spirits are in training for the yoke, another party, less attached to the soil, and completely dependant on the bounty of the government, is to be raised to opulence and power,--to be invested with exclusive privileges, more especially that of taxing their fellow-citizens at discretion."[17] Ruffin resented the power the manufacturers would hold at least as much as he resented the particular ways in which they would exercise that power. The political triumph of the tariff party would ipso facto humiliate the agriculturalists.

The vanquishment of the agrarian sector would have deleterious political consequences for the nation as a whole. For Ruffin, the farmer was the peculiar custodian of not only moral values in general but republican virtues in particular. The limited government of the republic was socially rooted in the rural classes. The farmers did not request any special government favors; they sought no

bounties, charters, or monopolies. All the farmers sought was a laissez-faire economy: the government should not grant special privileges to any economic pursuit. The farmers asked for nothing but "the right to the undisturbed possession of the fruit of our labor and capital." Since most of the nation consisted of farmers, Ruffin argued, the tariff struggle was a case of special interests against "the people." The manufacturers, merchants, bankers, and capitalists were minority interests conspiring against the majority of the citizenry. The bestowal of "exclusive privilege" upon a faction would destroy popular rights and freedoms. The privileged manufacturers would ally with the government against the people and realize Alexander Hamilton's design of strengthening the central government. And the augmented power would tempt frail human beings to subvert republicanism and establish a despotism. The tariff controversy was then no mere rivalry between different economic classes but an epic struggle for the preservation of agricultural society and the republic itself. Thus the slaveholder Ruffin posed as the champion of popular liberties, the extoller of the virtues of the independent yeomanry, and the opponent of special privileges. He could not see that the government's protection of his basic slaveholding prerogatives made policies such as the tariff subsidiary inequities at most.[18]

Interestingly, Ruffin did not present the tariff controversy as a battle between hostile sections but as a

battle between different economic pursuits. Obviously, however, manufacturing interests were chiefly located in the North. And this sectional configuration inevitably crept into his arguments, albeit allusively. Ruffin contended, for instance, that the tariff policy violated the spirit of the Constitution by taxing agricultural states for the benefit of manufacturing states.[19] Here was the state rights creed in embryo. State rights republicanism and strict construction constitutionalism would not prominently figure in Ruffin's arsenal of arguments after he became a secessionist. But other fundamental facets of Ruffin's response to the tariff controversy in the 1820 period foreshadowed his response to the slavery conflict in the 1850s: the portrayal of agricultural interests as a victim of aggression; the perception of the conflict as a struggle for power; the association of inequality and loss with dishonor and disgrace; the determination to resist the adversary at the threshold; the focus upon the most obnoxious statements by the opposition as representative of the entire body; the exaggerated warnings of doom if the opposition policy succeeded; and the deep animosity against and suspicious distrust of his foes.

The state rights ideology, which posited the equality of all states and the limited authority of the federal government, was the standard Ruffin used to assess men as well as measures. Anticipating the 1824 election, Ruffin in the summer of 1823 penned an essay for the Richmond Enquirer

in which he rejected all five of the leading presidential contenders. John Quincy Adams was "an apostate federalist" and Andrew Jackson had "openly trampled on the constitution." The other three, Henry C. Clay, John C. Calhoun, and--strangely enough--William H. Crawford, were all renegade republicans, supporters of the American System--the tariff, the bank, and internal improvements. Why, he preferred an open Federalist like Chief Justice John Marshall to spurious Republicans! Still, Ruffin settled upon a genuine Republican, Nathaniel Macon. The North Carolina senator, whose long tenure in the national councils was distinguished chiefly by his dogged opposition to federal expenditures, incarnated Ruffin's ideal of republican purity and agrarian virtue. Patriotism, rather than ambition, Ruffin convinced himself, had propelled Macon to hold legislative office in the nation's capital for more than three decades. Only the illness of John Taylor of Caroline prevented Ruffin from selecting his hero as his presidential choice. Thus did Ruffin display his maverick streak. The young Virginian seemed indisposed to compromise. He seemed to prefer the politics of principle to the politics of victory.[20]

Ruffin himself entered the political arena in the fall of 1823 as a candidate for the state senate. Deeming himself a gentleman patrician, who merited office by virtue of his social status, Ruffin obstinately declined to campaign. Political office, in Ruffin's mind, was the

birthright of an aristocrat, as much his patrimonial legacy as the slaves he inherited. Soliciting votes was demeaning, a denigration of one's station, an open manifestation of ambition typical of demagogues, whose very electioneering exposed their unworthiness of political office. Such campaign tactics as barbecues were thinly disguised forms of bribing the electorate. Candidates should be selected on the basis of their virtues rather than their vices. Electioneering was thus a corruption of the electoral process, a subversion of republicanism. Ruffin's temperament shrank from such devices. He had no oratorical talent and loathed speaking before crowds. Moreover, political office, to Ruffin, was an honor to be conferred rather than pursued--at least not openly. Courting voters directly would have tarnished the image of indifference to politics which he so fastidiously cultivated. Notwithstanding his failure to campaign, Ruffin won the election. His staunch championship of agrarian interests against manufacturing bounties and his budding reputation as an agricultural reformer may have tipped the scale in his favor. In any event, Ruffin had won a four-year term in the Virginia senate.[21]

Ruffin tried sedulously to adhere to his political creed. The new senator consistently voted against expenditures. As a member of the committee on internal improvement, Ruffin vetoed all needless measures. Similarly, he opposed every motion to recharter the Farmer's

Bank of Virginia. Thus, Ruffin carried his creed of limited government to the state level. But Ruffin learned that he could not practice the politics of principle inside the state legislature with the same facility that he had outside of it. He found himself besieged by friends, supporters, and constituents expecting some appointment to office or some beneficial piece of legislation. In Ruffin's idealization of statecraft, the statesman selflessly served the public and awarded patronage according to merit. In the actuality of political life, the officeholder naturally rewarded his loyal supporters with coveted appointive positions and his constituents with desired legislative enactments. Ruffin was torn between the ideal and the real. Generally, the idealistic senator withstood personal entreaties and voted in accordance with his conscience. But occasionally the beleaguered politician succumbed to the pressure and betrayed the public trust. In a way, Ruffin experienced the worst of both worlds: his usual defiance of importuners alienated many erstwhile and potential supporters and his occasional submission to political temptation pricked his conscience.[22]

If Ruffin lacked the fortitude for strict adherence to principle, he also lacked the temperament to acclimate himself into the give-and-take atmosphere of American politics. Ruffin's poor speaking abilities reinforced his disillusionment. He felt as uncomfortable facing assemblies of representatives on the senate floor as he had imagined

himself feeling in front of throngs of voters at outdoor barbecues. Regarding public speaking as a performance, he could not help feeling self-conscious about his delivery. His lack of confidence predetermined his failure. Unsurprisingly, Ruffin's only successes as a public speaker occurred when he lost himself in the excitement of his topic. Furthermore, Ruffin viewed eloquence as part of the qualifications of a statesman. He did not want others to pronounce him inferior to his modest political position. As he later recalled, "I was too proud to be willing to be deemed below any station in which I might be placed." Ruffin, in other words, was a high need-achiever: he preferred to abstain from activities in which he could not excel than to reveal his mediocrity. Moreover, perhaps overcompensating for his embarrassing oratorical deficiencies in public, Ruffin privately hurled sarcastic barbs and painted "ludicrous caricatures" of political opponents, whose success he inwardly envied. Having antagonized influential politicians as well as violated his own scruples, Ruffin prudently withdrew from the political arena after three years of service. He would turn his ambition for public acclaim into other channels. For the time being, however, he retreated to his Coggin's Point plantation and the pleasures of domesticity.[23]

The 1820s was the most prolific decade for Ruffin as a procreator. His wife, Susan, whose parturient experiences spanned about twenty years, gave birth to eleven children,

nine of whom survived infancy. Edmund Jr. and Agnes had been born in the early years of Ruffin's marriage. In the 1820s Julian, Rebecca, Elizabeth, Mildred, and Jane arrived. Ella and Charles were still to come. By virtue of their fortuitous birth into the higher echelons of the Southern social structure, the Ruffin children enjoyed the privileges of the few. As Ruffin would later boast, the exploitation of slave labor relieved slaveholding agriculturalists from the tedious chores of domestic drudgery and enabled their cultivation of intellectual refinement, social graces, and moral virtues. One of the chief perquisites of the slaveholding aristocracy was, indeed, education.[24]

One episode concerning the education of his children in the late 1820s revealed Ruffin's growing sensitivity to cultural sectionalism. Since few good preparatory schools existed in the South, Ruffin, like many other Southern planters, arranged to have his son educated in a Northern school. In 1828 Ruffin enrolled his eldest son, Edmund, in a preparatory school in New Haven. But young Edmund did not confine his education to studying his textbooks. In a letter to his father, Edmund praised the Connecticut Yankees as "enlightened and polished," an industrious and religious people, whose customs and manners were superior to those of Virginians. Furthermore, he wished that Virginian lands as well as her manners were as cultivated as those of Connecticut. Perhaps most distressing to his father, young Edmund expressed his admiration for the seeming middle-class

nature of New England society. Coming from a society with marked social distance between aristocratic planters and poor whites, Edmund erroneously perceived Connecticut as a land of relative economic and social equality, where the artisan was as respected as the merchant. Sensing that he had waxed too poetic on the virtues of Yankeedom, Edmund assured his father that he still preferred Virginia. Ruffin was not amused. At the end of the semester year, he removed Edmund from the Northern gymnasium and enrolled him in the University of Virginia. Henceforth, Ruffin sent his children to Southern schools only.[25]

The year 1828 was also eventful in national politics. The notorious "Tariff of Abominations" set one Southern state on the path of nullification. Led by the former nationalist John C. Calhoun, in November 1832 the South Carolina state convention nullified both the 1828 tariff and the 1832 tariff (which had not sufficiently lowered rates) but delayed the execution of the ordinance for a few months. In December 1832 President Andrew Jackson denounced the doctrine of nullification and proclaimed his intention to enforce federal laws. A military collision between federal forces and South Carolina seemed impending. But on March 1, 1833 Congress provided for the gradual reduction of tariff duties to 20% ad valorem by July 1, 1842. On the same day, Congress passed the "Force Bill" authorizing the president to exert military power to protect federal customs offices in South Carolina should nullification take effect. On the

pretext of receiving the Virginia commissioner, Benjamin Watkins Leigh, dispatched by the Old Dominion to mediate the dispute, the South Carolina convention reassembled and prudently rescinded nullification. No other state had supported the South Carolina initiative. But many Southerners had opposed the threat of federal coercion. Ruffin's views on this important episode in the escalating sectional conflict are unknown. Presumably, Ruffin viewed the prospect of federal military intervention in South Carolina as repugnant to his state rights professions. But there is no evidence that Ruffin endorsed nullification, much less secession, at this time. But we do know Ruffin's reaction to the critical drama which unfolded in Virginia in the early 1830s.[26]

The complacent repose of the Virginian slaveholder was rudely shattered on the night of August 22, 1831 as Nat Turner and his cohorts roamed from farm to farm in Southampton County and indiscriminately slaughtered about sixty whites. The shrewd slave preacher had divulged his plans only to a chosen few. Turner recruited most of the slave rebels in the course of the uprising itself. The elusive leader managed to evade authorities for a couple of months. But all the other slave rebels were either killed or captured within the week. Although the rebellion had been local in scope, many Virginians imagined the Turner plot had been a massive slave conspiracy extending from the center of the state to the southern portion of North

Carolina. The terror-stricken whites not only summarily executed the actual participants but also convicted many innocent slaves on the flimsiest of evidence. Indeed, many slaves did not even receive the courtesy of a trial but were ceremoniously executed by bands of white vigilantes, who hung the lifeless heads of their victims upon poles along the road as a gruesome warning to potential conspirators.[27]

Ruffin was relatively free from, what he later termed, this "community-insanity." Ruffin realized that the Turner rebellion had been a local incident and not a statewide conspiracy. Amidst the atmosphere of paranoia, Ruffin maintained his composure. In fact, Ruffin sympathized with the slaves who were wrongly accused and punished by hysterical and vengeful whites. One instance concerned a slave in Prince George County who was sentenced to death by four magistrates. Ruffin perceived that the evidence against the slave, furnished by the testimony of an unreliable and unworthy poor white man, was irrelevant, even if accurate. And he knew that anyone who defended a suspected slave rebel "incurred odium, if not personal danger, as a favorer, if not approver, of murderous insurgents, & midnight slayers of sleeping men, women & children." Nevertheless, Ruffin was so affected by the plight of the innocent slave that he framed a petition to the governor to pardon the man and personally solicited the signatures of his neighbors. Many a farmer believed the slave innocent but refused to sign the petition. The

determined Ruffin took his petition, endorsed by only twelve individuals including its sponsor, to Governor John Floyd at Richmond. But the governor was uncooperative. He had already commuted the death sentences of those slaves wrongly condemned to sale beyond the state. Ruffin was not satisfied. He told Floyd that only a complete pardon was commensurate with the demands of justice. The governor was not persuaded. The sympathetic planter later realized the prudence of banishing the convicted slave since hostile whites in Prince George would have murdered the slave upon his return to the county. For his efforts to save one innocent life, Ruffin was denounced by white Virginians, including some men who had themselves previously admitted to him their belief in the innocence of the convict.[28]

The Turner insurrection spurred a full political debate on the subject of slavery by the Virginia legislature in 1832. Conservatives in the Old Dominion downplayed the Turner rebellion and proclaimed the safety of slavery in the state. The conservative Thomas S. Gholson viewed slavery as a "curse," apologized for its existence in Virginia as the imposition of British and New England merchants, and anticipated its natural demise in the state. Likewise, William O. Goode held that the conversion of eastern Virginian agriculture from tobacco to wheat and corn farming would render slavery unprofitable and encourage slave sales southward. Economics, Goode assured antislavery men, would kill Virginia slavery; emancipation programs were

superfluous. The Turner episode had evidently put Virginia conservatives on the defensive.[29]

Emancipationists cited the insurrection as evidence of the urgency of abolition. Thomas Jefferson had long warned his countrymen that unless they emancipated their slaves, the latter would end their bondage by violence. The eminent Virginian's grandson, Thomas Jefferson Randolph, called for liberating all slaves born on or after July 4, 1840. Another legislator, William Henry Brodnax, advocated the gradual colonization of free blacks and then slaves. Though emancipationist sentiment was concentrated in western Virginia, where slaves were sparse, a considerable number of eastern Virginians supported some form of liberation. Over a third of the tidewater representatives in Virginia's lower house voted for a resolution by Archibald Bryce which called for the colonization of free blacks and manumitted slaves as first steps towards "final abolition." But the Bryce resolution was largely rhetorical. The Virginia house did pass a bill subsidizing colonization of free blacks and manumitted slaves but the senate, disproportionately representing east Virginia, squelched the measure. Instead, the Virginia General Assembly adopted a "police bill" to avert future slave rebellions. The bill, for example, prohibited slave preaching and unsupervised religious meetings. Also, the bill abrogated jury trials for free blacks. Thus, rather than inspiring Virginia to free her slaves, the Turner insurrection provoked her to tighten the

stranglehold of bondage.[30]

The Virginia legislative debate on slavery stimulated literary productions on both sides of the question. Thomas R. Dew, a professor at William and Mary College, upheld the status quo in his Review of the Debate in the Virginia Legislature of 1831-1832, while Jesse Burton Harrison's Review of the Slave Question supported colonization. Dew's arguments anticipated the coming proslavery orthodoxy--the view that slavery was a "positive good." Dew depicted slavery as the principal form of labor organization. Originally arising as a mitigation of the cruelties of military defeat, slavery had been the historical engine of civilization. Slavery tamed savages, converted man's natural indolence into industry, and freed women from domestic drudgery. Slavery, Dew claimed, was sanctioned by the Old Testament and not impugned by the New Testament. Politically, slavery fostered republicanism by engendering a devotion to liberty among the masters. Socially, slavery promoted white equality by confining menial work to blacks. Jefferson had claimed that slavery had a pernicious effect upon the character of the master. Dew maintained that slavery made the slaveholder generous, compassionate, and hospitable. The paternalistic authority exercised by the slaveholder "humanizes and softens the heart." Bondage, moreover, was good for the blacks, given their brutish condition and natural inferiority. Finally, the black slaves of the South fared better than the free indigent

whites in densely populated countries.[31]

Nevertheless, Dew did not pronounce slavery a positive good. On more than one occasion, Dew's Review referred to slavery as an evil. His primary purpose was not the theoretical defense of the moral propriety of slave ownership but the practical demonstration of the unfeasibility and undesirability of emancipation schemes. Freeing the slave without compensating the owner, Dew protested, blatantly violated property rights. Randolph's plan of post-nati emancipation had the additional flaw of encouraging slave discontent and rebellion among those born prior to the 1840 cut-off date. Colonization was economically prohibitive even without compensation. The cost of transporting masses of blacks to Africa and sustaining them in Liberia was enormous. Liberia was anyway a fiasco. Dew, furthermore, disputed the simplistic assumption of colonizationists that white labor would flock to Virginia to fill the vacuum caused by the departure of slaves. On the contrary, Dew argued, whites would flee Virginia to avoid the higher state taxes necessitated by colonization. Colonization was not a viable alternative at all. Virginia's choice was slavery or abolition. The real issue, Dew concluded, was not free white versus black slave labor but whether blacks would labor better as slaves or as freedmen. And given their natural idleness, sloth, and moral degradation, black freedom was impractical. Virginia's course was clear: keep the slaves in bondage.[32]

Jesse Burton Harrison confined his assault to the economic evil slavery caused white Virginians; he did not discuss the moral evil slavery caused black Virginians. Slavery, Harrison contended, contributed to the exhaustion of Virginian soil. Slaves were crude laborers, incapable of making agricultural improvements. Their productivity was limited to fertile soils. Slaves, unfit for manufacturing, furthermore, tied the state economy to farming. Their presence in Virginia deterred the growth of the class of white mechanics and skilled laborers. Also, slavery was more expensive than free labor to employers. And slavery bred social inequality amongst whites. Slaveholding bred arrogant and improvident characters. Whereas Virginia conservatives took the domestic slave trade as a matter of course, Harrison arraigned the sizable annual sales of Virginian slaves to the Deep South as evidence either of the moral callousness of Virginian slaveowners or the economic unprofitability of slavery in the state. Whether Virginian masters sold their slaves out of greed or out of need, their behavior reflected badly upon slavery in the Old Dominion. Opposing the morally repugnant practice of slave sales to the lower South, Harrison could not accept the economic abolition of slavery by geographic determinism. Instead, Harrison urged the colonization of free blacks and manumitted slaves in Liberia as the inauguration of full emancipation.[33]

In June 1833 Ruffin printed excerpts of both Dew's and

Harrison's work in the Farmers' Register. Consistent with his publication of both sides of the question was his call for open-mindedness and impartiality. Ruffin called for the careful and objective analysis of the slavery issue to discover the truth, "wh ever it may be found." Sounding more like a disinterested philosopher than an impassioned polemicist, Ruffin deplored the intellectual carelessness and visceral partisanship with which Virginians generally approached the controversial subject. Instead of meticulously analyzing all aspects of the question, Virginians had conveniently elaborated the strongest points of their own side and assailed the weakest points of their opponents. "The abolitionist can scarcely fail, when attempting to prove that negro slavery in Virginia is attended with enormous evils; and having established that position, he passes at once to the conclusion that the removal of slavery would be cheaply purchased at any cost. The anti-abolitionist is equally successful in maintaining the immense difficulties of the attempt, and evil consequences of his opponent's schemes, and thence persuades himself that slavery, if not a positive good, is at least an institution that admits of no remedy from legislative enactments." Though Ruffin excepted Dew and Harrison from his indictment, he feared that their arguments would furnish grist for the mills of their respective proponents. For Ruffin, the "truth" of the slavery question lay somewhere between Harrison and Dew: "Mr. Harrison . . . proves beyond

dispute, that the existence of slavery in Virginia, is a great and increasing evil--and his views are presented with a degree of force and eloquence worthy of his cause, and the generous feelings it calls forth; and Mr. Dew as clearly demonstrates the utter inefficiency, or ruinous cost, of all the schemes that have been proposed for the emancipation and removal of the African race. If we can ever settle beneficially this distracting question, it will be only by giving due consideration to the opinions of our antagonists, as well as to those on our own side." [34]

Thus, in 1833 Ruffin viewed slavery as an economic evil to white Virginians and presumably as a moral evil to black ones. Dew had convinced him that the hitherto proposed programs for ending Virginian slavery were either worse than slavery itself or entirely unfeasible. The difficulties of terminating Virginian slavery did not spur Ruffin to designate slavery as a positive good; such a mentality, in Ruffin's estimation, showed mindless partisanship. Ruffin, for one, refused to transmute slavery, however necessary an evil, into a good. Moreover, Ruffin even intimated that some type of legislative solution--other than those proposed in the previous session--should be found. At this time, Ruffin was still a "speculative abolitionist": slavery was an evil which should be abolished if possible. Ruffin called upon his readers to decide the slavery issue in a "spirit of toleration and compromise." [35] He evidently believed that an impartial investigation of the subject

would persuade Virginians to concur with his views. The range of sentiment would be narrowed: nobody would proclaim slavery a positive good but nobody would propose the mass colonization of Virginian slaves in Liberia. Ruffin, however, offered no program at all to end slavery. It is difficult to say whether Ruffin's silence stemmed from his fear of rising proslavery opinion or doubts about the feasibility of his scheme. Perhaps, he had no plan at all. In the absence of an innovative, concrete scheme of emancipation, Virginia would retain the status quo; slavery would remain a "necessary evil." His theoretical endorsement of Harrison was less important than his practical endorsement of Dew.

Ruffin maintained this uneasy compromise as the abolition movement in the North grew. The mid 1830s saw the systematic attempt by Northern abolitionism to flood the South with antislavery literature. Guided by the wealthy New York merchant Lewis Tappan, in 1835 the American Anti-Slavery Society published and mailed numerous abolitionist pamphlets to Southern post offices. Some abolitionists had an evangelical faith in the efficacy of the gospels to convert slaveholder consciences to extirpate the sin of slavery abruptly. Others hoped that the exhibition of a pervasive Northern sentiment against bondage would cajole the supposedly large numbers of surreptitious antislavery sympathizers across the South to avow their creed openly and exert pressure on their backward countrymen

to end their reprehensible occupation.[36]

Ruffin did not gainsay the evil of slavery but vehemently objected to Northern interference with Southern affairs: "We do not intend to discuss the question of right, or policy of the institution of slavery as it exists in these states. We should disdain maintaining the argument to defend our rights, or to urge our claim of property. Whatever may be the evils of our system of slavery, (and we deny not that they are many for the slaves, and still more for their masters,) the matter is our own concern--and we will not consent to its regulation being touched by the people of the north."[37] What Ruffin resented most about Northern abolitionism was its arrogant dictation to the South. The underlying conviction of moral superiority made such presumptuous meddling in Southern affairs legitimate to Northerners but unbearable to sensitive Southerners like Ruffin. His own misgivings about slavery made the assault by Northern abolitionists all the more insufferable. From their distant perch in the free states, the abolitionists were basking in their own moral glow as they haughtily judged and swiftly condemned Southern slaveholders as sinners and simplistically demanded immediate abolition of the iniquity. Ruffin was singularly unimpressed by such philanthropy:

> The detestation of slavery, in the abstract, is a feeling almost inseparable from man's best feelings; and thousands of slaveholders--who will, if necessary, defend their rights against the attacks of the abolitionists, at the bayonet's point--would make far greater personal sacrifices, in any feasible and proper

> manner, to mitigate the evils, or remove, if possible, the existence of slavery, than those who condemn and denounce them. It is the easiest thing in the world to be charitable at the expense of other people--and there never will be a lack of fierce advocates for the removal of this evil, though by producing evils ten times greater, so long as all the losses and dangers from the change, whatever they may be, must fall on those far removed from the zealous and ferocious "philanthropists" --who are striving to put fire to a train of gunpowder, because they are in perfect safety from the awful and destructive explosion that may follow. 38

Ruffin could not have articulated the position of the "necessary evil" school--or revealed the self-deception of its members--any better. Conscientious slaveholders, who deemed slavery morally repugnant and earnestly sought to free their slaves, feared that sudden and wholesale emancipation would ignite racial conflagration. But would not the retention of the institution produce the same eventuality? Would not the slaves themselves violently forge their own emancipation if their masters refused to set them free? Would not the active incitement by Northern abolitionists accelerate the outbreak and facilitate the success of a general slave insurrection? Ruffin professed not to fear slave insurrection.

The abolitionists, Ruffin contended, could not by "mere words" incite Virginian slaves "as a body" to rebellion. At most the abolitionists could instigate slave conspiracies on the local level. In virtually all cases, Southern slaveholders would detect slave plots beforehand by virtue of slave divulgence. For instance, a plot by Mississippi slaves, which Ruffin believed had been partly hatched by "secret emissaries" of Northern abolitionism, was recently

discovered and averted by local whites. Only in rare cases would actual massacres by slaves occur. The Turner rebellion, Ruffin assured Virginians, would not recur. Turner's fanatical religious zeal, magnetic character, and absolute faith in his powers of prophecy, had enabled him to recruit a small band of confident, determined, and loyal rebels. Moreover, Turner had shrewdly withheld the plan of action from most of his followers until the day of the insurrection. The availability of brandy during the distilling season, Ruffin added, stimulated the cowardly black to savage acts of "drunken valor." Despite these advantages to the insurgents, the whites speedily and brutally crushed the rebellion. The upshot of all discovered conspiracies and actual insurrections was judicial and mob vengeance upon innocent and guilty blacks and whites. Given the overreaction by outraged whites, the principal victims of abolitionist agitation would be the supposed objects of their philanthropy. Thus Ruffin's equation of abolitionist agitation with slave plots led him to the strange proclamation that whoever "desired the greatest possible amount of misery to be inflicted on the slaves of the south . . . ought to wish for the increase of the numbers, strength, and power of the abolitionists of the north." [39]

The problem, for Ruffin, was that abolitionists did not stop with "mere <u>words</u>" but sent lithographs depicting the brutalities of bondage to the South. Southerners found

pictorial cuts of whips and chains scattered in abolitionist literature. Even illiterate slaves could understand such pictorial appeals. What Ruffin apparently feared most, however, was that Northern abolitionists would dispatch fanatical antislavery men to the South to liberate the slaves, murder the masters, and destroy the plantations. Imagine, Ruffin addressed the great majority of non-abolitionist Northerners, that a group of fanatical Southerners who detested the high tariff plotted to destroy the interests of Northern manufacturers. Suppose these Southern anti-tariff zealots hired agents to burn Northern factories, poison their capitalist owners, and incite their laborers to rebellion. Imagine further, Ruffin continued, that the Southern fanatical opponents of protective duties held public meetings across the South, published their incendiary propaganda, and openly recruited agents of destruction. Even if these nefarious designs amounted to nothing, would Northern men be mollified by Southern assurances that the anti-tariff fanatics were few in number and in general disrepute? Would Northerners be comforted by Southern protestations that although they could not suppress the anti-tariff conspirators as no law had been violated, they would applaud Northern punishment of the culprits once the plot was implemented? Hardly. The moral was obvious: the North had to put down the abolitionists to maintain sectional comity. Northern condonation of abolitionist fanaticism, Ruffin admonished, would seriously jeopardize

"the welfare of the people of the United States, and the permanency of their present general government." Here was Ruffin's first recorded expression of the fire-eating trademark: the threat to sever the Union. But at this stage Ruffin had no desire to shatter the Union; his polite admonition was designed to impress Northerners with the urgency of the issue.[40]

Acknowledging that free speech and assembly were legal rights, Ruffin did not suggest how the North should deal with the abolitionists. Many Southerners called for Northern legislation to suppress abolitionist societies and restrict the circulation of their "libellous and incendiary" publications. But Ruffin made no call for the legal curtailment of civil liberties. He seems to have had extralegal violence in mind. The South was not squeamish in resorting to extralegal remedies to cope with the abolitionist menace. In the summer of 1835 the citizens of Charleston, South Carolina, for instance, broke into the federal post office, seized the packages of antislavery literature, and burned the "incendiary" material. Likewise, a vigilance committee in Nashville, Tennessee seized and whipped a young evangelical abolitionist student from Lane Seminary, Amos Dresser, who had not adequately concealed the antislavery propaganda he carried. Anti-abolitionist violence was even more common above the Mason-Dixon line. Ironically, anti-abolitionist violence in the North reached its zenith in August 1835--a month before the appearance of

Ruffin's article. Interestingly, though welcoming Southern unity and resolve to resist Northern abolitionism "at all hazards, and to any length," Ruffin feared that all the attention paid to the abolitionists by the Southern press and demonstrations against abolitionists by the Southern citizenry might backfire. "The violence of effort openly exhibited in endeavoring to suppress these publications (even if entirely successful in the attempt,) may have as ill effects on those for whom these publications were designed, as their circulation." Ruffin feared that the slaveholders' efforts to suppress abolitionist propaganda with great fanfare could convey to the slave the insecurity of the master and rouse him to rebellion. Ruffin may have also feared that the Southern reaction would increase the publicity of abolitionism and evoke sympathy among slaveholders. He did not perceive that anti-abolitionist violence in the North could have similar effects amongst moderate Northerners.[41]

Whether Northern abolitionists sent agents to direct slave insurrections or mailed literature to pierce the conscience of slaveholders, the danger was the same. The conversion of Virginians to immediate abolitionism could be calamitous. Released from the taming shackles of bondage, the pent-up energies of the savage slave could embroil the state in race war. Whether slaughtered by fanatical abolitionists or by the masses of black freedmen, the lives of the Southern aristocracy would be sacrificed on the

abolitionist altar. Slave insurrection, in Ruffin's mind, would also be the aftermath of the abolition of slavery by the federal government.

Their ambitious postal campaign thwarted by Southern censorship and their "emissaries" intimidated by Southern vigilanteeism, in the winter of 1835-1836 the abolitionists sent neither inflammatory tracts nor conspiratorial agents to the South. Instead, they launched a campaign to deluge Congress with antislavery petitions, primarily requesting the abolition of slavery in the District of Columbia. Here lay a new danger: the mobilization of the federal government in behalf of abolitionism. But that Ruffin's underlying fear remained slave insurrection is evident in his May 1836 article which portrayed Northern abolitionists as the tools of Great Britain. Already perceiving the error of her abolition of slavery in her West Indian colonies, Britain, Ruffin charged, sought slave insurrection in areas belonging to her economic rivals to offset her folly. If not in the active employ of the British government, Northern abolitionists merited payment as the seekers of the British goal, namely the destruction of the Southern agricultural economy. Ruffin, to be sure, still maintained that the slaves themselves represented no danger to their masters; the only danger stemmed from the Northern abolitionists. "From our slaves themselves, and from any political effects of the institution of slavery, as it exists in the South, we have <u>nothing</u> to fear . . . but the South, <u>and</u> <u>the</u> <u>Union</u>,

have everything to fear, (and danger far greater than any from servile insurrections) from the restless, mad, and sustained action of the northern abolitionists."[42]

The sincerity of the Northern antislavery zealots made them all the more dangerous in Ruffin's eyes. Imbued with a "holier than thou" conviction, the abolitionists were worse than ordinary robbers and murderers. Convinced of their moral and religious superiority, these men would persevere until they either forcibly eradicated slavery themselves, persuaded the slaveholders to become the voluntary agents of their own annihilation, or engineered Congressional abolition. The abolitionists had to be stopped. Though still hopeful about suppressing antislavery within the Union, Ruffin's disunion warning became more emphatic. And though he invidiously depicted the abolitionists as British agents, he was appealing to Northern nationalist feeling to quash abolitionism and thus protect the economic interests of the country. Even if the abolitionists failed to overthrow slavery, their very existence was an affront to Ruffin's proud sensibility. The Virginian did not propose how Congress should deal with antislavery petitions; in fact, his article did not explicitly discuss this latest phase of antislavery assault. But the "gag rule," which automatically tabled abolition petitions and thereby shielded both Southern interests and honor, probably allayed Ruffin's fears of political abolitionism, at least temporarily.[43]

Many years later Ruffin recalled that prior to the onset of abolitionism virtually all Southerners had deemed slavery an evil. Even he had been a "speculative abolitionist" in the Jeffersonian mold. Abolitionism, Ruffin noted, had prompted Southerners to reexamine slavery and realize that it was a positive good. The transition from "necessary evil" to "positive good" ideology did not occur quickly and easily in the South; among many Southerners, the conversion was never complete; and some Southerners, especially in the border states, never made the transition at all.[44] Part of Ruffin's journey along the proslavery road can be traced from the essays on slavery which sporadically appeared in the Farmers' Register in the 1830s. The onset of abolitionism did not immediately transmute Ruffin into a "positive good" theorist. In the mid 1830s, he still referred to slavery as an evil and professed to desire its safe termination. In the course of the decade, the Register printed several articles which were consistent with both the necessary evil and the positive good school of thought. As the decade progressed, however, Ruffin became increasingly defensive about slavery until by the end of the decade he cautiously and equivocally proclaimed slavery a positive good.

In August 1833, two months after publishing excerpts from Dew and Harrison, Ruffin printed an essay entitled "The Slaves of Hunger" describing the misery of British factory workers and thereby justifying Dew's classification of

British free laborers as slaves. A few months later, the Register featured a more traditional article which dwelt on the failure of Southern slaves liberated by the British during the War of 1812 to progress economically, socially, and morally. It was probably not coincidental that Ruffin published the next set of essays rationalizing the retention of black bondage after the abolitionist postal and petition campaigns tried to permeate the South and Congress, respectively, with antislavery material. For example, a May 1836 essay by ex-president and founding father James Madison reported that the descendants of the slaves manumitted by the well-meaning Virginian planter Richard Randolph had regressed to "idleness, poverty, and dissipation." Since Randolph's blacks had been educated in the school of slavery to develop habits of industry and had been emancipated with farms to smooth their transition to freedom, Ruffin pronounced the deterioration of the freedmen's children under such ideal conditions "decisive" in demonstrating the utter incapacity of blacks for freedom. Ruffin's logic, emanating from the Jeffersonian premise of innate black racial inferiority, dictated perpetual bondage for the Negro.[45]

The contention that Southern slaves were better off than the proletariat and peasantry, their laboring counterparts elsewhere--though not absent from Jeffersonian apologias--became a staple tenet of the positive good school during the Jacksonian era. The July 1836 edition of the

Register contained excerpts from James K. Paulding's Slavery in the United States pertaining to Virginian slavery. Paulding contended that the longevity of Virginian slaves indicated their humane and indulgent treatment. Conceding that slavery was not a utopian ideal, Paulding pronounced the Virginian slaves as happy as any peasantry in the world. And in December 1836 Ruffin printed a rebuttal by Virginia Presbyterians to abolitionist aspersions about the sinfulness of slaveholding. Christ and the Gospels, they declared, had legitimated slavery.[46] Thus by 1837 Ruffin was well on his way to the positive good creed. The thrust of these articles was that slavery was a necessary and benevolent condition for the black rather than an economic blessing for the white. Significantly, Ruffin found it more difficult to shed his qualms about the economic evils of slavery for the master than his misgivings about the moral evil of bondage for the slave.

Ruffin's qualms about the economic impact of slavery upon the slaveholders are evident in his July 1834 article which contended that the idleness of many upper-class whites contributed to the decline of lower Virginia. Dew had argued that slavery made the masters hospitable. Ruffin deemed Virginian hospitality excessive. What Dew had esteemed as a virtue, Ruffin condemned as a vice. Virginian hospitality, Ruffin charged, produced an entire class of parasitic idlers. Gracious planters welcomed and entertained not only friends, relatives, and amiable

visitors but "every individual of the despicable race of loungers and spongers . . . gentlemen (for they are all so styled,) who spend their lives feasting at the expense of other people, and who are content to live despised, provided they can live without labor." Ruffin hoped that these "gentlemanly vagrants" would starve in the North or be forced to labor, an occupation they considered "almost as painful an alternative." The prevalence of such parasites in Virginia, Ruffin believed, had driven many industrious farmers, who feared incurring the reputation of niggardliness, to migrate to the West. The "gentlemanly vagrants" were obviously a portion of the higher echelons of the slaveholding class. But Ruffin did not explore the issue of whether these idlers germinated from slavery itself. He was prudently silent.[47]

Ruffin's address to the Historical and Philosophical Society of Virginia in the spring of 1836 further illustrates the ambivalence of his position. Ruffin discussed the history of Virginian agriculture and the causes for its decline. Ruffin depicted slavery as a concomitant of the crude tillage used by early tobacco plantations. The fertility and cheapness of land in seventeenth-century Virginia along with the relative scarcity and expense of labor conduced to a system of crude, labor-intensive agriculture, tobacco concentration, and slave labor. Ruffin objected not to the early existence of crude tillage and tobacco plantations in Virginia but to

their persistence. The logic of Ruffin's analysis meant that slavery too was an outmoded stage of historical development. He noted "that by the general use of slave labor, Virginia, while a planting colony, was greatly benefited--and that her wealth and prosperity were greatly more promoted, than they would have been without slaves." True, Ruffin argued that slavery was necessary for "the lowest class of laborers" in regions boasting mild climates and fertile soils. In cold and sterile areas, hunger would overcome man's natural idleness and compel him to labor. But Ruffin did not analyze nineteenth-century conditions in Virginia with a view to determining the suitability of slavery. And his association of slavery with soil fertility, crude cultivation, and plantation society implied slavery was outdated.[48]

Yet when sketching the causes for Virginia's agricultural declension, Ruffin did not even mention slavery. He carefully but noticeably sidestepped the issue of slavery. Instead, Ruffin noted the persistence of primitive and exhaustive methods of farming and the consequent despondency about agricultural opportunities in the state. Also, Ruffin dwelt upon the corresponding optimism about farming opportunities in the West, the "generally prevailing madness for emigration"--a phenomenon which he deemed more cultural than economic. But, most importantly, Ruffin stressed the pervasive ignorance about scientific agriculture by Virginia's planters, farmers,

overseers, and slaves. The hopeful reformer called for a systematic and comprehensive program of agricultural research and instruction through the establishment of agricultural professorships in Virginian colleges, the creation of experimental farms under the auspices of a revitalized agricultural society, and the circulation of agricultural periodicals. Unless the massive ignorance was ended, Virginia would sink to the abyss. Ruffin, unfortunately, expressed no opinion about whether the slaves could be educated by their enlightened masters. Presumably, Ruffin deemed blacks capable of following instructions and using new implements. The proponent of marl had, after all, increased his own output through slave labor. Thus Ruffin was ambiguous on the suitability of slavery for the kind of sophisticated, multi-crop farming he envisioned for the Old Dominion.[49]

Whatever uncertainty about the suitability of slavery for scientific agriculture his reticence reflected in 1836 had largely dissipated by 1839. Responding to a Northern critic, Ruffin stated that the best managed Virginian farms were completely dependent upon slave labor. William Kenrick, a Massachusetts businessman and agriculturalist, contended that the emancipation of Virginian slaves would spur the arrival of Northern emigrants and sufficiently raise Virginian land prices to more than offset her loss of slave values. Kenrick envisioned eastern Virginia as "a perfect garden" of wheat, and fruit and vegetable farms

based on free white labor. Ruffin had previously invited Kenrick to plant silk culture in Virginia. The shrewd New England entrepreneur, however, had set up a small mulberry farm near Richmond and had employed free laborers. After only a couple of years, Kenrick reaped a huge profit. Ascribing the failure of native Virginian farmers to slavery, Kenrick tried to goad the state to convert to free labor.[50]

In conscious opposition to the increasingly narrow proslavery mentality, which proscribed all antislavery writings as insulting and injurious to slaveholders, Ruffin printed Kenrick's letter. The editor of the Register excluded himself from that portion of the Southern proslavery school which was as "bigoted and fanatical" as its antislavery counterpart. The future pillar of border state proslavery ideology thus deemed the radical proslavery crusader who sought the imposition of an orthodox uniformity upon the South and the proscription of all heterodoxical expressions as misguided as the abolitionist. To be sure, Ruffin noted that he supported both the private and political rights of the slaveholders. He further exclaimed that slavery has benefited mankind historically by promoting labor, wealth, civilization, refinement, morality, and religion. Ruffin also declared that slavery "under certain circumstances, (and which are in full operation in the greater part of the southern states,) is politic and proper in itself." Ruffin did not explain how slavery could be

intrinsically good if its propriety was limited to particular conditions. This paradox was never resolved by the proslavery theorist. Moreover, Ruffin avowed that slavery, like other pervasive institutions, had its evils. And he even speculated that Southerners, including himself, may have overstated the positive and understated the negative features of slavery. Accordingly, examination of the opinions of intelligent Northerners on the subject was judicious: "Their correct views will do us good--the incorrect will certainly do us no harm." Such open-mindedness was a far cry from the sensitivity to abolitionism which Ruffin had exhibited earlier and the sensitivity which he would later display towards milder forms of antislavery. At this stage, he was still able to differentiate between "intelligent and observing strangers" and "abolitionist emissaries."[51]

Ruffin, strangely enough, did not directly meet Kenrick's proposition that the emancipation of the slaves would convert Virginia to free white labor and elevate her land values. Perhaps Ruffin felt that Dew had adequately shown the impracticability of such schemes. Ruffin confined himself to defending the role of slavery in the Virginia economy. Conceding the agricultural declension of lower Virginia noted by Kenrick, Ruffin exculpated slavery. He pointed out that the best Virginian farms, which utilized scientific techniques, employed slave labor. He also asserted that on good Virginian farms, slaves fared better

than ninety-nine percent of free laborers across the globe. Ruffin conceded that the Virginia farmer was indolent, wasteful, and careless compared to the Yankee farmer. But he denied slavery was the primary cause of such negative traits. Rather, the abundance of natural resources in Virginia conduced to slothfulness and extravagance. Likewise, the inclement climate and barren soil of Massachusetts promoted industry and frugality amongst the inhabitants. But Ruffin admitted that slavery also contributed to the negative character traits of Virginia planters. Furthermore, dangling the bait of high profits, Ruffin invited Northern entrepreneurs to farm Virginian soils with or without slavery! Instead of being perturbed by the penetration of Northern men and free-labor experimentation in Virginia, Ruffin welcomed such projects. He was particularly desirous of demonstrating the feasibility of silk culture in Virginia. At this point, Ruffin either saw no danger of Northern free laborers farming in Virginia or else his desire to display the advanatages of Virginia's climate and soil transcended his concern for protecting the integrity of the peculiar institution.[52]

Two years later Ruffin founded a short-lived, avowedly sectionalist periodical, The Southern Magazine and Monthly Review. But Ruffin's sectionalism remained moderate. He carefully noted that his breed of sectionalism meant only a special solicitude for the South, not hostility to the

North. Ruffin commended "the many points of character and conduct, and the excellent works, of our intelligent, industrious and indefatigable fellow-citizens of the northern states." The North, Ruffin readily conceded, was superior to the South in science and literature; the North, Ruffin jealously noted, respected its intellectuals. Northerners, moreover, were more energetic in sustaining their institutions and doctrines. "How immediately superior would have been the present condition of the states, from Maryland to Georgia inclusive if their sons had made efforts for their improvement equal to those which have [been] bestowed on Massachusetts."[53] Although Ruffin's praise of the North was partly designed to encourage Southern emulation--to spur the South to a more vigorous defense of her sectional interests as well as to elevate the status of intellectuals in the South--still his attitude towards the North was more envious than hostile and his praise was sincere.

Indeed, in the 1840 period, Ruffin's main concern was not defending slavery or the South. After the 1837 Panic, Ruffin invested a great deal of his energy in attacking banks. His target was not the abolitionist but the banker. And his assault was devoid of sectional flavor. He did not blame the Panic upon the machinations of Northern banking establishments; he directed most of his missiles at Virginia banks. Personal experience may have fuelled Ruffin's animosity against banks. A series of improvident

investments in railroads and other speculative ventures had cost Ruffin an estimated $30,000 of his $100,000 fortune during the depression of the late 1830s. Though he initially blamed his losses on his own credulity, he soon seized on banks as the cause of the depression. More precisely, Ruffin assailed the banks not so much for the original recession but for exploiting the crisis to promote their interests. Instead of temporarily contracting operations, the banks issued more loans for their own enrichment. Specifically, Ruffin charged that Virginia banks had issued paper money in excess of cash reserves and then had deliberately and systematically exchanged notes with distant banks to escape their obligation of specie payments. When the Virginia legislature required creditors to accept bank notes as payment on outstanding debts, Ruffin resolved to challenge the banking power. The columns of the Farmers' Register advocated the adoption of reformist legislation such as restriction on loans, control of speculation, and payment in specie.[54]

Ruffin's reformist program aroused the ire of bankers and their supporters. Many readers of the Register who relied on banks for agricultural credit charged its editor with violating his pledge to eschew political topics and cancelled their subscriptions. Ruffin defended his right as an agricultural journalist to attack banks; his prospectus had declared his intention to discuss those political subjects which affected agricultural interests. Ruffin's

tone and language, originally moderate, became increasingly shrill and harsh. He denounced banking as a "system of pillage" based on "lying, fraud and swindling." Ruffin acknowledged that bank directors may be honorable gentlemen, but he insisted that the institution of banking was rotten to the core. The private virtue of individuals did not legitimate their chosen occupation. Why, honorable men had participated in the iniquitous African slave trade! Ruffin, however, had no kind words for the journalists and politicians who supported banking interests; these men were contemptible minions of bankers, "servile and shameless . . . bank slaves." The bankers, at least, were masters in the business world; and the slaveholder Ruffin respected their power.[55]

The Register, Ruffin proudly boasted, was virtually the only prominent journal attacking banks. His solitary stance did not impel him to withdraw from combat or even retreat; he seemed to glory in the odds against him. That the formidable banking power could overwhelm him and shut down the Register did not intimidate Ruffin into moderating his posture: "It will not be easy to force us to silence; and while we continue to publish, we shall not cease to maintain the contest with the fraudulent banking system, until either it is reformed, or its formerly possessed power shall be restored, and rendered impregnable. In the effort, we may be made to break under the storm of bank power, but we shall not bend to it."[56] Here was the character of an indomitable

crusader who would not truckle to superior force. Here was the mentality of an inflexible extremist who would fight to the death rather than submit. Here was quintessential Southern Honor directed against a peripheral target--banks.

The headstrong Virginian became a one-man crusader "determined to resist" the banking establishment. In September 1841, Ruffin began a second monthly periodical, the Bank Reformer, entirely devoted to the objective denoted by its appellation. Ruffin mailed free copies to anti-banking men to induce them to find customers for his journal. Ruffin even gave batches of the Bank Reformer to the post office and instructed the Virginia postmaster to deliver his periodical to anyone willing to pay the postage. Meanwhile, in Petersburg Ruffin organized the "Association for Promoting Currency and Banking Reform," whose primary purpose was to inundate the Virginia legislature with anti-banking petitions. Additionally, availing himself of a Virginia law that provided for the summary adjudication of petty suits by the local magistrates, Ruffin brought weekly warrants on five-dollar bank bills before the Petersburg magistrate to compel specie payment. The indefatigable Virginian also wrote private letters to various state and federal officials in which he urged them to reform banking abuses. Ruffin embroidered the envelopes of these letters with epigrammatic denunciations of banks. Indeed, Ruffin's most characteristic form of protest was substituting anti-banking slogans for his signature on bank notes. If he

could not compel banks to resume specie payments, he could at least stop endorsing their notes. Ruffin distributed his anti-banking epigrams to anyone who promised to paste them on the back of bank notes. The circulation of the bank notes adorned with Ruffin's condemnation was a delicious irony which its originator relished with the hope that they would "instruct by its back as many persons as it cheats by its face."[57]

Aware of the pettiness of his tactics, Ruffin tried to rationalize them as efficacious. "This printing endorsements may seem to be a petty and impotent mode of attack. But it puts truth before hundreds who never otherwise would have an idea of its existence. And the banking gentry are more annoyed by these small shot than by the heaviest artillery. The falling of drops of water in time wears away the hardest stone." Bedecking bank notes with mischievous witticisms became more important for Ruffin after financial difficulties forced the termination of his journalistic ventures. His unpopular Bank Reformer, begun in September 1841, ended February 1842. And the Farmers' Register, plagued with mounting cancellations, ceased publication in April. Ruffin's "small shots" were the only weapons left in his arsenal after losing his "heavy artillery." Printing anti-banking slogans enabled Ruffin to vent his frustrations against the banking power and compensate his futile attempts to humble it.[58]

Still, his petty modes of attack were time-consuming

and costly. What prompted Ruffin to continue the struggle? Privately, Ruffin conceded that the "game" was "very costly" but noted that few amusements were free. "Other men spend their money or time & labor in hunting, shooting, fishing, & c. or in pursuit of office and honours. . . . I have no fancy for any of these very common pleasures & spend nothing on them--& therefore can the better afford to amuse myself with hunting banks & bank directors, & in enjoying their anger & malignity . . . much more than dreading their revenge."[59] Attacking banks was thus a sort of surrogate sport for the bored Virginian. Concealing his yearning for popularity even from himself at times, Ruffin persuaded himself that he had no reason to fear public retribution. He did not seek public acclaim. On a deeper level, Ruffin's fear of neglect exceeded his need for praise. Caustic attacks on politicians and bankers, however detrimental to Ruffin's reputation, prevented his name from vanishing in the mist of anonymity. Notoriety was preferable to obscurity.

Agricultural reform was, of course, a more popular cause than banking reform. But Ruffin pursued agricultural reform in an unpopular way. Ruffin had long objected to the perfunctory nature of Virginia agricultural societies. Typically, Virginian farming associations assembled twice a year, selected a few distinguished elderly gentlemen as titular leaders, and awarded premiums to the farmers who produced the largest crop. Generally, these organizations

proved ephemeral, casualties of popular indifference. To overcome the public apathy, the societies resorted to introducing non-agricultural subjects. Ruffin was highly critical of both the structure and functions of these societies. The Virginian sought to transform agricultural societies into well-funded bodies of serious farmers who carefully observed or performed agricultural experiments and disseminated their conclusions across the state.[60]

As a shortage of money chronically hampered these societies, state government aid was the linchpin of the scheme. Notwithstanding his general opposition to governmental expenditures, Ruffin sought Virginian subsidization of agricultural research and education. He called on the state legislature to fund agricultural societies and establish agricultural professorships. But the legislature was unresponsive. Ruffin was chagrined that the legislature debated pointless party issues for days but neglected so critical a matter as agriculture. A professorship of agriculture, Ruffin pointedly noted, would cost less than the expense of a public printer. The outlay would be paltry compared to the long-term gains for the entire community. Furthermore, despite his professed state rights creed, Ruffin sought federal aid for agriculture. The huge annual appropriations to the Patent Office for the issuance of worthless and plagiarized agricultural publications, Ruffin pointedly protested, would be better spent by endowing agricultural institutions. Governmental

mishandling and neglect of farming--which Ruffin identified with the common weal--increased his cynicism about the political process.[61]

A State Board of Agriculture was finally created in 1841. And Edmund Ruffin, appropriately enough, became its corresponding secretary. Ruffin enthusiatically drew up a program embodying his views on the systematic gathering and distribution of agricultural data. But his scheme was stillborn. Hamstrung by the customary stinginess of the Virginia legislature vis-à-vis agriculture, the board floundered. The enmities Ruffin had made by his bank fight proved an additional handicap. His journals folded at about the same time. Ruffin sulked; Virginia did not appreciate him.[62]

A more congenial climate seemed to await him in South Carolina. In 1843, at the invitation of Governor James Henry Hammond, Ruffin became the Agricultural Surveyor of South Carolina. Though originally skeptical of Ruffin's agricultural methods, Hammond had obtained such excellent results with marl on his Silver Bluff plantation that he styled himself Ruffin's "apostle." The Carolinian governor, moreover, was a longstanding opponent of the tariff and abolitionism. A supporter of nullification, Hammond sought to diversify and develop the agricultural and industrial sectors of the Southern economy to put the South in a position to secede from the Union. Also, in a recent gubernatorial message, Hammond had attacked the South

Carolina state bank. Thus feeling repudiated by Virginia and welcomed by South Carolina, Ruffin accepted Hammond's propitious invitation. For several months the noted Virginian reformer spread the gospel of marl in the Palmetto State. But the results of the mission did not approach Ruffin's expectations. Many Carolinian planters cordially received Ruffin but proved unreceptive to his ideas. Ruffin estimated that not even one in a hundred Carolinian farmers followed his marling instructions. The Virginian returned home in late 1843.[63]

But Ruffin did not stay long in Prince George County. During his sojourn in South Carolina, Ruffin's son Edmund had bought his father a new tidewater plantation, consisting of almost a thousand acres alongside the Pamunkey River in Hanover County. Prior to his departure from Prince George County, Ruffin's old neighbors held a farewell dinner in his honor. The farmers of the county toasted Ruffin's agricultural endeavors as "imperishable works of genius and industry" and presented him with an engraved silver plate. The local Petersburg Republican and the influential Charleston Mercury covered the event. Still, Ruffin felt neglected. The major Virginia newspapers, the Richmond Enquirer and the Richmond Whig, had not mentioned the honorary affair. "If any such complimentary dinner had been given to any political personage, though noted only for the unscrupulous promoting of his own private interest his altogether selfish ambition--or to any worthless vagabond of

military life--some foreign traveller of no account at home--or even . . . to a very ordinary stage player, . . . any of these proceedings would have been republished in every paper in Virginia, none of which noticed the only such honors ever offered me."[64]

Peeved at the Virginian public, Ruffin rejected the presidency of the reorganized Virginia Agricultural Society, which had chosen him as its leader in absentia in early 1845. Ruffin viewed his relationship to society in personal terms. He carefully measured how much of his services the public merited--based upon their past appreciation of his labors. Ruffin's determination to punish an ungrateful public--as well as his obsession with the opinions of others--may be gauged from his considerable vexation by the failure of the agricultural association to announce publicly that the eminent Virginian had declined to accept the presidency. Although he wrote several agricultural articles for popular edification, for the rest of the decade Ruffin turned inward. He became absorbed with transforming his new plantation, aptly named "Marlbourne," into a productive and profitable enterprise. Ruffin's diligent application of marl and utilization of other scientific techniques paid off handsomely. His wheat crop rose from less than fifteen bushels per acre in 1845 to almost twenty-three bushels per acre in 1851. And his corn crop rose from about eighteen bushels per acre in 1845 to nearly forty-four bushels per acre in 1852.[65]

Ruffin's successful farming operations were made possible by the exploitation of slave labor. It was Ruffin's slaves who, using the new agricultural implements and machinery purchased by their master, carefully plowed the fields, spread the marl, applied the fertilizer, reaped the crop, and threshed the grain. Economics played a large role in shaping the treatment of antebellum slaves. Ruffin was no exception. Ruffin saw himself as a paternalistic master, catering to the material and spiritual needs of his slaves. Ruffin provided clean living quarters and an adequate diet for his slaves. His medical expenses were considerable, but the death rate among his slaves, especially infants, was high. Also, Ruffin sporadically provided religious ministry for his slaves. Economic calculation as well as human sentimentality spurred Ruffin's benevolence. Ruffin believed that a slave would be a better laborer if he were properly nourished, sheltered, and Christianed.[66]

The surviving correspondence of the Virginian and his progeny reveals that the priority of the Ruffin family was the maximization of crop production and profits, not slave welfare. On the few occasions when slaves were mentioned, they were viewed in economic rather than in human terms. The acquisition of a slave was not an opportunity to uplift and nurture the African but a sound investment, a "good bargain." Likewise, the death of a field hand was lamented as the loss of a "valuable" laborer rather than a family

member. Thus like many slaveholders, Ruffin viewed his slaves primarily as laborers and property, not as human beings. But his position was ambivalent. Ruffin listed slaves alongside mules, horses, and livestock in his farm journal. Yet he buried his black mammy next to his own children in the family cemetery in Petersburg and penned her epitaph "In rememberance of Lucy Lockett, a slave, yet not the less the friend of her master's family."[67]

Affectionate moments with mammies, however, were subsidiary to the economics of plantation management. Ruffin tried to respect the family ties of his slaves. During the 1830s, for example, Ruffin tried to sell his Prince George plantation to a single buyer in order to maintain family units. But Ruffin took about thirty slaves when he moved to Marlbourne in January 1844; he left the remainder with Edmund at the Beechwood estate. Ruffin claimed that the separation of slave families caused more pain to his own family than to the slaves themselves! As he considered the slaves' family feelings "brutish," his own misgivings may have been slight indeed. Yet during Christmas holidays and "slack periods of labor," Ruffin permitted six to eight men to return to Prince George County, "where they have wives." Such was the extent of his paternalism. Likewise, though Ruffin opposed the infliction of gratuitous cruelty upon his slaves, he may not have been averse to using whips for labor discipline. Significantly, Ruffin opposed both excessive severity and excessive <u>lenity</u>

towards his slaves.[68]

Initially, Ruffin relied on white overseers to manage his field laborers. But after his employees violated their contracts by abusing the slaves, Ruffin assumed the personal supervision of his Marlbourne estate and made one of his slaves, Jem Sykes, his "foreman" or "negro overseer." The talented Sykes enjoyed both the trappings and responsibilities of a white overseer. Sykes lived in the overseer's house and had keys to all buildings on the farm. Additionally, Sykes was completely responsible for plantation operations during his master's periodic absences from Marlbourne. For instance, in August 1848 Ruffin took his daughters for a month vacation to White Sulfur Springs and left Sykes with the duties of threshing the wheat and shipping it to the market. Ruffin remarked that his neighbors were almost as surprised by his encharging Sykes with processing his crop as they were by the size of the crop.[69]

But the admiration of his neighbors for his farming success could not fill Ruffin's deep need for public acclaim. Not even his growing reputation as an agricultural reformer sufficed. A single agrarian contributed more to society than all politicians combined. Such had been the pretentious motto of the Farmers' Register. But Ruffin's personal opinion about the relative merits of farmers and politicians was irrelevant. The South esteemed her political leaders far more than her agricultural

benefactors. Indeed, Ruffin himself shared this elevated conception of public station. Thus he yearned for political fame, not agricultural appreciation. But his experience in political office had yielded more frustration than recognition. Ruffin felt disgusted by and unsuited for public office.[70]

His revulsion towards politics increased in the decades after his resignation. He particularly despised the Jacksonians, whose "spoils system" seemed a travesty of aristocratic republicanism and whose chieftain was disrespectful of state rights. But the Whig party, whose Northern contingent sought to foist the repugnant "American System" of tariffs, banks, and internal improvements upon the nation, was almost equally distasteful. Furthermore, Ruffin observed that candidates of both parties professed state rights principles while seeking power but shamelessly violated their pledges after acquiring power. Though he gravitated towards the State Rights Whigs of the South, Ruffin considered himself politically unaffiliated. From his independent perch, Ruffin tried to steer politicians in the state rights direction. For example, in 1841 Ruffin publicly and privately tried to keep John Tyler in the fold of strict constructionism after his ascension to the presidency upon the death of William Henry Harrison. In the same year, Ruffin had launched <u>The Southern Magazine and Monthly Review</u>, whose motto "Party Spirit: The Madness Of The Many For The Gain Of The Few," dispelled any lingering

doubt about the anti-partyism of its editor. His nonpartisanship was the product of his cynicism. Believing that states' rights had degenerated into "mere idle words," Ruffin sought to revitalize the old republican creed by exposing the political corruption of both parties. But nonpartisanship was unprofitable in the antebellum South. His journal folded after two issues.[71]

Unfortunately, a gap in the sources on Ruffin's political and social views exists for most of the the 1840s. Yet this was the decade of Ruffin's transformation from sectionalist to secessionist, from moderate Southern rights supporter to fire-eating crusader. In the 1830s Ruffin had sought to preserve Southern economic and social interests inside the Union; in the 1850s he mounted a crusade to persuade the South to leave the Union and form an independent slave confederation. In the 1830s Ruffin had reserved his antipathy for the small group of Northern abolitionists; in the 1850s he viewed all Northerners as abolitionists and his hatred rose correspondingly. Also, Ruffin's groping, halting proslavery posture crystallized into ardent proslavery defense. From the periphery of proslavery orthodoxy, from dangerous proximity to heterodoxy in his avowed open-mindedness on the "evil" aspects of slavery in the 1830s, Ruffin became a leading propagandist of the "positive good" school in the border states in the 1850s. What stimulated Ruffin's conversion?

The dearth of sources renders answers highly

speculative. The continuation of the sectional controversy doubtlessly accelerated Ruffin's evolution to radicalism. In August 1842 Congress enacted a new high tariff in violation of the 1833 compromise agreement. In May 1844 Northern Democrats tabled a bill which provided for a moderate tariff. A month later the Senate, loath to admit another slave state into the Union, defeated the Texas annexation treaty. These events sparked South Carolinian extremists led by Robert Barnwell Rhett to advocate independent state action to nullify the tariff and, if necessary, secede from the Union. In his message to the South Carolina state legislature, Governor James Henry Hammond raised the specter of race war and invoked the spirit of the American Revolution to rouse Carolinians to resist federal antislavery oppressions. While professing devotion to a constitutional Union, Hammond exhorted his audience not to be "overawed by the divine right of Union." Ascribing South Carolina's agricultural depression to the protective tariff and the rejection of Texas annexation to the pervasive Northern abolitionist fanaticism, Hammond urged the Palmetto State to act. With the support of the Charleston Mercury and Governor Hammond, the "Bluffton movement" for unilateral action appeared strong indeed. But John C. Calhoun, who counted on the Democratic presidential candidate, James K. Polk, to reduce the tariff and annex Texas upon election to office, managed to quash the Blufftonites.[72]

From the Southern standpoint, however, the beginning of the Polk administration was inauspicious. The president dismissed Calhoun from the cabinet and delivered an inaugural message conspicuously ambiguous on the tariff. The summer of 1845, accordingly, witnessed a resurgence of the Bluffton crusade by the restless Carolinian spirits. At a watering place in Virginia, Rhett called for South Carolina to nullify the tariff unless Congress immediately reduced it to the revenue level. Hammond privately blamed Calhoun for stifling the formation of a Southern confederacy. Though still occupied with attacking banks, Ruffin became increasingly concerned about sectional issues. In May 1845, Ruffin reported to Hammond that he appreciated his forceful gubernatorial message and regretted that other Carolinians did not exude the "same spirit." Carolinian capitulation may have dashed Ruffin's hopes of securing Southern interests within the Union via nullification and turned his attention to secession to save the South. "My hopes of redress rested on S.C. alone of all the states--& I fear that <u>that</u> hope has no longer any ground to rest upon." In September 1845, Ruffin wrote his friend Hammond that the South would have to defend her rights "by the strong hand against the Northern abolitionists, and perhaps against the tariffites. I certainly hope it will be done if necessary." Ruffin was apparently more concerned about Texas than the tariff. But the annexation of Texas by joint Congressional resolution in late December 1845 and the passage of the

Walker tariff, which significantly reduced rates, in July 1846 obviated the need for the "strong hand" for the time being.[73]

Hostilities soon flared over the acquisition and disposition of the Mexican cession. The desire by the North to keep slavery out of the federal territories aroused Southern ire. In August 1846, an obscure Pennsylvanian Democratic Congressman, David Wilmot, attached a proviso barring slavery from the vast territories expected to be acquired from Mexico to a two million dollar appropriation bill for the purchase of those territories.[74] The Wilmot Proviso may have sealed Ruffin's conversion to secessionism.

Nevertheless, Northern encroachments on slavery in the previous decades had not made Ruffin into a fire-eater. The events of the 1840s evidently exceeded his threshold for tolerance and forbearance. But why? What personal factors conduced to his radicalization in the 1840s? His sojourn in the radical state of South Carolina in 1843 and the friendship he formed with one of its eminent fire-eaters doubtlessly contributed in some way to his growing radicalism. In the mid 1840s Hammond sent Ruffin his radical message as well as his proslavery writings. Hammond sought Virginia's help in South Carolina's struggle against federal oppression. And he beseeched Ruffin to "keep Virginia <u>in the lead</u> on the slave question." Ruffin may also have become a regular reader of the <u>Charleston Mercury</u> during this decade. In February 1846 Ruffin's wife, Susan,

ill for alomst a year, died. Ruffin became hypochondriachal and despondent.[75] This event may have deepened his gloomy outlook on life. Cynicism and pessimism formed the backdrop of fire-eating for Ruffin: he was cynical about the professions of constitutionalism by freesoil politicians and pessimistic about the South's ability to defend her interests within the Union. Also, nonpartisanship facilitated Ruffin's conversion to disunionism. Party affiliations, loyalties, and rewards made other Southerners reluctant to embrace disunionism. These hindrances did not exist in Ruffin's case. He was largely indifferent about the fate of the major political parties in the nation.

It was not that Ruffin did not seek political distinction; rather, he had long relinquished hope of achieving political fame by obtaining high office. Ruffin realized that his election to high office was unrealistic. But he did not cease yearning for political honor. One solution was to seek political distinction by unconventional means. Ruffin's subscription to the proslavery and secessionist ideologies, while not impelled by his ambition for public acclaim, would afford him an excellent opportunity of displaying his talents and carving out his niche in the pantheon of Southern heroes. Largely dispensing with his diffident oratorical abilities, Ruffin would wield his confident pen and exercise his caustic tongue--at least in private conversation. Not seeking immediate election to office by the voters, Ruffin would

enjoy somewhat greater latitude than the ordinary politician. He would try to win public favor as a molder rather than as a reflector of popular opinion. By propaganda and agitation, he could rouse the South to seek her political salvation. By defending slavery as a blessing and by spurring Southern political independence to prolong the life of her maligned but valuable institution, Ruffin could at once affirm the honor of the South and achieve his own.

If such hopes guided Ruffin's course, they were destined for keen frustration. The manipulations of the political "outsider" required substantial concessions to the backward state of public opinion, particularly in the upper South. Neither his extremism nor his compromising moderation won him the glory or the gratitude of his fantasies. He was as much an observer as a shaper of the events culminating in secession and a Southern confederation. And, most tragically, disunion proved a recipe for Southern doom instead of Southern salvation.

Notes

(1) Mitchell, Ruffin, 3, 5, 21.

(2) Ibid., 4-5; Craven, Ruffin, 11.

(3) Mitchell, Ruffin, 5-6.

(4) "Gallery of Industry And Enterprise. Edwin Ruffin, of Virginia, Agriculturalist, Embracing a View of Agricultural Progress in Virginia for the Last Thirty Years. with a Portrait," Debow's Review (hereafter DBR), XI (Oct., 1851), 431.

(5) Ibid., 431-432.

(6) Ibid., 432-433; "First Views which led to Marling in Prince George County," Farmers' Register, VII (Nov., 1839), 659-662; Mitchell, Ruffin, 9-14.

(7) "First Views," 662-665; Mitchell, Ruffin, 13-15; In 1822 Thomas Cocke, a friend of Ruffin's pronounced the marling experiment "Ruffin's Folly." See "Edwin Ruffin," 434.

(8) Edmund Ruffin, An Essay on Calcareous Manures, ed. by J. Carlyle Sitterson (Petersburg, 1832; Cambridge, Mass., 1961); Craven, Ruffin, 56-57, 60-61, 63-64; Craven credits Ruffin's popularization of marl with increasing the yields and raising the land prices in the tidewater region, helping to rejuvenate Virginian agriculture, and retarding westward migration after 1840. Craven notes that other factors were also involved such as agricultural diversification, better farm management, internal improvements, the passing of flush times in the Southwest, and the use of Peruvian guano. Craven points out that guano worked on lands where marl had failed. Avery O. Craven, Soil Exhaustion as a Factor in the Agricultural History of Virginia and Maryland, 1606-1860 (Urbana, Ill., 1926; Gloucester, Mass., 1965), 119-150. Genovese also notes the superiority of guano but stresses the severe limitations of all types of agricultural reform in the Old South including fertilizers. Genovese, Political Economy, 90-95.

(9) "Edwin Ruffin," 435; "An Address to the United Agricultural Societies of Virginia, from their Delegates, in General Meeting Assembled," American Farmer, II (Jan. 19, 1821), 338.

(10) Charles S. Sydnor, The Development of Southern Sectionalism 1819-1848, Vol. V of A History of the South, ed. by Wendell H. Stephenson and E. Merton Coulter (Baton Rouge, 1948), 140-145; On Ruffin's active leadership of the

early anti-tariff movement in Virginia, see James Henry Hammond to Edmund Ruffin, March 11, 1851, James Henry Hammond Papers, Library of Congress (hereafter LC) & Julian Ruffin to Edmund Ruffin, January 2, 1852, Edmund Ruffin Papers (microfilm), Southern Historical Collection (hereafter SHC), University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill.

(11) "An Address to the United Agricultural Societies of Virginia," 338-339; "Edwin Ruffin," 435.

(12) "An Address to the Public from the Delegation of the United Agricultural Societies of Virginia," American Farmer, II (May 19, 1820), 57; "To the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States in Congress Assembled," American Farmer, II (Jan. 19, 1821), 339.

(13) "An Address to the Public," 57; "To the Senate and House," 339.

(14) "An Address to the Public," 57, 59.

(15) "To the Senate and House," 339.

(16) Ibid., 339-340.

(17) Ibid., 339.

(18) "An Address to the United Agricultural Societies of Virginia," 338; "An Address to the Public," 57, 59.

(19) "An Address to the Public," 59.

(20) Mitchell, Ruffin, 23-24; William H. Crawford was a states' rights Republican akin to the Taylors and the Macons. Ruffin's curt rejection of Crawford is puzzling. See Sydnor, Southern Sectionalism, 135, 160.

(21) Mitchell, Ruffin, 25; Ruffin's aristocratic pretensions were common among Southern planters who resided in the Atlantic seaboard states in the early nineteenth century. Dominating county courts, state legislatures, and state caucases, planters could afford to dispense with campaigning for office. But Ruffin may not have had any influential political connections. And he clung to such attitudes long after the old political culture had been eroded. See Sydnor, Southern Sectionalism, 281-282. The older, established aristocrats perceived that a new type of aggressive and passionate politician was displacing their traditional authority. William R. Taylor includes Ruffin among these politically alienated "Southern Mugwumps." See Taylor, Cavalier and Yankee, 55-65.

(22) Mitchell, Ruffin, 26; Ruffin, Diary, II, Entry for

Jan. 20, 1863, 544-545; Ruffin may have unsuccessfully sought legislative appropriations for agriculture during his senatorship. A decade later Ruffin condemned the Virginia legislature for neglecting agriculture. See "Sketch of the Progress of Agriculture in Virginia, and the Causes of its Decline, and Present Depression," Farmers' Register, III (April, 1836), 754.

(23) Ruffin, Diary, I, Appendix B: "Fragments," 619-620; Mitchell, Ruffin, 27-28.

(24) Ruffin, Diary, I, xlvii-xlviii; Edmund Ruffin, Address to the Virginia State Agricultural Society on the Effects of Domestic Slavery on the Manners, Habits and Welfare of the Agricultural Population of the Southern States; and the Slavery of Class to Class in the Northern States (Richmond, 1853), 7.

(25) Edmund Ruffin, Jr., to Edmund Ruffin, March 28, 1829, in Mrs. Kirkland Ruffin, ed., "School-Boy Letters of Edmund Ruffin, Jr.," North Carolina Historical Review, X (Oct., 1933), 318; Mitchell, Ruffin, 62. In spite of his growing cultural sectionalism, in the mid 1830s Ruffin hired a highly-recommended New England tutor for his young daughter. But after finding her devoid of both "scholarship" and "lady-like manners," he dismissed her after six weeks and resolved never to employ Northern tutors again. Ruffin, "Incidents of My Life," II, 137, Edmund Ruffin Papers, SHC.

(26) Sydnor, Southern Sectionalism, 209-210, 214-217; Ruffin's biographers assert that their subject supported nullification in 1832 but present no evidence. Craven, Ruffin, 47, & Mitchell, Ruffin, 46.

(27) Mitchell, Ruffin, 31-32.

(28) Ruffin, Diary, II, Entry for Jan. 4, 1862, 207-209.

(29) Alison Goodyear Freehling, Drift Toward Dissolution: The Virginia Slavery Debate of 1831-1832 (Baton Rouge and London, 1982), 138, 154-155. Another Virginian conservative, John Thompson Brown, denied that slavery was evil or sinful but disclaimed justifying slavery "in the abstract." Slaves, Brown declared, fared better than four-fifths of mankind. Later, proslavery theoreticians, including Ruffin, would incorporate this very argument in their attempt to justify slavery in the abstract. On Brown, see Freehling, Drift, 153-154. Another Virginian, Charles Yancey, used a similar argument (slaves fared better than poor Northern whites) to apologize for slavery but admitted that slavery was "an evil of great magnitude." Adherence to the "necessary evil" or "positive good" school was not

merely a matter of specific argumentation--though certain types of arguments were associated with each creed. On Yancey, see "Address to the Agricultural Society of Buckingham," Farmers' Register, IV (March, 1837), 695-696.

(30) Freehling, Drift, 129, 142-143, 148-149, 164, 166-167, 185, 188-192.

(31) Thomas R. Dew, Review of the Debate in the Virginia Legislature of 1831 and 1832 (Richmond, 1832; Westport, Conn., 1970), 9-36, 91-93, 106-112.

(32) Ibid., 46-93; Freehling contends that Dew, along with other conservatives of the period, deemed slavery incompatible with small-scale, diversified farming and with commercial-manufacturing pursuits and, accordingly, expected slavery to wither away from Virginia. In fact, Freehling claims that unlike other conservatives, Dew was not content to rely passively on natural factors to end plantation slavery in Virginia but sought internal improvements to accelerate the process. Freehling, however, may have overstated the similarities between Virginia conservatives and emancipationists. Dew's declaration of the unsuitability of Virginia for slavery and his endorsement of internal improvements appear as incongruous afterthoughts to his tedious and comprehensive defense of slavery. Dew may have sought to deflect the antislavery clamor of the nonslaveholders of western Virginia by assuring them that time would eventually erode slavery and by calling on slaveholders to subsidize railroad and canal construction. But Dew did not envision the rapid transformation of the Virginia economy or the swift demise of slavery in the state. In the true conservative vein, Dew pointed out that "the evil of yesterday's growth, may be extirpated to-day, and the vigour of society may heal the wound; but that which is the growth of ages, may require ages to remove." See Freehling, Drift, 206-207, & Dew, Review, 5, 123, 126.

(33) Extracts from Jesse Burton Harrison's Review of the Slave Question in the Farmers' Register, I (June, 1833), 36-41; Many of Harrison's points had been made by west Virginian emancipationists during the legislative debate. Freehling, Drift, 145-147, 157.

(34) "Agricultural Review. Slavery and Emancipation," Farmers' Register, I (June, 1833), 36.

(35) Ibid.

(36) Merton L. Dillon, The Abolitionists: The Growth of a Dissenting Minority (DeKalb, Ill., 1974), 64, 89-90.

(37) "Movements of the Abolition Societies; and

Anticipated Results," Farmers' Register, III (Sept., 1835), 288.

(38) Ibid., 287.

(39) Ibid., 287-288; Other Southerners made similar arguments. William Harper, for example, argued that if the abolitionists succeeded in instilling guilt in slaveholders, then the latter would vent their frustration by treating their slaves more harshly! See William Harper, "Slavery in the Light of Social Ethics," ["Memoir on Slavery"], in Cotton is King, and Pro-Slavery Arguments Comprising the Writings of Hammond, Harper, Christy, Stringfellow, Hodge, Bledsoe, and Cartwright, on this Important Subject, ed. by E.N. Elliott (Augusta, 1860; New York, 1969), 623-629. See also James Henry Hammond, "Slavery in the Light of Political Science," ["Letters to an English Abolitionist"], in Cotton is King, 651.

(40) "Movements of the Abolition Societies," 288-289; Southerners--as well as conservative Northerners--quite plausibly interpreted abolitionist lithographs as designed for slaves. See Henry H. Simms, Emotion at High Tide: Abolition as a Controversial Factor, 1830-1845 (Richmond, 1960), 24-26, 49-51, 53, 70-71, 82.

(41) Dillon, Abolitionists, 61-64, 90-91; Leonard L. Richards, "Gentlemen of Property and Standing": Anti-Abolition Mobs in Jacksonian America (London and New York, 1970), 15-18; On the civil liberties issue drawing Northern sympathy for the abolitionists, see Russel B. Nye, Fettered Freedom: Civil Liberties and the Slavery Controversy, 1830-1860 (East Lansing, Michigan, 1949).

(42) "Some of the Effects of West Indian Emancipation, as Stated by the Friends of that Measure," Farmers' Register, IV (May, 1836), 49; Sydnor, Southern Sectionalism, 232-233.

(43) "Effects of West Indian Emancipation," 49; Sydnor observes that the slaveholder resented the moral righteousness of the abolitionists, who condemned him as a "sinner." Sydnor, Southern Sectionalism, 233, 238, 241, 248.

(44) In 1859 Ruffin recollected, "Formerly, it would have been difficult to find in Virginia, a man of education who did not deem slavery both a public and a private evil." Significantly, Ruffin credited Dew in particular with undertaking a sophisticated reevaluation of slavery. Edmund Ruffin, "Liberia and the Colonization Society," DBR, XXVI (April, 1859), 419-420; On Ruffin's retrospective styling of himself as a "speculative abolitionist" like Thomas Jefferson, see Ruffin, Diary, I, Entry for Oct. 20, 1858,

238; Several other proslavery writers similarly perceived a major ideological transformation in the South on the slavery issue. Harper, "Slavery," and Hammond, "Slavery," in Cotton is King, 609, 684-685. Also see George Fitzhugh, "Southern Thought," in The Ideology of Slavery: Proslavery Thought in the Antebellum South, 1830-1860, ed. by Drew Gilpin Faust (Baton Rouge and London, 1981), 274-275.

Most historians deny, or sharply qualify, the very existence of a "necessary evil" school in the South during the Revolutionary and Jeffersonian eras. Historians have argued that most slaveholders took the legitimacy of slavery for granted and that public concessions of the "evils" of slavery were mere tactical maneuvers and confined to the political and economic aspects of bondage. Genovese emphatically denies that Southerners ever held slavery was a moral evil and felt guilty about retaining their slaves in bondage. McColley stresses that antislavery projects were unpopular in Jeffersonian Virginia and that the state failed to emancipate her slaves. Jenkins, Proslavery Thought, 48-65; Genovese, World Slaveholders Made, 132, 143-150; Robert McColley, Slavery and Jeffersonian Virginia (Urbana, Ill.,1973), 114-162; Tise, Proslavery, 33-37.

William W. Freehling, however, argues that the nullification crusade converted South Carolinians from the necessary evil apologia to the positive good defense. And Alison Freehling contends that in Virginia the perception of slavery as an evil was shared by emancipationists and conservatives in the legislative debate on emancipation in 1831-1832 and ambivalence about slavery persisted into the 1850s. William W. Freehling, Prelude to Civil War: The Nullification Controversy in South Carolina, 1816-1836 (New York, 1966), 76-82, 327-329, & Freehling, Drift, 122-169, 248-249. Donald G. Mathews contends that the view of slavery as evil and concomitant guilt feelings persisted into the nineteenth century. See Donald G. Mathews, Religion in the Old South (Chicago and London, 1977), 69-73, 79-80, 138-139, 152-153, 182-184.

My position, in the main, is that of the Freehlings. Historians who have dismissed the sincerity of the necessary evil school by the Southern failure to undertake emancipation or who have viewed the admission of the necessary evil position as tantamount to the acknowledgement of Southern guilt have focussed exclusively on the "evil" aspect of the ideology and forgotten about the "necessity." The fear that liberation would have dreadful consequences for both races impeded the implementation of an emancipation program and inhibited the development of strong guilt feelings. Historians who deny the existence or significance of a necessary evil school in the South during the late colonial and early national period have not satisfactorily explained why so many positive good theorists affirmed its presence and sought to uproot it. Indeed, the denial of a substantial necessary evil sentiment during the Jeffersonian

era unwittingly furnishes evidence for those historians who view the positive good effusions of the post-nullification era as expressions of a guilt complex.

(45) "The Slaves of Hunger," Farmers' Register, I (Aug., 1833), 187-190; "Refugee and Emancipated Slaves," Farmers' Register, I (Dec., 1833), 405-406; "Condition of the Descendants of a Number of Emancipated Slaves, in Prince Edward County," Farmers' Register, IV (May, 1836), 3-4; See also "An Experiment of Emancipated Negroes, Under Very Favorable Circumstances," Farmers' Register, III (Nov., 1835), 429-430.

(46) "Slavery in Virginia," Farmers Register IV (July, 1836), 180-183; "Opinions of the Presbyterian Church of Virginia on Slavery, and the Northern Efforts for its Abolition," Farmers' Register, IV (Dec., 1836), 507-508.

(47) "Causes of the Depressed Condition of Lower Virginia," Farmers' Register, II (July, 1834), 96.

(48) "Sketch of the Progress of Agriculture in Virginia," 748-750.

(49) Ibid., 751-760; "Extract from the Records of the United Agricultural Societies of Virginia. Report on Agricultural Premiums, Submitted to and Approved by the delegation of the United Agricultural Societies of Virginia, December 6, 1822," Farmers' Register, I (Aug., 1833), 147-149.

(50) "Alleged Effect of Slavery in the Agriculture of Virginia," Farmers' Register, VII (April, 1839), 235-238.

(51) Ibid., 235-236.

(52) Ibid., 236.

(53) Ruffin quoted in Mitchell, Ruffin, 61.

(54) Edmund Ruffin, "Incidents of My Life," II, 141-146, 150-153, 158, Edmund Ruffin Papers, SHC; "What Constitutes a Specie-Paying Bank? And Wherein Does it Differ from a Non-Specie Paying Bank" Farmers' Register, IX (Mar., 1841), 163-165; Mitchell, Ruffin, 39-40.

Ruffin viewed himself as financially inept: a good farmer in the easygoing, insulated rural world but a poor businessman in the pressure-laden urban world. Yet he blamed not only banks for his financial losses but the entire urban environment for inducing his speculative investments. Since his poor investments had been made during his residency in Petersburg and had involved commercial and manufacturing enterprises, Ruffin's pecuniary misfortunes reinforced his

anti-urbanism. He also interpreted political positions on banking as a reflection of personal interests. He privately claimed that the Virginia legislators' personal indebtedness induced them to legally suspend specie payments for five years. See "Incidents of My Life," II, 143-145, 150-151, Edmund Ruffin Papers, SHC. It should be noted, however, that Ruffin's opposition to banking antedated his financial losses. The "enormous emissions" of paper money and the consequent fluctuations in land prices, Ruffin had complained, ruined numerous farmers. "Incidents of My Life," II, 109, Edmund Ruffin Papers, SHC.

(55) "Party Politics and Private Matters," & "Editorial Remarks in Reply," Farmers' Register, IX (Oct., 1841), 617-618; Craven, Ruffin, 66-67.

(56) "Editorial Remarks in Reply," 617-619.

(57) Edmund Ruffin, "Incidents of My Life," II, 150-154e, Edmund Ruffin Papers, SHC; Edmund Ruffin to James Henry Hammond, October 24, 1845, James Henry Hammond Papers, LC; Craven, Ruffin, 68-69; Mitchell, Ruffin, 40-43; Ruffin tried to enlist Hammond in his crusade by getting him a press to print anti-banking endorsements. The receptive Hammond wanted to extend Ruffin's anti-banking crusade to South Carolina. See Edmund Ruffin to James H. Hammond, Oct. 24, Nov. 11, 1845, James Henry Hammond Papers, LC; James H. Hammond to Edmund Ruffin, Oct. 10, Nov. 20, 1845, Jan. 2, 1846, Edmund Ruffin Papers, SHC.

(58) Edmund Ruffin to James Henry Hammond, September 7, 1845, James Henry Hammond Papers, LC; Mitchell, Ruffin, 43. Ruffin claimed that his attacks on the "swindling aristocracy" (the banking establishment) lost him $7,000 worth of subscriptions to the Farmers' Register. Edmund Ruffin to James H. Hammond, July 6, 1845, James Henry Hammond Papers, LC. Ruffin also ascribed the failure of his editorial venture to the competition of cheap Northern agricultural periodicals and to his own ignorance of the publishing business. Edmund Ruffin, "Incidents of My Life," II, 146-148, Edmund Ruffin Papers, SHC.

(59) Edmund Ruffin to James Henry Hammond, September 7, 1845, James Henry Hammond Papers, LC.

(60) "Extracts from the Records of the United Agricultural Societies of Virginia," 147-149; "The Advantages and Defects of Agricultural Societies," by "An Ex-Member," Farmers' Register, I (Sept., 1833), 200-201; Edmund Ruffin, "Incidents of My Life," III, 244, Edmund Ruffin Papers, SHC.

(61) "Sketch of the Progress of Agriculture in

Virginia," 754, 760; Edmund Ruffin to James Henry Hammond, November 26, 1846, James Henry Hammond Papers, LC.

(62) Edmund Ruffin, "Incidents of My Life," II, 155, Edmund Ruffin Papers, SHC; Craven, Ruffin, 71.

(63) Mitchell, Ruffin, 46-48.

(64) Edmund Ruffin, "Incidents of My Life," II, 160-163, Edmund Ruffin Papers, SHC; Mitchell, Ruffin, 49-50.

(65) Edmund Ruffin to James Henry Hammond, May 17, 1845, James Henry Hammond Papers, LC; Edmund Ruffin, "Incidents of My Life," II, 213, Edmund Ruffin Papers, SHC; Craven, Ruffin, 88-89; Mitchell, Ruffin, 50-52.

(66) Ruffin, Diary, I, Entry for Feb. 20, 1859, 284; Craven, Ruffin, 19-21; Mitchell, Ruffin, 50.

(67) On Ruffin's concern with the amount and price of his crops, see Edmund Ruffin to James Henry Hammond, May 17, 1845, December 8, 1853, James Henry Hammond Papers, LC; Edmund Ruffin to Julian Ruffin, July 23, 1853, Edmund Ruffin Papers, SHC. On his sons' concern with the growing and marketing of crops--a preeminent concern even during the 1850 sectional crisis--see Edmund Ruffin Jr. to Edmund Ruffin, September 9, 1846, July 12, 1851, May 3, June 30, 1852, Julian Ruffin to Edmund Ruffin, June 28, 1848, November 25, 1850, July 7, 1851, September 11, 1852, Edmund Ruffin Papers, SHC. On the Ruffin family's viewing slaves as economic objects, see Edmund Ruffin Jr. to Edmund Ruffin, July 6, 1848, January 10, 1856, Julian Ruffin to Edmund Ruffin, April 1, 1853, Edmund Ruffin Papers, SHC; For the notations in Ruffin's farm journal and the epitaph for his mammy, see Mitchell, Ruffin, 54.

(68) Edmund Ruffin, "Incidents of My Life," II, 105, 138-139, Edmund Ruffin Papers, SHC; Craven, Ruffin, 18; Mitchell, Ruffin, 53-54.

(69) Edmund Ruffin, "Incidents of My Life," II, 104, 187-188, Edmund Ruffin Papers, SHC; Mitchell, Ruffin, 54-55.

(70) The motto of the Farmers' Register was "Whoever could make two ears of corn or two blades of grass to grow upon a spot of ground where only one grew before, would deserve better of mankind, and do more essential service to his country, than the whole race of politicians put together." As Mitchell comments, Ruffin protested too much. See Mitchell, Ruffin, 35. Years later John Tyler praised Ruffin for his early resignation of political office and pursuit of the more worthwhile object of agriculture. Ruffin's response was candid and revealing: "I perceive that

you, like many other friends who have known me more intimately, have mistaken me in this respect. It was not because I was devoid of ambition, or the desire to wield political power, that I have not sought political stations. On the contrary, few persons would have been more gratified by being so placed." Ruffin, Diary, I, Appendix B: "Fragments," 619. Drew Gilpin Faust argues that Ruffin's almost insatiable need for acclaim stemmed from his childhood rejection and neglect. Even when Ruffin achieved a modicum of distinction, he was dissatisfied. What requires emphasis, however, is not merely the degree of popularity Ruffin sought but the kind of popularity he sought, namely political distinction. Faust discusses Ruffin's quest for political eminence in the context of his more general pursuit of moral stewardship as an intellectual. Faust, Circle, 24, 35, 42, 52-55, 105-111.

(71) "Editorial Remarks in Reply," 619 ; "Summary of News," Farmers' Register, IX (April, 1841), 253; Ruffin, Diary, I, Appendix A: Edmund Ruffin to John Tyler, June 29, 1841, 613-615; Edmund Ruffin, "Incidents of My Life," II, 149-150, Edmund Ruffin Papers, SHC; Mitchell, Ruffin, 60-61.

(72) Charles M. Wiltse, John C. Calhoun: Sectionalist, 1840-1850 (New York, 1951), 86-88, 173-174, 182, 188-193; "Governor's Message. No. 1. EXECUTIVE DEPARTMENT, COLUMBIA, NOV. 26, 1844," Charleston Mercury, November 28, 1844.

(73) Wiltse, Calhoun: Sectionalist, 221, 227-229, 262-272; Cooper, South and Slavery, 219-220; Edmund Ruffin to James Henry Hammond, May 17, September 7, 1845, James Henry Hammond Papers, LC.

(74) Wiltse, Calhoun: Sectionalist, 287-288.

(75) Historians have noted that Ruffin's close friendship with Hammond promoted his radicalization. See, for instance, Mitchell, Ruffin, 59-60. Faust contends that the friendship between Ruffin and Hammond was rooted in the social alienation of intellectuals in the antebellum South. Faust, Circle, 1-3; On Hammond's influence, see James Henry Hammond to Edmund Ruffin, January 7, August 7, 1845, March 26, 1847, Edmund Ruffin Papers, SHC; Ruffin may have formed lesser friendships with other South Carolina fire-eaters including Whitemarsh B. Seabrook, president of the state agricultural society as well as the Blufftonite candidate for governor to succeed Hammond. See [Edmund Ruffin,] "Private Diary of E.R., State Agricultural Surveyor of South Carolina 1843," Edmund Ruffin Papers, SHC; It is difficult to pinpoint when Ruffin began reading the Mercury, but he seems to have been a reader by the 1840s. On the death of his wife, see Edmund Ruffin, "Incidents of My Life," II, 183, Edmund Ruffin Papers, SHC; & Mitchell, Ruffin, 58-59.

Chapter Two: The Emergence of a Fire-Eater

The year 1850 saw Edmund Ruffin's entrance into the sectional controversy. The growing expansion of the federal domain in the 1840s had escalated sectional tensions. Northern and Southern Congressional delegations vied with each other over the organization of the extensive region obtained from Mexico by virtue of American victory in the Mexican War. In 1846 many Northerners supported the proposal of David Wilmot to prohibit slavery from entering the entire Mexican cession. The House of Representatives passed the bill but the Senate filibustered the Wilmot Proviso to death. The continuing freesoil agitation, culminating in the reenactment of the Wilmot Proviso by the House in Februrary 1847, galvanized Southerners into action. The outstanding Southern rights leader John C. Calhoun introduced a series of resolutions into the Senate which succintly articulated the Southern interpretation of the Constitution and denied the legitimacy of the freesoil proviso: the federal government, an agent of the sovereign states, had no authority to bar slaves, the peculiar species of Southern property, from entering the western territories, the joint property of all the states.[1]

On the state level, the Southern rights response to the mounting freesoil threat was spearheaded by Virginia. In March 1847 the Virginia state legislature adopted a set of resolutions, which became the model for other Southern states. The Virginia resolutions echoed the Calhounite

position on the unconstitutionality of federal restrictions upon the emigration of Southern slaveholders to the western territories and then signally declared "that a violation of the Missouri Compromise and the passage of the Wilmot Proviso will force the people of Virginia to follow the only alternative that will then remain of abject submission to aggression and outrage, on the one hand, or determined resistance on the other, at all hazards and to the last extremity." Even more blunt was the Virginia governor's December 1848 legislative message which stated that if the Wilmot Proviso or a kindred measure passed Congress, "then indeed the day of compromise will have passed, and the dissolution of our great and glorious Union will become necessary and inevitable." In January 1849 the Virginia legislators not only reaffirmed the March 1847 resolutions but called upon the governor to convene them into session immediately if Congress passed the Wilmot Proviso or abolished slavery or the slave trade in the District of Columbia.[2]

Such fire-eating proclamations by Southern state governments failed to quell the antislavery agitation in the halls of Congress. Southern representatives successfully parried the freesoil thrust of David Wilmot but were unable to enact any satisfactory territorial settlement. Northern representatives, constituting a Congressional majority, refused to compromise; they rejected proposals to extend the Missouri Compromise line of 36° 30' to the Pacific Ocean or

to let the federal courts decide the status of slavery in the territories. Seeking to circumvent the cumbersome problem of territorial slavery, President Zachary Taylor arranged for California--the largest and richest of the Mexican lands--to skip the territorial stage altogether and apply for admission into the Union as a free state. But Southerners were hardly thankful for this executive stratagem, as the opprobrious Wilmot Proviso would be only nominally evaded.[3]

Southerners were further angered by the persistent Northern attempts to abolish slavery in the District of Columbia. In fact, some Southerners, including several Virginia Whigs who had regarded the Wilmot Proviso serenely as an indirect attack upon an abstract issue, were alarmed by the movement to eliminate slavery from the nation's capital. Although in Northern eyes the federal government had legal jurisdiction over the District of Columbia, Southerners viewed the issue as a litmus test of Northern fidelity to the Constitution. Reinforcing this constitutional apprehension was the practical fear that an abolitionized Washington would serve as a haven to runaway slaves from the border states. Many Southern men, particularly those residing in the upper South, clamored for an effective fugitive slave law.[4]

While sectional partisans heatedly debated these measures on the Congressional floor, Edmund Ruffin, the prominent agricultural reformer, began his career as a

Southern fire-eater. In early 1850 Ruffin penned three essays entitled "What will be the Results of the Northern Abolition Action?" which soon appeared in the Richmond Enquirer under the pseudonym "A Virginian." In these essays Ruffin portrayed sectional relations as a pattern of fanatical Northern aggression and fanatical Southern concession. The South, Ruffin believed, was just as compulsively passive and submissive as the North was active and aggressive. Ruffin held the Missouri Compromise responsible for inaugurating this pernicious pattern. Since the proscription of territorial slavery was unconstitutional, Southern acceptance of the Missouri Compromise had signalled her retreat from the protection of the Constitution. Additionally, since the area above the selected latitudinal demarcation was considerably larger than the region below it, the South had incurred practical disadvantage. Ruffin dismissed the argument that the South's formal acceptance of a freesoil Northwest had merely acknowledged the patent unsuitability of slavery in the region by pointing out that the North had attached the Wilmot Proviso to the Oregon territorial bill. If the Northwest was naturally inhospitable to slavery, why had the North been so anxious to proscribe it legally therein? Indeed, the Missouri Compromise became a precedent for further Northern encroachment as the North sought to apply the Wilmot Proviso to the vast Mexican cession and prepared California for admission as a free state.

Continued Southern submission, Ruffin warned, would encourage a series of Northern measures against slavery which would culminate in the extinction of slavery and racial extermination. The Wilmot Proviso would be enacted to exclude slavery from all the territories. Slavery would be abolished in areas within the South over which the federal government--according to Northern construction of the Constitution--could exercise jurisdiction such as the District of Columbia, federal dockyards, forts, lighthouses, and navy-yards. These places in the South would become havens for fugitive slaves and "abolitionist arsenals" attacking slavery within the South itself. Meanwhile, the ratio of blacks to whites in the South would rise to dangerous proportions as the more rapid birth rate of the slaves would spur the emigration of many Southern whites, whose departure would only compound the problem. The diffusion of slavery by removals to the territories would be precluded by the Wilmot Proviso. Ultimately, the black/white ratio would be high enough to enable the slaves to rebel and subjugate the remaining whites.

By this time, Ruffin contended, the infiltration of organized abolitionism into the border states would have destroyed slavery in the upper South. Abolitionists disguised as missionaries, teachers, and merchants would jeopardize slavery by the dissemination of numerous "incendiary publications" which even illiterate slaves could understand--such as portraits of "a beautiful white female,

with dishevelled hair, in the embrace of a negro man." These insidious forms of abolitionist subversion would induce many a slave to abscond until border state slavery withered away. Thus while the suffusion of slaves in the lower South would eventuate in the overthrow of slavery by cataclysmic servile revolt, the progressive depletion of slaves in the upper South by abolitionist enticement of slave escapes would gradually erode slavery.

Even if these gloomy contingencies did not transpire, Ruffin pointed out that the North's monopoly of territorial acquisitions and corresponding increment of political power would enable the hostile section to abolish slavery by constitutional amendment. If necessary, Ruffin warned, the zealously abolitionist and brazenly aggrandizing North would annex Canada to obtain the requisite three-quarters majority to amend the Constitution. These constitutional amendments, Ruffin predicted, would not only abolish slavery but raise all blacks to political equality with whites.[5]

Ruffin either did not perceive or chose to ignore the pervasive racism of Northerners. In his mind, the entire North was fanatically abolitionist. The "tendency" of the North as a "community," Ruffin asserted, was identical to that of the most rabid abolitionist. The body of the Northern people, including their Congressional representatives, sought the same objective as the followers of William Lloyd Garrison, namely the elevation of the blacks and the extinction of the whites. To Southerners

like Ruffin, abolitionist propaganda seemed designed to stir black violence rather than white consciences. The vituperative declamations against slaveholders in the Liberator and the pictorial representations of slaveholder cruelty in the Emancipator made Garrisonian subscription to Christian nonresistance appear to Southerners as shameless hypocrisy. Ruffin, however, may have confounded his own anticipations of the consequences of the abolition of Southern slavery with the intentions of the Northern abolitionists. For Ruffin, not only the abolitionists but virtually all Northerners sought to reduce the Southern planters to the status of their counterparts in Jamaica, Guadeloupe, and ultimately St. Domingo.[6]

But whereas the abolitionist openly avowed his aims, the Northern masses cunningly concealed theirs. Compromising with the North was therefore absurd. The North had no more respect for laws, constitutions, and compacts than Garrison. And yet, a baffled Ruffin complained, Southerners pertinaciously cited legal authorities affirming their constitutional rights and meticulously documented Northern usurpations; they made their expostulations to the very tribunal which knowingly violated the Constitution and willfully oppressed them. How could the South continue to negotiate with such a fanatical and hypocritical people who sought her utter ruin! Ironically, Ruffin used the dictum of New Hampshire's antislavery Senator John P. Hale, "Concession to fanatics never satisfies fanaticism," as an

argument against compromising with the North. Moreover, Ruffin believed that compromise in general bred further aggression. The North was like a bully: submission would encourage her but resistance would intimidate her.[7]

But threats of resistance would no longer suffice to deter Northern aggression. John C. Calhoun hoped that a concerted Southern demand for substantial Northern concessions would succeed if backed by a disunion ultimatum. Such calculations lay behind his scheme of the Nashville convention. But Ruffin believed that the South had cried wolf too often: "We of the South have so often declared that we would no longer submit to the repetitions of Northern aggressions--so often threatened to resist the recurrence at all hazards--that our declarations and threats are not heeded. We are continually insulted and derided by Northern politicians and Northern publications, as braggarts and boasters who will not dare to defend what we claim to be our rights. They have abundant reason, in our past forbearance, for not believing in the possibility of our resisting the like assaults." Although the South, in Ruffin's mind, had repeatedly submitted out of her love for the Union, the North interpreted Southern passivity as symptoms of cowardice, weakness, and fear. At this point, then, Southern verbal threats would be nugatory. The South would have to act. Secession was the her only recourse left.[8]

But was an independent South feasible? Unionists said no. Ruffin maintained that a Southern confederacy was both

militarily and economically viable. The North, Ruffin assured his reader, would not invade the South; the calculating Yankees would not risk losing millions of dollars and thousands of lives in an offensive war against Dixie. Only among barbarous nations was hatred a sufficient cause for war. But with the civilized North, Yankee avarice would preserve the peace. The Mississippi River, for example, would induce peace not war; the greedy Yankees would prefer peaceful commerce with the South along the river than risking great losses for its capture in war. Thus, in Ruffin's mind, Northern rationality, powerless to overcome abolitionist fanaticism against a dependent South, would suffice to quell belligerency towards an independent South. And secession would not fortify Northern abolitionists as many Unionists feared. Northern abolitionists would become as harmless to the South as other foreign abolitionists. A Southern confederacy could effectively exclude all foreign abolitionists from her borders and thereby thwart the pernicious threat of abolitionist emissaries which so tormented the Virginian fire-eater.

Should the North make the irrational choice of invading the Southern confederation, Ruffin was certain that the South could defend herself well. The South, after all, would have many advantages in such a military contest. While the Northern invader would have to conquer Southern territory, the South would merely have to defend her own

terrain. Also, the South would have the strategic asset of controlling the mouth of the Mississippi River. Further, slavery itself was a great asset for the South. Northern reliance on white farm labor would limit the number of troops she could mobilize. But slave agriculture would enable the South to gather a large proportion of whites for military service. And the Southerner, accustomed to martial pursuits, was more fit for military service than the Northerner. Moreover, the valuable agricultural staples raised by slavery would enable the South to finance the war more easily than the North.

The South would experience no difficulty in sustaining herself economically. On the contrary, liberated from the incubus of a draining Northern tribute, the South would prosper. The South could either remain agricultural and obtain cheap manufactured goods directly from Europe subsidized through her crops, or she could become economically self-sufficient by developing her manufacturing industry protected from foreign competition by a tariff of her own. Whatever her choice, the South would save millions in annual tribute. Freed from Yankee domination, Southern cities would become flourishing commercial centers. Unleashed from the shackles of Northern bondage, an independent South could become a veritable cornucopia. But if the South remained in the Union, the increasing Northern financial exploitation of the South such as the tariff would progressively weaken her. The logical implication of

Ruffin's analysis was the quick secession of the Southern states.[9]

Thus Ruffin's 1850 essays articulated many staple tenets in the ideology of the classic fire-eaters: the viewing of particular issues from a larger historical perspective within which Northern aggression and Southern submission were the dominant motifs; the contention that concession only encouraged further aggression; the portrayal of the North as an abolition monolith whose relentless course could not be stymied by traditional political strategies such as national political parties; the assailment of the South for her addiction to concession; the admonition that continued Southern submission would culminate in the abolition of slavery; the equation of the extirpation of slavery with the racial extermination of the Southern whites; the urgency of the secessionist imperative to avert the further enervation of the South in the Union; and the assurance that an independent South was both militarily viable and economically desirable.

Nevertheless, Ruffin did not call for outright disunion in any of his three essays. In fact, his first article was quite hypothetical, hesitant, and even melancholy in calling for secession. Ruffin designated three circumstances which would warrant disunion: the enactment of the Wilmot Proviso; the abolition of slavery in the District of Columbia; and Congressional refusal to pass a fugitive slave law. Narrowly interpreted, none of these conditions materialized.

Later that year Congress passed a fugitive slave law and did not enact the hated proviso or abolish slavery in the nation's capital. Such Northern gestures, however, could hardly be reassuring to someone convinced that the South would be inevitably doomed if she remained in the Union. Moreover, Ruffin professed to stand squarely on the bedrock of a Constitutional Union and to lament disunion as a "deplorable" prospect. The South, Ruffin noted, venerated the Constitution, while the North shamelessly violated the Constitution by refusing to implement its fugitive slave provisions. But such a constitutional posture seems an irrelevancy at best to a Southerner who realized that the growing Northern majority would soon be able to abolish slavery by constitutional amendment. Furthermore, Ruffin declared that if the North desisted from future aggressions--a condition ostensibly precluded by the fire-eater's identification of the North with fanatical abolitionism--then "not one advocate for disunion will be heard in all the Southern States." Ruffin's first essay thus articulated radical premises but exuded the aura and propounded the program of Southern moderates.[10]

Ruffin's second article was more pessimistic but still rather tentative and hypothetical. "The dissolution of the Union may now be deemed inevitable and near, for it is only to be avoided by one of two alternatives, both of which are extremely improbable": either the North ceased its hostilities and redressed Southern grievances or the South

shamefully capitulated to continuing Northern aggression. The South, Ruffin asserted, would unanimously welcome the first option "as the sure guaranty for the preservation of the Union."[11] But Ruffin failed to spell out what he meant by redress.

Ruffin's third essay did not clarify this ambiguity but did specify a concrete measure which the South should "resist to the last extremity" (the popular euphemism for secession), namely the admission of California into the Union as a free state. What then should be done with California? Ruffin proposed that the area above 36° 30' enter the Union as a free state and the area below that parallel be organized as a federal territory. Instead of calling for the reorganization of the entire region into one or more territories with the explicit recognition of the slaveholder's right of entry with his slave property and federal protection of this right, Ruffin contented himself with calling for truncating California's boundaries along that line of demarcation he denounced as unconstitutional in principle and adverse to Southern interests.[12] For someone who condemned concessions to the North as a suicidal policy, Ruffin displayed a strange willingness to sacrifice the South on the abolitionist altar. His conditional call for secession looks pale alongside his apparent willingness to acquiesce in another compromise. Thus at first glance Ruffin's essays appear schzoid: their Unionist pronouncements and tame conclusions seem hopelessly at odds

with their fire-eating premises.

The seeming paradox may be resolved by using Ruffin's secessionist ideology as a lexicon to interpret his moderate proposals and assertions. The programs Ruffin advanced, such a fugitive slave law and a reduced California, were not so much ends as means: they were tactics to accelerate a series of events Ruffin, by this time, deemed inevitable--irreconcilable sectional clashes culminating in Southern secession. At one point in his third article, he was quite candid: "The general contest must begin and the battle be fought on some one of the minor positions contended for; and, on no one can we appear more fully in the right, or more moderate or reasonable in our claims, even in the eyes of our opponents, then when we offer to admit the State of California, but only with her Southern boundary fixed on the latitude of 36 deg. 30 min."[13] Ruffin evidently was looking for an issue which would be important enough for the North to reject but moderate enough for the South to demand. At first Ruffin sought to rally the South behind a fugitive slave law and against Congressional proscription of territorial slavery or abolition of slavery in the District. His conviction of Northern fanaticism led Ruffin to think that even this moderate Southern program would be unattainable.

But after Henry Clay's elaborate Senate speech on February 5, 1850 urged a compromise package which accounted for the aspirations of moderate Southerners, Ruffin, in his

third article, raised a new issue. He seized upon the impending admission of California and demanded its division along the 36° 30' parallel. Ruffin must have known that Northern Congressmen had repeatedly rejected the proposal to extend the Missouri Compromise line to the Pacific as a compromise of the contentious territorial issue. In fact, Ruffin's third essay tried to prepare the South for the loss of California. Ruffin conceded William H. Seward's warning that unless Congress quickly incorporated the coveted region into the Union, California might revolt and unite with Oregon to form an independent nation. But he argued that in light of the sectional controversy, the South would lose nothing by such an event. The economic, political, and military resources of the huge Northwestern states would anyway be enlisted by the North to oppress the South even more.[14] Thus, Ruffin proposed to cede northern California to freesoil only because he believed the North would not concede to giving the South an opportunity to colonize southern California. The North's refusal to compromise would, in turn, justify Southern secession. Ruffin had at last found a contingency likely to transpire and thereby transform the potential disunionist into an actual disunionist.

On the other hand, Ruffin realized that the division of California, accompanied by a disunion ultimatum, was moderate enough for Southerners to support. Indeed, many Southerners such as Louisiana Senator Pierre Soulé and

Mississippi Senator Jefferson Davis would champion this course in Congress and the Southern rights assemblage at Nashville in June would adopt it as well.[15] But whereas for most Southern rights men the division of California was a sincere attempt to compromise and the disunion allusion a means of showing seriousness of purpose, for Ruffin the Nashville Platform was a way to shatter the Union. Ruffin correctly perceived that the North would yet again reject extending the Missouri Compromise line across the continent. The South, however, could not know the truth; she had to believe that a moderate program would save her in the Union. Hence Ruffin would refer to disunion as a "deplorable" prospect to be avoided if possible. Hence he would affirm that the South stood upon the Constitution and esteemed the Constitutional Union. Such pronouncements would portray Northerners, who violated the Constitution, as the real disunionists and shrewdly cast the odium for any dissolution upon the North. Perhaps the misgivings of Ruffin's Southern readers, particularly Virginians who cherished the Union, would be assuaged if their Unionist self-image was not rudely dispelled.

Although no significant letters written by Ruffin during this period have survived (to my knowledge), a few letters written to Ruffin by his South Carolinian friend and fellow radical James Henry Hammond are extant. Considering their implicit agreement, Hammond's letters shed light on Ruffin's views as well. Hammond's letters stressed the

necessity for the South to exit the Union as quickly as possible in order to avoid the dreadful fate of Jamaica, as the North was gaining more states annually. Hammond confided to Ruffin that he had "no faith in amendments, new pledges & guarantees or anything of that sort" and that "a treaty formed under the law of nations & to be enforced by the sword would be far more respected than a constitutional compact." Ruffin sent his essays to Hammond for inspection. Hammond informed Ruffin that he had arranged to have the essays printed in a Georgia Whig paper whose editor shared their views. A few months later after reading Ruffin's third article, Hammond expressed some reservations about the suitability of California as an issue to foment disunion, for he feared that internal factors might prevent its organization for admission into the Union. But both fire-eaters were evidently groping for issues with which to wreck the Union in 1850.[16]

Three years later, when the sectional controversy was at its ebb, Ruffin privately recorded: "I am strongly opposed to what were mis-called the "compromise" measures enacted in 1850--and preferred a separation of the southern from the northern states, as I still do, to submission to these measures of fraud & triumph of the north, & grievous wrong & humiliation of the south. While these measures were before Congress, & there yet remained hope that the southern states would not submit, I wrote a series of three articles on the subject. . . . Of course they were entirely useless."[17]

But in the spring of 1850 Ruffin did not foresee that the Clay Compromise would be enacted and that the South would acquiesce. Indeed, for many months Clay tried abortively to push his package through Congress. Meanwhile, Southerners seemed determined to protect their slave interests. The Nashville convention scheduled to meet in June 1850, though officially sponsored by Southern rights Whigs of Mississippi, had been designed by its secret architect, John C. Calhoun, to present a firm and united Southern stance and thereby effectively resist Northern antislavery aggression. And in many localities throughout the South citizens assembled to endorse the upcoming convention in Tennessee and to remonstrate against the contemplated antislavery measures such as the exclusion of the South from the western territories.[18]

But a closer glance at the Southern temper should have given the secessionists pause. Southern Unionists, especially Whigs, denounced the proposed Nashville gathering as disunionist. Many Southern Whigs believed that Henry Clay's compromise package along with Daniel Webster's conciliatory "Seventh of March Speech" had obviated the need for such a sectional assemblage. The most populous Southern state, which had evinced a desire to reassert her traditional leadership of the South by her heated reaction to the Wilmot Proviso, was lukewarm about the Nashville conclave. Reflecting the ambivalence of its constituency as well as the pragmatism of its members, the Virginia

legislature, in February 1850, verbally encouraged the Tennessee assemblage to meet but declined to appropriate any funds for that purpose. Southern rights proponents in the Old Dominion were hamstrung by the hostility of Whigs and the nonslaveholders of western Virginia. Only eastern Virginia selected representatives to Nashville. And most Virginia counties, even in the eastern part of the state, were unrepresented in the district conventions which chose delegates to Nashville. Furthermore, only six of the fourteen chosen Virginia delegates attended the Southern convention! Most of the selected representatives, including Robert G. Scott of Ruffin's Richmond district, refused to go. Nathaniel Beverly Tucker was the only thoroughgoing disunionist in the Virginian delegation. And he was a substitute delegate for the moderate Henry A. Wise, who had declined to attend.[19]

The various primary assemblies in Hanover County, wherein Ruffin's Marlbourne plantation lay, illustrate the difficulties Southern rights activists such as Ruffin encountered in stimulating the citizenry to adopt a stalwart position in the sectional controversy. Initially, a combination of popular apathy and Whig hostility impeded the selection of delegates to the Richmond district convention. Only through the persistent efforts of Southern rights crusaders did Hanover County choose delegates to Richmond. Ruffin was one of the many delegates selected to the district convention but he was far too radical to be sent to

Nashville. The selection of the moderate Robert G. Scott to represent the Richmond district at Nashville did not reconcile Whig opposition in Hanover. At a late May meeting Ruffin introduced a resolution attacking the Clay measures. While most participants professed to oppose the Clay package, they also opposed the Nashville convention. The meeting broke up in disarray.[20]

The resolutions adopted by a splinter group of Southern rights men were an exercise in rhetorical fustian. After proclaiming their obligatory "deep devotion" and "holy attachment" to the cherished Union, the Hanover activists staunchly defended the right of secession as Northern violations had voided the constitutional compact. Likewise, after expressing their "heartfelt gratitude" and "fraternal regard" for Northern champions of Southern rights, the Hanover assemblers declared that they would no more associate with Northern "fanatics and traitors, who seek under the false garb of religion and philanthropy to interfere with our domestic institutions, than we should press to our bosoms the assassin, who strikes the dagger at our throats, or the incendiary who applies the torch to our dwelling." Such rhetoric, which smacked of the vocabulary and breathed the spirit of the ardent anti-abolitionist and the defiantly nonpartisan Edmund Ruffin, was undermined by the assemblers' failure to deduce the practical implications. Not a word was said about withdrawing from the national Democratic or Whig parties, each of which

contained healthy Northern contingents of antislavery politicians.[21]

The resolutions were not entirely devoid of specificity. They did attack Northern legislative enactments hindering the recovery of fugitive slaves, Congressional attempts to abolish slavery in the District of Columbia, schemes to interfere with the domestic slave trade, and proposals to exclude slavery from the western territories as unconstitutional. But not a word was said about the admission of California. Indeed, the Hanover activists became more moderate as the date of the Nashville convocation approached. In early May they had implicitly condemned the prospective abolition of the slave trade in the District of Columbia. A few weeks later they limited their denunciation to the abolition of slavery in the District. Thus the two most obnoxious features of the Clay Compromise, which the Hanover Southern rights men professed to oppose, namely the admission of California as a free state and the abolition of the slave trade in Washington, were conspicuously omitted from assailment. Of course, the assemblers pledged to resist "an overt act of aggression upon our rights . . . 'at all hazards and to the last extremity.'" Unfortunately, they did not define the term "overt act." And the aggressions enumerated as unconstitutional did not cover the Clay Compromise except by a very strained construction--which Southern strict constructionists were loath to make. Such was the nature of

Southern resolve which Ruffin found in his own county in the spring of 1850.[22]

The lack of Southern interest in the Nashville convention, along with the related lack of determination by Southern rights activists, was both perceived and reflected by Ruffin's Carolinian correspondent, who deemed the impending Southern assemblage pointless. James H. Hammond, chosen as a delegate to Nashville, informed Ruffin that he would attend the meeting halfheartedly. The radical South Carolinian foresaw the futility of the Nashville convention. At most the delegates would pass resolutions and addresses affirming Southern rights; but no "measure" of resistance would pass. Hammond encouraged Ruffin to persist in his efforts to "redeem" Virginia but prescribed no mode of redress. Hammond's fears were well-grounded. The Nashville convention contented itself with calling for the extension of the 36° 30' line to the Pacific but adopted no concrete measure.[23]

Ruffin's political fears in 1850 were not confined to national politics. Another state convention designed to rectify the discriminating apportionment and the limited enfranchisement of the 1830 Virginia constitution loomed on the horizon. The aristocratic slaveholder Ruffin had long feared that an equitable apportionment of representation would so benefit the increasingly populous western counties that he preferred the vertical separation of the state to granting complete equality to the numerous nonslaveholders

of the region beyond the Allegheny ridge. The tidewater patrician was also apprehensive about democratic rumblings to make Virginian suffrage (currently limited to freeholders and leaseholders or taxpayers in towns) universal and to make all political offices (not merely the the legislature) elective. Ruffin's son Edmund, whose aversion to democracy was a patrimonial legacy, tried to get his father nominated as a delegate to the state convention. In mid summer, a nonpartisan group of independents nominated Ruffin as a delegate to the state convention. Ruffin soon issued a public letter sketching his views.[24]

The patrician called for the "mixed basis" of apportionment whereby representation would be founded on a combination of white population and direct taxation. Additionally, though he avowedly preferred freehold suffrage and adamantly opposed universal enfranchisement, Ruffin was willing to extend the vote to taxpayers who performed their militia duties and fulfilled a residency requirement. Furthermore, in spite of his opposition to the wholesale election of state executive and judicial offices, Ruffin was willing to acquiesce in the election of the local magistrates who comprised the important county court system. And he even proposed an indirectly elected "council of appointment" to fill judicial and executive vacancies in appointive offices. Sounding more like a pragmatic conservative than an uncompromising reactionary, Ruffin declared that whenever a political institution was "too

deeply rooted to be overthrown," prudence dictated its salutary regulation rather than its complete extirpation. Ruffin's greater willingness to compromise intrastate issues than sectional ones was based on the dubious supposition that the Virginian movement for mass democracy could be appeased by concessions which would not seriously erode the political power of the plantation aristocracy.[25]

Ruffin's two-front battles on the state and national levels were both designed to maintain the honor and interests of the slaveholding elite. But there was a closer connection between Ruffin's dual battles. Ruffin had long recognized that western Virginia was closer in sentiment to the neighboring Northern states of Pennsylvania and Ohio than to the South. This internal geographical division, along with the subservience of eastern Virginia Whigs to the Northern-dominated national party organization, had shorn the Old Dominion of her traditional leadership of the South.[26] Still, the presentation by Virginia of a strong front in the sectional arena, however subsidiary her role, required the hegemony of the eastern Virginian aristocracy. Virginia's bid to resume her leadership position in the latest phase of the sectional conflict as well as the increasingly critical proportions that the conflict was assuming in the summer of 1850 reinforced Ruffin's concern for restricting Virginian democracy. Reluctant to grant suffrage to poor whites in general, Ruffin was particularly apprehensive of those with Northern backgrounds. Hence Ruffin called for a long

residency or a substantial freehold requirement for European immigrants or transplanted Northerners. Hence Ruffin, if necessary, would sever Virginia not along the Blue Ridge but along the Allegheny Mountains, as the westernmost portion of the state contained a sizeable number of Yankee residents. Thus Ruffin's concern about Virginian domestic politics partly reflected his fear of abolitionist infiltration.

Both state and national events must have disheartened the Virginian slaveholder. Virginian voters did not select the conservative Ruffin to represent their interests at the state convention. And eventually the new state constitution substantially augmented the power of the west, introduced universal white manhood suffrage in elections for the lower house of the state assembly, and subjected a variety of state offices, including the governorship, to popular election. Meanwhile, although the Southern rights men at Nashville had made the extension of 36° 30' their minimum demand and maximum concession, Congress heedlessly enacted in piecemeal fashion the compromise proposals of the Senate Committee of Thirteen, which reflected the viewpoint of Henry Clay. The entire area of California was admitted into the Union as a free state. The state of Texas was dismembered. The slave trade in the District of Columbia was abolished. But some Southern animus was deflected by the passage of a new fugitive slave law. Also, the territories of Utah and New Mexico were organized without the explicit prohibition of slavery therein. Here was an

opportunity for Southern rights exponents to redeem the disunion ultimatum of the Nashville convention. But the hollowness of the Nashville threat soon became apparent.[27]

The state of Virginia had led the Southern movement against exclusion from the Mexican cession but seemed to retreat in the face of Northern antislavery encroachment. Her senators, Robert M.T. Hunter and James M. Mason, had warned the august body to which they belonged that the enactment of antislavery measures would induce the Old Dominion to sever her ties with the Union. But in a caucas of Southern senators in early August 1850, both Mason and Hunter opposed a resolution by Pierre Soulé to resist the impending admission of California by all parliamentary means. And after the passage of the California bill, the Virginian senators merely joined their Southern colleagues in signing a protest against the deed. The senators' disguised retreat mirrored the course of the institution which had elevated them to their posts. In January 1849 the Virginia state legislature had provided for a special legislative session if such exigencies as the passage of the Wilmot Proviso or the abolition of either slavery or the slave trade in the District of Columbia occurred. But the following year the Virginia legislature, bowing to the pressure of Whiggery, diluted its resolve. Instead of requiring the governor to call an emergency legislative session, the February 1850 resolutions authorized the governor to summon a state convention, which would be

empowered to appoint delegates to a general Southern convention.[28]

Moreover, as the abolition of the slave trade in the nation's capital became much likelier than the outright abolition of slavery, the Virginia legislature exorcised any specific reference to the slave traffic in Washington. The contingencies meriting state action became "the passage of the Wilmot Proviso, or of any law abolishing slavery in the District of Columbia, or in any manner interfering with the rights of slaveholders therein, or abolishing slavery or the slave trade between the States." Exploiting the resultant ambiguity, Governor John B. Floyd, backed by the overwhelming sentiment of the state, contended that none of the compromise measures enacted by Congress fulfilled the contingencies specified by the 1850 resolutions of the Virginia General Assembly. The admission of California as a free state was not equivalent to the exclusion of slaveholders from the federal territories. And the abolition of the slave trade in the District was not tantamount to the abolition of slavery itself.[29]

Virginia's determination to stay in the Union, however, neither betokened hearty endorsement of the 1850 compromise nor precluded all forms of Southern rights action. The state did not welcome the admission of California, the dismemberment of Texas, or the abolition of the slave trade in Washington; it merely felt that these were insufficient grounds for resort to radical remedies. The two leading

Virginia newspapers, the Richmond Enquirer and the Richmond Whig, had opposed the Clay proposals before their passage but accepted them afterwards. While the overwhelming majority of the state opposed disunion, some Virginians, especially Democrats residing east of the Blue Ridge, seemed amenable to some form of action to manifest their displeasure. Notwithstanding their opposition to secession, Governor Floyd and the Enquirer advocated economic retaliation against the North for its persistent hindrance of the recovery of fugitive slaves. This longstanding concern of Virginians was intensified by the fact that the fugitive slave law, authored by Mason, was the only aspect of the Clay Compromise favorable to the South. Yet in the months after Congressional adoption of the fugitive slave bill, Northern state legislatures continued to pass personal liberty laws and Northern mobs continued to impede the recovery of fugitive slaves. Even the Richmond Whig, which repudiated its past support of economic sanctions against the North, made the fugitive slave law the sin qua non of the endurance of the Union. As Ruffin's son Edmund perceived, Virginians would support the Clay Compromise and cling to the Union "unless the repeal or equivalent alteration of the fugitive slave law opens their eyes."[30]

Several Southern rights associations, embodying the program of commercial and cultural non-intercourse with the North, sprang up in eastern Virginia in the 1850-1851 period. Virginian radicals such as Ruffin had a choice:

they could either privately sulk--and commiserate with fellow extremists--about the failure of their state to vindicate her pledges of resistance and passively wait for other Southern states to act or they could become involved with the small but growing movement in their state to curtail social and economic liasons with the North. Ruffin did both. However chagrined by the governor's specious evasion of duty, Ruffin must have known that Floyd himself had proposed non-intercourse with the North. Accordingly, the Virginian fire-eater gravitated towards the orbit of the non-intercourse associations in his state. In fact, Ruffin's eldest son and namesake, Edmund Ruffin, Jr., was a guiding force behind the formation of one of the earliest of such associations in Virginia.

In November 1850 a group of citizens of Prince George County assembled and pledged to "adopt a system of rigid non-intercourse with the people of the non-slaveholding States till their aggression on our rights and property ceases, and also use our most strenuous efforts to build up Southern commerce and manufactures." The constitution of the association enumerated several items including coarse cotton and woolen clothes, carriages, saddles, and plows which members were forbidden to purchase from the North. Additionally, the members pledged "generally" to buy Southern or foreign goods in preference to Northern products. Further, the constitution forbade the transportation of Southern agricultural resources in vessels

owned, commanded, or staffed by Northerners. Moreover, the faithful pledged not to patronize any Southern school which employed Northern teachers and never to send their children to Northern schools "under any circumstances." This unqualified antipathy to Northern schools, perhaps Edmund's penance for his youthful appreciation of his Northern education, must have been particularly pleasing to his solicitous father. Finally, the members promised not to take any vacations in the North or visit Northern watering places.

Whereas the aforementioned proscriptions applied to all Northerners alike, several other provisions of the constitution of the Prince George Southern Rights Association distinguished between sympathetic and hostile Northerners. For instance, the association prohibited the support of Northern preachers except those who affiliated themselves with Southern religious organizations and intended to become Southern citizens. Similarly, the constitution forbade the extension of hospitality to itinerant Northern newspaper agents, peddlars, and other travellers unless they could demonstrate their trustworthiness by letters of introduction or other reliable sources. In fact, some of the clauses of the constitution were directed as much against Southerners who deviated from Southern rights orthodoxy as against Northerners. For example, members pledged to patronize only those merchants and hire only those mechanics who favored Southern

interests. Likewise, members were not permitted to subscribe to Southern as well as Northern newspapers which did not espouse the Southern cause.[31]

The Richmond Whig opposed the formation of the Prince George Association as untimely and criticized its program as too stringent. Southern sectionalist agitation was superfluous given the passage of the 1850 Compromise. Indeed, a non-intercourse crusade would only rekindle the sectional flames, which the Clay measures had extinguished. True Northern sentiment was not represented by Boston mobs which violated the fugitive slave law but by Union meetings in New York and Philadelphia. The great majority of Northerners, aided by President Millard Fillmore, would put down the "small fraction" of abolitionists. Further, the Whig objected that the Prince George Southern Rights Association would unfairly punish the large body of loyal Northern men for the misdeeds of the small minority of abolitionists. The proscription of Northern teachers--even highly-qualified, longstanding Southern residents sympathetic to the Southern plight--was a particularly obnoxious feature.[32]

Such criticisms hardly deterred the elder Ruffin from supporting the non-intercourse movement. The radical Virginian must have viewed Northern Union meetings as mere ripples in the waves of abolitionism. If the North was an abolition monolith, then distinctions between friendly and unfriendly Northerners made little sense. And if Southern

agitation antagonized the North, the secessionist would not be displeased. Such conservative attacks upon the non-intercourse program could only make it more appealing for the fire-eater. Even if the Southern rights associations did not directly exacerbate sectional tensions, they could keep the Virginia faithful from being utterly demoralized. The state had repeatedly threatened to resist Northern aggression to the last extremity. Non-intercourse was not disunion but it was preferable to the disgrace of complete passivity. If Virginia refused to vindicate her pledges of political withdrawal from the Union, she could at least effect a partial withdrawal in her social and economic relations with the North. The proscribing of Northern teachers and preachers, molders of public opinion, would curtail the transmission of Northern antislavery ideas. The boycott of Northern manufactures--a sort of Southern radical counterpart to the Northern abolitionist boycott of slave cotton--would enable Virginia to maintain a semblance of moral purity. Additionally, by stimulating the development of domestic manufacturing and direct European trade, non-intercourse could prepare the state economically for disunion. And if South Carolina or another cotton state seceded in the near future due to the Clay Compromise, then the Virginian Southern rights associations, preserving the spirit of resistance in the state, could lend vital support. These may have been some of the considerations which attracted Ruffin to the non-intercourse movement in the

eastern part of the state.

In February 1851 Ruffin himself participated in the formation of a similar association in Hanover County. The constitution adopted by the Hanover Southern Rights Association was a verbatim copy of the constitution suggested by the Richmond Enquirer the previous November. Although the Hanover articles generally resembled those adopted by Prince George, they diverged in a couple of particulars. The Hanover Southern rights activists proscribed economic relations with Northern merchants even if they permanently resided in the South and voiced support for the Southern cause. Only the joining of a Southern rights association practicing economic discrimination against the North sufficed to remove suspicion from merchants born or reared in the North. But this feature of the Hanover program was countervailed by another which qualified the proscription of Northern goods to cases where substitute products of comparable quality were available at nearby towns at a price which did not exceed the Northern by more than ten percent. Such was the extent of the financial sacrifice Virginian patriots were willing to make at this juncture.[33]

Still, the non-intercourse movement made little headway in Virginia. A few counties formed associations, but only a fraction of the citizenry participated. Indeed, the Prince George Association initially could not even muster the fifty men required by its own constitution to make the program

operative! A Central Southern Rights Association was formed in Richmond in late 1850 but its appeals to the public and, more importantly, the state legislature were unavailing. In light of the limited interest in voluntary boycotts against Northerners by the Virginian citizenry, legislative action was imperative. Both the Prince George and the Hanover associations urged the state government to enact legal restraints upon trade with the North. Edmund Ruffin, Jr. had in fact called upon the state convention, coincidentally assembling at the time for domestic purposes, to devise a constitutional means of taxing Northern produce. Governor Floyd made similar pleas. But neither the Virginia legislature nor the state convention was responsive. Consequently, the fledgling non-intercourse movement floundered and expired.[34]

Virginia secessionists such as Ruffin could turn their gaze to other Southern states less devoted to the Union than the Old Dominion. But prospects for disunion seemed increasingly bleak. The South displayed no eagerness to resist the 1850 Compromise jointly. Most Southern states had shunned the second assemblage of the Nashville convention in November 1850. The few dozen delegates present, disproportionately composed of extremists, could do little more than denounce the Clay Compromise, uphold the right of secession, and call for a Southern Congress. The South Carolina legislature also called for a Southern Congress. But her sister states ignored the summons. The

Virginia legislature, in the spring of 1851, not only declined Carolina's invitation but practically repudiated the second Nashville convention--wherein the radical William F. Gordon had served as Virginia's sole representative--by passing resolutions supporting the 1850 Compromise and opposing secession. The General Assembly seemed almost determined to erase all vestiges of her previous resistant spirit. Fire-eaters were morose. Edmund Ruffin, Jr. thought his "poor old state disgraced by the recent action of her legislature."[35]

Perceptive secessionists such as Robert Barnwell Rhett of South Carolina realized that disunion was likelier to be effected by individual state action. But one state after another fell into line behind the compromise. In December 1850 the Georgia state convention resolved to acquiesce in the Clay Compromise. In August 1851 Unionists triumphed in Alabama's Congressional elections. The following month saw the defeat of secessionist candidates for representation in Mississippi's state convention. Radicals across the South looked to South Carolina for leadership as the Palmetto State increasingly loomed as the last bastion of secessionist hope. The Mississippi governor, John Anthony Quitman, privately exhorted South Carolinians to engineer the secession of their state. So did Nathaniel Beverly Tucker and Muscoe R.H. Garnett of Virginia. In Alabama William Lowndes Yancey pined for the same result.[36]

South Carolina's reputation for extremism was

well-deserved. From the days of the nullification movement onward, the Palmetto State had carried the torch of Southern fire-eating. And in the 1850-1851 period, she showed few signs of weariness. In all other states, secessionists were increasingly on the defensive. In Alabama, for example, the issue became whether to accept the 1850 compromise or to support the secession of other Southern states. In Mississippi, radicals eventually found themselves having to defend the abstract right of a sovereign state to secede. In the border states, the question of secession hardly arose at all--in any form. But in South Carolina the contest was between two types of secessionists: cooperationists who professed to seek joint Southern secession and separatists who favored the solitary secession of South Carolina, if no other state would join her. Many fire-eaters, understandably, placed their faith in Carolina.[37]

Ruffin, like his compatriots elsewhere, initially hoped--and may have even encouraged--South Carolina to secede alone from the Union. But Ruffin's cooperationist confidant James Henry Hammond tried to persuade the Virginian to support his own scheme whereby South Carolina would remain in the Union but not participate in federal institutions. Hammond's program, which had been published anonymously in the Charleston Mercury in the spring of 1851 as "Plan of State Action," called upon South Carolina to dissolve all relations with the federal government whose severance would not provoke the latter to initiate military

hostilities: the state should recall her Congressional delegation; stop appointing presidential electors; boycott presidential and Congressional elections; bar her citizens from accepting most federal offices; cease accepting federal appropriations; penalize her citizens who resided in nonslaveholding states for more than a month annually; impose discriminatory taxes on Northern goods imported into South Carolina; and encourage domestic agriculture, manufacturing, and commerce--including the construction of versatile steamships suitable for direct peaceful commerce with Europe as well as naval warfare. By such means South Carolina could avoid military collision with the federal government entailed by actual secession and yet establish a moral independence which in due time would evolve into the political independence of a Southern confederacy.[38]

Hammond's plan was a substantially more extensive and invigorated version of the cultural and economic non-intercourse Ruffin supported in Virginia. Yet Ruffin may not have greeted the scheme with enthusiasm. Considering the abject passivity and stolid conservatism of Virginia in the winter of 1850-1851, non-intercourse was a vibrant, forward-looking measure for the Old Dominion. But South Carolina seemed far different. Separatists had swept the February 1851 elections for delegates to the Carolina state convention. Emboldened by their victory, separatists no longer spoke of initially attempting to coordinate disunion with other Southern states. In April Barnwell

Rhett pronounced cooperationism dead and avowed his intention of leading the state out of the Union. In such an atmosphere, Hammond's clever scheme appeared retrograde to Carolinian ultras and their outside sympathizers such as Ruffin. At this point Ruffin apparently sought the solitary secession of South Carolina. Nor were the Carolinian cooperationists, increasingly antagonized by separatist highhandedness and increasingly beckoned by political alliance with Unionists, attracted to Hammond's plan. In fact, both separatists and cooperationists, seeking to win the October 1851 elections of South Carolina delegates to a Southern Congress, ignored the Hammond scheme completely.[39]

The autumnal election in South Carolina altered the political landscape of the state as well as the political strategy of Edmund Ruffin. The cooperationists, a coalition of genuine secessionists and masquerading Unionists, triumphed in the pivotal October elections. Afterwards, some influential South Carolinian separatists like Maxcy Gregg turned to Hammond's isolationist program to save the state from complete submission and themselves from political oblivion. At this point, Ruffin, who may have privately been mulling over Hammond's scheme as a contingency plan in case of a setback, came out publicly for Hammond's plan. In November Ruffin, using his "A Virginian" pseudonym, wrote an article for the Charleston Mercury, entitled "The Armed Truce." Simultaneously, Ruffin, posing as a South Carolinian, sent a similar piece to the Richmond Examiner.

Ruffin's purpose was to dispel the popular illusion that the October election in Carolina had been a "Unionist" victory.[40]

Such a misconception was prevalent not only among gleeful Northerners but also among disappointed Southern rights exponents, who regarded South Carolina as their leader. Hoping to prevent widespread demoralization among Southern resistance men, Ruffin sought to steer Carolinian cooperationism in a secessionist direction. Ruffin argued that most cooperationists such as Langdon Cheves and James H. Hammond were genuine Southern patriots, who opposed the immediate secession of South Carolina on grounds of expediency alone. To vindicate their zealous devotion to Southern rights, however, Ruffin called upon the cooperationists to adopt the "Plan of State Action," which had appeared anonymously in the papers some time ago. Anxious to appear as an independent and impartial, though concerned, outsider to his Carolinian reader, Ruffin claimed that he had long ago conceived of such a program and had only "very lately" learned that this plan was being circulated in South Carolina. "As a substitute for immediate and solitary secession, and in the event of that mode of action being decided against, I had long ago conceived the opinion that the best course for South Carolina would be, to withdraw her representatives from Congress, and to take no part in any Presidential election, and to have no other voluntary participation in the Federal Government."

Ruffin felt that this "armed truce" would preserve the honor of South Carolina and thereby salvage the Southern rights movement from complete wreckage. By curtailing her relations with the Union, the state would be physically yielding to the more powerful federal government while morally registering a "perpetual protest" against federal oppressions such as the 1850 Compromise. Southern rights men elsewhere would be encouraged by this quasi-secessionist posture. On the other hand, South Carolina's maintenance of her former relations with the federal government would convey the impression of voluntary and absolute resignation and consequently demoralize the spirit of resisters everywhere. Ruffin hoped that both factions in South Carolina would find Hammond's isolationist compromise acceptable: the forbearance from immediate and solitary secession would appeal to the cooperationists; the unilateral adoption of isolationist policies, conducive to disunion, would appeal to the separatists.[41]

Initially, the prospects for success looked auspicious. Ruffin had somewhat tempered his Examiner essay for his Virginia audience and it appeared to be paying dividends. John Moncure Daniel, the editor of the Democratic Richmond paper, seemed receptive to the scheme. And Ruffin believed that he may have persuaded the Mercury editors to give the Hammond plan a fair hearing. The Charleston editors requested the delighted Virginian to pen more essays on the state of Virginian political opinion. Hammond reported that

Ruffin's article in the Mercury had "an excellent effect" and would be of "great consequence" in showing South Carolinians that "true men abroad do not regard this "Armed Truce" as a halfway, petulant, sulky, sneaking & cowardly measure as its active opponents will be sure to call it." But Hammond's optimism was exaggerated. The erratic editor of the Examiner soon pronounced the plan quixotic and ridiculed South Carolina as "Gascony." Nor was the Palmetto State hospitable to the scheme. Mutual distrust between the antagonistic South Carolina factions made the adoption of the compromise formula impracticable. The cooperationists, in particular, suspected that the conciliatory overtures by the separatists were attempts to inveigle them onto a unilateral secessionist path. In fact, some separatists openly linked Hammond's isolationist scheme to the ultimate solitary secession of the state. Furthermore, many cooperationists were loath to share their recent political victory at the polls with their vanquished rivals. The upshot was that the April 1852 South Carolina state convention, though unequivocally affirming the legitimacy and justifiability of state secession, not only declined to secede but took no resistant action at all. So ended Ruffin's endeavors to stimulate secession during the 1850 period.[42]

Notes

(1) Wiltse, Calhoun: Sectionalist, 287-288, 303-307.

(2) Henry T. Shanks, The Secession Movement in Virginia 1847-1861 (Richmond, 1934), 22-26.

(3) Wiltse, Calhoun: Sectionalist, 352-353, 357, 397-398; Holman Hamilton, Prologue to Conflict: The Crisis and Compromise of 1850 (New York, 1964), 46-49; Arthur C. Cole, The Whig Party in the South (n.p., 1914; Gloucester, Mass., 1962), 154-156.

(4) Shanks, Secession Movement, 25, 29.

(5) "WHAT WILL BE THE RESULTS OF THE NORTHERN ABOLITION ACTION?" by "A VIRGINIAN" No. I, Richmond Enquirer, Jan. 22, 1850.

(6) "WHAT WILL BE THE RESULTS OF THE NORTHERN ABOLITION ACTION?" by "A VIRGINIAN" No. III, Richmond Enquirer, April 2, 1850.

(7) "WHAT WILL BE THE RESULTS OF THE NORTHERN ABOLITION ACTION?" by "A VIRGINIAN" Nos. I & III, Richmond Enquirer, Jan. 22, Apr. 2, 1850.

(8) Wiltse, Calhoun: Sectionalist, 399; "WHAT WILL BE THE RESULTS OF THE NORTHERN ABOLITION ACTION?" by "A VIRGINIAN" No. I, Richmond Enquirer, Jan. 22, 1850.

(9) "WHAT WILL BE THE RESULTS OF THE NORTHERN ABOLITION ACTION?" by "A VIRGINIAN" Richmond Enquirer, No II, Jan. 25, 1850.

(10) "WHAT WILL BE THE RESULTS OF THE NORTHERN ABOLITION ACTION?" by "A VIRGINIAN" No. I, Richmond Enquirer, Jan. 22, 1850.

(11) "WHAT WILL BE THE RESULTS OF THE NORTHERN ABOLITION ACTION?" by "A VIRGINIAN" No. II, Richmond Enquirer, Jan. 25, 1850.

(12) "WHAT WILL BE THE RESULTS OF THE NORTHERN ABOLITION ACTION?" by "A VIRGINIAN" No. III, Richmond Enquirer, Apr. 2, 1850.

(13) Ibid.

(14) Ibid.

(15) Hamilton, Prologue, 98-99; Cleo Hearon, "Mississippi and the Compromise of 1850," Publications of

the Mississippi Historical Society XIV (1914), 125, 135.

(16) James Henry Hammond to Edmund Ruffin, Feb. 8, May 7, 1850, Edmund Ruffin Papers, SHC.

(17) Edmund Ruffin, "Incidents of My Life," III, 248, Edmund Ruffin Papers, SHC.

(18) Hamilton, Prologue, 95-111; Hearon, "Mississippi," 61-66.

(19) Cole, Whig Party, 158-162.

(20) "MEETING IN HANOVER," "THE MEETING IN HANOVER LAST MONTH," "PUBLIC MEETING IN HANOVER COUNTY," "CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT CONVENTION," & "PUBLIC MEETING IN HANOVER COUNTY," Richmond Enquirer, April 26, May 10, 14, 17, June 7, 1850.

(21) "Hanover County," Richmond Whig and Public Advertiser (hereafter cited as Richmond Whig), June 4, 1850.

(22) Ibid; "PUBLIC MEETING IN HANOVER COUNTY," Richmond Enquirer, May 14, 1850; Edmund Ruffin, Jr. was also active on the grass-roots level in the spring of 1850. In spite of the opposition of the Whig press and the apathy of the people, who were "drugged with Webster's speech," Edmund Jr. persuaded his locality to send delegates to Nashville. The younger Ruffin solicited his father's aid in drafting Southern rights resolutions. See Edmund Ruffin, Jr. to Edmund Ruffin, n.d. [April, 1850?] & April 18, [1850]. (The latter is misdated and misfiled as 1852.) Edmund Ruffin Papers, SHC.

(23) James Henry Hammond to Edmund Ruffin, May 7, 1850, Edmund Ruffin Papers, SHC; Hearon, "Mississippi," 125-127.

(24) Edmund Ruffin to James Henry Hammond, Sept. 7, 1845, James Henry Hammond Papers, LC; Edmund Ruffin, Jr. to Edmund Ruffin, June 13, July 12, 1850, Edmund Ruffin, "Incidents of My Life," II, 213-214, Edmund Ruffin Papers, SHC.

(25) Edmund Ruffin to Messrs. Benjamin R. Blake, Edward C. Pollard, et al., Aug. 3, 1850, in Richmond Whig, Aug. 13, 1850.

(26) Edmund Ruffin to James Henry Hammond, Sept. 7, 1845, James Henry Hammond Papers, LC.

(27) Freehling, Drift, 239-240; Potter, Impending Crisis, 99-113.

(28) Shanks, Secession Movement, 27; Hearon,

"Mississippi," 139-43; "The Slavery Resolutions," Richmond Whig, Jan. 23, 1849; "THE SOUTHERN CONVENTION, & c." Richmond Enquirer, Feb. 12, 1850.

(29) The original joint committee resolution specifically included the abolition of the slave trade in the District but the need to appease the Whigs led to the deletion of the reference. "THE SOUTHERN CONVENTION," "THE ATTITUDE OF VIRGINIA," & "THE SOUTHERN CONVENTION, & c." Richmond Enquirer, Feb. 1, 8, 12, 1850. On the controversy over the meaning of the equivocal phrase and the intended position of the Virginia legislature in regard to the Clay bills, see "Mr. Senator Mason," Richmond Whig, May 31, 1850 & "THE COMPROMISE BILL AND THE SOUTH," by "MACON," Richmond Enquirer, June 18, 1850.

(30) Shanks, Secession Movement, 36-41; Edmund Ruffin, Jr. to Edmund Ruffin, Oct. 24, 1850, Edmund Ruffin Papers, SHC. The Richmond Whig had supported economic retaliation in early 1850 but retreated after the passage of the compromise bills. Richmond Whig, Jan. 18, 22, 25, Mar. 19, 1850. For the Virginia Whigs, threats of disunion and sectional remedies were designed to extract concessions from the North while Congressional legislation was pending; they were not intended as programs of action. Thus, the Whigs recoiled from radical measures after the enactment of the Clay bills. The Whig could understand the fire-eaters' disunion talk over "a question yet to be decided, and about which the action of Congress might be influenced by their threats"; but it regarded secessionist agitation over "a past transaction" as "naked treason." See "Admission of California--Disunion," Richmond Whig, Sept. 24, 1850.

(31) Untitled article from the Petersburg Intelligencer in the Richmond Whig, Nov. 26, 1850.

(32) "PRINCE GEORGE MEETING," Richmond Whig, Nov. 26, 1850.

(33) Although Ruffin was not an officer of the Hanover association, his name appears first in the list of members. "HANOVER SOUTHERN RIGHTS ASSOCIATION," Richmond Enquirer, Mar. 14, 1851. See also "ARTICLES OF ASSOCIATION FOR THE DEFENCE OF SOUTHERN RIGHTS," Richmond Enquirer, Nov. 29, 1850.

(34) Shanks, Secession Movement, 41; Edmund Ruffin, Jr. to Edmund Ruffin, Nov. 21, 1850, Edmund Ruffin Papers, SHC; Untitled article from Petersburg Intelligencer in Richmond Whig, Nov. 26, 1850; "HANOVER SOUTHERN RIGHTS ASSOCIATION," Richmond Enquirer, Mar. 14, 1851. Governor Floyd's advocacy of taxing Northern goods may have been geared as much to deflect South Carolinian secessionism as to enforce the

Fugitive Slave Law in the North. Significantly, Floyd also called for a National Convention to resolve the sectional crisis. "GOVERNOR'S MESSAGE TO THE LEGISLATURE OF VIRGINIA" & "MESSAGE FROM THE GOVERNOR," Richmond Enquirer, Dec. 3, 20, 1850. Of course, some Virginians may have used the threat of cotton state disunion to rally the border states behind non-intercourse. The boycott movement also emanated from a desire to restore Virginian leadership of the South, both economically and politically. "CENTRAL SOUTHERN RIGHTS ASSOCIATION" & "CIRCULAR OF THE CENTRAL SOUTHERN RIGHTS ASSOCIATION OF VIRGINIA," Richmond Enquirer, Apr. 4, 18, 1851. The acquiescence of the Deep South in the 1850 Compromise was the coup de grâce to the Virginian non-intercourse movement.

(35) "Resolves of the Nashville Convention," National Intelligencer in the Richmond Whig, Nov. 29, 1850; "THE NASHVILLE CONVENTION," Richmond Enquirer, Nov. 19, 1850; "THE POSITION OF VIRGINIA," "THE COMPROMISE RESOLUTIONS," & "VIRGINIA LEGISLATURE. HOUSE OF DELEGATES," Richmond Whig, Mar. 28, Apr. 1, 1851; Edmund Ruffin, Jr. to Edmund Ruffin, n.d. [spring, 1851], Edmund Ruffin Papers, SHC.

(36) Potter, Impending Crisis, 125-129; J. F. H. Claiborne, Life and Correspondence of John A. Quitman, Major-General, U.S.A., and Governor of the State of Mississippi (New York, 1860), II, 123-127, 135-136; On Tucker, see Faust, Circle, 136-137; On Garnett, see Shanks, Secession Movement, 39; Ralph B. Draughon, Jr., "William Lowndes Yancey: From Unionist to Secessionist, 1814-1852" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, 1958), 218-245, esp. 243-244.

(37) Draughon, "Yancey," 225, 245; Hearon, "Mississippi," 206-207; Harold S. Schultz, Nationalism and Sectionalism in South Carolina 1852-1860: A Study in the Movement for Southern Independence (Durham, N.C., 1950), 27-30.

(38) "Plan of State Action," Charleston Mercury, May 2, 1851; James Henry Hammond to Edmund Ruffin, July 20, 1851, Edmund Ruffin Papers, SHC.

(39) John Barnwell, Love of Order: South Carolina's First Secession Crisis (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1982), 145-146, 152-153, 163.

(40) Philip M. Hamer, The Secession Movement in South Carolina 1847-1852 (Allentown, Pa., 1918), 130-132; Edmund Ruffin to James Henry Hammond, Nov. 11, 1851, James Henry Hammond Papers, LC.

(41) "The Armed Truce," by "A VIRGINIAN," Charleston

Mercury, Nov. 7, 1851.

(42) Edmund Ruffin to James Henry Hammond, Nov. 11, 13, 1851, James Henry Hammond Papers, LC; James Henry Hammond to Edmund Ruffin, Nov. 21, 25, 1851, Edmund Ruffin Papers, SHC; Hamer, Secession Movement, 132-134, 136, 141-142.

Chapter Three: Launching the Crusade

Southern acquiescence in the 1850 Compromise and South Carolina's failure to adopt a resistant policy demoralized Ruffin himself. After the April 1852 state convention finalized the decision of South Carolina to remain passively in the Union, Ruffin's secessionist ideology became dormant. For the next few years, Ruffin's relative reticence on sectional issues reflected the larger quiescence of the sectional controversy in the Union. Ruffin retreated to his occupation as a scientific farmer. Accepting the presidency of the reorganized Virginia Agricultural Society, Ruffin toured the eastern seaboard states proselytizing the gospel of agricultural reform. His gaze returned to the chronic internal problems plaguing the Southern farmer. In the course of his speeches on Southern slave agriculture, Ruffin occasionally expressed his views on sectional affairs. But his remarks were generally confined to acceptable proslavery expositions in the tradition of the Virginian intellectual Thomas R. Dew, not fire-eating harangues in the style of the Carolinian nullifier George McDuffie. And when Ruffin did advocate a sectional policy, he called for commercial rather than political independence. Moreover, frustrated by the South's persistent neglect of his admonitions and exhortations about scientific agriculture as well as Northern abolitionism, Ruffin placed the brunt of responsibility for the problems of slave agriculture squarely upon Southern shoulders.

To the South Carolinian Agricultural Fair in November 1852, for example, Ruffin denied the antislavery allegation that slavery exhausted the soil, by noting that Virginian planters who practiced scientific agriculture conserved the soil. Instead, Ruffin ascribed the admittedly exhaustive nature of Southern agriculture to the fact that her staples such as cotton and tobacco required the turning and loosening up of the soil, a process hastening organic decomposition and exposing the land to erosion by rain. Additionally, Ruffin ingeniously contended that the relative cheapness and abundance of slave vis-à-vis free labor made the former a more effective instrument to achieve the ends of employers--whether the exhaustion or the improvement of the soil. [1]

Ruffin's exculpation of slavery did not extend to Southern planters. Their practice of exhaustive agriculture evinced a shortsighted preoccupation with immediate pecuniary returns as well as a selfish concern with individual profits. The Southern farmer was so obsessed with immediate gains that he neglected his own long-term interests, the continued productivity of his land. A Northern manufacturer or shipowner, Ruffin pointedly lectured his audience, who made no capital improvements or repairs would fail dismally. Only the self-regenerative powers of the soil had prevented the Southerners' abuse of nature from turning their once fertile farmlands into "barren deserts." Even from the standpoint of short-run

economic gains, the adoption of scientific techniques was more remunerative than the slothful practice of soil exhaustion. The Southern slaveholder was a poor capitalist indeed. As a further inducement to South Carolinians to improve their soils, Ruffin noted that land values in eastern Virginia had risen over seventeen million dollars (in the 1838-1850 period) despite her fragmentary implementation of agricultural reform. The confident agronomist predicted that the fertilization of the remainder of eastern Virginia would augment her land values by hundreds of millions of dollars.[2]

Ruffin maintained that the Southern soil could still be preserved by the widespread adoption of scientific techniques such as spreading marl, proper drainage, and crop rotation. He echoed the common Southeastern lament about the seemingly endless cycle of planters exhausting the available lands and then trekking westward. Ruffin claimed that if these planters had improved their lands instead of destroying them, the Southeast would have more than doubled its Congressional representation and thwarted Northern economic exploitation such as tariffs and bounties. The South's failure to replenish her soil made her prey for Northern oppression. Indeed, the exhaustion of Virginian soils compounded her foolish relinquishment of her vast territories to the Union by stimulating the emigration of many of her scions to the ceded Northwestern states, where they have sinced allied with the South's "most malignant

enemies." Thus, even if neglectful tillage promoted the selfish interests of individual proprietors, it was clearly detrimental to the general welfare of the South. The implication of Ruffin's analysis was that timely Southern agricultural reform would have obviated the necessity for disunion; Southern populousness would have rendered her impregnable. But Ruffin's primary concern here was not Southern rights but scientific agriculture. His portrayal of the sectional benefits of agricultural reform was designed less to assert Southern rights than to induce politically conscious but culturally sluggish South Carolinian planters to improve their outmoded farming methods.[3]

Moreover, Ruffin's contention that scientific farming would increase the South's population and political representation undermined his fire-eating ideology of inevitable Southern doom in the Union. Would not the efficient implementation of Ruffin's proposals fortify Southern political power within the Union and render disunion less imperative? Would not agricultural reform obviate political revolution? True, in the wake of the passage of the 1850 Compromise, Ruffin had supported the non-intercourse movement in Virginia which advertised itself as a scheme to secure Southern interests within the Union. Furthermore, the replenishment of Southern agricultural and human resources was not inherently a Unionist program. Some South Carolinian extremists such as Maxcy Gregg called for

strengthening the state's economy as a means of preparing her for secession. Indeed, Hammond's "Plan of State Action," which Ruffin had endorsed, advocated the economic development of South Carolina--including a modicum of scientific agriculture--alongside the state's political isolation from the federal government. Thus the fall of 1852 was not the first time that Ruffin had flirted with reformism since his conversion to secessionism. And the fire-eater was careful to qualify any reformist assumptions. His address to the South Carolina planters claimed primarily that past economic aggressions of the North could have been stymied by the South had she cultivated her soil scientifically; the Virginian radical, perhaps intentionally, refrained from making such claims about future abolitionist political aggressions. Nevertheless, Ruffin was intimating that agricultural rejuvenation could still aid South Carolina politically within the Union. Either Ruffin had not clearly pondered the implications of his old hobby of agricultural reform upon his more recent faith of secessionism or he was disingenuously endeavoring to seduce the Carolinian planters into embracing scientific farming by dangling the temptation of sectional gain. In any case, Ruffin in November 1852, barely a year since the publication of his "The Armed Truce," presented agricultural reform to a South Carolinian audience in an implicitly Unionist guise.

Indeed, Ruffin's speech to the South Carolina

Agricultural Fair in the autumn of 1852, a time when the embers of the heated sectional clash had barely ceased smoldering, breathed no fiery spirit. In fact, the prime targets of Ruffin's strictures on Northern oppressions were flaccid Southerners rather than aggrandizing Northerners. The chief instances of Northern exploitation upon which Ruffin focussed were not Congressional enactments such as tariffs to which the South had "no defence" but the various forms of "voluntary tribute" which the fatuous South awarded to her Northern foes. The South had only herself to blame for continuing to import Northern goods which she could manufacture more cheaply at home. "The buying of Northern lime by South-Carolina and Georgia is as unprofitable and as absurd a procedure as the usage of importing Northern hay." The Virginian urged Carolinians to excavate their own plentiful and accessible sources of marl instead of buying lime from New England--of all places--at triple the cost. Southern reluctance to cease her importation of high-priced Northern wares, her obstinate persistence in voluntary self-abasement befuddled the proud and economy-minded Virginian. In Ruffin's mind, the South deserved to be exploited for her economic sloth and moral lassitude: "this part of our general burden is fairly and properly levied by northern enterprise and industry upon southern listlessness and indolence." Thus Ruffin lashed out against Southerners for their continuing economic dependence upon the North as well as for their malign neglect of their soils: both

actions emanated from Southern character flaws--selfish cupidity devoid of calculation and industry.[4]

Ruffin failed to appreciate the economic obstacles impeding the development of Southern manufacturing and the adoption of commercial non-intercourse. The larger and well-established Northern industries supplying an extensive market comprising Northern, Southern, and Western customers could undercut nascent, small-scale Southern manufacturers. Contrary to Ruffin's suppositions, the ability of Southerners to produce goods more cheaply than Northerners was exceptional not general. And as Ruffin's reliance on economic arguments to induce both agricultural reform and non-intercourse illustrates, the Virginian viewed the Southern planter primarily as an economic animal; for all his exaltation of plantation leisure and slaveholder refinement and his corresponding disparagement of factory thrift and capitalist vulgarity, Ruffin arraigned the plantation aristocracy not for compromising its patriarchal ethos by the assimilation of marketplace values but for being poor capitalists.[5]

Thus in 1852 Ruffin fell back in South Carolina upon the very platform of economic non-intercourse which he had previously supported in Virginia. He said not a word about secession, not even obliquely. Ruffin did sprinkle his agricultural address with derogatory comments about the North. For example, Ruffin attacked the "pauper and plundering interests of the northern states" which enacted

bounties for Northern industries. Ruffin also made passing reference to the "plunderings and oppressions of tariffs" and tersely alluded to the 1820 and 1850 compromises--two favorite targets of Southern radicals--as "compromises (so-called) to swell Northern power." While other Southern rights men contented themselves with questioning the finality of the 1850 Compromise, Ruffin, however circumspectly, impugned the very legitimacy of the arrangement. But the Virginian fire-eater, who had noticeably moderated his irrepressible sectionalism, downplayed his adaptation. In an autobiographical sketch written the following year, Ruffin recorded that this speech to South Carolina had contained an "extreme" denunciation of Northern oppression "in my strongest language." Such was the nature of Southern radicalism in the conservative climate of the early 1850s: digressive and pithy condemnations of the North, incisive discussions of Southern culpability, and the espousal of reformist schemes. Even so extreme a fire-eater as Ruffin had to accommodate himself to the prevailing temper by toning down his radicalism.[6]

Moreover, Ruffin privately noted that he could not have made such statements in Virginia. Accordingly, Ruffin's address to the Virginia Agricultural Society in December 1852 made no reference at all to Northern oppressions and the hated compromise. Instead, Ruffin confined himself to impugning the motives of the abolitionists and defending slavery from their attacks. He portrayed slave society as

superior to free society in the manners, habits, and welfare of its white denizens. For example, he argued that by confining drudgery to the inferior black race, slavery enabled the whites to cultivate their intellectual faculties and polish their social graces. The abolitionists, who sought to destroy this beneficial institution, were driven more by overweening political ambition and hatred for the white masters than by love for the black slaves. Thus catering his remarks to his Virginia audience, which harbored a deeper attachment to the Union than South Carolinians, Ruffin ordered a safe, uncontroversial cultural defense of slavery and limited his sectional attacks to the notorious abolitionists. Ruffin's fire-eating zeal lay submerged in the waters of sectional calm.[7]

* * * * *

Sectional tensions remained suppressed until the need arose to organize more federal territories. In 1854 Congress passed Stephen A. Douglas' Kansas-Nebraska Act, which repealed the Missouri Compromise's exclusion of slavery in the Louisiana Territory north of 36° 30' and provided that the territorial residents could determine for themselves whether to have slavery, in accordance with the United States Constitution. Federal interference with this process was explicitly prohibited. While many Southerners welcomed the repeal of the Missouri Compromise's territorial restriction of slavery, antislavery Northerners were incensed that a new opportunity had been granted to slavery

expansionism. New England led the way in financing, equipping, and dispatching free labor migrants to Kansas. The South countered by sending proslavery forces to the scene. The strife for sectional supremacy on the plains of Kansas manifested itself in the establishment of rival proslavery and antislavery territorial governments and in the eruption of violent clashes between the contending groups.[8]

Meanwhile, the Kansas-Nebraska Act had left the national Whig party in a shambles and spurred the formation of a new, sectional freesoil party, which soon became known as the Republican party. In 1856 antislavery Whigs, Freesoilers, and some disaffected Democrats met in convention and adopted resolutions barring territorial slavery and the admission of more slave states. Supporting the Kansas Bill and clinging to the Union, the South devoted herself to stopping the Republican presidential candidate, John C. Frémont, from winning the nation's highest office. Many Southern rights politicians openly proclaimed that a Republican victory would signal the dissolution of the Union. Happily, James Buchanan, a Pennsylvania Democrat, whom most Southerners considered sound on sectional issues, became the nation's fifteenth president. Southerners congratulated themselves on their political triumph. Many hoped that under the friendly auspices of the chief executive Kansas would enter the Union as a slave state.[9]

It was at this juncture that Edmund Ruffin launched his

career as a full-time fire-eater. From this point onwards, Ruffin became increasingly absorbed in the sectional drama. His public and private lives fused: saving the South by the creation of a Southern confederation became Ruffin's preoccupation, if not his complete obsession. His identification with the South would intensify with the secession crisis and the outbreak of civil war and climax tragically with the defeat of the Southern Confederacy. In the winter of 1856-1857, Ruffin, unlike most Southerners, saw ominous clouds looming on the sectional horizon; for Ruffin, the emergence of a powerful antislavery party in the North and the ongoing sectional strife in Kansas eclipsed Buchanan's election to the presidency. The myopic South had to be alerted to the danger; she had to be roused from her languorous slumber. The fire-eating mantle in Virginia fell upon the shoulders of Edmund Ruffin.

But it was not merely the events on the public theatre which impelled Ruffin's fire-eating career; circumstances in his private life stimulated his exertions on behalf of his beloved South. In the mid 1850s, Ruffin retired from active plantation management, which had occupied him for many years. After reserving some capital for himself and his orphaned granddaughter Jane, Ruffin divided his property among his six remaining children. The family appointed William B. Sayre, Elizabeth's husband, resident superintendent of the Marlbourne estate. The former proprietor departed to his son Edmund's Beechwood property.

Ruffin's relinquishment of his plantation was voluntary. But nature deprived the patriarch of three precious children in the summer of 1855 without the courtesy of consultation. The deaths of Rebecca, Jane, and Ella plunged their father into a depression. The unmarried female trio had been Ruffin's choirmates at the weekly family gatherings in which he sang his favorite songs as another daugther, Mildred, furnished the musical accompaniment by playing the melodeon. As he had not remarried since the death of his wife, Susan, in 1846, Ruffin had no wife to console him. The degree to which the children had tempered the death of his wife was now reduced, if not lost entirely. And he was too sexually repressed to become involved with younger women.[10]

His continued interest in agricultural reform could not fill the huge void in his life. Ruffin had served as president of the Virginia Agricultutal Society in 1852 after the reorganized association had adopted his views on organizational structure and function. But the society's abandonment of Ruffin's program and the continued neglect of agricultural affairs by the state legislature reinforced Ruffin's sense that his exertions were unappreciated and useless. He declined reelection the following year. Ruffin continued to serve as an active member of the executive committee. For instance, in February 1856 Ruffin presented a report for a Farmers' Assembly to implement the provisions in the revised constitution which had transformed the body from a purely democratic to a representative agency. And

not only did Ruffin serve as a Hanover County delegate to the Farmers' Assembly for a couple of years but he was president of the agricultural society from 1857-1859, the maximum constitutional tenure. But these official stations, however honorable, could not compensate for his forfeiture of occupation and personal misfortunes.[11]

Nor could Ruffin find any solace in religion. He had seemingly long since shed his Episcopalian upbringing for a dispassionate form of Christianity. He rejected elements in Christianity which he deemed irrational, such as original sin, redemption, and the necessity of faith for salvation. He found no evidence of such doctrines as the trinity and the immortality of the soul in scripture. He believed in divine justice, but more abstractly than ardently. He attended church as a matter of form--but had an embarrassing habit of dozing off during services. Yet Ruffin's rational reevaluation of Christianity must have caused him profound spiritual anguish. He assailed the Calvinist dogma of original sin as satanic but saw himself as sinful and unworthy. Though his rationalism had removed the deity from the influence of human supplication, he engaged in earnest daily prayer. Despite the lack of scriptural evidence for everlasting divine retribution, Ruffin was deeply concerned about his own salvation. He repeatedly denied the relevance of faith for salvation but assiduously endeavored to believe in the very Calvinist dogmas from which he recoiled.[12]

Ruffin had only rejected certain aspects of Puritan

dogma intellectually; his character and conduct were Puritan to the core. Though despising the New England Puritans for their morbid theology, Ruffin had a puritanical aversion to the traditional vices of tobacco and alcohol and to such petty amusements as cards and billiards. He could not distract himself by the hobbies and amusements pursued by his fellow aristocrats.[13] The Virginian did have a moderate interest in the arts, especially music. He attended theatrical operas and privately enjoyed playing the harmonicon. But the deaths of his singing daughters may have associated musical pleasure with painful memories.[14] Ruffin could always try immersing himself in literature. He proclaimed reading and writing were his chief "pleasures." His variegated readings included historical works, novels, religious tracts, economic studies, proslavery material as well as newspapers and periodicals. But these intellectual pleasures had limited utility in relieving his melancholy.[15]

What Ruffin required were not petty pleasures or cultured recreation--or local eminence, for that matter--but a raison d'etre, a stimulant to life. It was no accident that in late 1856 Ruffin, with the meticulousness of a Puritan believer, began elaborately recording his daily thoughts and activities in a fascinating private diary.[16] But instead of exploring the spiritual state of his soul, Ruffin chronicled the political crisis of his section. For someone who neither held nor sought political office, Ruffin was disproportionately concerned with the politics of the South.

Promoting the Southern cause by proslavery literature and secessionist propaganda became Ruffin's primary occupation. Frequently, the timing of his labors was occasioned by boredom. For instance, on November 30, 1857 Ruffin noted in his diary, "Began to write an article on the institution of slavery--to furnish me with an occupation." In late September of the following year, Ruffin complained of boredom; five days later he began an essay against colonization. Similarly, the diary entry for August 3, 1859 juxtaposed a plaint about boredom with his intention to pen an article on the elimination of free blacks from Virginia.[17]

Although depression and boredom did not convert Ruffin to radicalism, they promoted his active proselytization of the fire-eating faith. The gloomy void which marked Ruffin's life in the mid 1850s helped transform the Virginian planter, whose heterodox political opinions had only been sporadically expressed hitherto, into "an itinerant missionary of disunion."[18] While Ruffin was not driven to embrace extremism by a need to spice up his mundane life, the propagation of iconoclastic views was an exciting enterprise, especially for one who relished notoriety. Moreover, the intense passions aroused by fire-eating agitation could more effectively combat his periodic depression than the milder pleasures of art and music. And typically Ruffin pursued his fire-eating vocation with the commitment of a Puritan and the zeal of a voluptuary.[19] Fire-eating became Ruffin's passion and dogma.

Ironically, Ruffin's conscious suppression of his heterodoxical religious convictions may have intensified his expression of his unorthodox political convictions. In the privacy of his diary, Ruffin protested against the tyranny of the Protestant church, founded on the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers: "Whoever presumes to judge for himself the true meaning of the bible, instead of receiving the interpretation of theologians & sects & their preachers, is immediately suspected, & charged, with opposing the doctrines of the bible, & of the Christian religion. This denunciation is the certain punishment of every individual who may dare to exercise, even in a single important particular, the right of private judgment, which was one of the great ends sought & contended for by Luther in the Reformation." True, Ruffin professed his indifference to such epithets as "heretic" and claimed that he kept his religious views to himself "to avoid giving pain to my children."[20] But behind such rationales lay Ruffin's fear of incurring the shameful stigma of heresy. The resentment Ruffin harbored against Southern respectability for his religious conformity erupted in his political nonconformity. Instead of publicly questioning the prevalent Calvinist theology, Ruffin attacked the icon of the Union. Revelling in the political notoriety earned by the expression of secessionist views was the Virginian's compensation for his scrupulous avoidance of religious controversy.

But Ruffin's crusade for disunion reflected not only

his craving for notoriety but also his strong need for approval. The charm of social distinction, which Ruffin had previously sought by political officeholding and agricultural reform, still beckoned him in the 1850s. The modicum of fame he had earned in the latter capacity did not satisfy him. In fact, Ruffin's need for recognition and approval increased in the 1850s. The death of his favorite relatives and his disenchantment with some surviving relations frustrated Ruffin's familial yearnings, expanded his domestic void. Although the patriarch was close to Edmund Jr., Julian, and Mildred, he had long been estranged from his eldest daughter's husband, Stanley Beckwith, a spendthrift physician, and his youngest son, Charles, an idle prodigal.[21] To some extent, the South became Ruffin's surrogate, or at least his extended, family. It was her love he coveted. It was for her that he embarked upon his crusade for Southern rights. Above all, he hoped that his native state of Virginia would shower him with appreciation.[22] The image he cultivated was that of a prophet, initially ignored but ultimately exalted. Only in the hated North did Ruffin expect permanent infamy. But Ruffin's impatience for Southern approbation occasionally tempered his fire-eating course. His periodic profession of seeming reformism was partly stimulated by his need for immediate social approval. Ruffin's vacillation between revolution and reformism was dictated not merely by objective calculations of Southern interests but also by his incongruous character traits.

Ruffin's headlong foray into the sectional fray came with a series of five articles, "Consequences of Abolition Agitation," which appeared in the Richmond Enquirer in December 1856 and in DeBow's Review the following year. In part, these essays elaborated upon some of the major themes discussed by Ruffin's 1850 articles, most notably the warning that abolitionist aggression would doom Southern interests in the Union and the assurance that Southern departure from the Union would be a peaceful process. More importantly, Ruffin--for the first time--openly called for the swift secession of the South and presented a program for its peaceful achievement. The enthusiasm with which the South hailed Buchanan's victory over Frémont was the immediate public precipitant to Ruffin's candid secessionism. Ruffin maintained that Buchanan's election was a mere "truce from sectional hostilities," not a genuine peace. Frémont's defeat, Ruffin argued, did not evince any change in the Northern antislavery disposition; it simply reflected the ineffectiveness of the Republican campaign. Had the Republicans directed their campaign more adeptly, they would have been victorious. Democratic ascendancy was but a temporary stopgap to the floodtide of abolitionism. The South, Ruffin warned, should not be lulled into a sense of security by Buchanan's election because the Republicans would win the next presidential contest. Although Ruffin would have jubilantly welcomed Southern secession in 1856 to anticipate coming evils, his primary purpose at this point

may have been to ripen Southern resolve to secede when the Republicans proved triumphant in 1860.[23]

Ruffin's deeper fear was that shortsighted Southerners would not even feel threatened by Republican victory. The shrewd Republicans, Ruffin believed, would not attack slavery directly but gradually and insidiously enervate the peculiar institution until they delivered the coup de grâce. The Republicans would encircle the South with nonslaveholding areas by proscribing territorial slavery. The prohibition of territorial slavery would not only deprive the South of her chance to obtain sectional equilibrium but would also eliminate the South's valuable outlet for her surplus slaves, "an unprofitable burden and a dangerous nuisance to the whites." For Ruffin, geographic confinement would promote the deterioration and hasten the extinction of slavery in two ways. Either, high slave density would economically destroy bondage when free labor became cheaper than slave labor. Or the Southern slaves, emboldened by their growing numbers and angered by the increasing frugality of their owners, would overthrow bondage by bloody rebellion.[24]

Meanwhile, Republican abolition of slavery in the federal properties in the South such as dockyards and forts would transform them into asylums for runaway slaves and strongholds for rebellious slaves. And Republican dispensation of political patronage to avowed antislavery men exclusively would induce many ambitious Southerners to

become abolitionists. Ultimately, the rapidity of Northern demographic growth as well as Republican division of the larger Northern states would provide the North with the three-quarters majority necessary to abolish slavery by constitutional amendment, a process whose legitimacy was conceded by even strict constructionists. An abolitionist like William H. Seward, Ruffin prognosticated, would win the 1860 presidential contest. The only Southern remedy in that case would be "another declaration of independence" from a despotism whose oppressions of the South exceeded those of Great Britain against the colonies. Let the South, Ruffin urged, emulate the illustrious example of the founding fathers, who preferred "disunion" from Britain to submission to tyranny.[25]

Complementing Ruffin's admonition of the destruction of slavery in a Republican-dominated Union was his assurance of the salvation of slavery in an independent Southern confederation. Ruffin denied the Unionist caveat that secession would bring civil war and economic ruin upon the South. As in 1850, Ruffin relied on Northern materialism to check her military ventures and offset her hatred of the South. Likewise, Ruffin reiterated his contention that the cessation of the myriad forms of Northern economic oppression such as the protective tariff, the fishing bounties, and internal improvements would ensure the economic viability of a Southern confederacy. In fact, Ruffin turned the Unionist argument on its head: the

vibrancy of the Northern economy was an illusion, stemming from her remorseless exploitation of the South; disunion would economically devastate the parasitic North, not the thriving South. The antagonistic interests of labor and capital, tempered by their mutual exploitation of the Southern economy and by the conservative political influence of the plantation aristocracy, would violently erupt after the South seceded. The Northern free laborer, having long harbored agrarianism in his bosom, would destroy capitalism by mob violence. The contented Southern slave, by contrast, would continue to cultivate agricultural staples. The Northern economy would flounder, the Southern economy flourish.[26]

Ruffin also challenged the Unionist argument that secession itself, regardless of whether war ensued, would strengthen the Northern abolitionists by freeing them from the salutary restraint of both Southern slaveholders and Northerners sympathetic to the South. Ruffin repeated his long-held conviction that the main abolitionist danger was the penetration of the South through various guises of respectability and that secession would end this nefarious practice at once as Northern citizens would no longer have the constitutional right to reside in a Southern state. Additionally, Ruffin argued that sectional separation would deprive slavery agitation of any political value. Ruffin divided the Northern abolitionists into two categories: religious fanatics and political opportunists. Consisting

largely of orators, journalists, and preachers, the fanatical abolitionists composed the smaller antislavery group. Motivated by moral and religious concerns, such abolitionists as William Lloyd Garrison and Henry Ward Beecher were misguided but sincere philanthropists. Much more influential were the antislavery politicians, who sought private gain and Northern domination of the Union. The political abolitionists such as William Seward and Charles Sumner were envious of the "Slave Power," which they so savagely excoriated, rather than sympathetic to the "Poor Slave," whom they so affectionately sentimentalized. Their reticence about worse forms of oppression such as Cuban and Brazilian slavery along with their tacit acceptance of Northern participation in the illicit and nefarious African slave trade convinced Ruffin of the utter hypocrisy of the antislavery politicians. These demagogues, Ruffin concluded, would cease their vitriolic denunciations of slaveholders and slavery after disunion rendered such rhetoric politically valueless. Ruffin admitted that the fanatical but sincere abolitionists would not be silenced by Southern secession; but he claimed that this small contingent of zealots would be inconsequential without the support of the powerful political abolitionists.[27]

Ruffin conceded that slavery would be terminated if the North emerged victorious from the war she waged against the South. But he denied the premise. The outbreak of war was itself "very improbable" and Southern defeat "impossible."

The South's defensive military position would offset her disadvantage in material resources. And slave agriculture, which would free a large proportion of Southern whites for military service, would counterbalance the South's inferiority in human resources. Ruffin acknowledged the superiority of the Northern navy and merchant marine but he considered an effective Northern blockade impractical: patriotic Southerners would gladly sacrifice their importation of luxury items; European nations dependent on Southern cotton would never permit a blockade; and Southern privateers would prey upon the numerous defenseless Northern vessels.[28]

Additionally, Ruffin claimed that diverse sectional interests, inspired by the example of Southern secession, would shatter the North into at least three separate confederacies. The Far Northwest will secede in order to maintain her valuable public lands. The Old Northwest will secede to secure her trade relations with the South along the Mississippi River. Indeed, Ruffin believed that a Southern blockade of the mouth of the Mississippi during civil war would induce the Old Northwest to forge a separate peace with the South and perhaps even to seek admission into the Southern confederation. The isolated Northeast, the casualty of Ruffin's almost obsessive secessionist vision, would hardly be in any position to conquer the formidable South.[29]

Ruffin's final article of this series called upon the

South to sever the Union and outlined a program for its successful and peaceful accomplishment. Realizing that the border states were unable to lead the secession movement, Ruffin appealed to the lower South to take the initiative. He envisaged secession as a two-stage process: first, the lower South would exit the Union; then, after a period of time, the upper South would follow. Ruffin entreated the South not to look to Virginia, the traditional Southern leader, for guidance. The "timidity" of a substantial minority in the Old Dominion disqualified her from directing the Southern quest for independence. Rather, Virginia and the other border states would follow cotton state leadership.

Also, Ruffin urged this particular sequence of secession to reduce the possibility of civil war. Although Ruffin dismissed the possibility that the North would deliberately embark upon a suicidal offensive against the seceded states, he acknowledged the contingency that sectional hostilities could be accidentally ignited by the passions of violent hotspurs on both sides or by the errors or ambitions of overzealous civil or military subordinates in the border regions. The danger of border clashes could be averted if the upper South delayed seceding for a while since there would be no common boundary between the North and the departed Southern states. No collisions, of course, would occur between the seceded Southern states and their sympathetic neighbors across their northern borders.

Furthermore, if the North dared to attack the seceded South deliberately, the upper South would serve as a military buffer, shielding the lower South from invasion. After the lower Southern states stabilized their movement and consolidated their power in a Southern confederation, the border states would join them. The upper South would be driven to secession as the political power of the Northern abolitionists in the shrinking Union would be significantly augmented by the exodus of the lower South. The initial departure of five or six contiguous cotton states, Ruffin assured his reader, would guarantee the peaceful secession of the lower South and the successful establishment of a Southern confederation which would eventually encompass the border states as well.[30]

For Ruffin, the quick secession of the cotton states was vital not only to protect them from further antislavery encroachments but also to preserve the slaveholding status of the border states. Their proximity to the North made the border states peculiarly vulnerable to permeation by "abolitionist agents." Disguised variously as teachers, ministers, merchants, mechanics, solicitors, and sailors, these devious antislavery itinerants enticed many slaves to abscond to the North. More importantly, the ominous presence of abolitionists in the border states rendered slave property so insecure in that region that many slaveholders chose to liquidate their precious property for cash rather than risk its loss to abolitionist inveiglement.

Thus the border states stood in danger of being depleted of their slaves as abolitionist emissaries in their midst induced many slaves to flee northward and indirectly stimulated many slaveholders to sell their slaves southward. For Ruffin, therefore, the swift secession of the cotton states was necessary to prevent the attrition of slavery in the border states and thereby preserve their capacity as territorial buffers during the secession process and ensure their ultimate integration into the Southern confederacy. Thus, for Ruffin, a timely withdrawal from the Union would preserve slave interests while Southern dalliance in the Union would destroy them.[31]

Ruffin's portrayal of Northern antislavery was overdrawn. His division between religious and political abolitionism was too tidy. Political antislavery was partly rooted in religious abolitionism. Many political abolitionists, such as Gerrit Smith, Joshua Leavitt, and James G. Birney, were religiously inspired. Conversely, many religious abolitionists, such as William Goodell and Lewis Tappan, supported antislavery politics.[32] Ruffin himself perceived that certain antislavery men such as Joshua R. Giddings defied classification. Indeed, the "abolitionist agent" whose penetration into South so alarmed Ruffin straddled the boundary between the two types of antislavery. Ruffin's condemnation of all political abolitionists as hypocrites was far too sweeping. The concentration on Southern slavery by Northern abolitionists

--political as well as religious--does not ipso facto prove their hypocrisy. Northern abolitionists felt moral complicity with the presence of evil in their own country. And from a practical standpoint, their prospects of ending slavery in the South seemed far greater than ending slavery elsewhere. Nor did the Northern abolitionist perceive any fundamental difference between Southern and Latin American slavery. Regarding slavery as inherently evil, the abolitionist did not scrupulously compare the horrors of Southern versus Brazilian or Cuban slavery. Nor does the relative reticence of antebellum Northern abolitionists about the African slave trade establish their hypocrisy. The clandestine importations of Africans into the South were sparse and illegal; Southern slavery stood on the bedrock of the Constitution. Moreover, slavery was the underpinning of the slave trade; the elimination of the former would end the latter. Thus Ruffin's portrait of Northern antislavery was overly crude and severe.

Nevertheless, Ruffin's analysis of Northern society was correct on three key propositions: the primacy of political abolitionism, the growing popularity of antislavery sentiment, and the abolitionist objective of Republicanism. The South had successfully thwarted the evangelical crusade to flood her with abolitionist literature in the 1830s. But she could not repulse such political programs as freesoilism. Although rooted in the religious impulses of the 1830s, political antislavery had acquired its own

momentum by the 1850s partly by shedding its religious and humanitarian components. By depicting the "Slave Power" as antithetical to the economic aspirations of the Northern worker to independent proprietorship and repugnant to the republican ideology of majority rule and civil liberties, the Republican party tapped into vital secular currents of Northern society. Such philanthropic concerns as the elevation of Northern blacks were jettisoned to accommodate the prejudices of the Northern white electorate. Unquestionably, a considerable number of Northern politicians were motivated more by hostility to the slaveholder than by sympathy for the slave. David Wilmot, for example, publicly denied he had any "morbid sympathy for the slave" and privately confessed his jealousy of the "Slave Power."[33]

Furthermore, the threat of Northern antislavery became more ominous with every state and federal election. The abolitionist tide swept aside the Northern Democratic "doughfaces" or transformed them into anti-Southern politicians. The triumph of a Republican presidential aspirant in 1860 seemed probable. And despite their dilution and disavowals of pristine abolitionist immediatism, the Republicans posed a grave danger to Southern slavery. In fact, Ruffin feared precisely the program of the progressive Republicans: freesoil encirclement, denationalization of slavery, dispensation of executive patronage to pliable Southern whites, and gradual

emancipation.[34] Ruffin, however, did tend to magnify the danger; he underestimated the resiliency of Virginian slavery and the time required for the consummation of the Republican agenda.

But the main problem with Ruffin's analysis was not so much with his somewhat distorted perception of Northern antislavery as with his belief that slave institutions would be safe in a Southern confederation. His supposition that Northern abolitionists would immediately desist from assailing Southern slavery after the severance of the Union overlooked the strength of Northern Unionism--not to mention the tenacity of Northern passions, whether sympathetic to the slave or hostile to the slaveholder. The very opportunism Ruffin ascribed to the Republicans would make them reluctant to lose their political hobby by disunion. Ruffin begged the question whether the North would allow the South to secede in the first place. Accustomed to the bluster of the rhetorical fire-eaters of the South, Ruffin mistakenly assumed that bellicose threats of military invasion by Northerners were mere bluff. Exaggerating the extent of Northern materialism, Ruffin did not perceive that Northern passivity in the face of Southern secession would be dishonorable. And Ruffin failed to realize that the very economic stake Northern business had in the South could reinforce Northern Unionism, however belligerent.

Furthermore, Ruffin's essays contained some striking ironies and intriguing inconsistencies that deserve

attention. Despite Ruffin's call for disunion, there were elements in his argument which were reformist, not revolutionist. Ruffin believed that the main abolitionist threat to slavery was the large number of antislavery agents in the South, who inveigled slaves to abscond, incited them to rebel, and generally fostered their discontent. Now Ruffin claimed that this insidious form of abolitionist agitation could be almost entirely eliminated if the South would permit the testimony of slaves in courts of law. Consonant with their ideal of white racial supremacy, Southern states barred blacks from testifying against whites. But Ruffin contended that such legislation was self-defeating. Because abolitionist efforts were made directly to the slaves themselves, only the latter could furnish the evidence to convict the former.[35] Thus Ruffin would preserve the institutionalized subservience of the Southern black by elevating him into a juridical personality! Southern proprietorship in the African would be protected by authorizing the peculiarly articulate species of property to implicate those who denied the legitimacy and exposed the absurdity of property in man! Furthermore, the Virginian fire-eater apparently failed to perceive that the stifling of abolitionist emissaries by the acceptance of slave testimony would lessen the urgency of the secessionist objective.

Further undermining the rationale for secession as the sole effective shield from the abolitionist menace was

Ruffin's portrayal of the Northern masses as rational materialists. Unlike the small but vocal contingent of fanatical abolitionists, bent on destroying slavery regardless of the consequences to themselves, the majority of Northerners was primarily motivated by material self-interest. But the unscrupulous antislavery politicians had persuaded the masses of Northerners that they would benefit by the abolition of slavery: "The great body of the Northern people have been so deluded by their unprincipled leaders, as to be made to believe that their personal interest would be promoted by extinguishing slavery in the Southern states." Ruffin did not shrink from stating the reformist corollary: "If they knew the truth of the reverse proposition, then the Northern people would quickly become . . . indifferent to the existence of slavery."[36] Being driven by self-interest, the Northern masses were amenable to rational appeals, which would have no effect upon the impervious abolitionist fanatics. Northerners would "quickly" cease supporting abolitionism if they became convinced that their material interests would be harmed by the destruction of slavery. Ruffin's analysis dictated that Southern Rights Unionists devote their energies to persuading the Northern people that the abolition of slavery would injure their pecuniary interests. The successful enlistment of the North's materialistic proclivities by Southern proslavery advocates to buttress the peculiar institution would make disunion unnecessary. This was the

unstated implication of Ruffin's analysis.

Moreover, Ruffin's examination of the Northern belief-system in general and the nature of political abolitionism in particular led him to the surprising conclusion that the North might refrain from abolishing Southern slavery. The North, Ruffin argued, believed that the South would submit to all antislavery encroachments which stopped short of outright abolition. The typical Southern response to Northern aggression--fulminating secession threats followed by tame submission--had made the North justifiably skeptical of the Southern will to resist. Southern "renegades," moreover, assured the North that she could continue to assail the beleaguered section with impunity. The calculating North reasoned that the South would prefer submission to further antislavery infringements, which might culminate in the destruction of slavery, to secession from the Union, which would entail civil war and certain abolition. Even if the South should secede, the North felt confident that the South could be quickly and easily conquered. Consequently, even Union-loving Northerners, who relied on Southern submission or Northern coercion to preserve the Union, could support abolitionist politicians--at least up to the point of abolition. Antislavery aggressions were thus predicated upon mistaken assumptions about the Southern will and ability to resist.[37]

Furthermore, Ruffin at one point contended that the

Northern political leaders would not enact the actual abolition of Southern slavery. For Ruffin, the antislavery politicians like Seward were not genuine abolitionists at all. Their rancorous outbursts against the "Slavocracy" were designed to wrest all political power from the South and thereby promote their own quest for offices. But unlike the fanatical abolitionists who desired to destroy slavery with reckless abandon, the antislavery politicians were concerned about the welfare of their section, which, they realized, would ultimately affect their selfish interests. In fact, they privately knew that the abolition of slavery would cripple the Northern economy, their demagogic rhetoric to the contrary notwithstanding. Consequently, Ruffin concluded, the political abolitionist had no intention of abolishing slavery and might not strike the "fatal blow" at all. Instead, the redoubtable but cautious political abolitionists would subject the South to continual encroachment short of abolition.[38]

Similarly striking was Ruffin's cavalier treatment of the territorial question--certainly a major sphere of antislavery aggrandizement. At points in his essays, Ruffin seemed willing--albeit after secession--to relinquish the western territories. Responding to the Unionist admonition that Southern secession would spark a conflagration over the North's retention of the seat of government, the military forces, the federal forts, and the public lands, Ruffin declared that the South should not go to war over these

matters. Instead, the South should passively acquiesce in Northern expropriation of these resources. In the Union, Ruffin pointed out, all territories were practically closed to the South; slaveholders could not safely migrate to any of the territories, anyway. The South would lose no territory by seceding! Moreover, in the Union, the South was subjected to a high annual tribute and did not receive a proportionate share of expenditures. By eliminating this economic incubus, secession would more than offset the South's loss of federal properties. True, Ruffin contended that the independent South could peacefully negotiate for her share of the territories, the adoption of economic non-intercourse ensuring a successful settlement. But Ruffin did not explain why such economic pressure could not be exerted by the South within the Union. And he implicitly conceded that economic measures may fail to obtain redress, but argued that they would still be effective as retaliation against the North. Indeed, Ruffin seemed almost as eager to punish the North as to rescue the South. Accordingly, he predicted spitefully that western settlers would squat on public lands and refuse to cede them to the United States government. He even fantasized that Southern secession would spur the territorial disintegration of the hated North. If the South would not obtain the territories, neither would the North.[39]

Ruffin's 1856 essays thus contained several reformist assumptions which seemed to conflict with the revolutionary

espousal of secession. The premise of a materialistic North diverged from his earlier depiction of the North as fanatically antislavery. Abolitionism no longer seemed a terrifying juggernaut crushing the rational faculties of Northerners who blindly threw themselves in its relentless path. For now Northern self-interest could check abolitionism. Northern aggression was not based on fanaticism but on a series of misconceptions about her own interest: abolition would aid the Northern economy; the South would not secede despite continuing antislavery infringements; and, if necessary, the North could easily subdue the South by overwhelming military force. The implication was that if the North could be persuaded that her abolitionist policy was inimical to her interests, Northern materialism would vanquish abolitionism and obviate Southern secession. Moreover, Ruffin's analysis of the antislavery politicians, whom he deemed the dominant element in Northern society, as cunning but rational opportunists who inwardly realized that the abolition of Southern slavery would topple the Northern economy, led him to the startling conclusion that the North might not abolish slavery after all. Such a hypothesis contradicted Ruffin's repeated warnings that the North would eventually abolish slavery by constitutional amendment and undermined his rationale for secession as vital to preserve slavery.

Further undermining Ruffin's secessionist entreaty was his claim that the infiltration of the South by abolitionist

agents--the encroachment he singled out as posing the greatest menace to slavery--could be thwarted by permitting the juridical testimony of blacks. Finally, for someone who feared that geographic confinement would annihilate slavery by servile rebellion or economic disintegration, Ruffin seemed strangely complacent about yielding the western territories after secession. Once they were safely ensconced in an independent confederacy, Southern leaders would surrender the federal territories--the safety-valve of Southern slavery as well as the focal point of the entire sectional controversy! What Ruffin had vehemently denounced as craven submissionism inside the Union would become the epitome of Southern statesmanship outside the Union.

Many of the apparent paradoxes in Ruffin's essays can be resolved by the concept of Southern honor. Though Ruffin portrayed secession as imperative to save slavery from Northern obliteration, the driving force propelling his secession quest was Southern honor. The perception of a materialistic North was deeply embedded in Southern culture and encapsulated under the "Yankee" stereotype. Similarly, the related perception of Northern politicians as impelled by self-interest was common among Southerners. The fire-eaters echoed these common Southern themes. Radicals such as Yancey, for instance, viewed the North as both abolitionist and materialist.[40] But Ruffin was especially sensitive to matters of Southern honor: he was so anxious to delineate Southern culture as refined and elevated and

Southern political leaders as statesmen guided by the common weal that he accentuated the crass materialism of Northern society and the selfish opportunism of Northern politicians. Ruffin's concern to portray secession as a peaceful process reinforced his exaggeration of Northern materialism--as the fire-eater was mainly counting on Northern self-interest to avert civil war. Further, Ruffin's radical cast of mind could not resist following premises to whatever destination they led. Thus Ruffin admitted the possibility of harnessing Northern materialism to stifle Northern abolitionism.

If antislavery aggrandizement was predicated upon the North's ignorance of her true interests, then it was incumbent upon Southern intellectuals solicitous about the welfare of their nation to enlighten their Northern neighbors. Ruffin, however, made no attempt to correct Northern misperceptions at least on the rhetorical level. His declaration that disunion would shatter the Northern economy was not based on a sophisticated analysis of the national economy; it was an emotional response to Northern denigration of Southern resources as well as an assurance to the South that a separate confederacy was viable. Similarly, Ruffin's advocacy of Southern military preparation to deter any contemplated invasion[41] and his assertion that the South could easily repel any actual Northern attack were not meant to intimidate the North into receding from her abolitionist course; they were designed to

bolster Southern confidence in her military capability and diminish her qualms about withdrawing from the Union. Ruffin's arguments on these issues were addressed to Southerners: it was them he hoped to inspire; it was their perceptions he tried to change; it was from them he expected action. Ruffin the propagandist did not exploit the supposed malleability of Northern public opinion.

Nevertheless, Ruffin did not remain altogether passive. He believed that Southern action, rather than rhetoric, was required to alter Northern perceptions and behavior. He pointed out the futility of proclaiming the South would secede, as her past history of submitting after threatening resistance discredited such pronouncements. Southern <u>action</u> was required to convince the North that the South was in earnest.[42] Accordingly, Ruffin would later urge the South to impose license taxes upon the North as a means of showing the North her utter dependence on the Southern slave economy.[43] Also, Ruffin, as much out of Southern honor as Southern interests, called for slave testimony.[44] He was tired of "wordy warfare" against Northern abolitionism, especially as he believed that abolitionists went beyond mere threats to proselytize actively in the South. Also, honor was partly a success ideology: it prized victory and despised failure. Being beaten by one's own inaction was particularly shameful. Thus Ruffin did have an activist program which can be viewed as compatible with preserving Southern interests in the Union. Yet he sought secession.

It was not that Ruffin sought secession regardless of whether Northern aggressions were suppressible within the Union: the primary impetus behind his quest for secession was his perception of the inequality of the South within the Union, not an ambition to unleash the dormant potentialities of a Southern nation. His forecast of Southern economic boom outside of the Union was not so much an incentive for secession as a defensive reaction to Northern prophecies of Southern economic doom. He was not so much seeking secession to enrich the South; he was primarily responding to Unionist derogation of the economic viability of a Southern confederacy. Likewise, his complaint about the North's economic expropriations of Southern resources in the Union was, in part, a response to Northern disparagement of Southern resources and Northern ridicule of Southern secessionist pretensions. Of course, the economic theme was not an altogether trivial inducement to disunion; Ruffin propagandized the economic grievances of the South and hated the North for what he deemed sectional plunder. As prospects for Southern agricultural reform grew dimmer, his vision of a prosperous Southern confederation grew brighter. If the South refused to deal with her internal economic problems such as soil exhaustion inside the Union, then she should resolve her external economic problem of Northern colonial exploitation by departing from the Union. But the preservation of slave property, rather than the termination of the myriad forms of Northern economic exploitation, was

the primary objective of Ruffin's secession quest; it was more a question of averting catastrophe than inviting cornucopia. Furthermore, what really incensed Ruffin about the continuing Northern economic oppression was less the amount of Southern pecuniary losses than the fact of inequality itself. Hence, compromising over the tariff was unacceptable. The inequitable distribution of economic burdens and benefits in the Union stigmatized the South as an inferior section. Secession would erase the insult with a vengeance; the Northern economy would crumble. Honor lay behind Ruffin's economic plaints.

Honor likewise underlay Ruffin's fear of Republican political assaults against slavery. Ruffin's vision that the political abolitionists would only gradually infringe upon slavery and refrain from delivering the final blow was not an aberrant insight but at the core of his fears: the very process of Northern encroachments--or more precisely Southern submission to these encroachments--was, for Ruffin, tantamount to the "complete humiliation"[45] of the South. Ruffin, if anything, was more afraid that the Republicans would not abolish slavery than that they would abolish slavery. The Republicans' power stemmed precisely from their withholding of the "final blow." Their intimidation of Southerners as well as their popularity among Northerners would cease as soon as they delivered the coup de grâce. The fire-eaters were typically more afraid of diluted antislaveryism such as freesoilism than of outright

abolitionism; they felt confident that the South would successfully resist naked abolition but feared that the South might succumb to disguised antislavery.[46] And Ruffin, who postulated Republican aggressions up to the point of abolition, may have feared that antislavery subtlety would eradicate slavery, irrespective of Republican intentions. The insidious Republican inroads might so erode slavery particularly in the border states as to make an abolitionist fiat a superfluous formality. Also, even if Northern politicians had originally intended to stop short of the outright extirpation of slavery, the dynamic of political events could propel the movement to its logical culmination. Thus, the fear of Republican gradualism can be understood from the standpoint of long-term Southern economic interests.

But Ruffin's fear of political antislavery had a more important dimension. He feared the enslavement of Southern slaveholders more than he feared the emancipation of Southern slaves. The shame of Southern subservience in the Union exceeded the economic loss of valuable property. For Ruffin, the prospect of indefinite subjugation of Southern aristocrats by the haughty freesoil adversary was more psychologically grueling than that of immediate demolition of slavery by fanatical abolitionists. The key lies precisely in Ruffin's specter of elongated, ceaseless Northern assaults and repeated Southern submission, Northern power and Southern powerlessness. Inequality as such was an

insult to Southern honor, Southern submission being a type of self-flagellation. Ruffin frequently complained of his own increasing debilitation, the degeneration of his physical and mental faculties, and avowed his preference for an early death to a period of prolonged enervation.[47] His dread of a protracted period of antislavery forays rested on the same psychological foundation.

Thus Ruffin could virtually concede at one point, though he generally avoided discussing this issue,--an omission revealing in itself--that the South would not obtain the western lands by secession. Ruffin's admission that disunion would not bring the South the coveted western lands is particularly significant since he held that Southern slavery needed lebensraum to survive. Would not high slave density destroy the peculiar institution by encouraging financially-motivated slaveowners to substitute free labor or by emboldening the numerically superior slaves to rebel? If disunion was strictly a matter of Southern interests, then Ruffin was not thinking coherently or at the very least falling for short-term solutions. If slavery was plagued with endemic ailments, then sectional amputation would at best delay inevitable death. But if Southern honor was the key, then Ruffin's insouciance about the territorial issue becomes comprehensible. The South did not possess the valuable territories in the Union anyway; at least out of the Union, she would have her priceless honor.

That Southern honor impelled Ruffin's secessionist

quest is still more evident in his discussion of civil war. Ruffin, of course, typically assured anxious Southerners that disunion would be peaceful. He argued that the North would not spend huge sums and risk numerous lives to invade the South. Yet at the same time he claimed that antislavery politicians had deluded the Northern masses into thinking that they could quickly and easily conquer the South. Ruffin must have realized that rational self-interest could not stop a military offensive if the North failed to appreciate her true interests. The truth is that Ruffin, at times, sensed that war would accompany secession, his asservations to the contrary notwithstanding. In fact, he recognized that civil war would be a particularly tragic event, "the most deplorable and calamitous of all wars." The longstanding sectional animosities would intensify war hatreds. And despite his professions that the superior Southern military could easily repel a Northern invasion, Ruffin realized that the relative equality of combatants would destroy both victor and vanquished: "The prosperity, wealth, and as yet happy condition of both powers, would be engulphed in one abyss of complete industrial and political ruin."[48]

But, Ruffin argued, the responsibility for averting civil war devolved upon the North, the aggressive party, not upon the oppressed South. It was incumbent upon the North to desist from further aggressions not upon the South to continue yielding to them. The South could not sacrifice

her honor to avert war, however dreadful and ruinous.

> The South, if still remaining in the Union, can do nothing except to submit entirely and unconditionally to every present and coming measure of aggression, which will be but another way to reach certain ruin. Rather than entire submission, we should prefer any hazards of war and its consequences. For all the calamities of war should be risked, and met, if necessary, by freemen who deserve to enjoy freedom, rather than to yield their freedom, without struggling, to the last ground of hope, in its defence. If then we are such men, the threat of war with all the necessary and horrible consequences, will have no influence to induce the South to purchase peace by entire submission.[49]

Eager to attract supporters, Southern radicals generally exaggerated the abolitionist perils of Unionism and minimized the military hazards of secession. But the Southern choice was not between a glorious, independent confederacy and the impending abolition of slavery as the fire-eaters simplistically claimed. The real dilemma facing the South was choosing between two evils: imminent war, the probable result of secession, or ultimate abolition, the probable outcome of submission. The classic fire-eaters seldom confessed this and rarely met the issue directly. But when they did address the issue, they still opted for secession.[50] Ruffin, for example, clearly preferred resistance, however destructive, to acquiescence. He considered "submission" appropriate for slaves but disgraceful for freemen. If the South submitted to Northern aggressions, she would not merit freedom. For Ruffin, freedom was not a natural condition of man, an inalienable right, but a privilege which had to be earned. The Virginian clung to an archaic conception of republicanism

which viewed liberty as the precious fruit of bitter struggle not as an automatic derivative of human dignity. To vindicate her honor and her claim to freedom, the South had to resist, whatever the cost. It is hard to avoid the conclusion that Ruffin's quest for secession was impelled less by rational calculations of sectional advantage than by the psychological dictates of Southern honor.

Notes

(1) Edmund Ruffin, An Address on the Opposite Results of Exhausting and Fertilizing Systems of Agriculture Read Before the South-Carolina Institute at its Fourth Annual Fair November 18th, 1852 (Charleston, 1853), 12-13.

(2) Ibid., 4-6, 8-11.

(3) Ibid., 17-19, 22-23.

(4) Ibid., 19-20.

(5) Genovese, Political Economy, 162-167, on the obstacles to Southern domestic manufacturing. Genovese views Southern slavery as essentially a patriarchal relationship generating a corresponding ethos. And he deems capitalist conditions and values in the Old South as an alien excresence of world market relations. Genovese, World Slaveholders Made, 121-126.

(6) Ruffin, Address on Opposite Results, 11, 23; Edmund Ruffin, "Incidents of My Life," III, 246-248, Edmund Ruffin Papers, SHC.

(7) Edmund Ruffin, "Incidents of My Life," III, 246-248, Edmund Ruffin Papers, SHC; Ruffin, Address to Virginia Agricultural Society, 7, 18. Although Ruffin generally confined himself to strictly agricultural topics in his other addresses, sectional themes, however obliquely, intruded themselves. For example, when addressing the farmers of Caroline County, Ruffin could not refrain from extolling both the agricultural and political merits of John Taylor. See Edmund Ruffin, "Address to the Agricultural Society of the Rappahannock," Manuscript in Edmund Ruffin Papers, SHC.

(8) Potter, Impending Crisis, 160-162, 199-210,

(9) Ibid., 225-265.

(10) Ruffin, Diary, I, "Introduction to the attempt," 5-6, on the division of Ruffin's estate; Ruffin, Diary, I, xxvii, on his singing daughters; Ruffin, Diary, I, Entries for July 29, Sept. 26, 1857, 94, 109-110, on Ruffin's despondency over the death of family members, including Edmund Jr.'s first wife, Mary, whom Ruffin loved "as a daughter," in the summer of 1857; Nov. 11, 1857, 123-124, on Ruffin's strong opposition to the gentry practice of marrying younger women; & May 30, 1858, 197, on his strong physical attraction to the daughters of his friend Judge Thomas Ruffin, one of whom later married his son Edmund, Jr.; That his children--especially his daughters--had

palliated the death of his wife is evident in Edmund Ruffin, "Incidents of My Life," II, 183, Edmund Ruffin Papers, SHC. Also, see Mitchell, Ruffin, 87-90.

(11) Edmund Ruffin, "Incidents of My Life," II, 227-237, III, 244-245, Edmund Ruffin Papers, SHC; Ruffin, Diary, I, xxxv-xxxvi, "Introduction to the attempt," 8-13, Entries for Sept. 26, 1857, Oct. 22, Nov. 2, 1858, Nov. 2, 1859, 109, 239-240, 243-244, 352.

(12) Craven, Ruffin, 28-35; Ruffin, Diary, I, Entries for Aug. 9, 1857, Sept. 29, 1859, 95-96, 344-345. Ruffin's MS Diary, Entries for June 18, Aug. 9, 1863, Feb. 24, 25, 1864, June 16-18, 1865, 2,729-2,731, 2,734, 2,885-2,887, 3,212-3,216, 3,219, 4,096, LC. Ruffin questioned both the necessity and sufficiency of Christian faith for the attainment of salvation. He could not believe that a just deity would consign virtuous skeptics to eternal perdition. Belief was "an involuntary act of the mind," creed a matter of circumstance. God would judge conduct and motives, not doctrines. Though Ruffin shrank from such dogmas as original sin "with horror & disgust," he tried hard to believe in them: "I have sincerely & earnestly...desired to be a Christian in belief, even if that belief was a delusion." Despite his religious rationalism, Ruffin apparently began daily prayers in about 1840. Shortly before his death, Ruffin explained why:

> I believed their earnest utterance--especially with my confession of my unworthiness & sinfulness, in begging for mercy, & forgiveness of my sins, in asking for strength to resist temptation & to avoid future sin, in offering thanks for God's blessings--by frequently reminding me of my duties & of God's blessings, would at least benefit me indirectly, & induce, or prompt, my penitence, reformation of my conduct, & my thankfulness to God. Thus, I strove to silence & smother my discouraging doubts--& despite of their frequent intrusion, I have persevered (though usually much too carelessly, & with always wandering thoughts) in the habit of daily prayer, to this time.

These were not the words of a dispassionate deist but a tormented Christian; they are signs not of religious indifference but of deep spiritual malaise. Ruffin was too much of a rationalist to embrace traditional Christianity blindly and wholeheartedly but too much of a Christian to dispense with religion casually.

(13) Ruffin, Diary, I, Entry for July 6, 1858, 209. But also see Ruffin, Diary, II, Entry for June 2, 1862, 674-675, where Ruffin confessed that he had drunk regularly in his youth and stopped drinking due to health reasons. Moreover, Ruffin recorded that he had thrice abandoned alcohol for long periods of abstinence.

(14) Ruffin, Diary, I, xxvi-xxvii, Entries for Jan. 8, 1858, Jan. 19, 1860, 142-143, 395.

(15) Ruffin, Diary, I, xxxii-xxxiii, "Introduction to the attempt," 14-15, Entry for Aug. 3, 1859, 327.

(16) Ruffin's undertaking to keep a diary and his first open call for secession, two events coinciding in time, were manifestations of the same impulse--the need to enhance the meaning of his own existence.

(17) Ruffin, Diary, I, Entries for Nov. 30, 1857, Mar. 13, Sept. 20, 25, 1858, Aug. 3, 1859, 135, 166-167, 231, 232, 328.

(18) The phrase is Ruffin's as quoted by Mitchell, Ruffin, 2.

(19) The Virginian's religious formulations, however rational, were emotionally sterile and psychologically distressing. They left Ruffin in a state of spiritual miasma. Unlike the mysteries of Christianity, the secessionist faith seemed to offer its votary foreknowledge and predictability. Ruffin transferred his partially untapped and perennially frustrated religious fervor unto the political plane and became a peripatetic, evangelical crusader in behalf of Southern rights, slavery, and secession. Being a fire-eating prophet enhanced the meaning and significance of his existence. Even if his soul were mortal, the proselytization of disunion could earn him everlasting fame with posterity. Thus fire-eating became Ruffin's canalized religion.

(20) Ruffin, Diary, I, Entry for June 1, 1859, 306-307; Ruffin's MS Diary, Entries for June 18, 1863, Feb. 24, 25, 1864, 2,726-2,728, 2,734, 3,213-3,215, 3,218-3,221, LC. Ruffin also feared that his expression of religious heterodoxy might undermine social morality. Although Ruffin viewed many episodes in scripture as immoral, he claimed that Christianity promoted morality. The Virginian tried to reconcile his honest expression of religious conviction with the dictates of social propriety by confining his attacks to relatively secondary aspects of Christianity, such as theological misinterpretations of the gospel. He generally avoided discussing cardinal Protestant tenets such as the necessity of faith for salvation. But since his family confounded his objections to theological constructions of the Bible with opposition to Christianity as such, Ruffin generally suppressed even his peripheral criticisms. Privately, Ruffin hoped to purge Christianity of its clerical perversions. He considered nineteenth-century Christianity as intolerant of "private judgment" as it had been before Luther. Ruffin, in effect, sought another

Reformation. But he remained prudently silent. And he admitted that his silence bordered on "intentional deception." It is not unreasonable to suppose that his deceitful suppression found compensation elsewhere.

(21) Ruffin, Diary, I, Entries for Mar. 10, May 31, Sept. 26, Nov. 8, 1857, Nov. 3, 1859, 49, 79, 109-110, 121, 353; Mitchell, Ruffin, 88-89.

(22) Ruffin, Diary, I, Entries for Nov. 27, 1860, Feb. 21, 1861, 505, 554, II, Entry for Sept. 30, 1861, 139.

(23) Edmund Ruffin, "Consequences of Abolition Agitation," No. I, DBR, XXII (June, 1857), 583-585. Interestingly, Buchanan's election also prompted Barnwell Rhett, who spent most of the decade in political retirement, to pen a long public letter which warned Southerners of the danger ahead and sketched a secessionist program. See "A Letter from the Hon. R. Barnwell Rhett to Governor Adams, on the State of Public Affairs," Charleston Mercury, November 7, 1856. The Mercury editors also wrote several editorials warning that Buchanan's victory was a mere truce. See, for example, "Hollow Rejoicings" & "The Result of the Election," Charleston Mercury, Nov. 17, 20, 1856.

(24) Edmund Ruffin, "Consequences of Abolition Agitation," No. I, DBR, XXII (June, 1857), 587-588.

(25) Ibid., 585-589.

(26) Ibid., 590-591; Edmund Ruffin, "Consequences of Abolition Agitation," No. III, DBR, XXIII (Oct., 1857), 385-390; Edmund Ruffin, "Consequences of Abolition Agitation," No. V, DBR, XXIII (Dec., 1857), 597, 601, 604.

(27) Edmund Ruffin, "Consequences of Abolition Agitation," No. II, DBR, XXIII (Sept., 1857), 266-267, 269-270; Edmund Ruffin, "Consequences of Abolition Agitation," No. IV, DBR, XXIII (Nov., 1857), 546-549; Edmund Ruffin, "Consequences of Abolition Agitation," No. V, DBR, XXIII (Dec., 1857), 602-603.

(28) Edmund Ruffin, "Consequences of Abolition Agitation," No. IV, DBR, XXIII (Nov., 1857), 550; Edmund Ruffin, "Consequences of Abolition Agitation," No. V, DBR, XXIII (Dec., 1857), 599-601.

(29) Edmund Ruffin, "Consequences of Abolition Agitation," No. V, DBR, XXIII (Dec., 1857), 603-604.

(30) Ibid., 605-607.

(31) Ibid., 607; Edmund Ruffin, "Consequences of

Abolition Agitation," No. IV, DBR, XXIII (Nov., 1857), 546-547.

(32) On the relationship between religious and political abolitionism, see Richard H. Sewell, Ballots For Freedom: Antislavery Politics in the United States 1837-1860 (New York, 1976), 3-79. Also see Eric Foner, Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men: The Ideology of the Republican Party Before the Civil War (New York and London, 1970), 109-110.

(33) Foner, Free Soil, 87-102; Foner, Politics and Ideology in the Age of Revolution (New York and Oxford, 1980), 41-43, 48-50, 72-74, 84, 86-87, 92-93; Michael F. Holt, The Political Crisis of the 1850s (New York and London, 1978), 51, 183-217.

(34) Foner, Free Soil, 115-123; Foner, Politics and Ideology, 50-52; Sewell, Ballots, 308-313.

(35) Edmund Ruffin, "Consequences of Abolition Agitation," No. IV, DBR, XXIII (Nov., 1857), 546-547.

(36) Edmund Ruffin, "Consequences of Abolition Agitation," No. II, DBR, XXIII (Sept., 1857), 269.

(37) Ibid., 270-271.

(38) Ibid., 270.

(39) Edmund Ruffin, "Consequences of Abolition Agitation," No. I, DBR, XXII (June, 1857), 591-593; Edmund Ruffin, "Consequences of Abolition Agitation," No. V, DBR, XXIII (Dec., 1857), 601-602.

(40) The primacy of Northern material interests was the fundamental assumption behind John C. Calhoun's hopes to save Southern rights within the Union by economic measures and disunion ultimatums. "Meeting of the Citizens of Charleston, TUESDAY EVENING, MARCH 9, 1847," Charleston Mercury, March 23, 1847 & Margaret L. Coit, John C. Calhoun: American Patriot (Boston, 1950), 473-474. Although they generally stressed Northern fanaticism, secessionists viewed the North as materialist as well. The Mercury argued that economic ruin was the only event which could turn the North against abolitionism. "The Effects of Disunion upon the North," Charleston Mercury, Aug. 29, 1859. Yancey included materialistic traits in his dissection of the Northern character. See his speech in Columbus, Georgia, 1855 in John Witherspoon DuBose, The Life and Times of William Lowndes Yancey: A History of Political Parties in the United States from 1834 to 1864; Especially at to the Origins of the Confederate States (Birmingham, 1892; New York, 1942), I, 301. And in the course of his campaign for Breckinridge in

1860, Yancey repeatedly appealed to Northern economic interests to preserve slave institutions. See, for example, Yancey's speech in New York City in Emerson D. Fite, The Presidential Campaign of 1860 (New York, 1911), 310-312, 315.

(41) Edmund Ruffin, "Consequences of Abolition Agitation," No. II, DBR, XXIII (Sept., 1857), 271; Edmund Ruffin, "Consequences of Abolition Agitation," No. V, DBR, XXIII (Dec., 1857), 598.

(42) Edmund Ruffin, "Consequences of Abolition Agitation," No. II, DBR, XXIII (Sept., 1857), 270-271.

(43) "Suggestions to the Southern States," Nos. I-V, by "R." Charleston Mercury, Aug. 30, Sept. 1-3, 6, 1858.

(44) The phrase is from "WHAT WILL BE THE RESULTS OF THE NORTHERN ABOLITION ACTION?" No. I, by "A VIRGINIAN," Richmond Enquirer, January 22, 1850.

(45) Edmund Ruffin, "Consequences of Abolition Agitation," No. II, DBR, XXIII (Sept., 1857), 270.

(46) Thus Rhett and Quitman actually preferred the Wilmot Proviso and the abolition of slavery in the District of Columbia to the 1850 compromise. Laura White, Robert Barnwell Rhett: Father of Secession (New York, 1931), 105; Claiborne, Quitman, II, 170-171.

(47) Edmund Ruffin, "Incidents of My Life," II, 218, Edmund Ruffin Papers, SHC. The loss of some of his beloved children and the "misconduct" of others also made Ruffin yearn for "immediate & unexpected death." Ruffin, Diary, I, Entry for Sept. 26, 1857, 109-110.

(48) Edmund Ruffin, "Consequences of Abolition Agitation," No. II, DBR, XXIII (Sept., 1857), 271.

(49) Ibid., 271-272.

(50) In 1850, for example, Rhett took the logic of Southern Honor to its ultimate limits. South Carolina, Rhett declared, would like to join her sister states in resisting Northern oppression but she would not submit to the North in any case:

> No, no, my friends! Smaller States have before us struggled successfully for their independence and freedom against far greater odds; and if it must be, we can make one brave, long, last, desperate struggle, for our rights and honor, ere the black pall of tyranny is stretched over the bier of our dead liberties. To meet death a little sooner or a little later, can be of

> consequence to very few of us; whilst duty performed may remain in its effect to many generations, and a fair fame, live forever. Looking to that undying reputation which has ever followed every people who have dared all to preserve their liberties, and have conquered or perished nobly in their defense; instead of shrinking, we might pant for the trial which shall isolate South Carolina in this great controversy.

"Speech of the Hon. R.B. Rhett, Delivered at Hibernian Hall, in the City of Charleston, June 21, 1850," Charleston Mercury, July 20, 1850.

The same themes of duty, honor, death, and imperishable fame surfaced in Yancey's speech in Montgomery after Lincoln's election in which the fire-eater called for the separate secession of Alabama:

> It is not all of life to live, nor all of death to die. To do one's duty, is man's chief aim in life. Better far to close our days by an act of duty--life's aims fulfilled, then to prolong them for years....As for myself, rather than to live on; subject to a government which breaks the compact at will, and places me in a position of inequality--of inferiority to the Northern free negro--though that life might be illustrated by gilded chains--by luxury and by ease, I would in the cause of my State gather around me some brave spirits, who however few in number, would find a grave, which my countrymen--the world and all future ages, should recognize as a modern Thermopyle.

"Mr. Yancey's Speech," Montgomery Weekly Advertiser, November 14, 1860.

Chapter Four: The Tactical Convolutions of a Fire-Eater

In the mid 1850s the territory of Kansas was the main theater of sectional strife. The North and South organized emigration movements to Kansas and vied for control of the region, as their respective settlers cast their ballots at the polls and exchanged their bullets on the plains. Southern rights advocates from neighboring Missouri to remote South Carolina urged their compatriots to send men and money to Kansas. Ranging from the moderate Missouri Senator David R. Atchison to the fiery editor of the Charleston Mercury William R. Taber, Southern spokesmen stressed the importance of making Kansas a slave state. The acquisition of Kansas, Southern leaders argued, was vital to maintain the sectional political equilibrium in the Union. Moreover, if Kansas became freesoil, then Missouri and the other border states would follow her course. Many fire-eaters actively participated in the Kansas emigration movement. The Alabama radical Jefferson Buford--with Yancey's blessing--organized and led an expedition to Kansas. Even some of South Carolina's fire-eaters became caught up in the excitement. The Mercury editor, for example, served on the executive committee of the Charleston Kansas Association. Edmund Rhett played a similar role in St. Helena's Parish.[1]

Ruffin was skeptical about the various Southern efforts to colonize Kansas. Ruffin claimed that not only was Kansas destined to be a free state despite the noble efforts of

concerned Southerners, but that all western territories would be freesoil. Economic opportunities in the East, Ruffin contended, largely determined emigration to the West. Since the North was more impoverished than the prosperous South, Northerners would naturally flock westward in larger numbers than Southerners! Thus the agricultural reformer's repeated lamentations of the ceaseless westward trek of Southeastern farmers yielded to the eagerness of the Southern sectionalist and the proslavery enthusiast to portray the South in the best possible light. Also, Ruffin asserted, the slaveholder's fear of removing his slaves to regions accesible to abolitionist agitation would neutralize the organized endeavors to stimulate Southern migration to the territories. The sectional controversy, Ruffin argued, had transformed every Northerner into an "Abolition agent." Hence, even if only ten percent of the territorial settlers were Northerners, slaveholders would be deterred from risking their human capital to abolitionist mischief. At most, a few slaveholders would take their domestic servants to the West; but only a foolish or reckless individual would take field hands along. Unsurprisingly, there were but a hundred odd slaves in Kansas. "If these views are correct, Kansas, and also every other new or future Territory, must come into the Union as non-slaveholding."[2] Ruffin's latter explanation for the scant migration of slaveholders to the western teritories is not implausible; slaves were, after all, a precarious property. Nevertheless, Ruffin's

chauvinistic sectionalism and rabid anti-abolitionism served to exonerate the slave economy and the slaveholder character from the South's failure to win the territorial war. Southern reluctance to settle the West reflected not the geographic and climatic limitations of slave agriculture but the superiority of the Southern slave economy, not a paucity of patriotic resolve but a legitimate fear of the ubiquitous abolitionist agent.

Ruffin's pessimism about the territorial expansion of slavery within the Union inclined him to view Southern efforts to colonize Kansas as diversionary maneuvers which retarded the secession movement. Whereas sectional contestants in the battle for Kansas commonly proclaimed that the fate of slavery hung in the balance, Ruffin retained the gist of his secession ideology. Whether Kansas entered the Union as a free or slave state, Ruffin warned, the North's overall territorial supremacy would enable her to abolish slavery by constitutional amendment within twenty years. While many fire-eaters were swept away in the excitement of organizing expeditions to Kansas, Ruffin seemingly stood aloof. "This impending and certain danger is not to be warded off by any such action as individual efforts to send men to Kansas, and subscribing money to induce such emigration. And no other and much stronger mode of defence will serve, if falling short of a speedy secession from the present Union." Instead of urging Southerners to emigrate to Kansas, Ruffin exhorted the

cotton states to use the "truce" of Buchanan's presidency to inaugurate Southern withdrawal from the Union.[3]

Southerners were somewhat more receptive to the appeals of Kansas publicists than to those of secessionists. Although few slaveholders migrated to Kansas, the proslavery faction managed to acquire and retain control of the territorial legislature at Lecompton by rigging the elections. The aggrieved freesoilers organized a rival government at Topeka and sought admission into the Union as a free state. The proslavery regime at Lecompton responded by scheduling elections for delegates to a constitutional convention, the preliminary to statehood. Pointing to the fraudulent nature of the "regular" Kansas elections, petulant freesoilers threatened to boycott this June 1857 election. Three territorial governors had failed to reconcile the hostile factions. In March 1857 President James Buchanan appointed the Pennsylvania-born but Mississippi-bred Robert J. Walker governor of Kansas. The new governor, who had considerable experience in politics, tried to cajole the freesoilers into participating in the upcoming June elections. Accordingly, Walker proclaimed that Kansas was destined by nature to be a free state, called for submission of the Kansas constitution to the voters for ratification, and even hobnobbed with freesoil leaders at Topeka.[4]

Southern rights exponents were vexed by Walker's course and some suspected Buchanan of dictating his appointee's

behavior. Ruffin privately condemned the appointment of Walker, an "unprincipled adventurer," and believed that the administration was scheming to make Kansas a free state. For most of 1857 Buchanan maintained a discreet silence. Since the freesoilers had boycotted the convention elections, the Lecompton Constitution had a proslavery tincture. The Lecompton Constitution provided for a limited popular referendum whereby the Kansas residents would choose whether to accept the "constitution with slavery" or the "constitution with no slavery." Their decision would determine the legality of future slave imports into Kansas. But the status of the slaves already in Kansas and that of their progeny could only be altered by constitutional amendment and only after 1864. In his December 8, 1857 message to Congress, Buchanan supported the Lecompton document. The president admitted that he had previously instructed Walker to favor submission of the entire Kansas constitution to the voters, since the Kansas-Nebraska Act had mandated popular sovereignty. But Buchanan claimed that the provision in the Lecompton Constitution for a popular referendum on future slave imports was a virtual referendum on slavery itself. Less than a fortnight later, about 6,000 Kansas voters ratified the "constitution with slavery" as the freesoilers abstained. Conducting their own referendum in early January 1858, the Kansas freesoil faction rejected the Lecompton document wholesale by over 10,000 votes. Moreover, the freesoilers had been victorious in the October

1857 elections for a new legislature after Governor Walker overthrew some blatantly fraudulent proslavery ballots. Clearly, the freesoilers constituted a majority of the bona fide residents of Kansas.[5]

Nevertheless, in early February 1858 Buchanan urged Congress to admit Kansas into the Union immediately under the Lecompton Constitution with slavery. Many Northerners of both political parties were outraged by Buchanan's posture. Denouncing the Lecompton Constitution as a fraud perpetrated by a bogus convention unrepresentative of Kansas settlers, Northern Congressmen blocked the admission of Kansas as a slave state. Stephen A. Douglas, the architect of the nonintervention policy of the Kansas-Nebraska Act, demanded another Kansas convention or at least Congressional supervision of a fair referendum on the Lecompton Constitution. Southern Congressmen denied that the elections of delegates to the Lecompton convention had been unfair; the antislavery men had only themselves to blame for boycotting the contest. Adopting strict construction of the United states Constitution as well a literal interpretation of nonintervention, Southerners further contended that fraudulent territorial elections were not within Congressional purview. Since Kansas had applied for admission to the Union with a republican constitution, Congress was legally bound to admit her. Many Southerners called for the implementation of the Georgia Platform of December 1850 which had made Congressional refusal to admit

a slave state one of the conditions justifying secession. Of eminent Southern politicians, the erratic Virginian Henry A. Wise stood alone in publicly condemning the Kansas fraud.[6]

The fire-eating Ruffin was ambivalent about Kansas. He privately admitted that Lecompton did not genuinely reflect Kansas sentiment. His diary minced no words in pronouncing Kansas "a corrupt & rotten issue," a "bad cause." The South, Ruffin noted, would lose moral credibility by selfishly clinging to the fraudulent product of the Lecompton convention. Moreover, Ruffin believed that even if Kansas entered the Union under Lecompton, she would eliminate the obnoxious "slavery feature" from her fundamental law within a year after statehood. Ruffin apparently felt that the state of Kansas, governed by antislavery forces, would defy the Lecompton Constitution's preclusion of amendment for a seven year period by assembling another constitutional convention shortly after entering the Union which would not only ban the importation of slaves into the state but abolish the institution altogether. Nevertheless, Ruffin held that it was incumbent upon Southern Congressmen to support the Lecompton Constitution. Echoing arguments of Southern legislators, Ruffin claimed that the question of fraud lay outside of Congressional jurisdiction. Furthermore, Northern protests against fraud were insincere; Northern representatives seized upon the fraud as a convenient instrument to thwart the admission of a slave state, their real objection to

Kansas. The freesoil majority in Kansas, Ruffin charged, had deliberately abstained from the territorial elections in order to continue the slavery agitation until the next presidential election. That Southern support of the Lecompton Constitution, "which is universally admitted not to express the will of the people," would only play into Republican hands was a hardly a consideration which could dissuade a confirmed secessionist like Ruffin from espousing a "bad cause."[7]

Yet Ruffin's attitude towards Lecompton does not seem to have ben determined by the long-term interests of the disunion objective. Ruffin was not perturbed by the Congressional stalemate on Kansas. In late March 1858 the Senate had consented to admit Kansas under the Lecompton Constitution, albeit with an amendment proposed by Senator Green of Missouri which declared that the people of Kansas could "at all times" change their "form of government." The House of Representatives, with a Northern majority, rejected the original Senate bill which had admitted Kansas as a slave state without qualification. In early April the House passed a measure making the resubmission of the entire Lecompton Constitution in a federally-supervised referendum the precondition for the admission of Kansas into the Union. An impasse over Kansas had been reached.[8]

Ruffin was not disappointed by the turn of events. Commenting privately on the House's rejection of the Senate's Kansas bill, Ruffin confessed: "I am not sorry for

it. We shall gain nothing by the admission, as Kansas will certainly & speedily alter the present constitution, & forbid slavery. Consistency required that southern men should vote for the admission . . . but I am perfectly satisfied to be defeated." In a newspaper article written twelve days later, Ruffin was equally candid. He conceded that Southern Democratic senators had passed the Kansas bill "in its least objectionable form" out of their sense of principle. Yet apparently interpreting the Green amendment as abrogating the stipulation in the Lecompton instrument which prohibited constitutional amendment before 1864, Ruffin delicately suggested that Southern Democrats may have "yielded more than duty and right required. But there is no present claim for doing more. Kansas will be and must be an anti-slavery State within six months after being admitted even under the Lecompton (or a pro-slavery) Constitution. Thus the South has nothing to gain and much to lose from the admission of Kansas."[9]

The admission of Kansas under the Lecompton Constitution, then, would be of no practical benefit to the South. On the contrary, the South would be weakened by the addition of another free state to the Union. Yet "duty" and "consistency," Ruffin felt, required that Southern legislators vote for Lecompton, however unenthusiastically. The South could not honorably retreat from her commitment to the Lecompton instrument, however fraudulent in origins and inimical to her interests. Recantation of Southern support

of Lecompton would be an admission of wrongdoing, an impeachment of Southern honor. Southern secession threats over Lecompton would only magnify the disgrace of her retreat. By such reasoning could Ruffin rationalize Southern support of the Lecompton Constitution as a matter of principle. Indeed, the very fact that the South was backing a cause harmful to her sectional interest--the speedy admission of Kansas--could restore the moral credibility undermined by her championing the corrupt Lecompton document in the first place. But the South's duty to uphold Lecompton had its limits. The South, Ruffin held, had fulfilled her obligation to promote the admission of Kansas. The South should no longer persist in her self-injurious course, especially at the price of concessions to antislavery such as the Green amendment. Thus Ruffin viewed the Lecompton affair as a clash between Southern interests and Southern honor. Southern honor dictated Southern support for Lecompton, Southern interests demanded Southern opposition to Lecompton. Ruffin's advocacy of an uncompromising Southern posture on Kansas was an attempt to reconcile the needs of each: staunch support of Lecompton would vindicate Southern honor and the ensuing Northern rejection of Kansas' request for admission to the Union would subserve Southern interests.

What is noteworthy is that Ruffin deemed the admission of Kansas antagonistic to Southern interests. His realization that Kansas would be at best a transient slave

state inclined him to oppose her entrance into the Union--even under the nominally proslavery Lecompton Constitution. But while Ruffin the sectionalist looked beyond the immediate import of the Lecompton document, Ruffin the secessionist failed to appreciate, or at least to exploit, the fact that the absorption of another free state could be a long-run benefit to the South by fostering an atmosphere conducive to disunion. Why would a classic fire-eater, convinced beyond all doubt that only secession would safeguard slavery from inevitable abolitionist aggression, seek to delay the process by keeping a free state out of the Union? Would not the swift transformation of Kansas into a free state after being admitted into the Union as a slave state furnish grist for the fire-eaters' mill? Would not the psychological jolt, the keen disappointment after raised expectations, make the South ripe for radical solutions? Would not the Kansas affair demonstrate that all territories must be free--one way or another? Did Ruffin still harbor hope in 1858 that Southern interests could be secured in the Union?

Ironically, Ruffin's radicalism may have contributed to his failure to exploit the secessionist potential of the Kansas episode. His fire-eating ideology of Southern doom in the Union disposed him to view the Kansas campaign with relative detachment. Never having been aroused by the excitement of forging a slave territory, Ruffin took the South's impending loss of Kansas in stride. By contrast,

Yancey's immersion in Democratic party politics in general and the Kansas crusade in particular galvanized his dormant secessionist ardor after the disappointing denouement in the spring of 1858. The disillusioned Yancey flirted with the possibility of using the Kansas issue to spark Southern secession. Other fire-eaters had calculatingly participated in the Kansas crusade in order to expose Southern weakness in the Union. The Mercury, for example, had zealously exhorted slaveholders to colonize the Kansas Territory in order to hasten a sectional showdown. But Ruffin neither agitated the settlement of Kansas by Southerners after the enactment of the Kansas-Nebraska Act in 1854 nor called for Southern departure from the Union over the passage of the English Bill in 1858. Either his perspicacity or his duplicity was limited.

Indeed, Ruffin reacted to the Kansas compromise with profound indifference. Contrary to the Virginian's hopes and expectations, Congress did manage to settle the Kansas controversy after all. In April 1858 a conference committee representing both houses of Congress assembled to end the stalemate. The ensuing compromise measure, sponsored by Representative William English of Indiana, seized upon the anomaly of Kansas' request for a huge land grant from the federal government and upon the irregularity of her lacking the requisite population to qualify for statehood constitutionally. By the terms of the English Bill, the Kansas electorate would vote on a reduced land allotment: if

Kansas accepted it, she would enter the Union under the Lecompton Constitution; if Kansas rejected it, she would remain out of the Union until she reached a population of 93,000. The provision to have Kansas vote on a land bill was doubtlessly designed as an indirect referendum on slavery which would satisfy the North's substantive demand for some type of legitimate test of Kansas' sentiment on slavery without violating the South's technical opposition to resubmitting the slavery issue or the Lecompton Constitution to the Kansas electorate. The strategy succeeded. Moderate Northern Democrats joined an overwhelming majority of Southerners to pass the conference bill. Only two Southern Democrats, the radicals John Quitman of Mississippi and Milledge Bonham of South Carolina, voted against the English Bill. Both men viewed the land grant vote as a disguised referendum on slavery and refused to make that concession to Northern antislavery. But most Southerners deemed the English Bill a fair settlement, if not a Southern victory. Jefferson Davis, for instance, considered the conference measure an endorsement of the Southern position of the admissibility of slave states into the Union. Most Southerners were more than glad to have been extricated by another sectional compromise from fulfilling their secession threats.[10]

Ruffin did not regard the English Bill as a Southern victory. While the bill was pending, he privately noted: "This bill is now in <u>rather</u> a more tolerable shape than that

passed by the Senate, & supported by all the southern votes. But it is still objectionable--& I care nothing whether it is enacted or not."[11] Presumably, Ruffin found the conference measure preferable to the Senate bill because it did not modify the Lecompton Constitution as had the Green amendment and held out the possibility of delaying Kansas' admission into the Union. Still, the English compromise was objectionable since the slavery issue would be virtually resubmitted to the Kansas voters in defiance of federal nonintervention as Northerners had sought and enable Kansas to enter the Union soon if she unexpectedly ratified the reduced land grant.

Ruffin did not appreciate the fact that the English Bill offered a solution to the Southern moral dilemma of maintaining her honorable consistency in advancing the cause of Lecompton without hastening the admission of another free state. Instead, Ruffin hoped that Northern hostility to the conference measure would rescue the South from commitment to a course of action adverse to her interests. Rather than celebrating the passage of the English Bill, Ruffin confided to his diary that he would not have lamented its defeat "if by abolition votes." The defeat of the English Bill by antislavery legislators would have cast the odium for rejecting sectional compromise upon the North and removed some of the Unionist qualms inhibiting Southern radicalism. But as matters stood, if Kansas accepted the land grant and entered the Union under the Lecompton Constitution, she

would prohibit slavery soon afterward. "So while it is a nominal victory for the South, it is no gain, & will be soon converted into a defeat & a loss." The Kansas imbroglio ended in an unspectacular fashion. In August 1858 the Kansas electorate rejected the Congressional land allotment by an overwhelming margin. Kansas would enter the Union as a free state, but not until 1861.[12]

Besides admonishing the South that no more slave states would be admitted into the Union, Ruffin, in the spring of 1858, emphasized that no more Southern candidates would be elected to the presidency. Indeed, in the same essay in which Ruffin rebuked Southern senators for yielding too much to the North on the Kansas issue, he contended that the Republicans would win the 1860 presidential election. Accidental circumstances were responsible for Republican defeat in 1856. In the last national election, the antislavery vote had been divided between the Republican Frémont and the American Fillmore; in 1860 the North will unite behind the Republican ticket. In 1856 Buchanan had won Pennsylvania by pledging to guard her tariff interests and California by promising to promote a Pacific railroad; in the next election, these circumstances will not obtain. The program of a Republican administration was no secret. Ruffin quoted the New York Evening Post to show that the Republicans planned to remove the constitutional bulwarks of slavery such as the three-fifths clause. Southern apathy was "astonishing" in light of this "impending danger."[13]

The South, Ruffin proclaimed, was blind to two great truths: "there will never be another slave-holding State admitted to the present Federal Union, and there will never be another Southern man elected President--unless, indeed, he is a renegade and a traitor to the South." But the desire for the executive office clouded the judgment of prominent Southern politicians: they did not see that the North would vote against any Southern leader who championed the rights of his section. In Ruffin's mind, the flexibility of Southern politicians on sectional issues such as Kansas and their expectation of a Southern presidential triumph in 1860 were intimately connected: blinded by political ambition, Southern leaders were indisposed to combat Northern antislavery encroachment vigorously. Every Southern presidential aspirant realized that he required Northern votes to elect him. Accordingly, the unscrupulous Southern politicians would openly cater to the prejudices of the Northern voter. But even "the purest of living men, so situated, will be cautious of offending the North, and will be more silent and less earnest and active in opposing Northern aggressions, than he would be otherwise." Ruffin was careful to exclude the revered Calhoun, who had exemplified "Roman virtue and perfect integrity," from the frailties of the ordinary politician and to avoid naming particular individuals. But the conduct of Virginia's two most prominent public aspirants during the Kansas controversy had demonstrated--in Ruffin's mind--these two

variations of Southern political corruption: Henry A. Wise had opposed the Lecompton Constitution to court the Northern voter; and Robert M.T. Hunter had tempered his sectional rhetoric to avoid alienating the Northern voter. Despite his recognition that the Lecompton Constitution was a fraudulent document and that the speedy entrance of Kansas into the Union would strengthen the North by the addition of another free state, Ruffin could only view the course of mainstream Southern politicians as impelled by political ambition, the simplistic fire-eater explanation of Southern moderation.[14]

Interestingly, Ruffin may have preyed upon the very ambitions he so severely chastised. An anonymous article published by the Richmond South in the early summer of 1858--a piece that Ruffin appended to his diary--urged the South to unite behind a Southern candidate for president in 1860. As the South had acquiesced in making Pierce and Buchanan, each of Northern nativity and residence, the last two presidents, fairness dictated that the next president be a Southerner. The time had arrived for the South to stop placating Northerners during presidential contests. The actual functioning of sectional politics during quadrennial elections barred Southerners from elevation to the nation's highest station as effectively as if a constitutional provision had explicitly excluded them. How could proud Southerners submit to such invidious discrimination in the distribution of honor? They would certainly protest against

a constitutional stipulation of exclusion. Let the South rally behind her most able champion in 1860. Northern rejection of a Southern candidate in the general election was preferable to Southern acquiescence in a Northern nominee at the national party convention. Honest defeat was far better than tainted victory. Perhaps Ruffin himself had written this essay, with the hope that Democratic rejection of a Southern presidential aspirant along with the triumph of the Republican contender would finally shatter the South's expectations of obtaining political power and preferment in the Union and turn her attention to a Southern confederacy as the proper theater for her political ambitions.[15]

But for a short time in 1858 Ruffin was not content to wait for external events to rouse the South from her slumber. He tried to form a Southern rights organization to foment disunion at the earliest opportunity or, at the very least, to prepare the South for secession after a Republican presidential victory. Though the fruit of Ruffin's efforts, the League of United Southerners, proved an embarrassing failure, the history of the League illustrates the problems encountered by fire-eaters in forging a secessionist organization and the relative imperviousness of the South to extremist agitation in periods of sectional calm. The League experiment also unveils Ruffin's assumptions about Southern society and illuminates the tactical convolutions made by fire-eaters surrounded by a suspicious public.

* * * * *

Ruffin's secessionist activities from 1850 onwards consisted of penning radical essays for the Southern press; voicing his disunion sentiments to Southern politicians during his visits to Washington, D.C., South Carolina, and Sulfur Springs, Virginia (a popular vacation resort); and exchanging opinions on the political course of the South with fellow fire-eaters such as Barnwell Rhett and Willoughby Newton by meetings and correspondence. Ruffin's excursions to the District of Columbia and his conversations with Southern rights politicians kept him abreast of sectional politics. But Ruffin did not acquaint himself with a cross-section of Southern leaders. He spent most of his time in Washington in the company of the "Hunter Mess," a small group of Southern rights politicos grouped around the Virginian senator. He had only limited acquaintanceship with Southwestern radicals, particularly those from the important states of Alabama and Mississippi. Ruffin, apparently, never even met John A. Quitman. And he did not meet Yancey until 1858. During Ruffin's sojourns at Sulfur Springs, he would typically seek out congenial Southerners, express his extreme views, and hope for a favorable reaction. Matters would usually end there. Ruffin's efforts were haphazard, piecemeal, unorganized.

Indeed, during the 1850s Ruffin was a one-man propaganda center, subsidizing and distributing his proslavery and secession literature. For example, in 1857

Ruffin mailed his "Consequences of Abolition Agitation" to many influential political figures including all Southern governors. Ruffin also distributed copies of this essay in the course of his travels to Washington. But Ruffin was not satisfied with the number of copies James D.B. DeBow had printed of his secession essay. The following year Ruffin contributed half the costs to publish 5,000 copies of The Political Economy of Slavery, a proslavery pamphlet. He relied on the franking privileges of friendly Southern Congressmen, such as William O. Goode and Thomas Ruffin, to distribute this pamphlet. But Ruffin found himself saddled with the tedious chore of mailing them. He did reach a larger audience with his written than his spoken words. The dissemination of his essays, however, consumed a great deal of his time, expense, and energy. Ruffin, thus, had firsthand experience of the handicaps affecting fire-eating propagandists in the Old South.[16]

The body most resembling a Southern rights organization in the antebellum South was the Southern Commercial Convention, in which representatives from several Southern states would annually assemble and discuss economic issues. Though these assemblages were originally designed to promote Southern commercial enterprise, in the late 1850s they increasingly became the vehicle for the agitation of radical schemes, especially the revival of the African slave trade. But the actual achievements of these conventions were quite limited: participants discussed issues, passed resolutions,

and adjourned for a year. No machinery was established to monitor the Southern political condition in the interim or to implement the convention's economic decisions.[17]

With a longstanding interest in fostering Southern economic independence, Ruffin was attracted to these annual Southern assemblages. But he was miffed by their chronic impotency. In 1857 Ruffin tried to cajole Hammond out of his political retirement to meet him at the Knoxville convention in August. Characteristically, Ruffin ascribed the past failure of the commercial conventions to their domination by urban residents, "agents of northern merchants," whose livelihood hinged on the perpetuation of Southern economic dependence on the North. The death of his daughter-in-law Mary prevented Ruffin from attending the Knoxville meeting.[18]

But in 1858 Ruffin was chosen as a Virginia delegate to the Southern Commercial Convention, which met in Montgomery that year. In early May Ruffin journeyed to Alabama through South Carolina. Along the train ride to Charleston, he distributed some of his disunion essays to fellow travellers for their dissemination in remote localities. Ruffin doubtless craved the opportunity of meeting fire-eaters such as Rhett and Yancey and sounding out the Southern delegates on secession. Recognizing the futility of past commercial conventions in promoting Southern economic independence, Ruffin hoped to exploit the large assemblage of influential Southerners gathered in Montgomery by informally agitating

for Southern political independence: "Though these Conventions have been of no direct use, they may be of indirect benefit. I shall go to meet & exchange views with men of the south, & for the possible chance of forwarding the union & welfare of the southern states, & in my private capacity, instigating secession from the northern states."[19]

True to his resolve, at Montgomery Ruffin espoused his secession sentiments privately but remained reticent publicly. Indeed, Ruffin's lack of enthusiasm for the African slave trade, the major topic of the convention, made him appear conservative. The Virginia delegation, which included such personages as Roger A. Pryor, the fluent editor of the Richmond South, and Lewis Harvie, the campaign manager of Senator Hunter, chose Ruffin for its honorary chairman. With Ruffin's apparent approval, the articulate Pryor spoke strongly against reviving the illicit trade. Ruffin's only recorded remarks on the convention floor were a denial of Yancey's intimation that Virginia's opposition to the renewal of the African slave trade stemmed from her selfish desire to monopolize the sale of slaves to the lower South. Economic necessity, Ruffin maintained, compelled Virginian slaveholders to sell their slaves. Ruffin voiced his opposition to the report of Leonidas W. Spratt, which called for reopening the foreign slave trade. The irony of his posture was not lost on Ruffin: "It is a singular state of things, & not a little amusing, that Harvie, Pryor, & I, who at home are regarded as extreme disunionists, &

disorganizers, should be here acting (in appearance) as conservatives & union men."[20]

The cynosure of the Montgomery convention was the eloquent Alabama fire-eater William Lowndes Yancey. His elaborate speeches, advocating the repeal of the federal prohibition of the African slave trade, were sprinkled with disunion references. Ruffin had no doubt about Yancey's disunionist purity. He considered Yancey's allusions to conditional secession as transparent disunionism. In the temperate political climate of the spring of 1858, few public figures openly voiced even conditional disunionism. Only his eminent stature in Alabama politics, Ruffin believed, constrained Yancey from avowing secession. And despite his own reservations about reviving the slave trade, Ruffin appreciated Yancey's oratorical abilities.[21]

In late May Ruffin privately conferred with Yancey at the Exchange Hotel in Montgomery and suggested the formation of a Southern rights organization which would influence public opinion by discussions, printed material, and speeches. Ruffin hoped to enlist the fire-eating Alabamian orator to spread the secession gospel throughout the South. Yancey stated that he could safely deliver a secession speech. With a flair for the symbolic, Ruffin asked Yancey to speak on the Fourth of July and to argue--appropriately for the occasion--that the colonial disunionists of the 1770s had less grievances with Great Britain than the Southern disunionists of the 1850s had with the North.

Yancey seemed receptive to Ruffin's suggestion. Ruffin proceeded to show Yancey along with two other Alabama radicals a constitution of his projected association. The Virginian reported that all three Alabamian fire-eaters were favorably impressed with his scheme.[22]

A few days later Ruffin publicly launched his scheme with two articles in the Richmond South. Ruffin conceded the weaknesses of the Southern Commercial Conventions: they were unwieldy bodies which discussed secondary issues. Still, these conventions had some value in affording eminent Southerners an opportunity to exchange views. To render Southern conventions more effective, Ruffin proposed the creation of a permanent standing committee of the Commercial Convention to investigate the major issues facing the South and disseminate its conclusions to the Southern masses. Such a program, Ruffin argued, would both educate the Southern people about their political interests and promote sectional unity--a prerequisite to the successful defense of Southern rights. "Above all things," Ruffin continued, "there is now wanted some suitable means for bringing together the minds and wills of all true and patriotic men of the South, for consultation, for concert, and for combined action."[23]

Echoing the lament of the late Calhoun, Ruffin contrasted Southern sloth to abolitionist zeal. In the North, a small but determined group of abolitionists forged an effective organization to convert an indifferent, if not

hostile, mass to its cause. Southerners, on the other hand, invested their organizational abilities into party conventions but neglected the momentous sectional questions. Consequently, despite their common interests and opinions, Southern rights men, discouraged by the absence of organization, acted sporadically as individuals or resigned themselves to passivity. With unconcealed admiration for abolitionist organization, a "disciplined army," Ruffin exhorted Southerners to emulate "our Northern enemies and oppressors."[24]

Ruffin envisaged an hierarchic organization comprising numerous local clubs permeating the entire South at the grass-roots level, a general council composed of both elected representatives and wealthy contributors at an intermediate level, and an annually chosen executive committee at the summit. Anyone who signed the constitution could join the association and anyone could withdraw by giving written notice to his club. The professed purpose of the association was to coordinate efforts in behalf of the "constitutional and legal rights" of the South by systematic meetings, discussions, publications, and speeches.[25]

Ruffin's quest for a secessionist organization was not only an attempt to fill the glaring organizational void marking the fire-eating movement but also a reflection of his experiences, perceptions, and needs. Ruffin's idea of an association of Southern radicals may have germinated from the annual meetings of the Southern Commercial Conventions.

But it was the frustration which he had encountered as a one-man propaganda center assiduously but futilely urging the South to secede which persuaded Ruffin that organization was imperative. The financial resources of the affluent South would be harnessed to publish and distribute proslavery and secessionist literature throughout the South. Ruffin's abortive individual toils would be a thing of the past. Ideally, the projected association would fulfill Ruffin's personal ambition for renown and his yearning for a Southern confederacy. What more glorious contribution to the secession cause than being the founding father of an effective disunion organization? His own writings would finally receive the acclaim he thought they merited. And the enlistment of talented orators in the secession association would vicariously compensate Ruffin for his own admitted--and frequently lamented--shortcomings as a public speaker. The secessionist seeds planted across the South by the deft cultivators of the United Southerners would blossom forth into a flourishing Southern confederation.

Ruffin assumed that Southern opinion-makers were potential leaders of the Association of United Southerners. His repeated launchings of secessionist trial balloons among receptive individuals in the course of his travels led him to exaggerate the popularity of disunionism in the South. In the course of his Southern travels, Ruffin met many individuals who concurred with his secessionist views privately but declined expressing their convictions

publicly. Roger A. Pryor was a case in point. On June 29, 1858, almost two weeks after Ruffin's articles on the United Southerners had appeared in The South, Ruffin recorded:

> Conversed with Pryor on Southern politics. He is fettered by his position--& dares not express in his paper sentiments as strong as he would wish. As yet, in Virginia, any public man would destroy his political prospects by advocating the separation of the Union. I, & others who have no political connexions or aspirations, can do so, because not to be injured by denunciation or disapprobation. There are plenty who think as I do, if they dared to avow their sentiments. But as yet, there is no candidate for office who does not think he would be ruined by such an avowal, & so would every publisher & press in Va, dependent (as all are) on popular favor for support.26

Ascribing the lack of avowed secessionism amongst Southern politicians and journalists to political circumspection, Ruffin convinced himself that many influential Southerners were pining for a Southern confederacy to escape their subservience in the Union. But if a fire-eating organization were forged, these surreptitious secessionists would come out into the open air and become a formidable force.

Ruffin's tendency to assimilate the various strands of Southern rights expression into the secession camp reinforced his perception that a large number of Southerners were secessionists. Accordingly, at the Montgomery convention Ruffin construed public allusions to the possibility of secession as disunionism itself. Likewise, he reported that outside of the convention he heard only two individuals--apart from the Virginia delegation--in private conversation "express themselves favorable to the

continuance of the present union with the northern states." At times Ruffin extended so wide a secession net as to exclude only unconditional Unionists. For instance, Ruffin noted that on his train ride from Virginia to South Carolina (en route to Montgomery) he could find only one "opponent" to disunion--the Virginian William C. Wickham, "who deems the union a greater blessing of itself than all the benefits it was made to secure, & who is one of those who will submit to every possible wrong from the north, before resisting to the extent of secession or separation." Only by such reasoning was Ruffin able one year later to designate the Alabama politician John A. Winston, an opponent of the territorial protection of slavery and a supporter of Stephen A. Douglas for the presidency, as a congenial secessionist spirit. Ruffin, in effect, adopted the Virginia conservatives' definition of disunionism whereby anything short of uncritical adulation of the Union was suspect.[27]

But Ruffin had badly miscalculated. His division of Southern opinion into Unionism versus Secessionism mistakenly relegated a host of intermediate positions into the latter category. Granted, Ruffin's inclusion of conditional Unionism under the secession umbrella could be justified by fire-eater ideology, which posited inevitable abolitionist aggression. Northern encroachments, Ruffin hoped, would transform the conditional Unionist into the practical disunionist. Ruffin, however, misunderstood the import of conditional Unionist remarks. Conditional

Unionism typically represented a compromise between Southern attachment to slavery and commitment to the Union. Conditional Union utterances were a means of vindicating one's Southern rights orthodoxy from fire-eater aspersions without requiring any immediate, concrete action. Southerners who believed that abolitionism was containable within the Union could profess resistance if the North ever abolished slavery. Less optimistic Southerners who were nonetheless devoted to the Union could make similar abstract concessions to indulge or divert the inquisitive Virginian extremist. Even those Southerners who sincerely, though reluctantly, were prepared to secede from the Union if abolitionism prevailed could hardly be expected to countenance, much less join, an ultra organization to wreck the Union. Tolerating the extravagant exclamations of a maverick zealot like Ruffin was one thing; engaging in a deliberate and systematic crusade to foment secession was another. That many Southerners of the conditional Unionist persuasion would ultimately opt for secession as the lesser evil to perceived sectional ruin and disgrace did not mean that they would condone the efforts by Southern extremists to precipitate a sectional collision artificially. The point of conditional Unionism was to postpone crisis; the goal of the United Southerners was to hasten a sectional confrontation.

If Ruffin was too quick in regarding conditional Unionist remarks confided to him privately by Southerners as

virtual secessionism, he was also too quick to ascribe public moderation to political posturing. Many Southern politicians such as Robert M.T. Hunter were sincere moderate Southern rights men. Others like William L. Yancey were deeply ambivalent. Moreover, even those public men of the South who were inwardly radical could not be enticed into affiliating, much less leading, the Association of United Southerners. Southern organization per se was not a sufficient bait to lure the surreptitious ultras into the open. These cautious radicals with one eye on the Southern confederacy and the other on their political fortune were loath to risk their ambitions upon the slim hope that enough like-minded Southerners would join them. Some issue was necessary to stimulate the sectional ardor of the South. But in the tranquil summer of 1858, none existed. The Kansas affair had been settled. No new Northern aggression was impending. The complex Alabama fire-eater William Yancey, keenly disappointed by the passage of the English Bill and confident in his ability to inspire the Southern masses, was the only prominent Southerner to support the the League of United Southerners actively.

The political impediment deterring Southern public figures from openly avowing radicalism was not so much presidential ambition, which enjoined the appeasement of the major Northern constituency, but the stolid conservatism of the Southern whites, stubbornly clinging to the Democratic party and the Union. As his observations on Roger Pryor

reveal, Ruffin at times sensed that the fear of repudiation by the Southern--or at least the border-state--electorate inhibited Southern rights politicians from open declarations of disunionism. And though Ruffin's distinction between Southerners holding public positions dependent upon popular support and Southerners who were private citizens unconcerned with popular approval is not entirely devoid of merit, it is ultimately superficial and misleading: a fire-eating agitator or propagandist had to direct his appeals to the same constituency as the politician or editor. Granted, the livelihood of a planter, unlike that of an editor, would not be jeapordized by the advocacy of disunion. Nevertheless, "outsiders," whether independent farmers like Ruffin or unconventional politicians like Yancey, had to accommodate their pronouncements to suit the temper of their audience or else find themselves unread, unheard, ignored.

The strategy of the "United Southerners" experiment and its hasty abandonment illustrate Ruffin's adaptation to the climate of Southern opinion in 1858. Aware of Unionist sentiment among ordinary Southerners and the consequent reluctance of Southerners in public stations to embrace disunionism openly, Ruffin had shrewdly couched the constitution of his projected secessionist association in the conspicuously tame and innocuous phraseology of Southern rights. The Virginian patrician's distrust of the Southern masses evidently exceeded his distrust of the Southern

politicians. Although the constitution of the new league provided for the formation of grass-roots chapters, the flow of information--the propaganda network and decision-making--would be in the hands of the fire-eating elites, who would disseminate their secessionist conclusions to the masses. Ruffin spoke of educating the Southern people on sectional issues. But he placed great reliance on radical agitation, which would rally mass support through simple slogans and banners. The League of United Southerners was, after all, modelled on Northern abolitionism, which, in Ruffin's mind, had succeeded by the incitement of mass passions against a fabricated "Slavocracy." Ruffin claimed that the South was already united; organization alone was required to invigorate her. What Ruffin really sought was to unite a divided South behind a secessionist program--by the very demagoguery he professed to despise.

But the League of United Southerners proved stillborn. Ruffin made only a halfhearted effort to form League chapters in the South. Initially, Ruffin tried to enlist the support of some locally prominent border-state acquaintances such as Judge Thomas Ruffin of North Carolina and Judge John Robertson of Virginia. But the public men of the upper South spurned his overtures. Ruffin did try to form a local club in Gloucester County, Virginia but indirectly--through the mediation of two acquaintances. Perhaps Ruffin realized that his active sponsorship of the League would contaminate it as a disunionist organization.

In July a restless Ruffin told Hammond that he could not wait for the slow action of other persons." The Virginian was ready to subsidize the publication of 10,000 copies of his "Consequences of Abolition Agitation" if friendly Southern Congressmen would frank the pamphlet. Disappointed with the timidity of the border states, Ruffin hoped that the League would be established in the cotton states. Yancey and his colleagues formed a few associations in Alabama, most notably in Montgomery. But Ruffin apparently made no attempt to persuade Southern rights men elsewhere to translate his vision into reality. Perhaps Ruffin considered the Alabama associations a trial balloon. Yancey's organizational activities created a stir in Alabama politics but, for a while, the rest of the South paid scant attention.[28]

In late July, however, Roger Pryor, whom Ruffin regarded as a fellow secessionist spirit circumstantially shackled by his editorial position, vehemently vilified the League of United Southerners. The association, charged The South, was a nefarious conspiracy hatched by Yancey and his Know-Nothing cohorts to overthrow the Democratic party. These disgruntled office-seekers had seized control of the naive but patriotic project of Edmund Ruffin to recoup their political losses. In a subsequent editorial, Pryor attacked the League as a disunionist organization. Interestingly, Pryor assailed Yancey and the United Southerners not so much for seeking secession as for assigning the border states a

secondary role in its implementation. Yancey's indiscreet letter to James Slaughter, which called for a cotton state revolution, furnished Pryor with damaging evidence against the Alabamian radical. Thus by feigning offense from a Southern rights viewpoint, Pryor cunningly sought to discredit the League of United Southerners amongst both devoted Southern Unionists and border-state Southern rights exponents. Pryor's caustic barbs punctured the United Southerners' balloon irreparably though, ironically, according the obscure and moribund League a modicum of notoriety.[29]

Privately, Pryor's behavior astonished and disgusted Ruffin. He deemed Pryor's allegations against Yancey "unfounded" and "absurd." He was especially incensed by Pryor's insinuation that Yancey hated the border states and planned to exclude them from the Southern confederacy. Pryor well knew that it was Ruffin's own scheme to have the cotton states inaugurate secession and the border states follow later. As the editor of the Richmond Enquirer in December 1856, Pryor himself had first published Ruffin's "Consequences of Abolition Agitation," which prescribed this two-stage secession procedure. What surprised Ruffin most was that but a month ago Pryor had advertised the United Southerners scheme in The South and had encouraged other newspapers to publicize the project. To rationalize Pryor's erratic course, Ruffin resorted to his customary political explanation. Pryor, Ruffin speculated, feared that the

Northern Democrats would refuse to support the presidential pretensions of any Southerner associated with the League: "He doubtless loves the cause of the South much--but he still more cherishes the hope of making Hunter president, by aid of Northern votes." Only after Pryor began editing an organ of Stephen A. Douglas in the fall at Washington D.C. did Ruffin finally shed his illusions about Pryor's orthodoxy and denounce him as an apostate.[30]

Publicly, Ruffin denied that the Association of United Southerners was a disunionist organization. He quoted the temperate phrases of the League's constitution--had he anticipated such an attack?--to show that the organization was designed as a comprehensive discussion group encompassing all shades of Southern opinion, with the exception of outright submissionists. The constitution of the "United Southerners" pledged members to promote the constitutional rights of the South by all proper and legal means, such as free discussion; not a word was said about secession. Leaguers were merely required to support Southern rights as their goal; the particular means were left up to individuals. In both the constitution of the general League and that of the Montgomery chapter "there is no sentiment that ought not to be approved . . . by every man who is favorable to the maintaining of the interests and constitutional rights of the South, no matter whether he is a Democrat or Whig--Unionist or Disunionist--or anything else but a thorough Submissionist to the North--or a traitor

to Southern interests."[31]

But in the process of defending Yancey's Montgomery league from Pryor's allegations, Ruffin contended that even consummate submissionists were eligible for local league membership. Ruffin denied that the Montgomery constitution--whose body contained no disunionist references--was a secessionist document. But even if the Montgomery branch had adopted a disunionist instrument, the League of United Southerners as a whole would be untainted. The policies of a local chapter were irrelevant in judging the nature of the general association. Local clubs might devise their own idiosyncratic membership tests. "For example--if either particular local association should make the test of admission for its members the unconditional support of the federal union and of the national democratic party, yet, if uniting with the other societies in the great object of aiding in seeking truth by full discussion, there would seem to be no reason why such society should not be admitted to the general League, under the proposed constitution."[32] Ruffin's portrayal of the League as an innocuous debating society dealing with Southern rights issues enabled him to make the startling claim that unconditional Unionists could form local chapters. Stressing the process of debate about sectional issues rather than particular decisions reached, Ruffin cloaked the United Southerners with the Bill of Rights mantle and displayed a Jeffersonian faith in the efficacy of the

untrammeled exchange of ideas to arrive at truth. Of course, if the fire-eating elites became safely ensconced in the League's central council and executive committee, "truth" would have a decidedly secessionist flavor. Still, Ruffin's professed willingness to admit some unconditional Unionists into the association was less a serious design to convert submissionists than a flamboyant gesture to deflect the disunion charge, a sign that Pryor had touched a nerve.

To further divert attention from the secessionist objective of the League, Ruffin pointed out that the propriety and expediency of secession were not the only issues requiring discussion. The United Southerners should also examine such matters as slavery, the tariff, indirect taxation, and the various Northern bounties and monopolies in the Union such as domination of the coastal trade. As the North had injured Southern interests in all these vital areas, the South must discuss the best means for an "effectual defence." [33] "How could such discussions do harm?" Thus the fire-eater Ruffin responded to harsh criticism of his project not by the forthright defense of secession but by retreating to the sanctuary of the hallowed Constitution, transforming the disunionist organization into a harmless discussion club, and reverting to the economic themes associated with the less controversial Southern Commercial Conventions.

Ruffin's cautious defense of the League of United Southerners reflected the conservative atmosphere enveloping

the South in the summer of 1858. The upper South, with near unanimity, frowned upon radical schemes to revive the foreign slave trade and destroy the Union. For example, in June the influential Richmond Enquirer, eschewing the buffer state role which Ruffin and Yancey had assigned to the Old Dominion, warned that should the cotton states secede and reopen the African slave trade, Virginia might remain in the Union permanently. Though primarily indicative of Virginia's antipathy to the slave trade scheme and her understandable reluctance to relinquish leadership of the South, the Enquirer's declaration also revealed Virginia's strong attachment to the Union.[34]

Of greater concern to Southern ultras were the Unionist pronouncements of Southern rights men in the cotton states. For instance, while visiting the Northeast during the summer and fall of 1858, Mississippi Senator Jefferson Davis made several speeches which stressed the common bonds uniting the North and South, praised Northern citizens for their patriotism, and called for sectional harmony. The fire-eater of 1850 had seemingly metamorphosed into a goodwill ambassador to the North. Particularly distressing to many radicals was a brief Fourth of July oration in which Davis expressed optimism about the endurance of the Union and dismissed pessimists of each section as "trifling politicians." Southern fire-eaters, Davis insinuated, were as harmless an annoyance to the Union as "mosquitoes around the ox."[35]

An even greater shock to many ultras was the defection of James Henry Hammond. The South Carolinian senator, whose disunionism had privately eroded since the 1850-1851 crisis, availed himself of an honorary barbecue at his Beech Island homecoming on July 22, 1858 to espouse a reformist program publicly. Hammond called upon the South to try to safeguard her interests within the Union. The South's superior moral civilization, Hammond felt, would promote the success of such a venture. James L. Orr, the leader of the National Democratic faction in South Carolina, welcomed Hammond's "conservative speech" and delivered a couple of his own. In August Orr pointed to the principle of the Kansas-Nebraska Act, allowing slaveholders to migrate with their property to all western territories, to argue that the South was better off in the Union than ever. Orr praised the Northern Democrats for their fidelity to Southern rights and voiced his willingness to support Stephen A. Douglas as the party standard-bearer in 1860. Radicals were accustomed to hearing such sentiments from the National Democrat Orr but were stunned by Hammond's articulation of the conservative position.[36]

Hammond delivered an elaborate speech at Barnwell in late October with the hope that the clarification of his position would mollify the radicals; instead, his speech only sealed his public conversion to conservatism. Contending that a united South had triumphed on every issue since the Missouri Compromise, Hammond proposed Southern

unity as a means of postponing, if not altogether obviating, secession. Fearing that secession would generate social upheaval within the South and doubtful about the South's readiness to resist a Republican president in 1860, Hammond clung to Southern rights but shelved his erstwhile disunionism. Hammond resolved his dilemma of maintaining Southern rights without risking the violent disorder of social revolution on the one hand and the political isolation of South Carolina on the other by convincing himself that the South could reform the Union by virtue of her lofty moral stature, her superior slave culture. To persuade the skeptical, Hammond pointed to the Kansas-Nebraska Act and the Dred Scott decision as evidence of Southern gains. Without the "Plan of State Action," which had envisaged the elevation of the South to South Carolina's level of resistivity, Hammond's cooperationism had degenerated into South Carolina's passive accommodation to the conservative South. The related myths of the invincibility of a united South and the overriding influence of principle in politics--two legacies of John C. Calhoun--underlay Hammond's promise to the South in October 1858 of a "magnificent future" in the Union.[37]

Not all Southern spokesmen were so sanguine in 1858. The Virginia agriculturalist Willoughby Newton, close friend and political confidant of Edmund Ruffin, injected a dose of disunionism into his scheduled address to the Virginia Military Institute on Independence Day. Newton warned

Southerners not to be fooled by the "deceitful calm." The settlement of petty issues such as Kansas upon favorable terms to the South should not obscure the central fact that the Northern majority had seized political power in the Union and rendered the Constitution "effete" and state sovereignty a dead letter. The South must inevitably choose between abolition and independence: "Disguise it as we may, the time is fast approaching when there will be no alternative but separation from the North or tame submission to uncontrolled despotism." Aware of the conservative proclivities of the Old Dominion, Newton called upon Virginia to prepare herself for the coming crisis: "The path of interest and duty and honor lies plain before her. She must be the leading star of a great Southern constellation." Newton made lavish promises about the economic benefits of political independence to the South in general and to Virginia in particular. The agricultural, industrial, and commercial development of Virginia, Newton declared, would progress with "unexampled rapidity." He even intimated that a Southern confederation was a providential plan to unleash the vast capacities of the Anglo-Saxon race.[38]

The poetic Newton, however, proposed no program of action. Despite his personal and political affinity with the originator of the scheme, Newton said not a word about the United Southerners, much less did he attempt to enlist cadets as Leaguers. Instead, Newton contented himself with expressing vague fears about the fate of the South in the

Union and painting a roseate picture of the future of the South out of the Union. Nevertheless, Newton was severely chastised by the Southern press. The Richmond Enquirer claimed that not a single Virginia paper approved Newton's address. The Enquirer ruefully contrasted Jefferson Davis' harmonizing efforts in the North with Newton's divisive discourse in the South. The National Intelligencer exposed the two basic flaws of Newton's "jeremiad." No Northern aggression was being committed in the summer of 1858; there was no imperative need to secede. By appearance, at least, the South was safe. The Intelligencer could understand discontent under palpable oppressions but found it strange "that men should torment themselves with theoretical ills and imaginary horrors." Moreover, Virginia's promised economic expansion in a Southern confederation was mere bombast, without factual basis. Newton's statement that after secession Southern capital and energy "would spring as if by magic into being" was more reminiscent of medieval wizardry than the product of rational deliberation.[39]

The newspaper attacks on Ruffin's League of United Southerners and on Newton's Fourth of July oration as well as the increasing number of Unionist speeches by prominent Southern figures induced Ruffin to make another retreat. On August 14 Ruffin trekked to Westmoreland County, in Virginia's Northern Neck, to confer with its most radical resident, Willoughby Newton. His fellow agriculturalist, Ruffin reported in his diary, concurred with him completely

on "the necessity for, & the advantages of a separation & independent confederacy of the slave-holding states." Both men instinctively attributed the recent wave of conservatism among Southern politicians to their overweening presidential aspirations. As the 1860 election approached, Unionist paeans would multiply. Southern Democrats, Ruffin discerned, not only sought to garner Northern votes but to maintain the unity of the National Democracy. Because the viability of a Southern presidential candidate hinged upon the preservation of the Democratic party, Southern Democrats would pursue a conciliatory policy to keep the declining number of their Northern colleagues within the fold. Ruffin, in fact, suspected that Pryor's sudden volte face, Hammond's mysterious conversion, Davis' defection, and Orr's unabashed Unionism indicated a concerted arrangement among ambitious Southern Democrats to sacrifice the South for the integrity of the National Democracy.[40]

Ruffin had little sympathy for the latter organization. "If the success of this party is to be best effected by injuring (& still more if by destroying) the supporters of southern rights, then I shall more anxiously wish for the speedy overthrow of the national democratic party, & its being beaten by the "Black Republican" or abolition party, in the next presidential election. This is wanting to unite southern men under the banner of the south, disentangled from all northern alliances." Even if Southerners yielded on the platform, the Democratic party would not nominate a

Southerner. And if a Southern candidate were nominated, he would not be elected. "Still better if this "national" democratic party shall then be defeated and ruptured, & an abolitionist elected. Then perhaps the South may act for its defence & only salvation." The casualty of these secessionist speculations was the League of United Southerners:

> Newton has convinced me, (& I readily yield to his better judgment,) that in this view of prospects, it will be bad policy for me to endeavor to establish associations of "United Southerners," or in any such manner to separate & identify our true & boldest men. For, under present circumstances, not one in 100 of those who think with us, will dare to avow their opinions, & to commit themselves by such open action. And the very few who would so move, would be by our opposers counted as being <u>all</u> of the disunionists--& we would be powerless, & sink in our apparent weakness. I admit fully the force of these views, & I will desist from any further effort for the present time--hoping that the events of 1860 will change circumstances, so that the dishonest & the timid southern men may then be as strongly <u>bribed</u> by their selfish views to stand up for the South, as now to stoop & truckle to the North.[41]

The astute Newton thus persuaded Ruffin that the formation of League chapters would be inimical to the secession cause: the paucity of membership would demoralize the radicals and the identification of disunionists would cripple them politically. If the radicals were to serve effectively as uncompromising Southerners within the Democratic party, they could not afford to incur any taint of disunion. Ruffin's futile attempt to moderate the image of the United Southerners necessitated the jettison of the League as an encumbrance upon the radicals. Southern union would not be forged by fire-eater design in 1858 but would

emerge out of Democratic wreckage and Republican ascendancy in 1860. Ruffin, in effect, reverted to his previous strategy of waiting for the next presidential contest to dispel the illusions of Southern aspirants. He was counting on the very ambitions that kept Southern politicians loyal to the Union to drive them ultimately out of the Union. Their presidential yearnings stifled by a hostile Northern electorate, Southern politicians would look to a Southern confederacy to satisfy their lofty pretensions. Ironically, Ruffin shared the psychological assumptions of his Unionist critics: disappointed ambition fostered political extremism. Ruffin, of course, hoped that more Southern politicians became frustrated.

Considering the presidential obsession the primary inhibitor of the secessionist zeal of the Southern politician--even superseding the absence of renewed Northern aggression[42]--Ruffin wrote another article on this well-worn theme. "Treachery to the South--Active or Passive" contended that virtually every prominent Southern politician, including South Carolinians, was afflicted with the presidential fever. Almost all politicos of the South either coveted the presidency for themselves or craved the bestowal of presidential patronage. Since only the numerically superior North could gratify their longings, Southern politicians tried to propitiate the North either "actively" by openly betraying their section or "passively" by muting their defense of Southern rights. The Southern

voter would recognize and disown active "traitors" but could be deceived by passive "apostates" who masqueraded as Southern rights champions while insidiously fashioning their rhetoric and tailoring their politics to suit the North.[43]

The novel element in Ruffin's essay was not the substance of his remarks but the direction of his appeals. Relinquishing his hope of convincing Southern politicians of the futility of their presidential quest, Ruffin called upon the Southern people to repudiate all politicians who were known presidential aspirants. Ruffin, here, sought to force Southern representatives to cater to a Southern not a Northern constituency, the very goal Yancey had sought to achieve through the League of United Southerners. But the idea of weaning the South away from the Democratic party and her traditional political elites without the creation of a substitute organization and the emergence of new leadership was chimerical. And Ruffin knew it. The masses, Ruffin privately lamented, obsequiously followed their leaders. Hence, he would wait for 1860.[44]

Ruffin did not envision an activist role for fire-eaters in the interim. At most the ultras could make sporadic proclamations of secessionist orthodoxy in the press to show that they were still vibrant repositories of Southern patriotism; they had not been engulfed by the Unionist tidal wave but would keep the torch of liberty burning. But active agitation for secession was hopeless. Since all disunion pleas were presently falling on "deaf

ears," Ruffin privately resolved, "I will trouble myself no more about it, until a suitable time shall come." Thus after his abortive attempt to foment secession through the Association of United Southerners, Ruffin confessed the helplessness of fire-eaters to promote disunion amidst pervasive Southern complacency. Instead, he looked for external events such as the disintegration of the National Democracy, the defeat of Southern presidential aspirants, the triumph of an abolitionist presidential candidate, "or some new outrage"--a Harpers Ferry perhaps?--to arouse the slumbering South.[45]

* * * * *

Ruffin's resolution to suspend disunionist agitation was not merely a petulant outburst of frustrated resignation but a deliberate decision to beat a tactical retreat. Even before Ruffin decided to abandon his United Southerners scheme, he had written a series of articles calling upon the South to institute heavy license taxes upon the North as a means of safeguarding Southern interests within the Union. Although these essays were not published until after the abandonment of the League, they were probably designed by their author to moderate the radical image of the association.[46] Ruffin's essays, which significantly bore the same title as his original proposals for the League namely "Suggestions to the Southern States," contended that the South was still in long-term danger from Northern abolitionism. Instead of promoting the League as a disunion

vehicle, Ruffin tried to justify the need for any Southern action at all. He found himself countering Unionist arguments that the South was now better off than ever in the Union. Unionists confidently pointed to the Kansas-Nebraska Act, which had repealed the iniquitous Missouri Compromise's restriction on territorial slavery; the Dred Scott decision, which had pronounced the abolition or exclusion of territorial slavery unconstitutional; and the English Bill, which had evinced a Northern disposition to allow the entrance of a slave state into the Union. The prospects for the future geographic expansion of slavery seemed auspicious. In the interim, the South could increase its political power in the Union by dividing the huge state of Texas into a few smaller states. Additionally, Unionists claimed, Southern proslavery literature had converted many honest Northerners to uphold Southern slavery.[47]

Ruffin admitted that recent legislative and judicial enactments placed the South on higher ground than she had previously occupied, but he denied that these accorded the South any substantial gain. The Kansas electorate, Ruffin accurately predicted, would reject the proferred land ordinance and not enter the Union as a slave state. Furthermore, even if Kansas accepted the land ordinance, she would immediately select abolitionist representatives to Congress and refuse to protect slavery within the state. For Ruffin, moreover, the sectional conflict was not a question of isolated pieces of Congressional legislation or

Supreme Court decisions; it was a long-term struggle for political supremacy by rival peoples. Since numerical superiority was the only method of achieving political supremacy in a democratic society, the antislavery North would emerge as the inevitable victor. The horde of European immigrants annually flocking to the North made the triumph of abolition as certain as "any simple problem in arithmetic." The South could not alter this trend by ideological conversion: the North would obtain ten new free states before the South could convert a single Northern state. Similarly, the division of Texas into several small slave states would fail even as a stopgap: the North would admit twenty more free states in the interim. No more slave states would enter the Union. The only Southern victories would be as hollow as the "miserable and pitiful" Kansas triumph. The North, which routinely violated the Fugitive Slave Law, could not be trusted to abide by the Constitution. Should the North somehow become scrupulously adherent to the Constitution, her growing numerical preponderance would soon enable her to abolish slavery by constitutional amendment.[48]

Although Southern secession seemed the logical corollary to this portrait of Southern doom in the Union, Ruffin prescribed a reformist panacea. Invoking the authority of the distinguished Georgia Senator Robert Toombs, a Southern rights Unionist, Ruffin contended that the license tax scheme was both constitutional and

practicable. Many states in the Union, Ruffin argued, levied general taxes on commodities and exempted the goods of their own state. The same principle could be utilized in the sectional conflict: the South could impose high license taxes on those goods it generally imported from the North (e.g., coarse cloth, livestock, fish, hay, bacon, potatoes, onions, brooms, etc.) and then exempt these goods if produced in a Southern state. If the North was the only source for a particular commodity, the taxes should be slight, for revenue purposes only. But if the South could manufacture the item herself, the taxes should be high and prohibitory. By this method the South could virtually embargo Northern produce without levying unconstitutional import duties or passing flagrantly discriminatory legislation against the North. The license tax system, Ruffin pointed out, could also be used to fulfill a longstanding dream of Southern rights exponents--direct trade with Europe. The Southern states could simply exempt all goods directly imported from Europe from the taxes, but retain the taxes for all European goods which entered the South through the North.[49]

But Ruffin's cardinal economic objective was not fostering direct European trade but stimulating internal Southern economic development to create a "home market" for Southern agricultural produce. For Ruffin, the South's failure to develop industrially did not stem from the absence of a substantial rural market; the plantation system

provided a sufficient rural market. Instead, a combination of discriminatory federal legislation benefiting Northern industries and inveterate slaveholder addiction to established commercial relations channeled Southern funds into the hands of Northern manufacturers. Ruffin had tried to alter the slaveholders' consumption patterns by demonstrating their economic disadvantage. But since Northern commodities were generally cheaper and more accessible than Southern ones, Ruffin's economic arguments amounted to patriotic sectionalist pleas, or at least entailed the sacrifice of individual pecuniary gain for the prospect of long-range economic interest. As Southerners had ignored his appeals to boycott Northern commodities voluntarily, Ruffin would promote Southern economic self-sufficiency by governmental legislation. High license taxes on Northern merchandise would make the consumption of domestic products a matter of self-interest and spur the growth of Southern manufacturing to supply the rural demand.[50]

The adoption of the taxation scheme by the entire South would end commercial relations between the sections since the Southern embargo on Northern goods would provoke a Northern embargo on Southern goods. Deprived of their traditional Northern market, Southern planters would sell their produce to the new Southern laboring classes of mechanics, traders, manufacturers, and sailors. Although Ruffin envisioned the new industrial and mercantile classes as economically subordinate to the plantation aristocracy,

his program would foster the growth of those very pursuits the Virginian agriculturalist had long disdained. Perhaps Ruffin hoped that the neighboring urban demand, by raising the price of such commodities as wheat and corn, would induce Southern slaveholders to further diversify their crops. In any case, Ruffin envisioned a mutually reinforcing Southern agricultural and industrial growth: Southern industries would supply farmers with inexpensive manufactured goods; and Southern domestic manufacturing would become a "home market" for native agricultural staples. Slave agriculture would be preserved within a diversified Southern economy. Ruffin's call for license taxes was, thus, a continuation of his labors to boost the Southern economy through agrarian reform.[51]

Ruffin conceded that license taxes were a form of artificial political engineering. But Ruffin was not a stickler for laissez faire principles. Man, for Ruffin, was not a rational economic animal who automatically pursued his pecuniary interests. Human sloth and proneness to habit could produce improvident behavior. Such had been the case with Southern slaveholders. Hence, governmental intercession was sometimes required to compel individuals to act in accordance with their economic interests. If license taxes violated "free trade" principles, so did the protective tariff. Indeed, the former was a provincial version of the latter. The license tax program would effect for the South what the protective tariff had effected for

the North--the creation of a home market for agriculture. Notwithstanding Ruffin's espousal of the free trade principle, he had no objections to a protective tariff per se. What repelled Ruffin about the protective tariff was not its curtailment of free trade but its promotion of the North's sectional advantage. The protective tariff built up Northern industry to the detriment of Southern agriculture. Given the high costs of transportation, Northern industry served as a market for neighboring Northern rather than remote Southern agriculture. Moreover, Southern consumers had a choice between high-priced Northern commodities or indirectly-imported European products, whose prices were inflated by the protective tariff. Ruffin deemed the license tax scheme, an avowedly restrictionist policy, as a just Southern response to the Northern protective tariff, as "only meeting restriction by restriction." Free trade between the sections would be stifled; but the protective tariff had already abridged it anyway.[52]

Ruffin's main purpose in advocating license taxes, however, was not economic but political. Even if the implementation of the scheme shackled the Southern economy, the political benefits would be paramount: retaliation for past Northern wrongs and protection against future Northern aggression. Ruffin appealed to the entire spectrum of Southerners from fire-eaters to Unionists-- excluding only unconditional submissionists--to ponder "the all-important present question . . . :<u>Can any measures be adopted by the</u>

Southern States which will tend or operate to preserve the Union, and yet induce or compel the observance of the just rights of the South by the Northern States?" Ironically, instead of trying to convert mainstream Southern rights men to immediate secession, Ruffin appealed to ultra fire-eaters, who had despaired of ever securing Southern rights in the Union, to adopt a reformist scheme. Ruffin claimed that the license tax scheme would either save the South in the Union by showing the North its complete dependence upon Southern trade and slave agriculture or prepare the South for disunion by promoting her economic diversification and self-sufficiency. The Virginian professed that the former scenario would prevail as impending economic ruin would return the Northern people "to their senses." While not entirely eschewing disunionism, Ruffin posed as a Southern rights reformer: "While the writer avows his readiness to resort to secession and independence of the Southern States, if such are the only means for maintaining their rights and equality in the Union, yet he has confidence in the means and ability of these States to maintain their rights and safety in the Union, which, if to be effected, ought to be the course preferred by all."[53]

Besides calling upon Southern states to impose license taxes upon Northern products, Ruffin called upon Southern politicians to seek vigorously through federal legislation the abolition of all types of Northern economic oppression

such as the fishing and ocean steamer bounties, Northern monopoly of coastal navigation, the protective tariff, and the entire system of indirect taxation. With his marked suspicion of Southern politicians, however, Ruffin had "little hope" that these "other measures for relief" would be implemented. Ruffin was quite pessimistic about obtaining any form of redress which required the exertions of Southern federal representatives, who were preoccupied with their presidential prospects. But license taxes, a form of direct state action, did not require the labors, or even the approbation, of Southern Congressmen. Nor did they require the unanimous action of all Southern states. One state could inaugurate the program and induce the other Southern states to follow. Granted, Ruffin held out the possibility that even the intense economic pressure of a united South may not suffice to quell Northern abolitionism. But the salient point is that the rabid Virginia fire-eater should propose any reform scheme at all.[54]

It is tempting to view Ruffin's 1858-1859 advocacy of reform as disingenuous. In February 1857 Ruffin had met Robert Toombs in Washington and had privately endorsed the license tax scheme. But Ruffin, unlike Toombs, had not considered the plan legal or constitutional; the Virginian had seriously doubted that the Constitution included the provisions for its own destruction. "It seems to me," Ruffin confided to his diary, "that if the several states fully possess the power of taxing, (& of course

prohibiting,) the sale of the commodities of other states, that it may be so exercised as to obstruct entirely the free commerce designed by the federal constitution, & to break the union itself. And though these results are exactly such as I would value the power for, I cannot believe that any such destructive power was ever designed to be admitted into the constitution."[55] Thus Ruffin had supported the license tax scheme precisely because he deemed it unconstitutional; he sought to destroy the Union, not to save it. No evidence exists that that Ruffin had changed his opinion about either the illegitimacy of state license taxes or the necessity of secession. On the contrary, in January 1858 Ruffin privately noted that the Southern states could only protect their manufactures and develop a home market by severing the Union.[56] And in his August 1858 essays proposing license taxes, Ruffin had reaffirmed his fire-eating premises about the continuing growth of Northern capacity and resolve to extirpate Southern slavery. Surely if his diagnosis of the Southern malady in the Union was correct, reformist prescriptions were mere quackery, or palliatives at most. For Ruffin, the illegal license tax scheme would exacerbate rather than mitigate sectional animosities. But economic retaliation had to be presented as a viable alternative to disunion in order to appear credible. If Southern rights Unionists were to be swayed to secession, a recipe for disunion had to be disguised as a program for Union. Only after reform experimentation failed would these men turn to

secession. An inefficacious attempt to obtain Southern redress by levying license taxes upon Northern wares would remove yet another reformist veil clouding the vision of Southern rights Unionists. His past disunion appeals rebuffed, Ruffin resorted to a more devious course. Such would be a plausible interpretation of Ruffin's convolutions.

Ruffin's tactical maneuvers were ultimately rooted in fire-eater ideology itself. There were elements within the radicals' sectional ideology which were as compatible with reformism as with revolution. That the naturally superior Southern slave economy was artificially shackled by the oppressive Northern economic regime especially the protective tariff was a staple ingredient of the fire-eater faith. In his 1850 and 1856 articles Ruffin had used this widely-held Southern belief to demonstrate the economic viability of an independent Southern confederation. Another basic fire-eater tenet was that the Northern character was corrupted by materialism and greed, while Southern gentlemen cultivated their intellectual and spiritual qualities. In his previous writings Ruffin had argued that Northern materialism would prevent civil war after secession: the calculating Yankees would not risk numerous lives and fortunes to invade the South. Thus Ruffin had enlisted the economic supremacy of the South and the ingrained materialism of the North to support the cause of secession.

But these premises were two-edged swords: they could

just as easily be invoked in a Unionist cause by Southern rights proponents. If the Southern economy were veritably preeminent, she could conceivably use her economic superiority to surmount her numerical inferiority and obtain political ascendancy, or at least equality, in the Union.[57] Likewise, if Northern materialism could vanquish abolitionism after disunion and avert civil war, perhaps it could crush abolitionism within the Union and avert secession. In fact, at one point in his 1856 essays "Consequences of Abolition Agitation," Ruffin had made precisely this claim: if the Northern masses could be persuaded that the destruction of slavery was inimical to their material interests, then Northern materialism would supersede and quell abolitionist fanaticism. But in 1856 this reformist concession appeared as an aberrant and subsidiary declaration, incongruous with Ruffin's call for secession.

Now, in 1858, sensing the unpopularity of outright disunionism, Ruffin made the myth of the natural superiority of Southern agricultural resources and the stereotype of the North as devoured by financial self-interest the foundations of a reformist program. He seized upon the license tax scheme as a means of persuading the Northern masses of the utter dependency of their vaunted industrial and commercial economy upon Southern slave agriculture for markets and raw materials. Although the South could not save herself in the Union by obtaining numerical equality through territorial

expansion or by converting Northerners through proslavery propaganda, she could compel the North to respect her rights by exerting pecuniary pressure. The arrows of the license tax would pierce the Achilles' heel of the North. Where balance-of-power politics and ideological conversion had failed, economic blackmail would succeed. Southern honor made the Southern mystique credible; the temperate political climate of 1858-1859 made the mystique Unionist.[58]

Ruffin's call for the imposition of license taxes upon Northern merchandise was more than a manifestation of his ideological flexibility or political realism; it was an emanation of his lofty pride and high sense of honor. Significantly, Ruffin's renewed call for license taxes in 1859 came in the context of his response to Northern disparagement of the economic productivity and efficiency of Southern slave labor. Ruffin argued that the levying of license taxes upon Northern goods and the ensuing repercussions on the Northern economy would show these arrogant Yankees their complete dependence upon the institution they so vilified. Consistent with his calls for Southern domestic manufacture was Ruffin's habitual dress in homespun fabrics. He scorned both luxurious European attire and practical Northern garb. His advocacy of license taxes reflected the same concern with Southern pride as the clothes he sported. The taxation instrument would deter foreign products from entering Southern soil and thereby foster Southern self-reliance and self-esteem. The

cessation of sectional trade would demonstrate Southern power and mastery. Northern abolitionists, who assailed slavery as a backward and inefficient mode of production and who hurled insulting epithets at the slaveholder with impunity, would be punished with heavy financial losses and find themselves at the "mercy" of the aggrieved section--a kind of poetic justice the angry fire-eater anticipated with relish.[59]

But what mattered even more than the consequences of the policy was the implementation of the policy itself. Ruffin justified his economic program not only as providing for Southern safety against future abolitionist designs but more fundamentally as "a retaliation for wrongs and depredations already inflicted on us."[60] License taxes, above all, was an activist program; it was no mere verbal warning as the South had issued to the North ad nauseam. Ruffin, by nature, could not passively bear insults, suppress his anger bide his time; he had to lash out. This essentially emotional response was rationalized by the Virginian intellectual as "retaliation" for exploitative Northern "bounties," portrayed as advantageous to Southern economic interest by the creation of a "home market" for agriculture, and integrated into Southern rights ideology by promoting license taxes as a means "to bring the northern abolitionists to their senses."[61] But it was basically a character trait which impelled Ruffin to urge schemes of tit for tat. Beneath his elevated conception of Southern honor

lay his psychological need to respond in kind.

It was not honor as such which dictated a response, however petty, to all provocations. A strategy of magnanimous forbearance or haughty indifference was also consistent with the honorable behavior of the superior nobleman.[62] But Ruffin's character was the exaggerated embodiment of the Southern fire-eaters' version of honor, which viewed passivity in the face of insults as shameful. Thus Ruffin's psychology dictated that honor assume an activist direction. His presentation of license taxes in a reformist camouflage was secondary. Ruffin seemed compulsively driven to defend Southern honor publicly, regardless of his resolutions to cease his futile warnings to an unappreciative public. He could not sit back and wait till 1860. Ruffin's self-worth depended so much on Southern recognition of his labors that Southern dismissal of radical agitators could discourage but not stifle his exertions. Indeed, Ruffin's psychological identification with the South was so great that her shameful remissness in defending her honor only increased his need to redeem her personally.

Notes

(1) "Kansas and the South," "Kansas--The South," "Kansas--Alabama," "The Kansas Meeting," "Kansas Meeting in Beaufort District," & "The Importance of Kansas to the South," Charleston Mercury, Nov. 3, 1855, Jan. 12, 25, Mar. 15, July 11, 1856, Sept. 1, 1857.

(2) "FOR THE MERCURY," by "A VIRGINIAN," Charleston Mercury, May 13, 1857.

(3) Ibid.

(4) Potter, Impending Crisis, 199-215, 297-302.

(5) Ruffin, Diary, I, Entry for June 5, 1857, 80; Potter, Impending Crisis, 302-318.

(6) Nevins, Lincoln, I, 248-249, 257-258, 272-275; Henry H. Simms, Life of Robert M.T. Hunter: A Study in Sectionalism and Secession (Richmond, 1935), 89-90; Craig Simpson, A Good Southerner: The Life of Henry A. Wise of Virginia (Chapel Hill and London, 1985), 162-169.

(7) Ruffin, Diary, I, Entries for Jan. 5, 22, 1858, 142, 148-149.

(8) Nichols, Disruption, 169-174.

(9) Ruffin, Diary, I, Entry for Apr. 6, 1858, 172; Untitled article dated Apr. 18, [1858], by "R." appended to Ruffin's MS Diary, Apr. 22, 1858, 321, LC.

(10) Potter, Impending Crisis, 323-324; Robert E. May, John A. Quitman: Old South Crusader (Baton Rouge and London, 1985), 347; "Letter from the Hon. Jefferson Davis," Montgomery Daily Confederation, May 25, 1858.

(11) Ruffin, Diary, I, Entry for Apr. 23, 1858, 180. Ruffin may have feared that Kansas would accept the reduced land grant to obtain the advantages of quick statehood. For the economic benefits of statehood to a territory, see James A. Rawley, Race and Politics: Bleeding Kansas and the Coming of the Civil War (Philadelphia and New York, 1969), 251.

(12) Ruffin, Diary, I, Entry for May 5, 1858, 183.

(13) Untitled article dated Apr. 18, [1858], by "R." appended to Ruffin's MS Diary, Apr. 22, 1858, 321, LC.

(14) Ibid.

(15) "THD [E] PRESIDENTIAL NOMINATIONS FOR 1860,"

appended to Ruffin's MS Diary, June 25, 1858, 376, LC.

(16) Ruffin, Diary, I, Entries for Dec. 21, 1857, Jan. 28, Apr. 17, 24, 26, 30, 1858, 138, 152, 174, 180-182.

(17) On the increasing extremism of the conventions, see Herbert Wender, Southern Commercial Conventions, 1837-1859 (Baltimore, 1930), passim, & Vicki Lynn Vaughn, "Southern Commercial Conventions: Continuity of Perceptions, Values, and Leadership, 1837-1871" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Missouri, Columbia, 1979), 8, 26, 41-42, 62-66, 87-88.

(18) Edmund Ruffin to James Henry Hammond, July 4, 1857, James Henry Hammond Papers, LC. Ruffin's perception of the urban domination of the commercial conventions was probably distorted. A recent study found that the typical participant was a planter and/or lawyer rather than a merchant and the programs advocated at the conventions favored Southern agricultural interests. See Vaughn, "Commercial Conventions," 21, 95-101.

(19) Ruffin, Diary, I, Entries for May 1, 5, 1858, 183-184.

(20) Ibid., Entries for May 10, 14, 1858, 186, 188; "Late Southern Convention at Montgomery," DBR, XXIV (June, 1858), 588.

(21) "Late Southern Convention," 574; Ruffin, Diary, I, Entry for May 11, 1858, 187.

(22) Ruffin, Diary, I, Entry for May 27, 1858, 195-196.

(23) "Suggestions to the Southern States--No. I: SOUTHERN CONVENTIONS--THEIR OBJECTS AND USES," by "R." appended to Ruffin's MS Diary, June 9, 1858, 364-365, LC. The article is also available in the Charleston Mercury, Aug. 25, 1858.

(24) Ibid.

(25) "Suggestions to the Southern States--No. II: PROPOSED PLAN OF ASSOCIATION FOR THE DEFENCE OF THE RIGHTS AND INTERESTS OF THE SOUTHERN STATES--FORM OF CONSTITUTION," by "R." appended to Ruffin's MS Diary, June 9, 1858, 365-366, LC. The article is also available in the Charleston Mercury, Aug. 27, 1858.

(26) Ruffin, Diary, I, Entry for June 29, 1858., 205.

(27) Ibid., Entries for May 5, 16, 1858, Sept. 2, 1859, 183-184, 191, 337.

(28) Ibid., Entries for May 31, June 23, 28, July 14, 1858, 197, 203-205, 214; Edmund Ruffin to James Henry Hammond, July 23, 1858, James Henry Hammond Papers, LC; For Yancey's controversial organizational endeavors, see the July 1858 issues of the Montgomery Advertiser and State Gazette, Daily Montgomery Mail, and Montgomery Daily Confederation.

(29) "CONSPIRACY AGAINST THE DEMOCRATIC PARTY--'LEAGUE OF UNITED SOUTHERNERS'" & "A NEW SCHOOL OF SOUTHERN STATESMANSHIP," appended to Ruffin's MS Diary, Aug. 11, 1858, 419-420, LC.

(30) Ruffin, Diary, I, Entries for Aug. 11, Nov. 11, 1858, 220-221, 247.

(31) "The Object of the League, by the Originator," Montgomery Advertiser and State Gazette, Aug. 25, 1858.

(32) Ibid.

(33) Ibid.

(34) "VIRGINIA AND THE SOUTH," Daily Richmond Enquirer, June 21, 1858.

(35) "Jefferson Davis at Sea!" Charleston Mercury, July 21, 1858; Hudson Strode, Jefferson Davis: American Patriot, 1808-1861, I (New York, 1955), 306, 309-312; Clement Eaton, Jefferson Davis (New York and London, 1977), 103-104.

(36) "Dinner to the Hon. James H. Hammond," by "L.M.M." Charleston Mercury, July 26, 1858; Drew Gilpin Faust, James Henry Hammond and the Old South: A Design for Mastery (Baton Rouge and London, 1982), 349-350; Roger P. Leemhuis, James L. Orr and the Sectional Conflict (Washington, D.C., 1979), 59-60. B.F. Perry, a prominent South Carolina Unionist, felt that Lawrence M. Keitt, an ultra fire-eater, was toning down his disunionism. See Craven, Southern Nationalism, 291. Ruffin similarly perceived Keitt's moderation at this time. See Ruffin, Diary, I, Entry for Aug. 16, 1858, 223-224.

(37) "SPEECH OF Hon. James H. Hammond, DELIVERED AT BARNWELL, C.H., OCTOBER 29, 1858," Charleston Mercury, Nov. 2, 1858; Faust, Hammond, 350-352. Ruffin used the Southern rights spirit of Hammond's Barnwell speech to clear his friend of the apostasy charge. Ruffin, Diary, I, Entry for Nov. 8, 1858, 246.

(38) The disunionist paragraphs of Newton's address are in "IN SORROW, NOT IN ANGER," Washington Daily National Intelligencer, July 24, 1858.

(39) Ibid; "THE HON. W. NEWTON, IN VIRGINIA, AND THE HON. JEFFERSON DAVIS, IN NEW ENGLAND," Daily Richmond Enquirer, July 27, 1858.

(40) Ruffin, Diary, I, Entries for Aug. 14, 16, 1858, 222-225.

(41) Ibid.

(42) Ruffin made this assessment explicit in "Suggestions to the Southern States--The True Policy," No. V, Charleston Mercury, Sept. 6, 1858. Ruffin's impression about the pervasiveness of the presidential illusion was reinforced by his conversation with Lewis E. Harvie, a key Hunter manager, who thought that a Southerner could win the presidency in 1860. Ruffin, Diary, I, Entry for Aug. 20, 1858, 225.

(43) "Treachery to the South--Active or Passive," by "R." Montgomery Advertiser and State Gazette, Oct. 13, 1858.

(44) Ibid; Ruffin, Diary, I, Entries for Aug. 16, 28, 1858, 224, 226.

(45) Ruffin, Diary, I, Entries for Aug. 16, 28, 1858, 224, 227.

(46) Ibid., Entries for Aug. 4, 5, 8, 1858, 218-219. It is difficult to tell if Ruffin knew of Pryor's attacks on the League before writing his reformist essay. Pryor's editorials appeared in The South before Ruffin began his article. But Ruffin's diary oddly makes no mention of Pryor's strictures until after the completion of his essay. In any event, Ruffin sensed the increasingly conservative climate in the South by early August.

(47) "Suggestions to the Southern States," No. I, by "R." Charleston Mercury, Aug. 30, 1858.

(48) Ibid.

(49) Ibid; "Suggestions to the Southern States--The True Policy," Nos. II & IV, by "R." Charleston Mercury, Sept. 1, 3, 1858.

(50) "Suggestions to the Southern States--The True Policy," No. IV, by "R." & "Slavery and Free Labor Defined and Compared," No. 5, by Edmund Ruffin, Charleston Mercury, Sept. 3, 1858, June 30, 1859.

(51) Ruffin, Diary, I, Entry for Feb. 23, 1859, 286; "Slavery and Free Labor Defined and Compared," No. 5, by Edmund Ruffin, Charleston Mercury, June 30, 1859.

(52) "Suggestions to the Southern States--the True Policy," No. III, by "R." & "Slavery and Free Labor Defined and Compared," No. 5, by Edmund Ruffin, Charleston Mercury, Sept. 2, 1858, June 30, 1859; Ruffin, Diary, I, Entries for Jan. 30, 1858, Feb. 23, 1859, 152-154, 287.

(53) "Suggestions to the Southern States," Nos. I, III, IV, by "R." Charleston Mercury, Aug. 30, Sept. 2, 3, 1858.

(54) "Suggestions to the Southern States--The True Policy," No. V, by "R." Charleston Mercury, Sept. 6, 1858.

(55) Ruffin, Diary, I, Entry for Feb. 16, 1857, 36; On Toombs' espousal of license taxes to promote direct trade with Europe, see "Letter from the Hon. Robert Toombs to the Commercial Convention," Charleston Mercury, Dec. 15, 1856.

(56) Ruffin, Diary, I, Entry for Jan. 30, 1858, 153-154. Ruffin was quite emphatic about the necessity of secession for Southern protection of domestic manufactures: "If the argument for protecting manufactures, & establishing a home market is sound, it is another & a very strong argument for a dissolution of the union--as then only can the southern states protect their own manufactures by discriminating duties on northern as well as European fabrics." Thus Ruffin's longstanding mission to improve the Southern economy in general and slave agriculture in particular reinforced his secessionist commitment.

(57) That Southern superiority to the North was a pliable presumption is illustrated by the fluctuations of James H. Hammond. In March 1858 the South Carolina senator defiantly proclaimed on the Congressional floor "Cotton is King" to champion the viability of a Southern confederacy. A few months later Hammond contended that the moral supremacy of slave civilization would enable the South to maintain her rights within the Union. The Southern mystique enabled Southern rights exponents to vacillate between Unionism and secession while preserving a semblance of ideological consistency. On Hammond's views, see Faust, Hammond, 346, 349.

(58) The image of the Northern character as obsessively materialistic and of the Northern economy as callously parasitic was not a reflection of Ruffin's waywardness from fire-eater orthodoxy. The persistent refrain of the Charleston Mercury that Southern interests could be preserved in the Union if the North took Southern secession threats seriously--that Southern firmness and unity could have previously safeguarded slavery within the Union--rested on these very premises. See, for example, "The Democratic Party," "The Southern Party," & "The Position of the South," Charleston Mercury, Nov. 1, 1854, Aug. 3, 1855, Nov. 4,

1856. True, the Mercury repeatedly rejected all patently reformist schemes including license taxation as dangerous distractions from the secession quest, the only sure guarantee of Southern safety. (e.g., "The Remedies," Charleston Mercury, June 22, 1857) Still, the suppositions of a superior Southern economy and a greedy Northern society were elements within fire-eater ideology itself which could be utilized to obviate disunion. Rhett, in fact, realized this danger and walked a tightrope. When explaining why the North voted for Buchanan, for example, Rhett declared that "Interest mastered fanaticism." Likewise, when assuring Carolinians that disunion would be peaceful, Rhett asserted that Northerners were a "calculating people" who would not fight the South. But when trying to demonstrate the need for secession, Rhett portrayed the North as ruled by "passion" and "fanaticism." See "Speech of the Hon. R.B. Rhett, Delivered at Hibernian Hall, in the City of Charleston, June 21, 1850," "Meeting at Walterborough," "A Letter from the Hon. R. Barnwell Rhett to Governor Adams, on the State of Public Affairs," & "SPEECH OF HON. R.B. RHETT, DELIVERED AT GRAHAMVILLE, S.C., July 4, 1859," Charleston Mercury, July 20, Sept. 12, 1850, Nov. 7, 1856, July 7, 1859.

(59) "Suggestions to the Southern States--The True Policy," No. III, by "R." & "Slavery and Free Labor Defined and Compared," No. 5, by Edmund Ruffin, Charleston Mercury, Sept. 2, 1858, June 30, 1859.

(60) "Suggestions to the Southern States--The True Policy," No. III, by "R." Charleston Mercury, Sept. 2, 1858.

(61) "Slavery and Free Labor Defined and Compared," No. 5, by Edmund Ruffin, Charleston Mercury, June 30, 1859.

(62) Wyatt-Brown points out that Southern Unionists rationalized their passivity by a different interpretation of honor. For example, they argued that coolness under provocation was honorable. See Wyatt-Brown, Saints and Sinners, 204.

Chapter Five: The Theoretical Aspects of Proslavery Ideology

In the 1850s Edmund Ruffin assumed the role of a proslavery propagandist, an increasingly fashionable avocation of the Southern intellectual. The composition and delivery of proslavery speeches, the writing and distribution of proslavery literature furnished Ruffin with an occupation less controversial than his crusade for secession. While all fire-eaters were ardent supporters of slavery, not all Southern proslavery polemicists were secessionists. Some proslavery propagandists, such as "Parson" William G. Brownlow, were staunch Unionists. Others, like William J. Grayson, were moderate Unionists. Some, like James Henry Hammond, vacillated between secessionism and Unionism. Still others, such as Thomas R.R. Cobb, were eleventh-hour secessionists. In fact, George Fitzhugh--generally considered the most extreme proslavery ideologue--was optimistic about securing slavery within the Union in the 1850s. Some Southerners believed that the moral force of the proslavery creed would promote sectional harmony by converting honest and intelligent Northerners to the slavery cause.[1]

Ruffin generally harbored no such illusions. He did claim that proslavery sentiment was growing among the "comparatively few men of intelligence" in the North; but he insisted that abolitionism suffused the Northern masses.[2] Ruffin's proslavery energies were expended less to convert

the ignorant Northern multitude intoxicated with abolitionist fanaticism or to persuade the intelligent Northern few already impregnated with proslavery values than to invigorate Southern commitment to slavery, which seemed to be flagging under the strain of abolitionist propaganda and economic decline in the border states. At the same time, Ruffin's proslavery expression would demonstrate his own orthodoxy: it would show both Southerners and Northerners that abolitionist arguments had not induced this former "speculative abolitionist" to regress to his old opinions or even falter in his devotion to slavery. Silence in the face of antislavery literature was no more permissible, according to the South's honorific value code, than passivity in the face of antislavery aggressions. Abolitionist allegations were insulting to Southern slaveholders. The honorable Edmund Ruffin had to reply. It does not appear that Ruffin was seeking to expunge any guilt feelings; his voluminous diary contains no evidence of any conscious qualms about the peculiar institution. In fact, Ruffin's public addresses and writings typically echo the sentiments he confided to his diary on the moral legitimacy and economic desirability of slavery in both tone and substance.

Viewing abolitionist tirades against the Southern slaveholder as personal affronts, Ruffin aimed to vindicate the moral integrity of the slaveholder from antislavery aspersions. Consequently, Ruffin portrayed Southern slavery

as a benevolent institution, advantageous to both slave and master. Seeking to raise the level of debate above coarse sectional partisanship, Ruffin cultivated the image of a political economist to endow his tendentious polemics with the aura of scholarly detachment. Accordingly, Ruffin traced the demographic and socioeconomic conditions conducive to free and slave labor and compared their impact upon employers and laborers. The proslavery ideology, partially rationalized by intellectual values (e.g., black mental inferiority and the development of white minds) may also have served as a device to win respectability for the Southern intellectual, a profession having little prestige in the antebellum South. In particular, Ruffin may have sought the acclaim from the Southern populace which his labors as an agricultural reformer and his efforts as a secessionist revolutionary had failed to obtain.[3]

If Ruffin hoped that his proslavery writings would earn him public acclaim, it was a vain ambition. True, unlike the extreme posture Ruffin adopted on the durability and desirability of the federal Union, the position Ruffin assumed on the slavery issue was within the Southern proslavery mainstream. But his very orthodoxy was a liability. His exposition of the common proslavery viewpoint accentuated a pedestrian style, which his iconoclastic fire-eating had overshadowed. His original contributions to the proslavery ideology, which had been developing in the South for decades, were insignificant.

Only when Ruffin took the preferability of slave to free labor for granted and confined his analysis to the economics of border state slavery in the 1850s did he display more than a mundane intellect. Moreover, pockets of areas lukewarm, if not hostile, to slavery punctuated the ideological landscape of the upper South especially. Western Virginia, for example, diverged sharply from the proslavery mainstream. And Ruffin could not help but direct some of his proslavery efforts, such as his calls to end African colonization and reenslave free blacks, into channels which ran against the intellectual currents of the border states. Furthermore, Ruffin's perception that border state slavery was declining and his desire to maintain the institution in the region eventually impelled him to publicly intimate, however circumspectly, his approval of a project anathema to most Virginians, namely the revival of the African slave trade. Ultimately, Ruffin found himself isolated.

Unlike other Virginian proslavery ideologues such as Thornton Stringfellow and Albert Taylor Bledsoe, who respectively examined slavery from the religious and political standpoint, Edmund Ruffin approached the subject chiefly from an economic perspective. Ruffin claimed that Southern writers had sufficiently explored the religious and political aspects of the question. But it was quite appropriate that Ruffin decided to focus on the supposedly neglected economic ramifications of slavery. Although he

subscribed to many of the hackneyed religious and political arguments, Ruffin wore both his Christian and republican vestments loosely. Also, Ruffin's perspective as a slaveholder and an agricultural reformer had been primarily economic. It was not that Ruffin disdained moral arguments. On the contrary, moral arguments figured prominently in his defense of slavery. But his paternalistic ethos was based upon his economic arguments. Yet so driven was Ruffin to exalt almost every economic facet of slave labor that his argument, at times, seemed to undermine the paternalist ethos. Unlike the paternalist theoretician George Fitzhugh, who gladly conceded the economic superiority of free labor to bolster the moral superiority of slave labor, Ruffin maintained that slavery was both economically and morally superior to free labor. Notwithstanding his considerable exertions, Ruffin failed to defend slavery in general as cheaper and more effective than free labor. But among antebellum proslavery ideologues, Ruffin most closely resembled Fitzhugh in his attempt to disassociate slavery from the peculiarities of Southern conditions (such as the presence of blacks) and thereby vindicate slavery as such as a positive good.

Following other proslavery writers, Ruffin contended that slavery was a widespread social institution, deeply-rooted in the history of man. Early sources of slavery included the enslavement of prisoners of war, criminals, debtors, and indolent nomads. In the case of war

prisoners, slavery appeared as an extenuation of "the horrors of war by saving lives that would otherwise be sacrificed." Ruffin conceded that the imposition of slavery was often harsh and sometimes extremely cruel to its victims, but argued that the consequences of slavery were beneficial. From the days of the hoary patriarch Abraham through the period of the Egyptian pyramids to the Greco-Roman epoch, slavery had been the engine of civilization. Without their forcible subjection to labor, the "wretched drones and cumberers of the earth," who had a natural aversion to toil, would have remained in slothful idleness, mankind in a state of primitive savagery. Moreover, slavery afforded the master class the luxury of leisure and thereby enabled the cultivation of art, intellect, culture, manners, morals--in a word, civilization itself.[4]

For proslavery thinkers like Ruffin, the historical prevalence and endurance of slavery as well as its contributions to human progress attested to its divine sanction. Slavery, for these ideologues, was not an historical accident but a common condition, not a transient aberration but an enduring system. Slavery was thus the providential means of civilizing barbarous nations. The teleological argument of design had been used by eighteenth-century theologians to support the existence of a supreme being: the intelligence, goodness, and harmony of nature indicated an omniscient and benevolent designer.

Antebellum proslavery writers used this argument to rationalize slavery as part of the divine plan: ubiquitous and persistent social institutions, being allowed by the deity, were also useful and beneficial. Although Ruffin also pointed to the contributions of slavery to human welfare, he came very close to viewing the pervasiveness and longevity of slavery as sufficient evidence of divine approval. Proslavery thinkers did not realize that by taking the benevolence of God for granted, they were engaging in circular reasoning. One could not use nature to assign goodness to its maker and then use the benevolence of the Creator to assign goodness to nature. Nor did Ruffin's secular utilitarian argument justify slavery. He conveniently viewed slavery as consonant with God's goodness since it promoted civilization, but he omitted such chronic occurrences as disease, famine, and war. For one who deemed population density inimical to the welfare of the masses, Ruffin strangely failed to appreciate the great demographic services rendered by these common scourges.[5]

Ruffin was not content to place the South within the historical tradition. He contended that slavery was still a pervasive institution in the nineteenth century--not an archaic relic confined to a few backward regions in the Western Hemisphere. To show that slavery was still common, Ruffin resorted to a popular proslavery device, namely defining slavery in such broad terms so as to encompass every form of social subjection. For Ruffin, slavery was

"the subjection of one individual or class to the authority and direction of another individual or class, so that the subjected party is compelled (no matter by what means) to labor, serve, or act, at the will and command, and for the benefit or objects, of the ruling individual or class." The paternalistic political economist thus defined slavery not as a labor arrangement for the benefit of the working class but as a form of social domination for the benefit of the ruling class. In accordance with his broad definition, Ruffin argued that various forms of slavery existed: economic slavery wherein the individual was enslaved to his physical needs and consequently to the capitalist class of employers, who could supply those needs; political slavery wherein a despot enslaved his subjects; military slavery wherein citizens were drafted by the army or impressed by the navy into long periods of compulsory service; and spiritual slavery wherein members of a religious sect were enslaved to their leaders and dogmas. For example, Ruffin considered not only Russian and Eastern European serfdom but also the British labor system economic slavery. The Prussian army and the British navy, relying on forcible recruitment, were instances of military slavery. New England Puritanism and contemporary Mormonism exemplified spiritual slavery. So metaphorically did Ruffin use the term "slavery" that he deemed European immigrants to America slaves as well--slaves to ignorance. Ruffin's shrewd categorization of myriad social, economic, and political

institutions under the slavery rubric was an attempt to integrate the South into the conventional mores of nineteenth-century Western civilization, an attempt to lessen the peculiarity of the "peculiar institution." Once Ruffin's conceptual scheme was granted, the evils of slavery were already mitigated. Southern slavery was no longer the diabolical horror, sui generis, of abolitionist portrayal, but, at worst, a poor form of a pervasive institution.[6]

But the most important form of slavery to which Southern domestic slavery was the benign alternative was economic slavery. In densely populated European countries, where the labor supply exceeded employment opportunities, "hireling slavery" predominated. In Great Britain, for example, free labor was nonexistent, the terminology a cruel misnomer. The British agricultural worker, the factory laborer, and the coal miner were all slaves to the capitalist class. Hunger and cold compelled these "hireling slaves" to toil in miserable conditions at long hours for meager wages. Freedom for them was a fiction--nay, a mockery. Unlike Southern slaves, they could theoretically choose their own employer; but practically, given the abundant supply of labor, they could not improve their penurious plight at all by exercising their choice of employer.[7]

Furthermore, British parishes barred the entrance of laborers into their localities. In hard economic times, the capitalist employer could still further reduce the wage

pittance of his workers or dismiss them entirely at his pleasure. The feeble laborer would then become a candidate for parish support. Even the robust laborer could not escape the miseries of impoverishment should he reach old age. True, the parish alleviated the privations of the less fortunate British laborer. But subsistence was given only in exchange for compulsory labor. The parish could assign the "pauper slaves" to work at any task in any region--even breaking up families in the process. And the callous parish employers, who had no economic stake in the welfare or longevity of their employees, could work their paupers to death.[8]

By contrast, Ruffin argued, Southern slaveholders supplied the physical needs of their slaves throughout their entire lives, regardless of the level of slave productivity or the nature of the prevalent economic conditions. Masters accorded slaves--young or old, healthy or sick, vigorous or frail--food, clothes, shelter, and medical care. Bondage shielded the slave from the economic vicissitudes afflicting the free laborer. During the 1857 recession, Ruffin claimed, Southern slaveholders suffered pecuniary losses but slave welfare was unaffected. The union of capital and labor in the person of the slave gave the master an economic interest in maintaining the well-being of the slave. Close paternal relations, which sometimes began with infancy, ensured kind treatment of the domestic slave. On the whole, personal slavery of individual to individual, an "intimate

association" generating an "attachment of love," was far preferable to the impersonal slavery of class to class in capitalist society, "the slavery of labor to want."[9]

Ruffin admitted, however, that free labor in the North was more than nominal. Unlike his unfortunate British counterpart, who incessantly struggled in vain to escape destitution, the Northern worker generally lived above the subsistence level. But Ruffin insisted that the relative comfort of the Northern laborer was an accidental and temporary circumstance. The migration of numerous laborers to the plentiful and inexpensive western lands reduced the supply of laborers available to Northern capitalists. But after the West was settled, Ruffin prognosticated, the North would succumb to the European malaise of "hunger-slavery." Indeed, only two options were open to free society: either capitalist exploitation of labor, a harsh though unacknowledged form of slavery, or a socialist economic arrangement, a prospect the conservative Ruffin disdained. The North, Ruffin believed, would ultimately be overrun by proletarian revolution and adopt the latter course. Only the moderating influence of Southern slavery prevented the consummation of Northern "agrarianism, communism, and anti-rentism."[10]

Though obviously wielding a proslavery axe, Ruffin, at times, resembled a detached sociologist in his analysis of capitalism as an institution. Rather than blame individual capitalists for immorally oppressing their workers, Ruffin

rationalized capitalist exploitation as objectively determined by the economic structure and social relations of the system. That capitalists strive to get the most toil out of their workers for the lowest possible wages "is not a matter of choice with the employers. They have their places in a complicated system of social machinery, and each one is compelled to act his required part of the general operation." As labor and capital have divergent interests, wage increases would cut into capitalist profits, which accrued at the expense of the laboring masses. Ruffin, thus, shared the socialist doctrine that capitalist enrichment occurred through the exploitation of labor. Likewise, Ruffin contended that huge cooperative endeavors would enhance labor productivity by the specialization of labor and the elimination of waste. And he endorsed the socialist argument that cooperative associations could economize expenses by purchasing necessary supplies at wholesale prices.[11]

For Ruffin, the fatal flaw of socialist theories was not their critique of capitalism but their proferred remedy of associated labor without a central governing power. This omission, Ruffin triumphantly noted, had been responsible for the numerous failures of socialist communes. Only those religious associations guided by a despot had succeeded. Socialists may not appreciate the affinity between their ideology and slavery, which they profess to despise; "but in supplying this single ruling power, the association is

thereby converted to the condition of domestic slavery." Southern slavery, for Ruffin, was authoritarian socialism: socialist to unite capital and labor, authoritarian to prevent disintegration. "Thus, in the institution of domestic slavery, and in that only, are most completely realized the dreams and sanguine hopes of the socialist school of philanthropists."[12]

The depiction of domestic slavery as a form of socialist transcendence of the antagonism between capital and labor was a fanciful dream of proslavery ideologues like Ruffin and Fitzhugh. The gist of the Marxist critique of capitalism pertained with equal, if not greater, force to slavery. In the antebellum South, the surplus value of labor was extracted by the slaveholding planter instead of the bourgeois manufacturer. Neither the free laborer nor the slave shared the profits of his employer. If the bourgeoisie were the dominant class in the North, the slaveholders--whether classified as capitalist or pre-bourgeois--were the master class of the South. The slaveholder's capital investment in his slave did not constitute a dramatic reconciliation between the divergent interests of labor and capital but a mere modification of labor/capital relations. The slaveholder's economic incentive to maintain the productive capacity of his laborer hardly secured the slave material comfort or exemption from excessive toil--even in the nineteenth-century South. Many slaveholders, especially those owning large rice and sugar

plantations, could not resist the temptation of short-term gain procured by the arduous toil of their slaves. Moreover, the supply and demand principle, which governed bourgeois/proletarian relations in capitalist societies, shaped master/slave relations in slave societies. By decreasing the price of slaves, a large supply of slaves would reduce the slaveholder's interest in the upkeep of his capital investment. Notwithstanding Ruffin's protestations, the Southern slave was not immune from the vagaries of the marketplace. During hard economic times, slaveholders could not only economize by curtailing slave allowances but could sell their laborers as commodities to the highest bidder, an enterprise alien to capitalist employers. Nor could the capitalist as such compel his laborer to remain in his employ or coerce a departed laborer to return to his service. Here, at least, even the destitute free laborer preserved a modicum of freedom.[13]

The contention by proslavery polemicists that the welfare of the slave was superior to that of the free laborer left them vulnerable to the oft-repeated antislavery boast that free labor was cheaper and more productive than slave labor. To many antebellum thinkers, the level of economic productivity seemed inversely proportionate to the condition of the laboring class. The clever antislavery allegation thus placed proslavery exponents in an awkward dilemma: if, on the one hand, they gainsaid the charge and asserted that slavery was cheaper than free labor, the

paternalist pretension about the benevolence of slavery would be undermined; if, on the other hand, they admitted the relative cheapness and efficiency of free labor, the inferiority of the slave economy would be acknowledged. The intellectual gymnastics Ruffin performed to escape this predicament were more a reflection of his discomfiture than a tribute to his mental agility and prowess.

Most proslavery writers conceded the general superior productivity and economy of free labor but exempted the South for a variety of reasons: the unsuitability of free labor in tropical climates since warm temperatures and luxurious vegetation augmented man's natural indolence; the unfeasibility of white labor in the tropics, given the racial constitution of the Caucasian; the impracticability of transforming the naturally slothful Negro into an industrious worker under a lax free labor regimen; and the undesirability of free labor in agricultural crop production since an unpropitious labor strike could destroy the staple production of an entire season. George Fitzhugh did not resort to such rationales; he relished the abolitionist criticism of the economic superiority of free labor as an unintended vindication of the mildness of Southern slavery by its harshest assailants. But Ruffin was satisfied neither with Southern exceptionalism, which smacked of the "necessary evil" apologia, nor with a consistent Fitzhughian paternalism, which repudiated the values of classical political economy.[14]

Initially, Ruffin was equivocal and evasive on this subject. In his address to the Virginia Agricultural Society in 1852, Ruffin the paternalist observed that the abolitionist proclamation of the greater productivity of free labor, while intended as a hostile denigration of Southern slavery, actually implied the lesser burden of the slave. But Ruffin the economist carefully sidestepped the question whether the abolitionist contention was correct. Ruffin did admit that free labor was cheaper than slave labor at least in Europe and the North. These regions switched from slave to free labor systems when the latter became more profitable. But Ruffin asserted that slave labor was more profitable in the South. The economist offered no arguments. He merely noted that the abolitionist depiction of the Southern planter as indolent and wasteful implied the superior profitability of slave labor, as prosperity rather than penury bred idleness. Fearful lest slaveholders appeared as avaricious capitalists, Ruffin elaborated upon the superior Southern intellectual cultivation and moral refinement, qualities he exalted far above the crass "accumulation of wealth." Thus Ruffin's few words on the comparative economic advantages of free versus slave labor in his 1852 address resembled the strategy pursued by the typical proslavery ideologue vis-à-vis classical political economy: concede the general superiority of free labor but except the South.[15]

Ruffin's secessionist essay "Consequences of Abolition

Agitation," written four years later, was ambivalent. In the context of discussing the superior military merits of slave societies, Ruffin seemed willing to concede the superior economic merits of free societies. Ruffin made population sparsity a prerequisite and a concomitant of slave labor and population density an outgrowth of free labor. He admitted that the free laborer was more productive than the slave laborer and the bourgeois was more industrious than the slaveholder. Consequently, Ruffin further conceded, free labor systems produced more wealth for their society as a whole. But Ruffin argued that the individuals within slave societies--slaves as well as masters--not only worked less but enjoyed "more space, more comfort and repose, and security against extreme privation" than the members of nonslaveholding societies. And the employers of slave labor used their leisure time for intellectual and social improvement.[16] Ruffin, in effect, shrewdly exploited the common association between slavery and population sparsity to contend that, in spite of the greater aggregate wealth produced by free labor societies, slaves were better off economically than proletarians. Ruffin, of course, had not explored the distribution of resources in slave societies. Slave economies did not preclude a highly inequitable distribution of both burdens and benefits. In fact, the lesser overall output of slave societies could exacerbate the plight of the laboring class. Furthermore, Ruffin had not shown that different demographic

conditions always accompanied the different labor systems. If free labor was compatible with a sparse population, then slavery lost its advantages.

Two years later, Ruffin's discovery of the economic drawback of free labor under conditions of population sparsity enabled him to challenge directly the discomforting abolitionist boast of the superior productivity of free labor. In The Political Economy of Slavery, Ruffin admitted the free-trade premise that the allurement of gain was a more powerful inducement to labor than the fear of punishment. The proper conclusion, for Ruffin, however, was not that free labor was more productive and accordingly cheaper than slave labor but that the free laborer will toil more diligently during the time he works than will the slave for the corresponding period. Knowing that his earnings will be proportionate to his exertions, the free laborer will strive to achieve maximum productivity during working hours. By contrast, the slave, who received the same amount of material support irrespective of his productivity, will expend the minimum energies necessary to avert physical chastisement. The free laborer, whose remuneration in sparsely-inhabited areas greatly exceeded his living expenses, was typically idle two days out of three. But population sparsity, which diminished the productivity of the free laborer, had no effect on that of the slave. The slave laborer, though generally working at two-thirds the efficiency of the free laborer, labored continuously. Thus

for Ruffin, both the free and slave laborer exhibited man's natural indolence: the free laborer by periodic leisure, the slave by slothful exertion. But since the continuous nature of slave labor more than compensated for its inferior hourly productivity, slavery was superior to free labor in overall output and profitability in sparsely-settled regions. By examining the impact of population sparsity upon the productivity of free societies, rather than merely upon distribution of resources in slave societies, Ruffin could maintain that slavery was economically superior.[17]

Ruffin, of course, had hardly established the economic superiority of slave labor. He unwarrantedly supposed that the free laborer would take two-thirds of his days off while the slave would shirk only one-third of his daily labor. With these convenient figures, he correctly calculated that the quantitative superiority of the slave exceeded the qualitative superiority of the free laborer. Interestingly, Ruffin's recourse to these transparent quantitative manipulations was unnecessary. Since he viewed compulsion as the distinguishing feature of slave labor which enabled the continuous extraction of labor, Ruffin did not entertain the possibility that incentives could be offered to promote the diligent labor of slaves. Similarly, Ruffin assumed that the free laborer had to be paid for his productivity rather than for his time. Ruffin, thus, needlessly conceded the antislavery claim concerning the qualitative superiority of the free laborer. In part, Ruffin's error stemmed from

his racial preconceptions. He could not picture blacks laboring without compulsion. More importantly, he became a victim of his own poor definition of slavery as forcible subjection. Had Ruffin correctly defined slavery as the ownership of person and logically separated the authority of a slaveowner from his exercise of power, he would not have held labor incentives incompatible with slavery. Coerced labor, though a frequent concomitant, was not a necessary ingredient of slavery. The ownership of slave property accorded the master the authority to compel the labor of his slaves; it did not require him to extort their labor by compulsion instead of encourage their labor by inducement. Of course, if Ruffin had acknowledged that the essence of slavery was the ownership of human beings as chattels, he would neither have been able to designate British free labor, however oppressive, as slavery nor to assimilate Southern slavery into the ethos of Western civilization in the nineteenth century.[18]

Ruffin understood that his depiction of the slothfulness of the free laborer applied only to sparsely-settled regions. Only where the demand for labor substantially exceeded the supply would wages be high enough for the free laborer to satisfy his wants with spurts of intensive productivity. Ruffin well knew that wherever the supply of labor exceeded the demand, continuous exertion would be required to satisfy the elemental needs of the free laborer. Accordingly, the slavery defender conceded the

greater productivity and profitability of free labor in densely-populated regions. In fact, in The Political Economy of Slavery, Ruffin drew a Malthusian sketch of the worsening condition of the laboring class as the population expanded. The intense competition for employment by members of the proliferating class of workers threw numerous laborers out of work, pushed wages down to the subsistence level, and increased the toil of those who managed to obtain or retain employment:

> When the greatest possible amount of labor is thus obtained for the lowest amount of wages that can barely sustain life and strength for labor, there has been attained the most perfect and profitable condition of industrial operations for the class of capitalists and employers, and also for the most rapid increase of general and national wealth. But these benefits...are purchased only by the greatest possible amount of toil, privation, and misery of the class of laborers under which they can live and work. It is readily admitted that slave labor could never yield anything like such large net returns--and that it would not only produce less, but would cost more.[19]

Although Ruffin the paternalist thus gladly conceded defeat on the superior economic potentialities of the capitalist system, Ruffin the economist maintained the lesser expense and greater productivity of slave labor as a general proposition. The slavery enthusiast performed this feat of legerdemain by implicitly viewing sparse settlement as typical and population density as exceptional--a claim which contradicted his usual portrayal of European conditions as general and inevitable and American conditions as exceptional and temporary. Indeed, when Ruffin sought to demonstrate the mildness of slavery relative to free labor,

he counterpoised the callous British parish and the miserable European proletarian to the solicitous Southern slaveholder and the contented Southern slave, respectively. But when he wanted to show the economic advantage of slavery vis-à-vis free labor, Ruffin virtually dismissed British demographic and labor conditions as atypical. The points of comparison were conveniently dictated by the nature of the argument. In his diary, Ruffin, even less persuasively, resorted to the verbal strategm of disqualifying European capitalism from a comparison with Southern slavery on the issue of economic efficiency because the dire survival needs compelling European workers to labor made them slaves by definition, "slaves to want." Needless to say, Ruffin did not similarly disqualify British laborers when he compared the relative benevolence of the free and slave labor systems.[20]

Perhaps sensing the inadequacy of his arguments, if not the inconsistency of his maneuvers, Ruffin's additions to a projected, new edition of Political Economy contended that slave labor was cheaper than free labor even in densely-populated countries. The cost of pauper maintenance as well as law enforcement had to be added to the wages paid to individual laborers in calculating the overall cost of free labor to the community as a whole. Even individual employers, presumably, had to add the amount of taxation they paid for police protection and poor relief. In slave societies, Ruffin argued, the expenses of law enforcement

were much less than in free societies not only because the well-treated slave had less inducement to crime but also because the individual slaveholder exercised police powers on his own estate. And, of course, no slave required poor relief. Hence, slave labor was cheaper on the whole than free labor even in overpopulated regions where wages were a pittance. Thus Ruffin argued that the common expression that slavery terminated when free labor became cheaper than slave labor referred only to wages and not overall costs to the community. By extension, Ruffin would have argued that the liquidation of slavery by Europeans and Northerners was myopically and narrowly based on the comparison between wages and the maintenance costs of a slave. Ruffin clearly held that slave labor was economically superior to free labor under all conditions.[21]

If labor productivity was Ruffin's major rationale for slavery in general, the natural inferiority of the black race, in Ruffin's mind, reinforced the legitimacy of Southern slavery in particular. Southern slavery, Ruffin maintained, was an especially appropriate relation as the most superior race of Anglo-Saxons was master and a most inferior race was enslaved. For Ruffin, the moral and intellectual inferiority of the black was a patent, axiomatic, obvious fact. While not relegating the Negro to the scale of a lower, non-human species of being, Ruffin did consider blacks an innately inferior breed of humans, who could not govern their lives and labor.[22] That blacks

required white supervision to prosper numerically and economically was evident by the failure of free blacks in Liberia, the West Indies, and the North.

In spite of the optimal conditions surrounding the Liberian experiment--whereby a number of exemplary Southern blacks educated by the school of slavery had emigrated under the beneficent sponsorship of white Americans to a region blessed with a fertile soil and a salubrious climate--the Liberian denizens were the impoverished and diseased victims of their own indolence and vulnerability. Similarly, Ruffin argued, the freedmen inhabiting the British and French West Indies had relapsed into the customary barbarism of the African; emancipation had converted the flourishing Jamaican and Haitian communities into desolate wastelands, their erstwhile industrious black laborers into parasitical drones. Even Northern blacks, who enjoyed opportunities for education and advancement, were mired in bogs of "ignorance, indolence, improvidence, and poverty"--not to mention their "vicious habits" and proneness to crime. Additionally, Northern free blacks were barely increasing at all through procreation; they relied on absconding and manumitted slaves migrating from the South to replenish their numbers. By contrast, the black slaves of the South had thrived numerically by natural increase and contributed heavily to the agricultural abundance of their section.[23]

Furthermore, Ruffin claimed, no free blacks anywhere had shown any noteworthy intellectual ability: "In all this

long time of freedom, and with great facilities for improvement, there has not appeared among all these free negroes a single individual showing remarkable, or even more than ordinary, power of intellect--or any power of mind that would be deemed worth notice in any individual of the white race." Black inferiority, Ruffin inferred, was not circumstantial but "the immutable decree of God." Why, the Southern blacks themselves, Ruffin thought, acknowledged their own inferiority. Accordingly, the slave typically deferred obsequiosly towards white overseers but manifested a marked displeasure towards black overseers. Likewise, the free black, having no respect for black authority, was loath to emigrate to Liberia, where blacks ruled. To Ruffin, the moral seemed obvious: blacks were fit to obey, not to rule. While blacks could boast of bodily brawn, they lacked the mental prowess of whites. Ruffin thus concluded that Southern slavery, which joined the inferior African to the superior Anglo-Saxon, was peculiarly felicitous: "When the Caucasian mind thus commands and directs the bodily powers of the ignorant negro, it is the best possible form of slavery, and the condition which conduces most to the benefit of both the white and the black race--and especially is best for the happiness and improvement of the latter."[24]

Ruffin, of course, had hardly demonstrated the inherent inferiority of the black. His treatment of the racial issue revealed much more about the nature of Ruffin's prejudice than about the nature of the Negro. Synthesizing the

secular materialist and utilitarian philosophies of the mid nineteenth century with the traditional Puritan ethic, Ruffin elevated economic production and human reproduction to the status of moral values. Industry and fecundity were intrinsically meritorious traits and highly useful to society. Indolence, for Ruffin, was not merely a reflection of extrinsic factors, such as the availabilty of natural resources required for survival; it was a vice. Similarly, Ruffin viewed population growth as a matter of natural endowment; he did not realize that adventitious circumstances such as sex ratios and epidemiological factors affected demographic patterns. Man's natural propensity to idleness, Ruffin felt, was accentuated in the black man. So ingrained was Ruffin's conviction that the free black would not labor that he deemed factual data superfluous. For instance, he considered Haiti's economic declension since the revolution "so well established" that "this question does not need discussion." [25]

Ruffin assumed that the reduced output of agricultural staples by blacks after their emancipation was necessarily a sign of moral deficiency. Ruffin neglected the impact of the slave experience upon the black character. The association between black bondage and manual labor in American slave societies was strong enough to have left a lasting impression upon the black. For some liberated slaves, idleness may have been a means of expressing their new condition of freedom. Moreover, many freedmen engaged

in self-sufficient agriculture. But Ruffin was so weltered in capitalist values and the Protestant ethic that he viewed the absence of a surplus as economic collapse and moral failure. Also, Ruffin overstated the environmental advantages aiding the blacks in their transition to freedom. For example, Ruffin portrayed the North as a land of educational and economic opportunity for the black. The "depressing and injurious influences" free blacks experienced in their dispersal among dominant and hostile Northerners, Ruffin claimed, were more than countervailed by the inestimable boon of proximate residence to the superior white race. Likewise, Ruffin's depiction of Liberia as a pastoral arcadia was a gross exaggeration.[26]

Interestingly, whereas Ruffin viewed the idleness of the Caucasian as a natural human trait exhibited under conditions of population sparsity, he ascribed the supposed indolence of the black in Liberia to the "natural aversion of the negro to regular and laborious toil" exclusively. Though Ruffin believed that tropical temperatures intensified man's natural indolence, he considered racial factors more important than climatic. Generally, slothful whites could be driven to work by their instinct for self-preservation; but the slothfulness of the blacks was so extreme that they preferred starving to working. The same tenacious racism marked Ruffin's treatment of Haiti. Ruffin acknowledged that the Haitian freedmen were subjected to an oppressive military government, which forcibly extracted

their labor. But he attributed the decline of the Haitian economy not to the coercive nature of the regime but to the inferior nature of the black. In fact, he argued that the impersonal slavery of the Haitian blacks to government officials had checked the rapid fall of the Haitian economy. Rather than undermining Ruffin's contention about the economic productiveness of forced labor, the Haitian example merely reinforced his inveterate prejudice against the Negro.[27]

Ruffin clung to his dogma of the innate inferiority of the black intellect by explaining away contrary evidence. His reaction to a pamphlet written by a black graduate of Cambridge University was typical. After reading this able essay, which, appropriately enough, contended for black equality, Ruffin suspected that the student had been awarded a diploma "because he was a negro. However, I would not deny the possibility of one negro in a hundred thousand cases being capable of receiving a college education, & being competent to write a commonplace address." As he encountered instances of black capability, Ruffin raised his expectations. Having the mental powers of their ordinary white counterparts was insufficient; blacks had to display "strong or remarkable mental power" to satisfy Ruffin. The success of the St. Domingo slave revolt--which abolitionist egalitarians hailed as evidence of black capabilities--was credited by Ruffin to the white race: the decisive military force despatched by the French revolutionaries to enforce

their decree of universal emancipation and the white blood which flowed through the blood of the mulatto rebel leaders on the island. Ruffin did acknowledge, albeit paranthetically, the outstanding intellectual and moral stature of the black Haitian liberator Toussaint L'Ouverture,"(the only truly great man yet known of the negro race)." But Ruffin argued that no other black had shown such high caliber. That few whites were the peers of Toussaint did not occur to the Virginian observer.[28]

Not even direct experience with black intelligence could change Ruffin's mind about black inferiority. When his slave foreman, Jem Sykes, ascribed the increased productivity of the Marlbourne plantation less to the recent careful tillage by the new superintendent, William Sayre (Ruffin's son-in-law), than to the agricultural improvements Ruffin had made years ago, the flattered agronomist was quite surprised: "I confess that I am especially gratified by these compliments from Jem, for though I am sure of the truth of the opinion, I did not expect a negro, even of superior intelligence as he is, to look back to causes so remote, & of such slow and gradual action."[29] Whether he reacted to evidence of black capacity with denigration, rationalization, or astonishment, Ruffin did not allow the facts to alter his racial tenets.

Perhaps the most striking illustration of Ruffin's closed mind on the racial issue pertained to his claim that blacks deemed themselves inferior to whites. The outward

manifestation of slave obsequiousness to white authority gave rise to the notions that blacks accepted their subservience as a matter of course and considered themselves infinitely beneath the level of their white masters. In Ruffin's mind, submissiveness not only betokened inferiority in rank but in character as well. Projecting his values unto the slave, Ruffin viewed slave submissiveness as an expression of contentment with bondage and a tacit recognition by the slave of the natural inferiority of his race. Ruffin's failure to discern the enmity concealed by the insouciant slave countenance may be extenuated by the general human disposition to regard appearances as reality; few Southern slaveholders, after all, probed behind the slave mask. But it is remarkable that Ruffin could argue that the Southern blacks' refusal to emigrate to Liberia demonstrated their reluctance to be governed by members of their own race as Ruffin himself posited other causes inhibiting black migration to Liberia. The black, Ruffin speculated, was a sedentary and timid race, fearful of novelty, solitude, and danger. He disparagingly contrasted the blacks' inability to colonize a territory with the white pioneers who intrepidly explored the western portion of the United States.[30] Ruffin interpreted the honorific ideology generated by slavery--bold masters versus timid slaves--in racial terms. It did not occur to him that Southern blacks regarded America rather than Africa as their home and distrusted the idyllic portraits of Liberia painted by

interested white artists. Ruffin seemed almost constitutionally incapable of analyzing black behavior outside of a racist framework.

Southern slaves, according to Ruffin, opposed even capable black overseers because they considered themselves racially unqualified to exercise authority. Some slaves may have genuinely opposed black overseers out of resentment at their incorporation into the plantation establishment. Slaves may have canalized their animosity towards slavery into resisting black overseers. But more likely, Ruffin exaggerated the extent of slave resistance to black overseers. For one who took slave expressions of docility and contentment at face value, displays of assertiveness towards black overseers may have appeared as outright defiance. Many Sambos reserved their dissembling acts for white audiences. Slave overseers, at least de facto, and, even more so, slave drivers were commonly used on Southern plantations, without provoking slave resistance. In fact, Ruffin had employed Jem Sykes as his overseer for years before the latter had been demoted to the rank of foreman on the estate of Ruffin's son-in-law in the mid 1850s. Slaves, hoping to obtain greater leniency and protection, may have preferred black overseers.[31] The same Ruffin who insisted that blacks could not govern themselves and that slaves opposed black authority figures had himself productively used a black overseer to manage his slaves and Marlbourne plantation! His posture as an impartial inquirer

notwithstanding, Ruffin's belief in the inherent superiority of the white man was less the product of rational analysis than an article of religious faith.

Holding his dogma of black inferiority to be indisputable fact, Ruffin impugned the motives of egalitarian gainsayers. Ruffin conceded that the earlier generation of abolitionists led by William Wilberforce may have been sincere though misguided philanthropists. But after the fiasco of West Indian emancipation had graphically demonstrated the utter incapacity of blacks for freedom, only fanatics or scoundrels could claim that abolition would benefit the Southern slave. Hatred for the master rather than humanity to the slave motivated the present generation of British abolitionists. Consuming political ambition, even more than hatred of the Southern slaveholder, propelled the leaders of Northern abolitionism.[32] The West Indian Indian experiment having exploded the myths of universal freedom and equality, it was the abolitionist egalitarian, in Ruffin's mind, who irrationally clung to discredited dogmas. These abolitionist zealots--or politicians in the guise of fanatics--preferred to sacrifice white civilization than abandon their shibboleth of liberty:

> Robespierre, in the French Convention, when urging the emancipation of the slaves in St. Domingo, and in answer to predictions of opponents of the ruin that would follow, uttered the memorable sentiment, "Perish the colonies, rather than sacrifice one iota of our principles!" The Northern Abolitionists, our fellow-citizens and our political "brethren," continue to reassert in effect, Robespierre's atrocious declaration, after they now well know, what their great exemplar, the bloody Robespierre, did not know the wide-spread ruin

> and destruction that would follow the practical establishment of their dogma and purpose of negro emancipation. Their procedure says louder than words could do, "Perish the wealth and all production of the Southern States, with all that refines, improves, and dignifies mankind within their bounds; perish there, the white race, men, women, and babes, by massacre, so that the negro slaves shall be freed! Perish even the Northern manufactures, commerce, and wealth, if dependent on the products of Southern slavery--and perish the industry, the comforts, the civilization, the morals, religion of the slaves, and even the slaves themselves, if to be necessarily caused by their receiving the gift of freedom!" 33

Ruffin could not escape from the haunting vision of the Haitian Revolution. The emancipation of Southern slaves, Ruffin feared, would reenact the bloody drama of St. Domingo. Wholesale slaughter and economic desolation would be the inevitable aftermath of abolition. The Caribbean scenario, however, was a poor model for the South. The resistance of Caribbean slaveholders to emancipation, the high proportions of blacks condensed into relatively small regions, the prevalence of African-born slaves, the cruelty of West Indian slavery--these factors seem to have eluded the thoughtful Ruffin. The Haitian experience was not reenacted in all of the Caribbean. In the British West Indies, the abolition of slavery occurred relatively nonviolently. Ironically, the same Ruffin who lambasted the abolitionists for not learning the historical lesson from the British West Indies that economic ruin inevitably followed emancipation failed to learn from the same event that abolition did not necessarily entail bloodshed. The particular features of slavery and abolition in St. Domingo would have to be transplanted to the South to make Ruffin's

dire forebodings plausible. Now obviously if Southern slaveholders like Ruffin chose to resist forcibly an emancipation statute enacted by the dominant North, then racial violence and economic decline would ensue. The Southern warning that abolition would engender racial carnage and economic collapse would thus amount to a self-fulfilling prophecy. But proslavery propagandists and fire-eating agitators like Ruffin contended that the dynamics of liberation itself would precipitate racial conflagration: freed from the civilizing shackles of bondage, the black would revert to an untamed savage; whites would have to resort to violence to protect themselves from annihilation. Ruffin, unfortunately, did not explain how the gentle Sambo could suddenly metamorphose into a violent Toussaint. Ruffin may have feared that competition over diminishing material resources would erupt into racial warfare. Still, how the naturally slothful black, who shirked labor to the point of starvation, and the naturally timid black, who instinctively shrunk from any hazardous enterprise, could become a genocidal warrior in a region where he was substantially outnumbered was a recondite matter, whose solution Ruffin did not vouchsafe. The abolitionists, evidently, had no monopoly on irrationality--or hyperbole.[34]

To Ruffin, the abolitionist was a consummate hypocrite. In addition to the blatant failure of West Indian emancipation, which even shortsighted abolitionists must

have perceived, Ruffin argued that the abolitionists' selective response to instances of oppression revealed their utter hypocrisy. As Southern slavery was no worse than other institutions about which the abolitionists were conspicuously silent, neither British nor Northern antislavery could be sincerely humanitarian. British abolitionism was a particular target for Ruffin's assaults. Until recently, Ruffin reminded his reader, Britain had herself been a leading slaveholding and slave-trading empire. Her Jamaican slavery had been notorious in cruelty and high slave mortality. While Britain had abolished hereditary, domestic bondage within her domain, she had lately surreptitiously revived slavery under the "coolie" system of Chinese forced labor and the "apprenticeship" system for Africans captured aboard outlawed slavers. The time limitations on these forms of slavery exacerbated rather than ameliorated slave conditions since masters lacked the incentive of hereditary property to ensure slave welfare. Moreover, Britain's subjection of India and Ireland were ongoing forms of slavery. Finally, British free laborers were enslaved; free labor was a misnomer, a verbal veneer for pauper slavery. Tacit condoners, if not actual perpetrators, of malign forms of slavery, British abolitionists had the shameless effrontery to condemn the benign form of Southern slavery.[35]

Ruffin was hardly alone among proslavery writers in his outrage. Many champions of slavery sought to discredit

their detractors. The burning indignation slaveholders felt at being vilified as heinous sinners and repulsive monsters by self-righteous paragons and self-styled saints fuelled their tirades against their insolent revilers. Granted, such charges were overstated. The typical abolitionist was neither a conscious hypocrite nor an oppressive capitalist as Ruffin insinuated. Yet the allegations were not entirely without substance. The abolitionists, especially in England, were relatively indifferent about the plight of the proletariat.[36] True, the culpable conduct and peccable character of one's critics were poor rationalizations for one's own sins. Yet, in Ruffin's mind, the choices of social organization were limited; even the mildest alternative would involve some amount of evil.

Indeed, the actual theme of the "positive good" school was not that slavery was an absolute good or an ideal institution but that slavery was relatively less onerous and more beneficial than other basic forms of social organization. Slavery, Ruffin argued, was no more oppressive than the concentration of economic or political power in the hands of a privileged minority. Exploitation and hierarchy were omnipresent features of social arrangement; universal perfection and equality were utopian fantasies. The duty of a slave to obey his master was, in principle, no different than the deference of a citizen to his government, the respect the propertyless had for laws protecting wealth. "The end obtained by each of these

several violations of natural and equal rights, or claims, is the same--the general and great benefit of the whole community, and of all mankind--even including (and especially as to personal slavery) the class least favored in the distribution of rights and property." In Ruffin's estimation, the utilitarian calculus subordinated individual rights and liberties to the overall benefits accruing to a society. Slavery, presumably, promoted the greatest amount of good for the greatest number of people.[37]

For Ruffin, the social utilities provided by Southern slavery were primarily the promotion of cultural values among the slaveholding class, the guarantee of subsistence for the enslaved class, and the allowance of political privileges to the intermediate class of nonslaveholding whites. Slavery freed the master class from the monotonous grind of physical toil and enabled it to pursue cultural pleasures. Southern women, in particular, were liberated by slavery from domestic drudgery and elevated to a dignified mental and moral plateau. Generally, slavery chastened the manners, developed the minds, and purified the morals of the slaveholding class. Although such values were compatible with the theoretical ideals of some bourgeois ideologues, their expression by Southern proslavery theoreticians was rooted in Southern gentility. Ruffin articulated the slaveholding intellectual's version of Southern honor: enslavement mired the slave in debasing physical drudgery, slaveholding uplifted the master to lofty intellectual

spheres. But, Ruffin added, Southern slaves fared much better than their free labor counterparts elsewhere. Solicitous masters ensured slave welfare during all stages of the life cycle, regardless of the state of the economy. Finally, Ruffin noted, slavery was a conservative political force which made republicanism possible. The exclusion of the "worst and most degraded half of its male population" from politics enabled the ruling class to grant political privileges to the white nonslaveholding class. Without the countervailing influence of black slavery, ambitious demagogues could exploit the economic hunger of the downtrodden white masses and commit legal plunder.[38]

Nevertheless, Ruffin conceded that slavery was less blissful in practice than in theory. The very leisure which accorded the slaveholders the opportunity to obtain cultural refinement also promoted self-indulgence, idleness, extravagance, and related vices. Furthermore, Ruffin admitted that some masters were cruel to their slaves. He responded to abolitionist allegations of cruelty not by denial but by rationalization. Slavery, Ruffin contended, like other social institutions, had to be assessed by general tendencies, not exceptional instances. Surely, nobody would argue that occasional child abuse justified the abolition of the family. In the case of slavery, the master's economic investment in and personal relationship with his slave laborers tempered abuse and cruelty. The overworking or underfeeding of slaves violated the master's

economic interest. And long periods of "intimate association" between slave and master bred such feelings of affection that more slaveholders were guilty of overindulgence than maltreatment. Indeed, Ruffin claimed that many a slaveholder had ruined himself economically and his slaves morally by excessive leniency. Although Ruffin used West Indian slavery to illustrate the dreadful results of emancipation, he dismissed the well-known hardships of Caribbean slavery as "accidental": the slave trade surplus, the prevalence of crude African imports, and the absenteeism of planters conduced to harsh treatment. But on the whole, slavery was a relatively beneficent form of socioeconomic organization, less oppressive and less exploitative than alternative forms. Notwithstanding the intentions of proslavery enthusiasts to justify slavery "in the abstract" as a veritable "blessing" and their designation of slavery as a "positive good," the defense of slavery propounded by Ruffin--as well as by most of his contemporary proslavery propagandists--may be just as aptly termed the "lesser evil" ideology.[39]

In the minds of paternalistic slaveholders like Ruffin, the existence of abuses did not warrant the eradication but the reform of the institution. Ruffin occasionally denounced slaveholders' cruelties in his diary. The chaste Virginian, for example, branded licentious slaveholders, who preyed upon their female slaves, "criminals," who should not be tolerated by the public opinion of the South. The

reputed virtue of the Southern white woman, which Ruffin had ascribed to slavery, had presumably not occurred at the expense of the female slave. At any rate, Ruffin felt that the despicable conduct of a minority of slaveowners made the South vulnerable to abolitionist criticism like Uncle Tom's Cabin. At times, Ruffin welcomed the exposure of such gratuitous cruelties as practiced by Wade Hampton of South Carolina. But Ruffin never launched a public crusade to reform Southern slavery; his condemnation of abuses was generally confined to his diary. An open campaign to reform Southern slavery would--at least temporarily--draw attention to those very abuses conscientious paternalists sought to eliminate; Ruffin was loath to furnish more grist for the abolitionist mills.[40]

More importantly, Ruffin's racism led him to rationalize slaveholders' outrages. Blacks, Ruffin thought, were much less sensitive to physical and psychological pain than whites. Indeed, measured by the delicate sensibilities of the white race, blacks were relatively insensate. Thus Ruffin deemed the miseries of slavery for the brutish blacks trivial compared to the miseries of British impressment for the sensitive whites. In some instances, blacks seemed almost devoid of human, or even animal, feeling. For instance, Ruffin believed that the Negro had weak family ties. African fathers would willingly sell their wives and children into slavery for a price. Likewise, black slave parents appropriated the bulk of food rations for themselves

and allotted meager amounts to their own children. Given his perception of the callous domestic attachments of blacks, the separation of slave families must have appeared to Ruffin as a venial offense. Baneful racial speculations sapped the benevolent impulses of the patriarch and lessened the urgency of reform.[41]

If Ruffin viewed blacks with a consistent and intransigent prejudice tempered by a patriarchal ethos, his attitude towards lower class whites ranged from smug indifference through haughty condescension to keen distrust. Though the distinction between races was most blatant, Ruffin sharply divided the white patrician from the white plebian in a hierarchic social order. The gentleman, for example, could endure hardship and privation with greater facility than the commoner, despite the former's habituation to affluence and comfort.[42] The distance separating the gentleman Ruffin from the white Southern masses was not mitigated by a sense of stewardship or noblesse oblige. Slavery accorded lower class whites few tangible benefits. The supposed cultural refinement slavery bestowed upon the white race was confined to substantial slaveholders. Urban artisans, nonslaveholding farmers, and even small slaveholders engaged in the very manual labor and domestic drudgery from which the aristocrat recoiled. The cultivation of their soils left most Southern farmers little time to cultivate their minds.

For someone who sought to raise the prestige of the

intellectual in the antebellum South, Ruffin was strangely unconcerned about public education in the South. The diffusion of literacy would only have elevated popular appreciation of the intellect. But Ruffin seemed anxious to keep education confined to the respectability. Ruffin may have believed that public enlightenment was incompatible with the hegemony of the slaveholding aristocracy. Or else, he simply opposed paying taxes to subsidize popular education. He denounced Henry A. Wise, a prominent spokesman for comprehensive popular education in Virginia, as an ambitious demagogue. Delibertely eschewing the compilation of data, Ruffin pronounced the common school system of the North a failure. The shameful illiteracy of the Southern white masses did not deter Ruffin from arguing the educational supremacy of slave institutions. The "social communication" of slavery, Ruffin cavalierly asserted, was a superior mode of educating children to the New England common school system. The pervasive ignorance of the poor whites of the South did not strike Ruffin as a refutation of his argument; for the elitist Ruffin, the masses simply did not count.[43]

Ruffin echoed the popular proslavery contention that slavery promoted political gains for the white masses: the conservative force of slavery made widespread, if not universal, suffrage possible for the South. But the ascription of democratization to slavery is a dubious proposition; it is just as arguable that slavery retarded

political egalitarianism. It was no accident that the Southeastern slave states Virginia and South Carolina were the most reluctanct to extend the number of elective offices and eligible voters and to grant representational parity to the upcountry. Notwithstanding their rhetorical obesiance to republicanism, many patricians of the Eastern seaboard opposed the democratizing trend of the nineteenth century. Ruffin himself sought to circumscribe the voting privileges he condescended to the masses as narrowly as possible. The enfranchisment of all adult white males and the convention system of nominating political candidates were particular targets of Ruffin's displeasure.[44]

The aristocratic Ruffin tried to rationalize his conservatism by classical republican ideology. Universal suffrage, he argued, was actually inimical to the essence of democracy. The majority of citizens consisted of ignorant, depraved, and impoverished individuals; they lacked the knowledge, virtue, and social interest requisite for republican citizenry. Whereas the landed aristocracy had a stake in society and could act for the benefit of the community, the masses voted in accordance with their narrow interests and irrational passions. Aristocratic slaveholders, for Ruffin, were the peculiar custodians of political intelligence and virtue, the only qualified rulers of Southern society. Moreover, the unwieldy expanse of universal enfranchisement, along with the creation of large electoral districts, fostered the development of the caucas

or convention to organize and direct the amorphous mass of voters. Ambitious and unscrupulous demagogues availed themselves of these instrumentalities to manipulate the electorate and obtain political power. Thus universal suffrage and the convention machinery operated to vitiate the power of the people.[45]

Ruffin's real concern, however, was not the erosion of popular sovereignty but the preservation of the slaveholding gentry. A government dominated by the propertyless masses would become a majority tyranny, imposing heavy taxes upon the wealthy classes and extravagantly disbursing public revenue. Ruffin's impulses were those of a landed aristocrat who espoused political conservatism to retain his economic prerogatives. As slavery was the basis of the Southern patrician's wealth, Ruffin sought to protect slavery from the political assault by nonslaveholders ideally by freeholder suffrage--or practically by taxpayer suffrage and mixed basis representation. Like many aristocrats, Ruffin was willing to tolerate democratic processes as long as his pecuniary privileges were not jeopardized. As his opposition to public education indicates, his desire to maintain the supremacy of the plantation aristocracy exceeded his commitment to republican principles. Lacking Jeffersonian optimism in popular intelligence and virtue, Ruffin concurred with the British conservative Thomas Macauley that universal suffrage would culminate in either mobocracy or autocracy. Unless the

spread of democracy could be contained, the aristocracy, Ruffin feared, would be forced to surrender its liberty to preserve its property.[46]

Proprietary fears were not the only source of Ruffin's antipathy towards democratic institutions. The proud planter resented the incorporation of the common man, his social inferior, into the political structure. Ruffin envisioned a natural coincidence between social and political stratification in an ideal hierarchic order. He viewed political office as a confirmation of social status and a reward for individual merit. With the advent of popular suffrage and the political convention, politics had degenerated into a vehicle for the social advancement of "office-seekers & demagogues." The Jacksonian spoils system of replacing meritorious incumbents with loyal partisans and personal friends was "sufficiently infamous." The enfranchisement of the vile multitude, driven by selfish concerns and base passions, made it necessary for the political aspirant to engage in demeaning electioneering, make compromising bargains, and display charismatic attractions. The consequent elevation of the coarse political careerist to the highest echelons of public honor struck the aristocratic planter, jealously vigilant of his own status, as a degeneration of his own station. More important than its divergence from classical republican postulates, the new democratic political culture collided with the dictates of Southern honor.[47]

In Ruffin's mind, the dishonorable means generally required to win and retain office in a democratic society made the victor unworthy of the conquest. For a politically ambitious slaveholder, such values were a veritable recipe for frustration. Thus in the 1820s, Ruffin had resigned his seat in the Virginia senate; the politics of principle, he found, could not be practiced in the legislative hall of the Old Dominion. In a bid to participate in the 1850-1851 Virginia constitutional convention, Ruffin had adjusted his platform to the public temper. But his grudging endorsement of taxpayer suffrage proved an abortive gesture, hopelessly outdated by the mass demand for universal enfranchisement. Ruffin's continued aversion to active campaigning was of no avail. The success of adroit politicians like Henry A. Wise compounded his political frustrations. Ruffin's allegation that such men were driven by inordinate ambition to sacrifice the common weal for personal advantage was of small consolation.[48]

Ruffin's ineptness and his repugnance for the conventional manipulative politician steered his quest for public acclaim into such channels as the advocacy of Southern rights and the writing of proslavery literature. His principal proslavery pamphlets were penned during times of relative sectional tranquillity after his more radical secession objective had been thwarted. Suspending his mission as savior of the South, Ruffin resigned himself temporarily to the role of steward. Furthermore, some

important aspects of Ruffin's proslavery propaganda such as his defense of the superior economy of slave labor and his assault on African colonization can be viewed as rebukes of prominent Virginian politicos who held contrary positions. Identifying the common weal with strident sectionalism, if not outright secessionism, Ruffin tended to be most suspicious and disparaging of such Unionist politicians as Henry A. Wise and John M. Botts of Virginia. By Ruffin's analysis, Southern political moderation was the epitome of demagoguery: the desire to coax the Northern multitudes to support their presidential pretensions prompted Southern politicos to abandon the rights of their section. Fire-eater ideology became a forceful corroboration of Ruffin's cynicism about democratic institutions and politicians. Majority rule threatened the honor and interests of the slaveholding aristocracy not only by the enfranchisement of the nonslaveholding whites of the South but also by the incorporation of the antislavery whites of the North. The Southern politician who catered to the Northern electorate was not merely a political huckster but a traitor as well.[49]

But Ruffin's strained proslavery rationalizations did not emanate from his desire to celebrate or recover a mythical Southern past of "cohesion, unity, and grace." Whatever nostalgic yearnings Ruffin harbored for an imagined heyday of the plantation aristocracy were not reflected in his proslavery writings. The propagandistic assertion that

slavery reconciled political republicanism with ruling class hegemony--an assertion belied by Ruffin's marked hostility to democratization--cannot be interpreted as a means devised by Southeastern slaveholding patricians to overcome their status declension. Ruffin's political alienation from Jacksonian democracy manifested itself in his conservative political stance rather than in his proslavery expositions. Blaming the corruption of the political realm upon universal suffrage and the convention system, Ruffin believed that a return to the electoral limitations of the 1776 Virginia Constitution could restore the politics of virtue.[50]

The contemporary revulsion towards slavery makes Ruffin's unabashed support of bondage and his acerbic animadversions on abolitionists seem like a bold and militant position. But a careful scrutiny of Ruffin's writings reveals undercurrents of negativism, defensiveness, and pessimism. In part, Ruffin's quest for eminence as a Southern intellectual and patriot discouraged wayward wanderings from the orthodox proslavery pathway. But also the utilitarian and Malthusian philosophies which he used to rationalize slavery, along with the Virginian's Christian heritage and antislavery past, set limits on Ruffin's proslavery extremism. Indeed, slavery, for the "positive good" school, was not an inherent, categorical good but an instrumental good in the context of man's vices. Pleasure was the sole intrinsic value posited by utilitarianism. For Ruffin, Southern slavery was good since it generally

promoted the intellectual pleasure of the master and the physical pleasure of the slave. The doctrine of utility, the greatest amount of happiness for the greatest number of people, was--as its terminology suggests--relativistic by nature. The standard used by Ruffin and his colleagues to justify slavery was actually an unstated corollary of the principle of utility, namely the least amount of pain for a society.

Ruffin viewed life more as a choice among lesser evils than among greater goods. Notwithstanding his rejection of irrational religious dogmas, his detestation of the "hell-flavored doctrines" of Calvinism, and his affirmation of divine benevolence, Ruffin was less imbued with the secular ethos of the Enlightenment, optimistic about the perfectibililty of man, than with the traditional, gloomy Christian portrayal of man as a naturally sinful, vicious, and base creature. Institutions were necessary to control human vileness: government to control man's aggressive drives, marriage to control man's sexual impulses. Slavery, for Ruffin, was necessary to overcome man's natural sloth. Bondage was "good" and progressive in the context of human depravity; it was preferable to perpetual indolence, the permanent fallowness of intellectual and material resources, an unchanging condition of primitive savagery. Similarly, slavery was preferable to the alternate labor system to counteract human sloth. Diligently depicting the miseries of nineteenth-century British capitalism, Ruffin argued that

Southern slavery was more benign. But the argument advanced by utilitarian slavery apologists like Ruffin did not entitle them to conclude that slavery was a good but merely a lesser evil. Surely no proslavery intellectual deemed primitive barbarism or modern capitalism a "good."[51]

Interestingly, though he denominated slavery a "postive and great benefit"[52] when addressing the issue directly, Ruffin, at times, unwittingly acknowledged the evil of slavery in the course of attempting to justify bondage or when discussing tangential themes. For example, when contrasting the condition of the British free laborer to that of the Southern slave, Ruffin declared "Whether negro slavery is considered the greater or the less evil, it is certain that its existence either presents [prevents], or is incompatible with, the presence, in the same community, of class or hireling slavery."[53] A more striking instance of Ruffin's lingering view of slavery as evil occurred during his reflections about his religious iconoclasm. Many proslavery propagandists rationalized Southern slavery as divine punishment for Ham's descendants, without realizing that this rationale conflicted with their basic contention that slavery was a positive good: punishment for sin or impiety was a curse, not a blessing. Ruffin, in his private musings, rejected the myth of Ham as a proslavery buttress not because he perceived its patent repugnancy to the positive good ideology but because he found no biblical evidence that blacks descended from Noah's irreverent son.

More importantly, Ruffin perceived that the tale clashed with his rationalist religious persuasion: "I would utterly reject the belief that the just & merciful God would sanction & consummate the curse of Noah, by which, for an act of unfilial conduct, . . . not the truly guilty son, but his innocent posterity, through all subsequent time, & for perhaps a third of all the human family, were doomed to live in degradation & misery."[54] Thus all his strenuous exertions to establish the beneficence of racial slavery could not prevent this momentary relapse to his earlier, long forsaken, conviction that slavery was, after all, but misery and degradation. But Ruffin was entirely oblivious to the import of his own admission; his inner humanity lay deeply buried beneath thick layers of plantation profits and intellectual rationalization. After his conversion to the proslavery creed, Ruffin seldom suspended his defenses; any subconscious misgivings about the legitimacy of keeping Africans in bondage seem never to have surfaced.

Ruffin's ambivalence over slavery--his apparent, outward militancy but inward hesitancy--is further illustrated by his schzoid attitude towards the enslavement of whites. Ruffin's economic rationale of slavery as required to overcome obdurate human sloth led him to call for the enslavement of indolent individuals, implicitly including whites. The utterly destitute individual, Ruffin believed, could not be induced to labor by positive incentives. Experiencing no artificial wants or despairing

of their gratification, the impecunious man becomes so demoralized that he ceases striving to meet even his natural needs. "All such persons soon learn to regard present and continuous labor as an evil greater than the probable but uncertain future occurrence of extreme privation, or even famine, and consequent death from want." The misguided utilitarianism of these sentient creatures of momentary passions had to be rectified by the sophisticated long-term vision of the proslavery intellectual:

> In all such cases--whether in civilized or in savage society, or whether in regard to individuals, families in successive generations, or to more extended communities--a good and proper remedy for this evil, if it could be applied, would be the enslaving of these reckless, wretched drones and cumberers of the earth and thereby compelling them to habits of labor, and in return satisfying their wants for necessaries, and raising them and their progeny in the scale of humanity, not only physically, but morally and intellectually. 55

Ruffin's cautious recommendation for enslavement of free laborers, implicitly irrespective of race, was not a sweeping call for the enthrallment of all European and Northern workers. Who were these "drones" or voluntary idlers whom Ruffin would enslave? Ruffin could not have been thinking of the British "wage-slaves" or "pauper slaves" for he deemed these overworked. Nor was Ruffin thinking of the typical free laborer in sparsely-settled lands where material comfort could be earned by intermittent labor. In established, civilized communities, Ruffin would enslave individuals "in the lowest grade of free inhabitants." Social dregs and economic parasites, not the industrious factory worker, artisan, or farmer, required

compulsory labor. Ruffin may have favored slavery for the jobless poor of densely-populated countries. Even if unemployment initially stemmed from the excessive supply of labor, rather than from a deficient supply of diligence, joblessness could breed generations of demoralized idlers. Ruffin further declared that slavery would be "most beneficial in young and rude communities, where labor is scarce and dear, and the means for subsistence easy to obtain." Indeed, Ruffin would enslave those who lived off the bountiful vegetation of tropical regions. His primary concern was not saving lives but obliterating idleness and promoting civilization. Although Ruffin presented the condition of the Southern slave as decidedly preferable to the condition of the British proletarian, he did not advocate the general enslavement of the latter class. True, Ruffin did refer to the writings of Fletcher of Salton, a Scottish scholar, who had urged the enslavement of emancipated serfs since they had become beggars, paupers, vagrants, and thieves. But Ruffin's point may have been to show the evils of emancipation, rather than to advocate the enslavement of British free laborers.[56]

If Ruffin's antipathy to idleness and concern for productivity impelled him to advocate slavery for certain cases of free labor, his racial sympathies for the Caucasian impelled him to express strong reservations about the subjugation of whites. More revealing than his hypothetical, abstract suggestion for enslaving indolent

whites was Ruffin's deep revulsion towards Eastern European serfdom. Although he feared that the planned liberation of the Russian serfs by Alexander II would have "awful consequences" due to their ignorance, improvidence, and impoverishment, Ruffin did not oppose their emancipation. Instead, Ruffin hoped that the momentous transition from servitude to freedom would occur gradually and thereby mitigate the dreaded aftermath of emancipation. It was not merely a question of Ruffin's pragmatic resignation to the unalterable resolve of the Russian autocrat or to the inevitable historical trend of free labor displacing bond labor. Ruffin denounced Russian and Eastern European serfdom as a "great outrage on humanity." What Ruffin found so objectionable about serfdom was not the element of labor compulsion or fixed social stratification as such but that the racial composition of the serfs was identical to that of their lords:

> The great evil and iniquity of the condition of serfdom ...consists, not in its being truly slavery, but in the slaves being of the same superior race as their masters, and equally capable of receiving the highest mental improvement. The serfs of Russia and Austria are of the same Caucasian blood as the nobles who own and rule them as masters, and are naturally as high in the scale of humanity as the families of the Russian Czar and the German Kaiser, and, if free, might rise as high in the scale of intellect and moral worth, with the aid of equal mental culture. 57

Ruffin's expression of sympathy for the downtrodden white masses of Europe was partly a polemical posture designed to divert attention from the subjugated black masses of the South and to expose the hypocrisy of

abolitionist philanthropists who fulminated against the oppressions of Southern slavery but remained silent about those of European capitalism and serfdom. But Ruffin's outrage, expressed both publicly and privately, was not entirely for effect. Granted, unlike most proslavery ideologues, Ruffin drew the corollary of his economic defense of slavery by delicately suggesting the enslavement of some slothful whites. But, in the final analysis, even Ruffin exemplified Fitzhugh's observation that Southern proslavery thinkers failed to carry their premise about the positive value of domestic slavery to its logical conclusion. A consistent, thoroughgoing paternalism would have dictated the immediate, wholesale enslavement of the wretched British proletariat and, at least, the eventual enslavement of Northern free labor as well. In spite of his considerable efforts to vindicate slavery in the abstract as an economically adavantageous, morally appropriate, historically sanctioned, and divinely annointed institution, Ruffin was ultimately unable to separate slavery from race.[58]

If utilitarianism enabled Ruffin to repudiate the natural rights ideology, including the inalienable right to liberty, by raising the banner of community welfare above the individual pursuit of happiness, then Malthusianism enabled Ruffin to depict slavery as more conducive than free labor to the common good by positing the tendency of population growth to impinge on the means of subsistence and depress the wages of the free laborer. But Malthusianism

was as much of a trap as utilitarianism. While utilitarianism made slavery an instrumental and relative value at best, Malthusianism made the future of slavery inauspicious. With the continuing expansion of population, hiring a free laborer would eventually become cheaper than maintaining a slave. Worse still, the cost of slave upkeep would exceed the income from slave labor. Population density would thus render slavery unprofitable. The peculiar institution would stand in danger of economic strangulation.[59]

Unlike other proslavery proponents of Malthusianism, Ruffin did not shrink from drawing the uncomfortable corollary about the terminal nature of slavery--at least hypothetically and abstractly. Ruffin did hope for the permanence of Southern slavery not only because of the alleged immutability of black inferiority but also because of the undesirability of "wage-slavery." Ruffin declared that the existence of slavery in the South was a shield against the penetration of the free labor system therein: "If negro slavery does not actually operate to exclude or long postpone, the entrance of the more wretched and cruel slavery to hunger and misery, the former must necessarily end, before the latter kind can begin to prevail."[60] Further, Ruffin did suggest that geographic expansionism could forestall the Malthusian specter of redundant populousness by diffusing the increasing supply of laborers over a large territory: "This abolition of slavery is indeed likely to

occur in every country in the progress of society, and where the increasing population has no sufficient and advantageous outlet."[61] Only the territorial outlet could retard historical "progress," the inexorable Malthusian trend of population growth. Thus the West, for Ruffin, served as a safety-valve for both sections of the United States: it prevented the pauperization of the Northern wage-earner and the displacement of Southern slavery by the capitalist ogre.

But Ruffin insisted that the territorial outlet draining surplus Northern labor and maintaining the relatively high wages of the Northern worker would eventually be filled: the Northern free laborer would be reduced to the status of his European counterpart. Though Ruffin generally limited his admonition about the temporary nature of the expansionist escape-hatch to Northern free labor, he realized that the same held true for Southern slave labor: "As long as there is an outlet for the excess of population, as now in this country, African slavery may continue to exist, & all the evils of the corruption of "free labor" be avoided. But without such outlet, the change, however long postponed, must come in the end."[62] The "change" from slave to free labor was inevitable according to Malthusian suppositions. The transition could be delayed; it could not be stopped. When free labor became cheaper than slave labor, employers of slave labor would sell their slaves to the remaining sparsely-settled slaveholding regions or emancipate them: "Whenever want and

competition shall reduce the wages of free labor below the cost of slave labor, then it will be more profitable for the slaveowner and employer to hire free labor (both cheapened and driven by hunger and misery) than to maintain slaves, and compel their labor less effectually and at greater expense. Under such conditions, slaves (if they could not be sold and removed to some other country where needed) would be readily emancipated by masters to whom they had become burdensome." [63]

Ruffin did not exclude the South from this generalization. Presumably, the dreadful horrors that Ruffin imagined as the aftermath of the abolition of slavery by political measures would not transpire if slavery were extinguished by the operations of the marketplace. Nor would the much heralded benevolence of the Southern slaveholder interfere with his economic interests. The master was, after all, an economic animal. Slavery had originated when bond labor was cheaper than free labor and would terminate when the converse occurred. Whatever benevolent impulses were generated by the paternalistic nature of the master/slave relationship would be superseded by the extrinsic conditions of the marketplace. Here was Ruffin's unintended confession: when slaves became a financial burden to their owners, they would be released from the security of bondage with the same facility, if not the alacrity, that capitalist employers discharged their free laborers.

His perception that population density would erode slavery did not reconcile him to the ultimate extinction of Southern slavery. Although his proslavery argument tended to equate the ethical with the actual, the divinely ordained with the historically prevalent, Ruffin himself showed no disposition to welcome the anticipated demise of slavery as a mark of historical progress or providential design. He remained a "perpetualist" in the sense of desiring and advocating the permanence of racial slavery in the South. In fact, subterranean Malthusian forebodings about the temporal fragility of Southern slavery may have intensified his exertions to preserve the institution for as long as possible. The envisioned termination of slavery would not occur for at least several generations. In the interim, Ruffin, for one, would combat those forces seeking to accelerate the inevitable downfall of slavery. In particular, Northern freesoilism alarmed the proslavery Malthusian since it threatened to remove the geographic vent for the demographic overflow of slaves. The confinement of slavery to the South proper would promote a surplus labor supply which would induce slaveholders to convert to free labor. True, the destruction of freesoilism would not have gained the South unlimited territorial accretions. But Ruffin may have reasoned that the South had to surmount the immediate danger posed by the abolitionists before she could devise a strategy to offset the anticipated long-term population growth. Ruffin's response to freesoilism in the

context of his Malthusian suppositions may thus be understood as rational.

But Ruffin seemed at least as much concerned about the means by which slavery would perish as about the duration of slavery's existence. The inexorable and impersonal operations of nature were perhaps easier to intellectualize than the arrogant boasts of a William H. Seward (e.g., the territorial battle has been fought and won by the North) and the insulting taunts of a Joshua R. Giddings (e.g., the South cannot be kicked out of the Union).[64] The deliberate eradication of slavery by Northern abolitionists, driven by religious fanaticism, political ambition, and rabid hatred may have seemed more intolerable to Ruffin than the inevitable withering away of slavery by natural causes in the distant future or, for that matter, the sanguinary destruction of slavery by abolition armies vanquishing a valiant Southern resistance. Submission to the decree of fate, whose impact would not be felt for many years, was less humiliating than submission to the decree of abolitionist rulers--providing Northern spokesmen, such as Stephen A. Douglas, refrained from reminding Southerners about the ultimate destiny of the peculiar institution. Natural death was bearable, but not willful murder.

But it is also possible that Ruffin found the decree of nature as unacceptable as the design of the abolitionists. For the Malthusian disciple, impersonal and ineluctable historical trends would doom slavery. But the

proslavery enthusiast acted as if Southern slavery would be perpetual--if not for the nefarious machinations of the Northern abolitionists. Significantly, Ruffin tended to express the dire implications of Malthusianism in general terms; he refrained from specifically pronouncing the doom of African slavery in the South. His allusions to the transitory nature of Southern slavery were elliptical. Ruffin's suppressed fears about the ultimate demise of Southern slavery by population density may have exploded in virulent anti-abolitionism. By focussing upon the external antislavery menace which could be surmounted by a secessionist revolution, Ruffin could harbor the illusion of the permanence of Southern slavery and displace his animosity from the impersonal forces of nature to the living, flesh-and-blood abolitionist. Unlike the absence of unlimited territorial space or the seemingly unalterable natural rate of reproduction, the abolitionist was a human foe who could be vanquished as well as a personal target upon whom Ruffin could vent his frustrations. Thus whether his Malthusian forebodings slightly disturbed or deeply troubled Edmund Ruffin, they directed his rage against the Northern abolitionist.

* * * * *

Even though Ruffin's quest for sectional independence was propelled primarily by the desire to preserve the life of slavery and vindicate Southern honor, a tincture of inchoate Southern nationalism, accentuating the differences

between the sections, colored Ruffin's secessionist commitment. True, unlike certain proslavery essayists such as William Gilmore Simms, Ruffin did not indulge in romantic speculations about the divergent ethnic origins of sectional inhabitants. The superior "Cavalier" pedigree of the Southerner versus the inferior "Roundhead" ancestry of the Northerner was a theme absent from Ruffin's writings. Nor did Ruffin denominate the South a "nation." Nevertheless, Ruffin believed that slavery, along with plentiful natural resources, had made the South a distinct and superior civilization. Environment rather than genealogy was responsible for Southern uniqueness.[65]

Ruffin espoused a sort of geo-economic determinism, whereby the nature of the soil and the economic system determined the character of the people. As the South was richly endowed with agricultural resources, Southerners had settled extensive tracts of land to make optimal use of their slave laborers. The operations of their sizable estates required slaveholders to cultivate their minds. Slave labor and plantation profits, in turn, accorded the master leisure time for cultural and intellectual pursuits. Additionally, successful plantation management put a premium on attending to major objects and neglecting petty details. The character of the slaveholding planter would be generous, hospitable, and high-minded. In a way, Ruffin's earlier rhapsodic sentimentalization of agriculture had become transmuted into a paean to slave agriculture.[66]

By contrast, the relatively unproductive soil and free labor system in the North gave rise to the small family farm. To avoid the high costs of labor, Northern farmers had their families participate in crop tillage and livestock raising. The relative sterility of the Northern soil encouraged the investment of human energies in intensive agriculture and the development of frugal habits to attain a level of subsistence or comfort. Farmers would have little, if any, time for cultural refinement or intellectual achievement. The character of individuals formed by such an environment would be materialistic and parsimonious, their manners would be crude, their minds barren.[67]

Ruffin conceded that the North had a modicum of education and culture; but he attributed it to fortuitous circumstances. The long and inclement New England winters, precluding outdoor activity, enabled the young to acquire a rudimentary education. The virgin nature of the Northern soil and the industriousness of the early Puritan settlers had made Northern agriculture profitable. Moreover, the North was not a good model for a free labor agricultural society for Northerners had originally used slave laborers. But in time, Ruffin warned, population growth--that ineluctable Malthusian albatross--would ruin the lingering amenities of Northern husbandry. Northern farmers would have to divide their property among their descendants. The drudgery of farm work and the related coarseness of manner would engulf entire families. The Northern farmer, in a

word, would become peasantized. Culture would be confined to the urban residents as cities alone would have the facilities for scientific and literary advancement. The rural North would become--nay, was becoming--culturally stagnant and morally decadent. Thus Ruffin imputed to free labor agriculture the moral degeneration he had previously reserved for industrialization.[68]

In spite of his animadversions upon American democracy, the political realm became for Ruffin an index of sectional character. The political prominence Southerners had achieved on the national level reflected the superiority of Southern civilization. Scarcely any rural representative of the North, Ruffin claimed, had made a mark as a statesman of rank. Only Northern urban representatives had shown noteworthy ability. By sharp contrast, many distinguished Southerners, residing in the countryside, had served in the nation's political councils since the early days of the republic. From the era of the Virginia dynasty of George Washington and Thomas Jefferson to the renowned Southern rights champions John C. Calhoun and Langdon Cheves, the most influential Southern leaders have been rural slaveholders. Indeed, Southerners have dominated the highest political echelons of the land, including the presidency, the Supreme Court, the foreign ministry, and the Attorney-Generalship. Lest his statement be misconstrued as an endorsement of the "Slave Power" allegation of antislavery Northern politicians, Ruffin hastened to add

that Southern political supremacy was confined largely to matters of "general policy" where superior intellect reigned; it did not extend to domestic sectional and financial issues, which the North controlled by virtue of her numerical preponderance.[69]

Furthermore, Ruffin claimed, Southern representatives were not only more sagacious than Northern ones but more virtuous as well. Whereas Northern politicians were driven by narrow self-interest, Southern statesmen considered the good of the whole nation. Universal suffrage and the convention system, Northern perversions of classical republicanism, had conduced to the rise of unprincipled demagogues and subverted the common weal. Presumably, the tasks of ministering to slave welfare and managing a large plantation had trained the slaveholder to be solicitous about the common weal and govern the entire country. Ruffin also contended that while the majority of Northern public men was corrupt, most Southern representatives were morally upright and honorable. Ruffin considered the Republicans as particularly corrupt: he deemed John C. Frémont a liar and a swindler; and he rejoiced when four antislavery representatives were expelled from Congress in 1857 for taking bribes. Indeed, Ruffin regarded antislavery itself as a form of corruption, akin to drunkenness and wife-beating.[70] And his portrayal of the political abolitionists as consumed by overweening ambition to espouse policies which they realized were inimical not only to the

nation but even to their section was the very antithesis of republican statesmanship. Thus the Southern slaveholder, in effect, became the repository of pristine republican virtue, the ideal statesman of impeccable personal integrity whose behavior was dictated solely by his conception of the common good. The class prejudice through which the haughty patrician viewed the lowly plebians was thus transplanted onto the sectional landscape: the South was the embodiment of aristocratic virtue, intelligence, and high-mindedness, the North the incarnation of vice, ignorance, selfishness, and pettiness. The South was to be measured by its highest specimens; the plantation aristocracy was "the South." The nonslaveholding masses were simply forgotten.

Ruffin had also forgotten his experience in the Virginia legislature, where he had been alienated by the sight of his peers' catering to the interests of their local constituents to the detriment of the larger public welfare. In fact, Ruffin found many instances of corruption among Southern officeholders throughout the antebellum period. For example, he characterized Virginia Governor John B. Floyd as a "private scoundrel" and Sam Houston as "a low black-guard & common drunkard." And Ruffin, ironically, never ceased berating Southern politicians for subordinating Southern rights to their inordinate presidential ambitions. Ruffin's deep-seated revulsion to the Southern politician as an opportunistic huckster and a treacherous knave was momentarily quelled by his rhapsodic outburst of proslavery

ardor and sectional fervor. But Ruffin also connected his perception of the divergent sectional political cultures to secession. At one point, after noting the pervasive corruption which enveloped Northern politicians, Ruffin declared that if the Northern people were as corrupt as their representatives, then secession was justified on this ground alone. Classical republican ideology may have played a role, albeit subsidiary, in Ruffin's secession quest.[71]

Granted, Ruffin repudiated the natural rights ideology of the American Revolution and the democratization of Jacksonian America. He unequivocally denied equality as a natural right or condition; and he opposed the political enfranchisement of the masses. But while he denied liberty as an inalienable right of mankind, he treasured liberty as a precious Anglo-Saxon privilege and legacy. The Founding Fathers, Ruffin explained, had overzealously and needlessly extended the legitimate rights of the British colonists to the universal rights of man. Likewise, the North had inordinately extended suffrage to all adult males, including the poor and the immigrant. Ruffin thus did not assail republicanism as such but only its universalist perversions: pristine republicanism, in Ruffin's mind, was best maintained by restricting its privileges to Anglo-Saxon landowners. True, Ruffin seldom explicitly discussed political republicanism, much less connected it with disunion. But he was imbued with such republican concepts as virtue and the common weal. And he portrayed Southern

slaveholders as the ideal guardians of the republican inheritance.[72]

Nevertheless, Ruffin was far more distressed by the threat that antislavery oppressions posed to his honor and interests than by their violation of abstract ideals. What upset Ruffin most about the political realm was his own exclusion. His own political failure may have indirectly spurred his petulant sectionalism and evolving secessionism. Since Ruffin deemed catering to the passions of the multitude the trademark of demagoguery, his espousal of the unpopular cause of disunion could vindicate his credentials to statesmanship. Moreover, by blaming the North for subverting the classical aristocratic republic by such corrupting innovations as universal suffrage and factious sectionalism, Ruffin could nurture the illusion that secession could restore the mythical lost Southern past--the politics of virtue. The portrayal of secession as political amputation to preserve the pristine republic from contamination by Northern corruption would enable the ambitious Southern politician, whose presidential aspirations were stymied by the perennial Northern majority, to withdraw from the Union with more than a good conscience: republican ideology would enable the Southern politician to make a political virtue out of a political necessity. Thus republicanism played a modest role in Ruffin's quest for Southern independence: the patrician's anxiousness to display his own statesmanlike qualities conduced to the

adoption of a secessionist position and his nostalgic longing for an aristocratic republic reinforced his secessionist commitment.

While Ruffin did not ascribe the differences between the Northern and Southern character to separate ancestry, his sectional chauvinism showed signs of germinating into Southern nationalism. His flirtation with the idea that secession was necessary to maintain the purity of Southern civilization from contamination by Northern depravity was one indication. Still, cultural differences alone did not imperil the Southern character any more than the presence of free labor in the North endangered Southern slavery. Surely the strong and magnanimous Southern gentleman could tolerate the mere presence of Yankee inferiors in the same political confederation. It was not a question of creating a separate nation merely because Southern political culture was superior. Southerners could not tolerate inferior Yankee politicians in their midst because they themselves had already been infected by the Northern malaise. Furthermore, the South's path to high political honor seemed hopelessly blocked by Northern numbers. And Northern vilification of the Southern slaveholding-politician made brotherhood with the Yankees impossible. Submission to debasement by brazen subordinates was unthinkable for the honorable Southern gentleman. Southern secessionism on the narrowly political plane was thus a defensive reaction to the perceived aggrandizement of Northern political culture.[73]

Ebullient eagerness about unleashing the cultural potentialities of the South was less of an impetus behind Ruffin's pursuit of secession than anxious apprehensiveness about tainting the Southern character by political association with the vile Yankees. Granted, Ruffin lent his approbation to certain measures which some historians view as economic and cultural nationalism. Ruffin, for example, advocated the imposition of license taxes upon Northern merchandise, a scheme which would foster Southern manufacturing. Also, Ruffin, like many Southern intellectuals, lamented the paucity of Southern literature. But for Ruffin, programs to develop the economic and cultural independence of the South were not so much ends-in-themselves as means to promote the political independence of the South. After the South had spurned his disunion nostrum in the late 1850s, Ruffin turned to license taxes primarily to punish Northern antislavery detractors rather than to unleash the industrial potential of the Southern economy. Similarly, in the wake of Harpers Ferry in late 1859, Ruffin hailed the withdrawal of Southern patronage from Northern businesses and the departure of Southern students from Northern colleges not as signal expressions of an incipient Southern nationalism but as harbingers of impending disunion. While Southern nationalists like William Gilmore Simms exalted over every step the South trod towards cultural self-sufficiency and demanded that the South be recognized as a nation even if

she were denied political independence, fire-eaters like Ruffin found sporadic manifestations of Southern cultural autonomy mainly valuable as reflective and promotive of growing sectional animosities, which would culminate in the dissolution of the Union.[74]

The nature and extent of Ruffin's Southern nationalism may be gauged from his attitude towards tropical expansionism. While many Southerners sought to bolster slavery by the annexation of Central American domains such as Nicaragua and Cuba or dreamt of a Confederate Caribbean slave empire,[75] Ruffin's outlook towards tropical expansionism was dictated primarily by the mid nineteenth-century American form of "romantic nationalism," namely Manifest Destiny. Southern imperialists, for example, strongly supported the escapades of the American adventurer William Walker, who had invaded and conquered Nicaragua in 1855. Anxious to cultivate Southern support for his imperial ambitions, Walker had legalized slavery in Nicaragua and invited Southern slaveholders to emigrate thither. Southern expansionists, in turn, hoped to use Nicaragua as a base for the spread of slavery throughout Central America and for the annexation of the entire region by the United States. Walker's inglorious defeat by a coalition of Central American nations and his subsequent arrest by the American naval commodore, Hiram Paulding, turned the "grey-eyed man of destiny" into a heroic figure among Southerners, particularly in the Gulf States.[76]

Edmund Ruffin, with the conservative's sense of legality and order, disliked filibusterism. His aristocratic spleen detested Walker as "a robber & murderer--a land pirate." The filibuster of ordinary lineage and of "vulgar countenance" had received the acclaim which the fire-eater long craved. Yet, rather paradoxically, Ruffin wished Walker success in conquering Central America.[77] His nationalistic impulses superseded his conservative dislike of filibusterism and his personal antipathy to Walker:

> If he, or other freebooters, do not take possession, I think it will be necessary, & also justifiable for the U.S. to seize & hold all Central America & the Isthmus of Panama, opening the routes across to the free passage of the commerce of the world. I would wish this measure delayed, if possible, until the southern United States had seceded, & made a separate political community. But the route across the isthmus of Panama ought to be taken possession of forthwith, as the only means of settling the just claims of this government against New Granada. The conquest of any of these semi-mongrel & semi-barbarous communities by any civilized power, would be a benefit to the conquered, & to the world. 78

The same rationales which Ruffin employed to legitimate Southern slavery were enlisted to legitimate American imperialism: racism and utilitarianism rationalized economic exploitation. The proslavery ideologue considered the Anglo-Saxons a "race."[79] In Ruffin's mind, the superiority of the Anglo-Saxon over all other white ethnic strains was nearly as manifest as the superiority of the Caucasian over the Negro race. The Anglo-Saxon, Ruffin believed, was destined to conquer and extinguish the "worthless" Central American people. Consistent in his chauvinism, Ruffin did

not limit the prerogatives of ethnic supremacy to America alone. Though critical of the violent excesses of British rule in India, Ruffin contended that British sovereignty was preferable to native Indian despotism. Indeed, Ruffin "heartily" endorsed British colonialism everywhere on the globe--everywhere except Latin America, "where our safety or progress would be endangered." The Southern secessionist still clung to the Monroe Doctrine: the Western Hemisphere was reserved for American exploitation.[80]

Significantly, Ruffin used his unexpected and unsought meeting with Walker at a nocturnal gathering in Yancey's Montgomery home in the spring of 1858 not to investigate the sincerity of the freebooter's intention of aiding the South or the viability of slavery in Nicaragua but to inquire about the feasibility of building a canal through Nicaragua, a prospect Ruffin claimed would be "the greatest improvement for transportation in the world."[81] Beneath the veneer of internationalist rhetoric, the ultra fire-eater Ruffin was still concerned with the economic interests of the United States. Realizing the strategic value of the Panama region, Ruffin still harbored ambitions of establishing an American trade empire through the acquisition of the isthmus and the construction of a canal linking the two great oceans. True, in 1859 Ruffin favored the construction of a railroad across Tehauntepec, Mexico instead of a transcontinental route across the United States itself. Though Ruffin contended that the shorter Mexican route was more economical, his

endorsement of the Tehauntepec railroad was consistent with Southwestern economic interests. New Orleans commercial interests had lobbied against the New York-dominated Panama route for years.[82] But in light of Ruffin's longing for a Panamian or a Nicaraguan canal, his support of Tehauntepec may have emanated as much from American nationalism as Southern imperialism.

Ruffin was not only thoroughly imbued with the impulses of Manifest Destiny but he foreshadowed the idiosyncratic variety of American imperialism, namely economic exploitation. Ruffin's powerful racist prejudices recoiled at the incorporation of inferior peoples into the United States. Ironically, the very racism by which Ruffin justified imperial conquests made such conquests undesirable from the standpoint of maintaining the purity of the Anglo-Saxons' blood and culture. Thus Ruffin opposed the annexation of Cuba into the United States as he deemed the island's white inhabitants' tradition of obsequious obedience to Roman Catholicism and European despotism inimical to Anglo-Saxon republicanism. Moreover, he feared the amalgamation of the superior Anglo-Saxons with the inferior Creoles, who, he noted, had Negro and Indian blood in their veins. In the Virginian slaveholder's mind, social equality inexorably bred miscegenation. Ruffin tried to reconcile his contradictory impulses about expansion by supporting the colonialist subjection of patently inferior peoples and the economic penetration of valuable tropical

regions. Whereas political incorporation encouraged physical assimilation, a colonial relationship enabled the conqueror to keep his distance from the conquered and preserve the purity of his stock. The imperial nation could even more easily safeguard its racial integrity by confining itself to economic exploitation. Thus American nationalism and virulent racism, rather than Southern nationalism, were the primary factors which impelled and shaped the contours of Ruffin's expansionism.[83]

Ruffin, of course, could not entirely suppress his fervent Southernism. He hoped that the seizure of Central America could be delayed until after secession. Perhaps Ruffin wanted the gain and glory of tropical conquests to accrue to the future confederation of Southern states. Perhaps Ruffin realized that if the United States conquered any Latin American country, the dominant North would determine the domestic institutions of that region. Sectionalist computations, as much as Southern nationalism, may have underlain Ruffin's hope to defer Manifest Destiny until the formation of a Southern confederacy. True, Ruffin sought the restoration of African slavery throughout Latin America professedly to raise economic output to previous levels. And, at least in the case of Haiti, Ruffin hoped that the Southern confederacy would conquer the island and engineer the transformation. Ruffin may have nurtured dreams of a Caribbean slave empire under Southern confederate hegemony to perpetuate, or at least prolong,

black slavery. But he never explicitly connected his imperial ambitions to his Malthusian fears of the overflow of Southern slaves. And his profound dread of racial intermingling between Anglo-Saxons and Creoles transcended the existence or nonexistence of both Southern slavery and Southern nationhood. Ruffin may have sought the colonial subjugation of Caribbean slave regions for the economic benefit of the Southern confederation. His incipient Southern nationalism was thus rooted in the traditional American nationalism of Manifest Destiny.[84]

Furthermore, Ruffin's quest for a canal through the isthmus, the main expression of his imperial aspirations, overrode any Southern calculations: he wanted the region seized immediately by the United States as a matter of national honor! Even if Northern merchants became the chief beneficiaries, the strategic value of a waterway across the Americas was too tempting a prize to chance to European design. True, at times Ruffin sensed that expansionist adventures could allay sectional hostilities. For example, in 1860 Ruffin realized that war with Mexico could drown the disunionist beacon in a tidal wave of patriotic ardor.[85] Nevertheless, even though Ruffin did not expect America's economic infiltration of the tropics to provoke military conflict with the aggrieved nations, his program could dissolve sectional antagonisms in an outburst of nationalism and consolidate Northern domination of the Union. Indeed, Ruffin himself was hardly insusceptible to nationalistic

blandishments.

In fact, it is arguable that Ruffin's American nationalism impeded his crusade to establish an independent Southern nation. At the 1858 Southern Commercial Convention, for example, Ruffin opposed a series of resolutions which supported Walker's filibustering efforts in Nicaragua and which warned the federal government to desist from violating such Southern rights as "emigration" to Central America. Ruffin's opposition to these popular resolutions stemmed partly from his antipathy to Walker and partly from his scorn of empty threats. But additionally Ruffin avoided making an issue with the North over Caribbean expansion because he hoped that the federal government would spearhead the imperial drive. By contrast, William L. Yancey defiantly supported the filibustering exploits of William Walker in Nicaragua and called for the arrest of Commodore Paulding. The perspicacious Yancey agitated for tropical expansion of slavery as part of his strategy of either elevating the South within the Union or taking her out of the Union. True, South Carolinian fire-eaters such as Barnwell Rhett opposed the agitation of tropical expansionism as they feared that the false hope of obtaining slave domains might distract Southerners from the pursuit of secession. Although their analyses varied, Yancey and Rhett examined tropical expansion primarily from the standpoint of Southern interests and secession.[86]

But neither Ruffin's expansionist ambitions nor his

reservations were based upon secessionist calculations. Whereas the determined Virginian fire-eater experimented with a variety of secesionist weapons with which to pulverize the Union, the idea of employing Southern expansionism as a disunionist instrument seems never to have occurred to him. The twin forces of American nationalism and perverse racism obfuscated his secessionist vision and inhibited speculations about the distinct ethnic origins of Northerners and Southerners. Instead of repudiating his common genealogical ancestry with the despised Yankees, Ruffin not only basked in his Anglo-Saxon heritage but used the presumptions of Anglo-Saxon racial superiority to rationalize American territorial aggrandizement.

Ruffin's immersion in American nationalism in the 1850s and his failure to develop a genealogical Southern nationalism did not, however, stifle his disunionist aspirations any more than his subscription to a cultural Southern nationalism engendered them. There was nothing inherently disunionist about the "positive good" slavery rationalization, the quasi-nationalistic Southern mythology, or the quest for sectional economic or cultural self-sufficiency. The radical proslavery thinker George Fitzhugh, the literary chronicler of Southern Cavalier mythology William Alexander Caruthers, and the prominent Georgian advocate of the license tax scheme Robert Toombs were hardly flaming fire-eaters. Conversely, the secessionist stalwart Edmund Ruffin was not driven to

disunion by his abstract speculations about Southern distinctiveness but by his perception of the supreme hazard Northern antislavery posed to that distinctiveness. Rather than inducing Ruffin to embrace disunionism, the proslavery ideology and the cultural nationalist derivative were manifestations of the very impulses which propelled Ruffin's secessionist mission, namely the desire to safeguard Southern slavery and vindicate Southern honor.

Ruffin had little faith that programs for Southern economic autonomy could be achieved within the Union and quell Northern antislavery. He had less faith that the proslavery ideology could convert the Northern masses saturated with abolition sentiments. But proslavery literature could prevent Southern slaveholders from slipping back into the old "necessary evil" mentality. If the South was powerless to stop the demographic expansion and political aggrandizement of the North, she could thwart the moral gains of abolitionism. In Ruffin's mind, meeting antislavery allegations and aggressions with silence and passivity would indicate the victim's tacit consent. By elaborating the proslavery defense and urging license tax reprisals, Ruffin would at the very least show that he had not submitted. If he could not display the military chivalry of the valiant warrior on the sectional battlefield, he could maintain the moral integrity of the intellectual rebel by ideological resistance. At best, the repeated, tedious, and painstaking plowing of the Southern

soil with the fire-eating persuasion, the proslavery ethos, and programs of strident sectionalism would facilitate the rapid growth of the abolitionist seeds into a luxurious secessionist crop.

Notes

(1) On Brownlow, see E.M. Coulter, W.G. Brownlow: Fighting Parson of the Southern Highlands (Chapel Hill, 1937); On Grayson, see McKitrick, ed., Slavery, 57; On Hammond, see Faust, Hammond. But also see Jon L. Wakelyn, "The Changing Loyalties of James Henry Hammond: A Reconsideration," South Carolina Historical Magazine, LXXV (Jan., 1974), 1-13, which downplays Hammond's Unionism; Thomas R.R. Cobb was a Southern rights Unionist in the 1850s, despite his growing pessimism about the endurance of the Union. Only with the election of Lincoln did Cobb become a full-fledged disunionist. See William B. McCash, Thomas R.R. Cobb: The Making of a Southern Nationalist (Macon, 1983), 133, 139-140, 152-155, 172, 183-185; On Fitzhugh's optimism about the Union, see George Fitzhugh, "Southern Thought," in Ideology, ed. by Faust, 284. For an example of a Southern proslavery propagandist believing in the feasibility of converting Northern opinions about slavery, see William A. Smith, Lectures on the Philosophy and Practice of Slavery, as Exhibited in the Institution of Domestic Slavery in the United States; With Duties of Masters to Slaves (Nashville, 1856; New York, 1969), 24-28.

(2) Edmund Ruffin, The Political Economy of Slavery; The Institution Considered in Regard to its Influence on Public Wealth and the General Welfare (Washington, 1858), 14-15, 23.

(3) Faust, Circle, 155-117, 122-123, 126. Faust views the proslavery crusade as "the vehicle for intellectual self-definition."

(4) Ruffin, Political Economy, 3-6. All these arguments echoed Ruffin's favorite proslavery tract, Dew, Review, 10-38.

(5) Ruffin, Address to Virginia Agricultural Society, 19-20; Dew, Review, 28, William Harper, "Memoir on Slavery," in Ideology, ed. by Faust, 81-82, 89-91; Faust, Circle, 119.

(6) Edmund Ruffin, "Slavery and Free Labor Defined and Compared," Nos. 1 & 2, Charleston Mercury, June 21, 22, 1859; Ruffin, Address to Virginia Agricultural Society, 12, 14; William A. Smith offered an even broader definition of slavery: a slave was "one who was subjected to the will or direction of another." All governments, Smith argued, were founded on the slavery principle. Smith, Lectures, 39, 47-48; Likewise, Harper viewed slavery as forced labor; thus free laborers compelled to work by starvation were "slaves." Harper, "Memoir," in Ideology, ed. by Faust, 112-113; On the prevalence of such definitions and arguments, see Jenkins, Pro-Slavery Thought, 107-117.

(7) Edmund Ruffin, "Slavery and Free Labor Defined and Compared," Nos. 1 & 2, Charleston Mercury, June 21, 22, 1859.

(8) Ruffin, Political Economy, 7; Edmund Ruffin, "Slavery and Free Labor Defined and Compared," No. 1, Charleston Mercury, June 21, 1859. Ruffin claimed that even Northern capitalism divided families since young men and women of the lower and middle classes left their New England homes for job opportunities in the West. Ruffin, Diary, II, Entry for Nov. 21, 1862, 492-493.

(9) Ruffin, Political Economy, 8-9, 20-21. The superior conditions of the Southern slave vis-à-vis European free labor was a staple proslavery theme. See Jenkins, Pro-Slavery Thought, 295-298; George Fitzhugh, "Sociology for the South," in Slavery, ed. by McKitrick, 45-47. Several writers viewed British free labor conditions as virtual slavery. See Harper, "Memoir" and James Henry Hammond, "Letter to an English Abolitionist," in Ideology, ed. by Faust, 93-95, 193-197. Also see Wilfred Carsel, "The Slaveholders' Indictment of Northern Wage Slavery," Journal of Southern History, VI (Nov., 1940), 504-520. Carsel, however, uses proslavery critiques of British capitalism as evidence for their indictment of Northern labor.

(10) Edmund Ruffin, "Slavery and Free Labor Defined and Compared," No. 3, Charleston Mercury, June 24, 1859; Ruffin, Address to Virginia Agricultural Society, 16; Ruffin, Diary, I, Entry for Aug. 10, 1858, 219-220.

(11) Ruffin, Political Economy, 9-10, 21.

(12) Ibid., 9-10.

(13) On labor extraction and sale of slaves, see Kenneth M. Stampp, The Peculiar Institution: Slavery in the Ante-Bellum South (New York, 1956), 75-85, 240-242.

(14) Shore, Capitalists, 20; Harper, "Slavery," & Hammond, "Slavery," in Cotton is King, ed. by Elliott, 566-569, 586, 601-607, 646-648; Dew, Review, 125-126; Thomas R.R. Cobb, An Inquiry into the Laws of Negro Slavery in the United States of America to which is prefixed, An Historical Sketch of Slavery (Philadelphia, 1858), cci-ccii; George Fitzhugh, " Southern Thought Again," in Ideology, ed. by Faust, 298-299.

(15) Ruffin, Address to Virginia Agricultural Society, 6, 12-13.

(16) Edmund Ruffin, "Consequences of Abolition Agitation," No. V, DBR, XXIII (Dec., 1857), 598.

(17) Ruffin, Political Economy, 4. In his diary, Ruffin not only claimed that slave labor was cheaper than free labor but that fear was a more powerful inducement to labor than self-interest. Ruffin, Diary, I, Entry for Feb. 23, 1859, 287-289.

(18) Although Southern rights proponents based their argument on the legitimacy of the territorial extension of slavery and the illegitimacy of federal exclusion or abolition on the fact that slaves were property, movable chattels, proslavery ideologues cautiously refrained from acknowledging this fact when they defended slavery philosophically. Most proslavery writers held that the master owned the labor of his slaves but not their persons. Jenkins, Pro-Slavery Thought, 108-110.

Orlando Patterson disputes the common historical conception of slavery as property in persons or disposable capital. Patterson argues that there are proprietary claims in free persons, such as spouses. Also, he points out that many free persons, such as African brides and Chinese concubines, are bought and sold. Patterson defines slavery as "the permanent, violent domination of natally alienated and generally dishonored persons." Patterson, Slavery, 1-32.

Three points are in order. First, one may accept Patterson's view that slavery generally involved the dishonor of natally-alienated people without incorporating this fact into a definition of slavery. Second, the various social institutions of the nineteenth century which Ruffin and his colleagues designated as "slavery" would no more qualify under Patterson's novel definition of slavery than under the traditional one. Third, despite his emphasis on the cruel and coercive aspects of bondage, Patterson recognizes the compatibility between slavery and labor incentives. In fact, he points out that in many slave cultures, manumission was used as a major labor incentive. Patterson, Slavery, 101, 340-341.

(19) Ruffin, Political Economy, 6-7. Like a true disciple of Thomas Malthus, Ruffin saw population control as the only solution for the problems of the indigent class in free society. Ruffin, Diary, I, Entry for July 29, 1860, 444-445.

(20) Ruffin, Political Economy, 21.

(21) MS fragments appended to Ruffin, Political Economy, Edmund Ruffin Papers, SHC. Ruffin offered a similar argument in his diary. Ruffin, Diary, I, Entry for Feb. 23, 1859, 287-288. What may have misled some historians to class Ruffin with those who conceded the general superiority of free labor is that Ruffin continued to echo arguments associated with Southern exceptionalism. For example, Ruffin, in The Political Economy of Slavery (p. 22),

contended that only blacks could labor in the tropics. But Ruffin, here, was trying to justify the restoration of Latin American slavery rather than the retention of Southern slavery. Such arguments should not obscure the fact that Ruffin contended that slavery in general was an economic and moral good.

(22) One school of proslavery theorists used pseudo-scientific ethnological arguments to relegate blacks to a lower species of being. Another school maintained the traditional Christian dogma of the original, equal creation of man by God. Jenkins, Pro-Slavery Thought, 252-275. Although Ruffin believed that the widespread dispersal of mankind from arctic to tropical regions undermined the dogma of the original unity of man, he accepted the arguments of Dr. John Bachman, a famous clergyman and naturalist who resided in Charleston, for the original unity of the human race. Ruffin, Diary, I, Entries for Feb. 1, Mar. 3, 1859, 281-282, 290. But also see Fredrickson, Black Image, 56-94, on the implications of this polygenesis controversy. Fredrickson argues persuasively that the origins issue was secondary to the issue of the permanence of black inferiority--a doctrine to which both sides subscribed.

(23) Edmund Ruffin, "Equality of the Races--Haytien and British Experiments," DBR, XXV (July, 1858), 27-37.

(24) Ibid., 28, 30-31; Ruffin, Political Economy, 10.

(25) Ruffin, "Equality of the Races," 32.

(26) Ibid., 28-29; On the impact of slavery upon black work habits, see Leon F. Litwack, Been in the Storm So Long: Aftermath of Slavery (New York, 1979), 340-346. Litwack points out that Southern blacks displayed their freedom after being emancipated either by economic advancement or by working less arduously than they had under bondage. White slaveholding planters, after all, had expressed their liberty by idleness. The irony of routinely idle slaveholders imputing an innate idleness to the black character seems to have been lost on Ruffin. Also see Foner, Politics and Ideology, 105-111.

(27) Ruffin, "Liberia and the Colonization Society," DBR, XXVII (Sept., 1859), 343-344; Ruffin did note, however, that tropical climates promoted white idleness as well. But Ruffin deemed blacks particularly slothful, so slothful that even impending starvation could not effectively drive them to labor. Ruffin, Diary, I, Entry for Sept. 10, 1857, 102-103, II, Entry for Nov. 14, 1862, 489. On Haiti, see Ruffin, "Equality of the Races," 31-33.

(28) Ruffin, Diary, I, Entry for Feb. 1, 1859, 277;

Ruffin, "Equality of the Races," 31-34.

(29) Ruffin, Diary, I, Entry for July 4, 1857, 86-87.

(30) Edmund Ruffin, "Liberia and the Colonization Society," DBR, XXVII (Oct., 1859), 394-396, 401.

(31) The stereotype of the slave Sambo has been significantly qualified, if not altogether demolished, by recent historical scholarship. See, for example, John W. Blassingame, The Slave Community: Plantation Life in the Antebellum South (New York, 1972), George P. Rawick, From Sundown to Sunup: The Making of the Black Community (Westport, Conn., 1972), and Eugene D. Genovese, Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made (New York, 1972), esp. 587-657; On black overseers and drivers, see Genovese, Roll, 365-388; On Ruffin's employment of Jem Sykes as an overseer, see Ruffin, Diary, II, Entry for May 26, 1862, 317.

(32) Ruffin, Address to Virginia Agricultural Society, 17-18.

(33) Ruffin, "Equality of the Races," 37-38.

(34) Some proslavery ideologues tried to explain their schzoid conception of the black by claiming that slavery temporarily held the naturally savage black in check. Fredrickson, Black Image, 52-55. But Ruffin viewed blacks as naturally docile and timid.

(35) Edmund Ruffin, "Slavery and Free Labor Defined and Compared," No. 2, Charleston Mercury, June 22, 1859; Ruffin, Political Economy, 7; Ruffin, Diary, I, Entry for June 13, 1858, 200; Hammond similarly noted that British abolitionists evaded their responsibility towards free white laborers at home by focussing on black slave laborers abroad. Hammond, "Slavery," in Cotton is King, ed. by Elliott, 657-662.

(36) On the complex relationship between British capitalism and abolitionism, see David Brion Davis, The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Revolution, 1770-1823 (Ithaca, N.Y., 1975), 347-468. On Northern abolitionist attitudes towards labor, see Foner, Politics and Ideology, 62-72, 74-76.

(37) Ruffin, Diary, I, Entry for June 20, 1858, 202-203; Ruffin, Political Economy, 20. The most elaborate utilitarian of the antebellum proslavery theorists was William Harper. See Harper, "Slavery," in Cotton is King, ed. by Elliott, passim, esp. 555, 558-559, 562.

(38) Ruffin, Address to Virginia Agricultural Society, 7-8; Ruffin, Political Economy, 6-9; Edmund Ruffin, "Liberia and the Colonization Society," DBR, XXVI (April, 1859), 418-419.

(39) Edmund Ruffin, "Slavery and Free Labor Defined and Compared," No. 4, Charleston Mercury, June 28, 1859; Ruffin, Address to Virginia Agricultural Society, 6; Ruffin, Political Economy, 20-21. The way in which Ruffin handled the antislavery allegation of slaveholder cruelty was representative of proslavery polemicists. For example, see Robert L. Dabney, A Defence of Virginia, [and through her of the South,] in recent and Pending Contests Against the Sectional Party (N.Y., 1867; New York, 1969), 237-241; Hammond, "Slavery," in Cotton is King, ed. by Elliott, 650; George Frederick Holmes,"Review of Uncle Tom's Cabin," in Slavery, ed. by McKitrick, 104-108. The argument that occasional abuses of slavery were irrelevant to a practical assessment of the institution was not a unique insight of Holmes as his biographer suggests. Holmes was more incisive on this point than most proslavery intellectuals but not atypical. On Holmes, see Neal C. Gillespie, The Collapse of Orthodoxy: The Intellectual Ordeal of George Frederick Holmes (Charlottesville, Va., 1972), 195-196.

(40) Ruffin, Diary, I, Entries for Nov. 7, 1857, June 19, 1858, 120, 202. It has become fashionable to equate the movement to reform slavery with proslavery ideology. Faust, Circle, 121-122; Tise, Proslavery, 120-121; Wyatt-Brown, "Proslavery Intellectuals," in Antislavery, ed. by Perry and Fellman, 330-332; Wyatt-Brown, Saints and Sinners, 164-166. Genovese stresses that the slaveholder movement to reform slavery was designed to consolidate, rather than undermine, bondage. Genovese, World Slaveholders Made, 227-228. But the connection between proslavery ideology and reform has been drawn too tightly. A more plausible approach is taken by Donald G. Mathews, who distinguishes between a "proslavery ideology," which primarily sought to justify slavery, and a "slaveholder ethic," which prescribed proper treatment of slaves. Mathews ascription of guilt to reformers is debatable but his basic distinction between the proslavery creed and the the reform movement is reasonable; though the two overlapped, they were not identical. Mathews, Religion, 173-181.

(41) Ruffin, Diary, I, Entries for June 19, 1858, Jan. 17, 1859, 202, 271; "Private Diary of E.R. State Agricultural Surveyor of South Carolina 1843," Edmund Ruffin Papers, SHC; Ruffin used such racist rationales when he broke up slave families. See Mitchell, Ruffin, 53-54.

(42) Ruffin, Diary, I, Entry for Mar. 1, 1857, 42.

(43) Ibid., Entries for Oct. 30, 1857, April 25, 1858, 118-119, 181; Ruffin, Address to Virginia Agricultural Society, 11.

(44) The conduciveness of slavery to republicanism was a popular proslavery theme, embraced by a wide range of Southrons from the aristocratic leader John Caldwell Calhoun to the spokesman for the common man Albert Gallatin Brown. Jenkins, Pro-Slavery Thought, 173-199, 285-295. Though most proslavery thinkers repudiated the natural rights ideology of the Enlightenment, they concurred that slavery provided the basis for republicanism. But only some slavery defenders favored universal suffrage and the extension of elective offices in practice. On the struggle to achieve a democratic Virginia, see Charles H. Ambler, Sectionalism in Virginia from 1776 to 1861 (Chicago, 1910), 137-170, 255-266. On the political backwardness of South Carolina, see Barnwell, Order, 20-31. On Ruffin's political conservatism, see Edmund Ruffin to Messrs. Benjamin R. Blake, Edward C. Pollard, et al., Aug. 3, 1850, Richmond Whig, Aug. 13, 1850; Ruffin, Diary, I, Entry for Dec. 6, 1858, 253, II, Entries for Nov. 19, 1861, May 14, 1863, 169-170, 652-654.

(45) Ruffin, Diary, II, Entry for May 14, 1863, 654-655; Ruffin's MS Diary, Entry for Jan. 1, 1864, 3,149, LC; Untitled MS Draft of a Speech to South Carolina [circa spring 1861], Edmund Ruffin Papers, SHC.

(46) Ruffin, Diary, I, Entry for May 14, 1860, 420, II, Entries for Nov. 14, 1862, May 14, 1863, 490, 653-656; Edmund Ruffin to Messrs. Benjamin R. Blake, Edward C. Pollard, et al., Aug. 3, 1850, Richmond Whig, Aug. 13, 1850.

(47) Ruffin, Diary, I, Entries for Feb. 21, Nov. 14, 1857, Dec. 6, 1858, 40, 127, 253, II, Entry for May 14, 1863, 653.

(48) Ruffin, Diary, I, Entry for Feb. 23, 1860, 405, II, Entry for Jan. 20, 1863, 544-545; Ruffin, "Incidents of My Life," II, 214, Edmund Ruffin Papers, SHC.

(49) Ruffin, Diary, I, Entry for Feb. 23, 1860, 405; Ruffin was particularly suspicious of Henry A. Wise, a supporter of colonization, who seemed lukewarm about slavery in Virginia. On Wise, see Simpson, Good Southerner, 143-144, & Freehling, Drift, 248; Robert M.T. Hunter, Wise's arch rival in Virginia politics, also took an interest in colonization schemes. Ruffin, however, may not have been aware of Hunter's flirtation with colonization. On Hunter, see the letters from Sir Henry Lytton Bulwer, Oct. 1, Dec. 19, 1850, and John B. Floyd, Nov. 8, 1850 to Robert M.T. Hunter, in "Correspondence of Robert M.T. Hunter, 1826-1876," Annual Report of the American Historical

Association for 1916, II, ed. by Charles H. Ambler (Washington, 1918; New York, 1971), 119-122. So strong was Ruffin's conviction that virtue--which included Southern rights orthodoxy--should be politically rewarded that he overcame his antipathy to democratic institutions to attend an 1859 Democratic county "convention" to nominate his fellow fire-eater's son, Willoughby Newton, Jr., for the Virginia lower house. Ruffin, Diary, I, Entry for Feb. 22, 1859, 284.

(50) David Donald views the proslavery ideology as an attempt by slaveholding patricians afflicted with status declension to recover a pastoral utopia. See Donald, "Proslavery Reconsidered," 3-18. Many Southern planters did indeed celebrate the past, especially the Revolutionary era; but their nostalgia did not generate their proslavery outpourings. But a kind of nostalgia may have played a role in secessionism.

(51) The utilitarian Harper came very close to conceding that slavery was an evil: "The condition of our whole existence is but to struggle with evils--to compare them--to choose between them, and, so far as we can, to mitigate them. To say that there is evil in any institution, is only to say that it is human." Harper, "Slavery," in Cotton is King, ed. by Elliott, 556; For another explicit defense of slavery as a control of human vice, rather than a good per se, see Dabney, Defence of Virginia, 206-208, 240-241; On the Southern church's view, as expounded by James H. Thornwell, Benjamin M. Palmer, and Bishop Stephen Elliott, that slavery was an evil like poverty, illness, and death, resulting from man's sinful state on earth, see Jenkins, Pro-Slavery Thought, 215-218, & Mathews, Religion, 168-170. Perhaps the most explicit religious defense for slavery as an evil was made by a Presbyterian Charleston minister, Thomas Smyth: "Slavery is part of the original curse pronounced on the earth, on man, on woman, and is therefore to be classed among the evils incident to a sinful nature in a sin-polluted world, and a providential remedial agency for accomplishing wise and beneficent results." On Smyth, see E. Brooks Holifield, The Gentlemen Theologians: American Theology in Southern Culture, 1795-1860 (Durham, N.C., 1978), 153. Yet all these proslavery propagandists were part of the "positive good" school.

(52) Edmund Ruffin, "Liberia and the Colonization Society," DBR, XXVI (April, 1859), 420.

(53) Edmund Ruffin, "Slavery and Free Labor Defined and Compared," No. 2, Charleston Mercury, June 22, 1859.

(54) Ruffin, Diary, I, Entry for June 2, 1859, 307-308.

(55) Ruffin, Political Economy, 3.

(56) Ibid., 3, 8.

(57) Ruffin, Diary, I, Entry for Apr. 19, 1858, 176-177. Also see Edmund Ruffin, "Slavery and Free Labor Defined and Compared," No. 2, Charleston Mercury, June 22, 1859.

(58) Fitzhugh, in fact, used the proclaimed superiority of the Caucasian race to argue that whites would make better slaves than blacks! See George Fitzhugh, "Origin of Civilization--What is Property?--Which is the Best Slave Race?" DBR, XXV (Dec., 1858), 661-663. Also see George Fitzhugh, "Southern Thought Again," in Ideology, ed. by Faust, 290. But Fitzhugh also favored the enslavement of Southern free blacks and eventually succumbed to rabid racism. Genovese, World Slaveholders Made, 237-239.

(59) Ruffin, in fact, feared that slaves would propagate more rapidly than free laborers. Fed regularly by their masters and devoid of all moral restraints, slaves had no salutary check on their rate of reproduction. In earlier years, Ruffin had hoped that agricultural reform could keep pace with the growth rate of Southern slaves. But the failure of slaveholders to practice scientific farming and the increasing economic problems of Virginian slavery apparently dashed Ruffin's hopes. See Ruffin, Calcareous Manures, Appendix B: 162-164. On the impact of Malthusiansim on proslavery thinkers, see J.J. Spengler, "Malthusianism and the Debate on Slavery," South Atlantic Quarterly, XXXIV (April, 1835), 170-189.

(60) Edmund Ruffin, "Slavery and Free Labor Defined and Compared," No. 2, Charleston Mercury, June 22, 1859.

(61) Ruffin, Political Economy, 8.

(62) Ruffin, Diary, I, Entry for Aug. 10, 1858, 220.

(63) Ruffin quoted in Spengler, "Malthusianism," 177. Other Malthusian proslavery theorists, such as James D.B. DeBow, tried to avoid the conclusion that population density would inevitably destroy Southern slavery by advocating the diffusion of slaves throughout the economy in manufacturing enterprises to avert a labor surplus. But such a formula assumed that the growth of Southern industrial occupations would keep pace with the increase of blacks and ignored the fact that white populousness could also destroy slavery by making free labor cheaper. In 1858 R.E. Colston tried to overcome these objections by offering a Malthusian solution to sustain Southern slavery. Southern masters, Colston argued, could control the population growth of their slaves

to avert a surplus of blacks. The nature of slavery itself, Colston claimed, checked the reproductive rate of whites: the stigmatization of manual labor as slavish discouraged whites from having more children than they could afford to support without resorting to physical toil. See Spengler, "Malthusianism," 185-186, 188.

(64) Fire-eaters periodically quoted inflammatory Northern statements in order to arouse the docile South. For examples, see "What They Think of Us," Charleston Mercury, Oct. 24, 1855 & "The Future of The South," Eufaula (Alabama) Spirit of the South, in Charleston Mercury, Mar. 3, 1858.

(65) On the genealogical mythology used to buttress Southern claims of distinctiveness and superiority, see Taylor, Cavalier, passim; Baltimore, "Southern Nationalists," 28-30; Osterweis, Romanticism, 134.

(66) Edmund Ruffin, "Slavery and Free Labor Defined and Compared," No. 4, Charleston Mercury, June 28, 1859; Ruffin, Address to Virginia Agricultural Society, 7.

(67) Edmund Ruffin, "Slavery and Free Labor Defined and Compared," No. 4, Charleston Mercury, June 28, 1859. Avery O. Craven singles out Ruffin's analysis of the impact of economic system upon regional character as his original contribution to the proslavery ideology. Craven, Ruffin, 138-140. But other proslavery theorists had similar conceptions. For instance, see George S. Sawyer, Southern Institutes; or An Inquiry into the Origin and Early Prevalence of Slavery and the Slave-Trade: with an Analysis of the Laws, History, and Government of the Institution in the Principal Nations, Ancient and Modern, from the Earliest Ages Down to the Present Time. with Notes and Comments in Defence of the Southern Institution (Philadelphia, 1858; New York, 1969), 375-380. Furthermore, Ruffin held geography at least as important as economics. Interestingly, the leading Alabama fire-eater William L. Yancey espoused a geographic determinism which resembled Ruffin's views. See William L. Yancey's address to the "Gentlemen of Erosophic and Philomatic Societies," William L. Yancey Papers, Department of Alabama Archives, Montgomery, Alabama, and Yancey's 1855 speech in Columbus, Georgia, quoted in DuBose, Yancey, I, 301.

(68) Edmund Ruffin, "Slavery and Free Labor Defined and Compared," No. 4, Charleston Mercury, June 28, 1859; Ruffin, Address to Virginia Agricultural Society, 9-10; Ruffin, Political Economy, 22.

(69) Edmund Ruffin, "Consequences of Abolition Agitation," No. II, DBR, XXIII (Sept., 1857), 267-269; Ruffin, Address to Virginia Agricultural Society, 9-10.

(70) Ruffin, Address to Virginia Agricultural Society, 9-10; Ruffin, Diary, I, Entries for Jan. 14, Feb. 14, 19, May 14, 1857, 24, 33-34, 37-38, 66.

(71) Ruffin, Diary, I, Entries for Jan. 14, Feb. 14, 19, 1857, 24, 33-34, 38.

(72) Edmund Ruffin, "Liberia and the Colonization Society," DBR, XXVI (April, 1859), 416-418.

(73) The republicanism theme, especially the fear of contamination by Northern corruption, is emphasized by Greenberg, Masters, 125-136.

(74) Ruffin, Diary, I, Entries for Aug. 27, Dec. 23, 1859, 335-336, 384-385; Ruffin was also interested in direct trade between Europe and the South. See his diary entries for Feb. 14, 1857, Nov. 2, 1859, 34-35, 352. Likewise, Ruffin's friend Newton supported projects for direct European trade but emphasized that Southern commercial independence would not be achieved until her political independence was forged. "Direct Trade--Letter of Hon. Willoughby Newton," Charleston Mercury, Aug. 11, 1857. On William Gilmore Simms, see Baltimore, "Southern Nationalists," 33. Avery O. Craven implicitly views Southern efforts to attain economic and cultural self-sufficiency (e.g., the promotion of Southern manufactures, railroads, direct European trade, agricultural reform, schools, literature, vacation resorts) as expressions of Southern nationalism. Craven, Southern Nationalism, 252-277.

(75) Southerners supported Caribbean expansionism out of a variety of sectional and secessionist motives. Some like Pierre Soulé felt expansion would enable the South to rule the Union. See C. Stanley Urban, "The Ideology of Southern Imperialism: New Orleans and the Caribbean, 1845-1860," Louisiana Historical Quarterly, XXXIX (Jan., 1956), 69. Others like John Tyler viewed expansion as a way of testing Northern fidelity to the Constitution. See John Tyler, Jr. to John A. Quitman, July 31, 1851, in Basil Rauch, American Interest in Cuba, 1848-1855 (New York, 1948), 158. Still others sought slave state allies for the South, whether she remained in or went out of the Union. See William S. Langley to John A. Quitman, Jan. 13, 1855, in C. Stanley Urban, "The Abortive Quitman Filibustering Expedition to Cuba, 1853-1855," Journal of Mississippi History, XXVIII (July, 1956), 181, n. 25. By the late 1850s some (e.g., William S. Samford of Alabama) dreamed of a tropical empire for the Southern confederacy. See Robert E. May, The Southern Dream of a Caribbean Empire 1854-1861 (Baton Rouge, 1973), 235-238.

(76) Charles H. Brown, Agents of Manifest Destiny: The

Lives and Times of the Filibusters (Chapel Hill, 1980), 273-313, 346-347, 352-355, 359-412, 418-419, 423-424, 427.

(77) Ruffin, Diary, I, Entries for Apr. 9, 1857, May 10, 1858, 54, 186.

(78) Ibid., Entry for Aug. 10, 1857, 96.

(79) Ibid., Entries for Feb. 20, Apr. 9, 1857, 38-39, 54; Ruffin, Political Economy, 22. Ruffin was not atypical in his conception of the Anglo-Saxons as a separate race. See Reginald Horsman, Race and Manifest Destiny: The Origins of American Racial Anglo-Saxonism (Cambridge, Mass., and London, 1981), 208-216.

(80) Ruffin, Diary, I, Entries for Feb. 20, Apr. 9, Aug. 10, 1857, Apr. 20, 26, 1858, 38-39, 54, 96-97, 179, 181-182.

(81) Ibid., Entry for May 17, 1858, 191-192. Ruffin did, however, also query Walker about Indian slavery in Nicaragua. See his diary entry for May 14, 1858, 188-189. Ruffin also hoped that the United States would expand its commerce with Asian countries. See his diary entry for Sept. 26, 1859, 343.

(82) Ibid., Entry for Jan. 18, 1859, 272; Osterweis, Romanticism, 174-177. Ruffin genuinely opposed extravagant transcontinental projects. See his diary entry for Jan. 12, 1859, 264-265.

(83) Ruffin, Diary, I, Entries for May 18, 1857, Apr. 18, 1858, Mar. 4, 1859, 73, 176, 290. Ruffin feared amalgamation with peoples he deemed quasi-degraded such as the Cuban Creoles and the "nearly-white" Dominicans more than he feared mixture with those groups he considered utterly debased such as the degenerate Nicaraguans. Americans were more likely to intermarry with those who resembled them outwardly than with those whose appearance was conspicuously different. See his diary entries for May 18, 1857, Jan. 22, Apr. 20, 1858, 73, 149-150, 177-178. Ruffin yearned to annex Dominica and eventually conquer all of Hispanolia but found the light skin of the interracial inhabitants a perplexing obstacle.

(84) Ibid., Entry for Apr. 20, 1858, 178-179; Ruffin, Political Economy, 22.

(85) Ruffin, Diary, I, Entry for Mar. 30, 1860, 412.

(86) "Late Southern Convention," 603-604; On Yancey's views, see William Lowndes Yancey, "A CARD," & "Speeches of Messrs. Hilliard and Yancey," Montgomery Advertiser, Jan.

27, Feb. 3, 1858; On Rhett, see "The Red Rag of Cuba for the South," "Speech of Col. Keitt on acquiring Cuba," "The Great Question," & "Statesmanship in the South," Charleston Mercury, Feb. 26, 1858, Jan. 24, Feb. 26, Mar. 10, 1859. Significantly, the usually vocal Mercury was silent about the Walker-Paulding affair. While Yancey and Rhett were not entirely devoid of Anglo-Saxon racism, Manifest Destiny imperialism, and American nationalism, they did not base their Caribbean policy on these elements.

4

EDMUND RUFFIN: CLASSIC FIRE-EATER AND PROSLAVERY CRUSADER

by

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Chapter Six: The Practical Implications of Proslavery Ideology

The proslavery ideology which crystallized in the upper South was not merely the literary pastime of idle intellectuals indulging their penchant of raising concrete particulars to the level of universal abstractions. Responding to abolitionist attacks was more than even the defense of Southern honor. Some proslavery writers hoped to stop the spread of abolitionism outside the South. For fire-eaters such as Ruffin, the danger of leaving abolitionist propaganda unanswered was not that it would convert more Northerners to antislavery ideology but, more perniciously, that it would undermine the Southern commitment to the peculiar institution. Some proslavery radicals tried to solidify the Southern nonslaveholders behind slavery. Ruffin's writings were implicitly designed for Southern slaveholders, particularly those residing in the border states. Although Ruffin generally professed that Southerners concurred on the moral legitimacy of slavery, some of his effusions were directed towards soothing--what Ruffin himself termed--"the morbidly tender consciences and weak minds of benevolent men, and women more especially." Furthermore, Ruffin was openly concerned about the supposed economic inducement which converting to free labor held out for the slaveholder. A powerful abolitionist argument was that slavery hurt the Southern economy. The high cost of Northern land, antislavery forces contended, exhibited the

prosperity of free labor, while the low prices of Southern land exposed the bankruptcy of slave labor.[1]

Some important editors and politicians in Virginia accepted the antislavery claim that free labor enhanced the price of land and drew the appropriate conclusion. In 1845 the Richmond Whig had printed several essays contending that slavery debilitated the Virginia economy, whereas free labor immigration raised land values. In 1853 the Norfolk Herald openly called on Virginian slaveholders to dispose of their slaves either by outright emancipation or by sale to the lower South in order to entice Northern immigrants to settle upon Virginia's vacant lands. Determined to provide Virginians with a direct demonstration of the practical superiority of the free labor system, in 1857 Eli Thayer and John C. Underwood, two Northern freesoilers, set up a free labor community in the outskirts of western Virginia. Northern supporters of the Thayer scheme argued that free labor settlements would rejuvenate the Old Dominion. Several border state newspapers shared this antislavery hope. For example, the Wellsburg Herald, speaking for the "Panhandle," welcomed the Thayer venture as a means of increasing both the population and the land prices of west Virginia. Governor Henry A. Wise warned the Northern migrants that any conspiracy to meddle with slavery would be punished but allowed them to settle in the new town of Ceredo. Furthermore, in June 1858 the Richmond Enquirer, the reputed organ of the Wise interest, cautiously intimated

that if the Union were dissolved and the lower South revived the African slave trade, then Virginia should remain in the Union. The Enquirer argued that Virginia's affiliation with the Southern confederation would not increase her land prices and the new supply of foreign slaves would lower her slave prices. By continuing her association with the North, Virginia could sell her slaves to the cotton South and raise her land prices by attracting free labor to fill the vacuum. Thus the economic arguments against slavery which had been voiced in Virginia's General Assembly during the debate over emancipation in the 1831-1832 legislative session reverberated across the state well into the 1850s.[2]

The views of the prestigious Enquirer were especially distressing to the classic fire-eater. Though Ruffin professed that at least nineteen of every twenty Virginians would prefer a Southern to a Northern connection if the Union were severed, he could not conceal his fears about the impact of the influential Enquirer's opinions upon Virginians, particularly eastern slaveholders. Rather than trying to discredit the prominent Richmond newspaper as unrepresentative of Virginian sentiment, Ruffin invested his intellectual abilities in dissecting and disputing the Enquirer's assumptions. The Enquirer naively supposed that the North would permit Virginia to sell slaves to the Southern confederacy and that the South would buy expensive slaves from a state which deserted the cause.[3]

But Ruffin interpreted the Enquirer's editorial not

merely as an admonition to the cotton states against reviving the foreign slave trade in the wake of Spratt's agitation for renewal at the recent Southern convention in Montgomery; in Ruffin's eyes, the Enquirer's remarks were nothing less than disguised abolitionism. The Richmond newspaper assumed that high land prices were intrinsically desirable and could be promoted by free labor substitution. Though the editors had carefully qualified their implicit endorsement of free labor substitution by the hypothetical contingencies of a dissolution of the Union and the renewal of the African slave trade, the premise of their argument--free labor emigration would raise Virginia's land prices--was independent of the specified contingencies. The logic of the paper's position, Ruffin argued, entailed the quick and unconditional conversion of Virginia into a free labor state. In fact, if the Enquirer's economic calculations were correct, then Virginia should immediately sell her high-priced slaves to the Deep South before the revived African slave commerce lowered slave prices. As so radical a policy could only be implemented by governmental coercion, Ruffin concluded, the Enquirer's editorial was a virtual summons for the Virginia legislature to abolish slavery.[4]

Ruffin denied that slavery engendered low land prices. He conceded that the North had higher land prices than the South. Massachusetts lands, for instance, were dearer than Virginian lands. But Ruffin ascribed the low prices of Southern land partly to the labor-intensive agriculture

practiced by the typical Southern planter. Instead of investing his capital into increasing his yield per acre, the Southern slaveholder bought large tracts of unimproved land to increase his overall output. Given the sparsity of scientific agriculture in the South, the price of land per acre was generally lower in Virginia than in Massachusetts. Thus the sectional discrepancy in land values was unrelated to slavery. An ardent exponent and innovative practitioner of agricultural reform, Ruffin saw no necessary connection between slavery and technological backwardness; slavery entailed neither inept slaves nor slothful slaveholders.[5]

But had not the availability of slave labor encouraged the Southern farmer to occupy extensive tracts of land and discouraged him from making capital-intensive improvements? Ruffin himself had avowed that slavery was best suited for "large spaces." And Ruffin had admitted that slavery fostered leisure class "indolence." True, many Virginian planters had improved their soils, often by adopting his recommendations. Improved Virginia lands, Ruffin noted, had substantially appreciated over the last thirty years. But so had Northern lands. That the lands belonging to agronomists like himself and his friend Willoughby Newton still lagged behind Northern lands in value signified to the zealous proslavery advocate not that slavery was an economic incubus upon the South but that other factors besides negligent tillage contributed to the reduced value of Southern lands.[6]

The high price of slaves, Ruffin contended, was another factor responsible for the low land prices in Virginia. The doubling of Virginia slave prices in the last fifteen years did not stem from a proportionate twofold increase in the value of her staple crops or in the fertility of her soil; rather, it reflected the greatly increased demand for slaves in the other Southern states. As slaves were a major capital investment, the rising prices of slaves had led to the declining profitability of agriculture in Virginia. But in order to maintain a semblance of profitability in Virginian agriculture, a corresponding reduction in the state's land prices had occurred to compensate for the steep escalation in slave prices. In fact, Ruffin predicted that Virginia land values would continue to fall. The diminishing profitability of Virginia agriculture would induce landowners to sell land and deter investors from purchasing land. The increasing supply and decreasing demand would further reduce Virginia land prices. Thus, in Ruffin's mind, the internal dynamics of the Southern marketplace--the growing profitability of cotton state agriculture and the growing need for slave labor in the lower South--promoted low land prices in Virginia. It was not slavery as such but the particular circumstances of the Southern economy which lowered land prices in Virginia.[7]

But Ruffin's argument, however ingenious, was not persuasive. He begged the question about slavery's role in promoting the intra-Southern economic disparity. Also, he

conveniently used Virginia as a model for the low prices of Southern land. The lower prices of Southwestern lands vis-à-vis Northwestern ones could not be explained on the grounds of declining profitability. Furthermore, Ruffin mechanistically assumed a self-regulating, capitalist marketplace, wherein land values would automatically fall to offset a rise in slave values. Only an audacious fire-eater or a rabid slavery enthusiast could use the argument that high slave prices produced low land prices to support the proposition that slavery had no negative effect on land values.

But the primary cause for higher Northern land values, according to Ruffin, was the economic diversification and the consequent populousness of the region. The relative infertility of the Massachusetts soil had originally stimulated the settlers to pursue non-agricultural enterprises, such as manufacturing, shipping, shipbuilding, and fishing. The extravagant federal bounties and the protective tariff system had greatly augmented the profitability of these various industries of New England. The diverse economic opportunities had, in turn, attracted many immigrants to the Massachusetts area. The large non-agricultural population provided "a vast home market" for the relatively few farmers in the vicinity. Since the village and town residents had a high demand for green vegetables and other commodities transportable over short distances, land values in Massachusetts were at a premium.

The upshot was that economic diversification, spurred by poor soil and fortified by federal discrimination, along with a sizable non-agricultural population, furnishing a valuable market for farmers, was responsible for the high land prices in the North. Moreover, since federal revenues, dispensed as bounties to Northern industries, were extracted chiefly from the South, Southern slavery, not Northern free labor, was ultimately behind Northern industrial as well as agricultural prosperity. Far from slavery fostering low land prices, Virginia was subsidizing the economy of Massachusetts![8]

Ruffin thus echoed the simplistic sectional cliché that Northern political oppression shackled an otherwise flourishing Southern economy. Ruffin, to be sure, tried to integrate this proslavery article of faith into a more sophisticated explanation for the economic disparity between sections. Federal policy, Ruffin perceived, merely intensified already existing Northern patterns such as population expansion and economic development. Further, the North's numerical superiority accorded her political ascendancy over the South and her variegated economy enabled her to benefit from federal subsidies. But Ruffin still evaded the central issue of the relationship between slavery and economic prosperity. Did slavery inhibit immigration to the South and retard Southern economic diversification? Ruffin did not say.

Moreover, Ruffin proceeded to admit that the

replacement of slave with free labor in Virginia would ultimately raise land prices in the state. But he argued that the transition to free labor would encounter so many obstacles, occasion so many hardships, and occupy so long a time as to render the scheme economically deleterious, if not entirely impractical. Ruffin denied that free laborers would quickly flock to Virginia to fill up the lands vacated by the departed slaves. If the mere absence of slaves were sufficient to attract free laborers, then Maryland and western Virginia would not have empty pockets of land. Economic incentives had to be offered to entice free laborers to emigrate to the state. But Virginian employers, who could barely sustain their slave laborers, could not afford to pay the high wages demanded by free workers. Free labor, Ruffin maintained, was even dearer than costly slave labor. That "higher wages are required by white hirelings, and greater indulgences, while they are more intractable, less contented and often more lazy, and always less serviceable and reliable than negro slaves . . . are truths known to every experienced Virginia farmer." Indeed, Ruffin asserted that the relative costliness and inefficiency of free labor compared to slavery were the most certain propositions of "agricultural or political economy."[9]

Should Virginian farmers be deprived of their slaves and forced to pay the exorbitant wages necessary to attract free labor immigrants, then the state would be financially ruined: the wealthy and industrious planters would flee,

lands would no longer be cultivated, buildings would decay, the countryside would become a desolate waste, "much of it returning to the original wilderness state." The intellectual and moral refinement characteristic of the slaveholder would vanish as well. Even if slaveholders voluntarily liquidated their slaves en masse to cotton state consumers, the process of changing from a slave to a free labor system would be catastrophic not only to the contemporary generation of slaveholders but to the welfare of Virginia as a whole. No amount of pecuniary gain which accrued to selfish but shortsighted individual Virginian slaveholders could offset the economic, social, and political losses to the state as a whole.[10]

Eventually, Ruffin conceded, the price of land would fall so low as to restore profitability to farming ventures. Future speculators who bought land at a fraction of its current price would profit from their investment in spite of the great expense of hiring wage-earners. But even when Virginian land prices had reached the nadir, prospective purchasers might choose to buy fertile lands in the West at $1.25 per acre instead of the exhausted and neglected lands of the Old Dominion. If enough white investors could somehow be coaxed into buying the inferior Virginian lands at the reduced cost, several generations of proprietors would suffer severe economic privation before the state became sufficently populated by immigrants so as to raise land prices above their current level. Two or three

centuries, Ruffin prognosticated, would pass before the transformation to free labor would raise Virginia's land prices to the level of Massachusetts' land values.[11] Thus, what began as a firm denial that slavery was responsible for the low prices of Southern lands evolved into a virtual admission that free labor substitution would ultimately enhance Southern land values. Instead of maintaining the high ground that slavery was an economic boon, Ruffin retreated to the well-trodden ground of proslavery predecessors such Thomas R. Dew and contemporaries such as Thomas R.R. Cobb by contending that the conversion to free labor was impractical. It was not that slavery per se was an economic good but that Virginian abolition, whether by sale of slaves to the Southwest or by outright emancipation, would entail a host of economic and social evils.

Sensing perhaps that he had conceded too much, Ruffin concluded by dismissing high land prices as economically undesirable in Virginia. High land values and the dense population which engendered them, Ruffin argued, were not intrinsic indices of prosperity. In Ireland, for instance, they reflected mass impoverishment and misery. At best, high land prices, if founded on increased productivity could reflect a <u>past</u> prosperity; in the case of Virginia, high land values, which would ensue from the general depression and bankruptcy of landowners, would reflect a past misery. Furthermore, because land was a major capital investment for the aspiring farmer, high land prices always hindered

agricultural investment, improvement, and productivity. From the standpoint of the future agricultural development of a society, low land prices were desirable. Thus, high land prices, hailed by abolitionists as striking evidence of the supremacy of free labor, became in Ruffin's dexterous hands a veiled indictment of the inequitable distribution of Northern wealth and an economic fetter restricting agricultural development.[12]

But Ruffin's denigration of high land prices is not persuasive. Ruffin adroitly donned and removed the paternalist cloak as the occasion suited him. Since Ruffin was now strenuously attempting to dissuade fellow slaveholders from becoming capitalist employers, he insisted that slave labor was cheaper and more efficient. But maintaining the general economic superiority of slave labor by speculative argumentation (e.g., slave labor was continuous) was one thing; responding to concrete, empirical data was another. When Ruffin experienced difficulties in exonerating slavery for the low prices of Southern lands, he adopted the paternalist mantle to challenge the underlying abolitionist assumption about the moral value of high land prices. High land prices, Ruffin protested, were compatible with mass misery. But so were low land prices. The Old South could hardly boast of an egalitarian distribution of wealth--even amongst the privileged white race. Nor was the aristocratic Ruffin the embodiment of a social conscience. The concern the aloof Virginian patrician had for the

welfare of the poor whites was about the same as he charged the abolitionists had for the plight of the poor slave.

Ruffin's economic argument against high land prices was narrow and specious. True, high land prices, ceteris paribus, discourage agricultural investment. But that was not the issue. Surely, a fair assessment of the comparative economic benefits of slave versus free labor in two established systems should be based more on evidence of past achievement and present situation than on hypothetical futuristic projections. Furthermore, what was a capital expense for the prospective purchaser was a precious asset for the landholder. Ruffin did not adequately distinguish between the varying interests of sellers and buyers of land. Unless landholders sought to expand their farm operations by purchasing more land, they could not regard low land prices as a desideratum. And only highly patriotic landholders could find the supposed conduciveness of low land prices to the general welfare of Virginia appealing. But even low land prices would not automatically spur agricultural growth and development. Ruffin wrongly took land prices out of the context of other economic variables such as overall capital investment, available capital, anticipated returns, and alternative investment opportunities. For example, if buyers could not expect farming enterprises to yield substantial profits or land values to rise in the future, then they would be reluctant to purchase Virginian lands, however inexpensive.

But the group to whom Ruffin appealed was the landowning and slaveholding class. Those who already possessed land and slaves--not the propertyless or nonslaveholders--stood in danger of being seduced by antislavery arguments that land values could be raised by switching to free labor. Similarly, the "morbidly tender consciences" which required assuaging belonged to slaveowners; it was the weak-minded slaveholders who flirted with colonization and manumission schemes because--Ruffin suspected--they had never fully accepted the "positive good" ideology. Notwithstanding his repeated declarations that he was addressing only those individuals "like myself," who considered slavery a "blessing" and abolition "an unmixed evil and a curse to the whole community,"[13] Ruffin directed his arguments to precisely those slaveholders whose commitment to slavery was being undermined by a combination of antislavery propaganda and the declining profitability of agriculture in the border states. Thus in the summer of 1859--on the eve of Harpers Ferry--Ruffin found himself arguing about the merits of slavery and the baneful consequences of abolition. Along with his efforts to spur Southern secession, Ruffin had to convince Virginia that since slavery was in her best interest, she should join the Southern confederacy rather than remained aligned with the North should the cotton states secede.

Besides responding to programs which avowedly sought the elimination of slave labor from Virginia, Ruffin also

attacked schemes such as African colonization which he deemed covert forms of abolition. After a decade of dormancy in the 1840s, the upper South experienced a resurgent interest in colonization in the 1850s. In 1850 the Virginia state legislature appropriated $30,000 annually for a five year period to colonize free blacks in Africa. Similar programs were adopted by other Southern border states. Additionally, the federal government subsidized the return of Africans captured on illicit slave ships to their native continent. Privately, affluent benefactors contributed thousands of dollars which enabled the American Colonization Society to send hundreds of blacks to Liberia during the 1850s. Still, the colonization society was a feeble institution of meager accomplishment. Although Virginian respectability supported the organization, both verbally and financially, the American Colonization Society by itself posed no serious danger to slavery, even in the border states. Yet in the late 1850s Ruffin penned several essays sharply attacking African colonization.[14]

The American Colonization Society, Ruffin argued, had been founded in 1816 primarily to promote the voluntary emigration of free blacks to Africa and secondarily to encourage individual manumissions. Depending upon the viewpoint of their audience, colonization agents variously stressed one or the other objective. Southern proponents of slavery were told that the removal of free blacks would fortify slavery. Northern and Southern opponents of slavery

were told that colonization would gradually emancipate all slaves by stimulating a profusion of individual manumissions or collective liberation. Thus both proslavery and antislavery men supported the society with the hope of furthering their particular objectives. Neverthless, despite the admittedly ambiguous character of colonization, Ruffin contended that emancipation was the raison d'etre of the organization. The Virginian quoted statements of such prominent colonizationists as General Robert Goodloe Harper of Maryland and Senator Henry Clay of Kentucky as well as colonizationist responses to abolitionist attacks upon the society as proslavery to show that emancipation was the cornerstone of the project. While he discounted the proslavery portrayals of colonization officials as rhetoric, Ruffin unhesitatingly accepted antislavery explanations as genuine. In Ruffin's eyes, the South, not the North, had been duped. The fund-raising assemblages the colonizationists annually held on the Fourth of July symbolized their ulterior purpose of liberating all slaves. Moreover, Ruffin noted, since 1830 more manumitted slaves than free blacks had been transported to Liberia under the auspices of the society. Now the few thousand slaves manumitted and transported to Liberia hardly dented the plight of the millions of slaves yet in bondage. And some of these liberated slaves may have been manumitted even if the colonization association had never existed. Nevertheless, Ruffin viewed the practice of colonization and

the very idea of manumission as dangerous to the stability of the peculiar institution.[15]

In part, Ruffin's excessive concern stemmed from his perception of colonization as tantamount to abolition. Ruffin did not believe that intelligent emancipationist-colonizationists like Henry Clay seriously thought that it was morally justifiable or technically possible to uproot and deport millions of Southern slaves or that it was financially feasible to reimburse the slaveholders for their emancipated slaves and pay for the transportation and sustenance of the freedmen in Africa. Instead, Ruffin suspected that those who advocated colonization as part of a scheme of gradual emancipation and compensation were using colonization as a stalking horse for outright abolition--wholesale emancipation without the removal of the freedmen or the compensation of their owners.[16]

But Ruffin opposed colonization even if limited to the removal of slaves manumitted by the occasional slaveholder. He harbored no objections to the deportation of free blacks from the South, but he strongly opposed manumission under any circumstances. Emancipation-colonization projects hurt the Virginian economy. Unlike slave sales to the lower South, the manumission and colonization of Virginian slaves exacerbated the labor shortage in the state without any compensation. Ruffin was particularly perturbed by slaveholding testators who freed their slaves by will, since the "emancipated" slaves remained in bondage for five years

before being sent to Liberia at state expense. During this five-year interval, these slaves, anticipating their liberty, acquired a "mutinous disposition" which infected their unemancipated colleagues, who considered themselves equally "entitled to this supposed benefit of freedom." As the slaves' contentment with bondage evaporated, the value of their labor became nugatory. Thus, manumission had a negative ripple effect on labor discipline in the neighborhood.[17]

For Ruffin, antipathy towards colonization ran deeper than his practical fears about its method of implementation. The logical implications of the proslavery ideology precluded individual manumission as much as collective abolition. If slavery was the morally appropriate condition for the inferior race of blacks, then emancipation was a punishment rather than a reward. The whole concept of rewarding meritorious slaves with freedom implied that slavery was a moral evil. Manumission and colonization were antiquated relics of the "necessary evil" school; the "positive good" ideology required their elimination. Perhaps with himself in mind, Ruffin recalled that "formerly, it would have been difficult to find in Virginia, a man of education who did not deem slavery both a public and private evil." Swept away by the natural rights ideology formulated by the overzealous patriots of the American Revolution, Southerners had considered the black race equal to the white. They had anxiously apologized for

the continuation of the evil of bondage by the plea of necessity: peaceful association with the liberated black was impractical, amalgamation was repugnant. But colonization had offered the Southern slaveholder a way of salving his conscience without jeopardizing his security or surrendering his purity: the removal of the black freedmen from the United States. Ruffin perceived that both colonization, a circumvention of the "necessary evil" apologia for slavery, and abolition, the recent and strident form of antislavery, were predicated on the doctrine of racial equality. Ascribing the degraded condition of free blacks in the United States to the oppressive social environment, colonizationists held that blacks could sustain their own independent community if they had a suitable opportunity to develop their skills, unhampered by the suffocating prejudice of neighboring whites. The success of the Liberian experiment would refute Southern claims about the innate inferiority of the Negro, a staple tenet of the "positive good" school. For someone who had himself regarded slavery as a moral evil, the eradication of all vestiges of the repudiated ideology assumed a special urgency. Ruffin's zealous, almost obsessive, pursuit of the proslavery mission would attest to his complete conversion to the new faith.[18]

Realizing that the success of the Liberian colony would confute the new orthodoxy, in the late 1850s Ruffin resolved to garner evidence that Liberia was an unmitigated failure.

His empirical investigation was designed to verify a conclusion dictated by the logical implications of the proslavery ideology. Unsurprisingly, Ruffin found that Liberia, despite its manifold advantages, was a fiasco. Liberia, according to Ruffin, had both a salubrious climate and a fertile soil, an environment conducive to agricultural development and human fecundity. Liberian settlers consisted of the most gifted elements of American blacks: the more respectable class of free Negroes, who felt their inequality most keenly in the South and had enough money to afford emigration; and those slaves whose exemplary conduct had earned their emancipation. Liberian political leaders, Ruffin added, were mostly mulattoes, who had some white blood running in their veins. Moreover, American public and private funds supported the Liberian colony. Yet, Ruffin eagerly reported, the colonists imported such necessities as food and lumber from abroad. Liberia's economic dependence confirmed Ruffin's view about the congenital ignorance of the Negro. Some black traits, Ruffin claimed, such as a proclivity to petty theft, which had been restrained by white masters on well-run Southern plantations, became rife amongst the Liberian freedmen. Ruffin cited the reports of American naval officers that hundreds of Liberians had become African bushmen. In forty years, Ruffin pointed out, the Liberian population had hardly grown above the approximately eight thousand emigrants. Only white organization, subsidization, and military protection

prevented the complete collapse of the Liberian experiment. The proslavery contentions that liberated black slaves would decline in numbers and regress to barbarism seemed vindicated.[19]

But did not the religious goal of Christianizing Africa redeem the Liberian project? Ruffin did not think so. He professed to respect such men as Reverend Philip Slaughter, a prominent Virginia colonizationist, who earnestly sought to convert Africa to Christianity. He argued, however, that the donations given to convert African heathens were primarily used to sustain the faith of the already Christianized Liberians themselves. While over a thousand Liberians were registered as communicants--an unwitting admission by Ruffin that many former slaves had not reverted to barbarism--only a few hundred Africans had been converted to Christianity. Similarly, Ruffin pointed to the failure of the famous British missionary David Livingstone to make lasting African converts. The glaring oversight of all these missionary endeavors, Ruffin triumphantly proclaimed, was their failure to enslave the Africans. Only bondage to the enlightened white race could effectively civilize and Christianize the savage black race. Although his attitude towards Christian dogma was critical and his practice of Christian ritual was ambivalent, Ruffin axiomatically upheld the Christianizing of heathens as a supplementary rationale for Southern slavery.[20]

Furthermore, Ruffin declared, the colonization of

Africa by several thousand whites and their enslavement of the natives upon plantations would more effectively spread Christianity than tenfold their number of skilfull, fervent, and perseverant missionaries. That these slaveholding imperialists would be driven entirely by "their own selfish object of gain" was irrelevant; the consequences of their deeds alone mattered, not their motives. Ruffin could echo utilitarian assumptions so fully--when it suited him. He was not so meticulous about separating doer and deed in his scathing dissection of abolitionist motivation. Nevertheless, Ruffin was less interested in disparaging the traditional methods of Christian evangelicalism or converting African souls than in demonstrating the inferiority of the Negro and the necessity of his enslavement. Those propagandists who eulogized Liberia as a thriving republic of tens, if not hundreds, of thousands of industrious inhabitants engaged in agricultural and commercial enterprises and diligently disseminating the blessings of Christian civilization throughout the African continent were perpetrating "a gross, though most successful, imposture" upon their credulous public. The American Colonization Society did indeed exaggerate the success of Liberia in their quest for public and private sponsorship. And the frustrated fire-eater, whose admonitions of Southern doom were unheeded and whose secessionist organization was stillborn, could not help feeling envious and resentful.[21]

Besides attempting to discourage private contributions to colonization, Ruffin tried to end governmental funding for the American Colonization Society. In 1858 Ruffin appealed to the Virginia legislature to proscribe manumission and to repeal the bill authorizing $50 for each Virginian black transported to Liberia by the colonization agency. The Old Dominion continued to permit manumission but ceased funding colonization. In 1859 President Buchanan sought to finance the education of the Africans captured by the U.S. Navy aboard the illicit slave-trading ship Echo. Considering himself an expert on the subject, Ruffin sent his anti-colonization writings to friendly Southern rights representatives in Washington. Alabama Congressmen Jabez L.M. Curry and James F. Dowdell used Ruffin's literature as a reliable source with which to attack colonization on the Congressional floor. The Alabamians thanked Ruffin privately for transmitting his material to them. But the Virginian was vexed that the Congressmen had not made "the slightest reference to my labors" in public debate. As compensation, Ruffin, with the pride of the progenitor, carefully attached the anti-colonization Congressional speeches to his manuscript diary, the chronicle and channel of his mounting frustrations. His spirits were not raised when Congress enacted subsidies for the Echo victims as part of a general appropriation bill. However discouraged, Ruffin persevered. He mailed his pamphlet to several leading colonizationists, but the American Colonization

Society did not respond. His argument against colonization was irrefutable, Ruffin convinced himself. And in 1860 Ruffin again protested against the contemplated federal colonization of Africans captured on other illicit slavers.[22]

Interestingly, Ruffin partially framed his objection to colonization of the rescued Africans from the standpoint of the black victims. Ruffin contended that the Africans captured aboard slave vessels became "apprentices," or short-term slaves, in accordance with Liberian laws. The black Liberian masters, Ruffin argued, treated these enslaved Africans cruelly. The brutish condition of the enslaved required stringent discipline. The temporary nature of bondage impelled the master to extract as much labor as possible from the slave during the allotted time period. Furthermore, blacks were not fit to be slaveholders. "The negro race, which makes the best of slaves, also makes the worst of masters in the world. This is because the negro is ignorant, careless, unfeeling, wanting in judgment, and altogether incapable of directing and ruling subordinates, even for his own best interests."[23]

Obviously, however, the enslavement of blacks as such was not what really aroused Ruffin's indignation. Ruffin was chagrined that Liberian blacks, rather than Southern whites, had been granted the slaveholding prerogative by the federal government under the guise of philanthropy to the suffering slave. The true beneficiary of this scheme was the parasitic American Colonization Society, which received

an "enormous and gratuitous tribute" for supervising the enslavement process. The hypocritical British government at least had the good sense to "apprentice" the Africans they seized on slave-trading ships in their own colonies. The foolish American government financed the enslavement of the captured Africans in an alien country. Perhaps Ruffin feared that the Liberian blacks would prove themselves capable slaveholders. In any event, Ruffin called for the perpetual enslavement of the rescued Africans in the South. The use of Southern territory as stations for the Africans added insult to injury. If the United States government continued its policy of returning captured Africans to their homeland, then Southerners, Ruffin advised, should use all legal means to prevent the detention of the captives on their soil. For instance, the South could essay to have the courts enforce the Africans' alleged status as free blacks and release these prisoners from unlawful federal detention. And then Southern state regulations on free blacks would apply to these Africans.[24]

Southern regulations governing free blacks were harsh but insufficient for proslavery radicals. In 1858 Ruffin called upon the Virginia legislature to eliminate, what he termed, "the free Negro nuisance." Earlier in the century, Southern border states, led by Virginia, had moved to curtail the growth of free blacks. But their actions had been halfhearted and ineffective. The Old Dominion, for example, had made tentative gestures towards the forcible

deportation and enslavement of free blacks. In 1806 the Virginia legislature had passed a law requiring all manumitted slaves to leave the state within a year or forfeit their freedom. But after being flooded with petitions by disgruntled freedmen seeking to remain in Virginia, the legislature relented. Lawmakers issued exemptions to blacks of "good character" and handed the thorny matter over to the state courts. Judicial discretion proved lenient; most black requests were granted and few were convicted of violating the 1806 statute. Similarly, in 1832 the Virginia legislators, faced with an overcrowded penitentiary and a meager treasury, authorized the whipping and enslavement of free black felons. But humanitarian protests forced the repeal of this measure as well. State support of colonization in the 1830s and 1850s partly reflected the mounting concern about the growth of the free black population. But the legislative appropriations were modest and emigration to Liberia was voluntary. Most blacks simply refused to leave Virginia.[25]

The number of free blacks in the upper South rose at a faster pace than the number of slaves. Certain regions, such as old tidewater areas from which whites departed and urban centers to which blacks flocked, grew noticeably darker in population hue with each passing decade. For example, from 1820-1860 the free black population of Virginia increased by 60% overall but more than doubled in Richmond (the city closest to Ruffin's Marlbourne

plantation) and almost trebled in Petersburg (where Ruffin had resided for several years). By 1860 almost 60,000 of the 225,000 free blacks who resided in the border states lived in Virginia. Furthermore, by the same year, the number of free blacks living in Maryland virtually equalled that of slaves. And in Delaware the overwhelming majority of blacks was free. Anxious whites feared that free blacks would eventually outnumber them in the upper South and start a race war.[26]

In the 1850s a few Virginian voices demanded a resolute policy against free blacks. In an 1851 tract, What Shall Be Done with the Free Negroes, George Fitzhugh bluntly advocated the enslavement of free blacks on grounds of both ideological consistency and practical expediency. Two years later, Virginia assemblyman John Rutherfoord proposed mandatory African colonization of all free blacks. Rutherfoord threatened sedentary blacks with enslavement but assured the squeamish that this dreaded last resort would be obviated by voluntary black exile. But popular opinion in Virginia recoiled from these schemes. The iconoclast Fitzhugh was ignored. And Rutherfoord's bill was defeated by fears of the economic repercussions ensuing from the contemplated removal of the black labor force and by moral qualms about the humanity of compulsory expulsion.[27]

In the late 1850s Ruffin devised a scheme midway between blanket enslavement of all free Negroes and forcible African colonization. Systematizing certain features of

previous legislative proposals and enactments, Ruffin made an earnest appeal to the Virginia legislature to substitute enslavement for imprisonment as punishment for black criminals. The gravity of the crime and the history of the offender would determine the length of enslavement. Free blacks convicted of serious felonies would be penalized with permanent hereditary bondage. Minor offenders would be enslaved for five years or longer. Moreover, law-abiding free blacks "of proved bad character and habits" such as drunkenness or idleness would become hired slaves for a two-year period. Recidivists of all types would find themselves permanently enslaved. Through this scheme, Ruffin promised, "many a felonious as well as worthless free negro would be made a laborious, profitable and submissive slave." In fact, under Ruffin's program, only those blacks who could periodically furnish the state with evidence that they were supporting themselves and their families through honest labor would be allowed to remain free. To ensure that blacks did not surreptitiously support themselves through illicit gains, Ruffin called for stricter police measures to suppress the underground economy of urban blacks. Any free Negro who disliked these conditions could leave the state. To stimulate black departure to the North, Ruffin urged the state legislature to transfer the $50 bounty awarded to the American Colonization Society for every Liberian migrant to every free black who voluntarily emigrated to the North.[28]

Ruffin would thus give Virginian free blacks a choice: exile or enslavement. Ruffin conceded that some free blacks were industrious and that their removal would harm their white employers. But he argued that this temporary inconvenience would be outweighed by the elimination of the large majority of "idle, profligate, and dishonest" Negroes. Indeed, the proslavery ideologue avowed that the utilitarian calculus would justify the immediate, sudden, forcible, and comprehensive elimination of free blacks from Virginia. Nevertheless, in deference to "public sentiment" and humanitarian concerns, he would abstain from recommending so drastic a policy and would target only the "lazy, improvident, degraded . . . , vicious, incorrigible and shameless" elements of free blacks. But Ruffin believed that three-fourths of the free blacks consisted of such undesirable characters! And the children of the industrious and thrifty blacks were likely to become idlers and prodigals! Ruffin expected that his program of the gradual enslavement of black criminals and vagrants would spur Virginian free Negroes to enslave themselves or leave the state. "In a few generations," Ruffin predicted, "there would probably remain in Virginia no negroes except such as were in their proper and suitable condition--that of being slaves to white masters."[29]

Ruffin's concessions to popular opinion, however, were of no avail. A combination of apprehension about the economic dislocations which the massive departure of free

blacks would occasion and lingering moral compunctions about the cruelty of the expulsion/enslavement scheme squelched radical solutions of the free black problem. Although the Virginia legislature terminated its annual subsidization of African colonization in 1858, it refused to deport, much less enslave, free black criminals and "bad characters." [30]

If fears of envelopment by free blacks in the distant future impelled Ruffin's proposal to reduce all blacks who chose to remain in the South to slavery, they were not warranted by demographic statistics. Virginian forecasts of a free black majority in the state by the middle of the twentieth century were miscalculations. True, the rate of free black increase in the upper South exceeded that of slave increase. But between 1830-1860 the pace of free black population growth was modest and did not greatly exceed the pace of slave population growth. Moreover, the white growth rate comfortably surpassed the free black growth rate. For example, between 1850-1860 the number of free blacks in the upper South increased 10.4%, the number of slaves 9.7% and the number of whites 26.2%. Likewise, in Virginia during the same decade, the free black population rose 6.8%, the slave population 3.9%, and the white population 17%. Furthermore, in 1860 the upper South had about 225,000 free blacks, but over 1½ million slaves and more than 5 million whites. Similarly, Virginia had less than 60,000 free blacks but nearly ½ million slaves and over a million whites. Thus in the upper South free blacks

composed less than 13% of the black population and less than 4% of the total population. And in Virginia free blacks composed less than 11% of the black population and less than 3% of the total population. The state of Maryland, where the number of slaves declined absolutely in the decades prior to the Civil War as the number of free blacks escalated sharply, was not representative of the upper South. Delaware was but a nominal slave state. The fears aroused by free blacks were greatly disproportionate to their actual numbers and rate of growth. Unless Southerners emancipated their slaves in droves or border state slaveholders sold their slaves to the cotton regions en masse, there was no objective threat of inundation by free blacks in the remote future even in the upper South.[31]

The fear that free blacks would eventually engulf Virginia cannot explain why Ruffin, though somewhat more casually, recommended the expulsion/ enslavement scheme for the lower South as well, a region where the number of free blacks was relatively minuscule and where the slave growth rate far surpassed that of free blacks.[32] Indeed, the lower South's obsession with eliminating the scant number of free blacks within her midst during the 1859-1860 period could not have stemmed from a fear of being numerically overwhelmed by the free Negro. Nor can distant demographic forebodings about the fate of Virginia account for the great apprehension and sense of urgency with which Ruffin approached the subject of free blacks in the border states.

The concern with the free black issue reflected a deeper concern with the fate of Southern slave institutions in general and border state slavery in particular. Ruffin believed that free blacks operated as abolitionist agents inducing slaves to abscond to the North. The elimination of the free blacks would reduce the number of slave runaways, a perennial preoccupation of the Southern border states. To perceptive slaveholders like Ruffin, the free blacks would not have to inveigle slaves to abscond by overt appeals; the very existence of the free blacks served as a pernicious example for the slaves, whose contentment with their social station partly hinged upon their acceptance of slavery as the natural condition of blacks.[33]

Moreover, the presence of free blacks could undermine the Southern slaveholders' commitment to slavery. In positive good ideology, the free black was "a veritable contradiction in terms." Ruffin carried the premises of proslavery thought, a synthesis of economic and racial formulations, to their logical conclusions: given the natural indolence of the black man, slavery was an economic necessity for the entire race. In a society of white masters and black slaves, the free Negro was a social anomaly, an aberration requiring rectification. Furthermore, the success of the free blacks in the upper South belied positive good speculation: free blacks clung stubbornly to freedom, instead of eagerly choosing slavery; they flourished economically, instead of becoming

impoverished; and most disturbingly, they increased numerically, instead of becoming extinct. It was not so much the precise rate at which free blacks grew that alarmed Ruffin. The fact that the free black population increased at all embarrassed the pretensions of the white supremacist who regarded reproduction as a vital measure of human prowess. That the number of free blacks in the upper South grew at a faster rate than the number of slaves must have absolutely discomfited the proslavery ideologue who dogmatically held that only under the humane treatment of the paternalistic white slaveholder could the inferior blacks flourish. Furthermore, the salience of light-skinned free blacks in the slave South substantiated abolitionist allegations of slaveholder lust and confuted proslavery contentions that thralldom was necessary to prevent racial amalgamation.[34] Such realizations, sensed but seldom expressed, lent the free black problem a special urgency. The integrity of the positive good rationale--as well as the integrity of its champions--was at stake. Free blacks were a living refutation of the proslavery creed. Rather than surrender the ideology, Ruffin and his fellow dogmatists like Fitzhugh sought to alter the reality. The expulsion or enslavement of free blacks would force reality to conform to ideology. Thus practical concerns, reinforced by ideological imperatives, led Ruffin to espouse radical solutions to the free black problem.

The ideological justification of slavery and the

practical fortification of slavery entailed not only the elimination of the free Negro but the cessation of certain slaveholder practices which allowed slaves to enjoy the privileges of the free man. Ruffin was particularly concerned about the abuses of urban slavery. Ruffin, for example, opposed the practice by urban slaveholders of paying their slaves with money instead of compensating them with food, clothes, and shelter. The flexibility of money enabled the slaves to choose how to spend their earnings. Many slaves, Ruffin claimed, exhausted their funds on whiskey and superfluous luxuries; they resorted to theft to procure food. Ruffin was even more opposed to the practice of letting slaves hire themselves out. Under this arrangement, slaves chose their own employer and paid a monthly fee to their master. These slaves, Ruffin complained, worked the minimum time necessary to pay their monthly fee and spent their leisure time in idleness, if not in perfecting their pilfering techniques. With the shackles of slavery only slightly loosened, black morals degenerated. Yet Ruffin was less concerned with the promotion of black virtue than with maintaining a sharp social differentiation between the races. Urban slaves behaved too much like white freemen; indeed, their leisure and extravagance had an uncanny resemblance to the habits of the plantation aristocracy. Their slavery was merely nominal; they enjoyed virtual freedom. This taste of liberty whetted the slaves' appetite for complete freedom. Frequently, slaves who hired

themselves out fled to the North and enticed others to join them in escaping from bondage. Thus Ruffin called for ending slaveholder practices which blurred the boundaries between slavery and freedom. Far from launching a crusade to ameliorate the plight of the slave, Ruffin would further tighten the screws of slavery; instead of restricting the methods of discipline to prevent slaveholder cruelty, Ruffin would restrict the masters' economic prerogative to prevent laxity. So much for Ruffin's "reform" of slavery.[35]

The multiple threats Ruffin perceived-- manumission, colonization, free blacks, urban slavery--were magnified by their interdependence. For instance, the presence of free blacks provided the colonization movement with a rationale consonant with the perpetuation of slavery and the existence of Liberia allayed the Negrophobia of humanitarian masters desirous of manumitting their slaves. Thus the resolution of one threat could help defuse another. The enslavement of recalcitrant Southern free blacks, who defied legislative warnings and stayed on Southern soil, could inhibit African colonization by shearing its advertised rationale of the removal of free blacks. And the termination of Liberian colonization could curtail manumission by unleashing the racial bugbear and make Southerners more amenable to radical solutions for the free black problem.

Compounding the various internal afflictions of Southern slavery was the growing menace of Northern antislavery aggressions. Inwardly anxious about both slave

and slaveholder loyalty, Ruffin was obsessed with the percolation of disguised abolitionist emissaries throughout the South. Fearful that a proliferation of slaves within narrow geographic confines would either unleash the savage beast that lay concealed behind the docile slave physiognomy or compel the economically-driven patriarch to emancipate his superfluous slaves, Ruffin viewed freesoilism as indirect but dangerous abolitionism. But just as the domestic fragility of slavery made fire-eaters highly sensitive to the slightest encroachment by antislavery Northerners, the unfolding sectional drama of the 1850s heightened their sensitivity to the internal danger. Thus the formation of Southern vigilance committees and popular hysteria about slave insurrections often coincided with sectional crises. Thus the movement to eradicate free blacks from all Southern states--along with Ruffin's effort to implement a host of internal reforms--peaked after the Harpers Ferry invasion. The function of these movements was not merely the racial control of blacks, but the political control of whites.[36]

The presentation of a united front against the Northern foe required the imposition of a strict orthodoxy upon Southern whites. The positive good ideology had to be carried to its logical conclusion by the very dynamic of the sectional struggle. To battle the antislavery North with success, the South had to remove all doubts and uneasinesses about the legitimacy of her cause. Uncertainty about

slavery would produce a weak and vacillating course. In particular, unless the morale of border state slaveholders was boosted, they would be extremely loath to serve as military buffers for the seceded cotton states as Ruffin envisioned. Indeed, the upper tier of Southern states might even ally itself with the hated Yankee as the Enquirer had warned. The supplantation of manumission-colonization with expulsion/enslavement was a means of reaffirming border state dedication to slavery, an implicit ritualistic endorsement of the positive good ideology which could solidify allegiance to the Gulf States. Thus the movement to reform slavery could be impelled, or at least rationalized, by the major fire-eater goal of fomenting political revolution.[37]

Although such thinking may have guided Ruffin's course, he does not appear to have assimilated slavery reform into his secession quest. Neither his public nor his private writings suggested that the prohibition of manumission, the cessation of colonization, and the elimination of the free black were conscious tactics of uniting the South and increasing her confidence about the feasibility of secession. But there were other--perhaps more potent--ways in which the ongoing sectional controversy affected Ruffin's prescriptions of slavery reform. In particular, the banishment or enslavement of free blacks can be seen as an outgrowth of his frustration in directly rebuffing the Northern abolitionist challenge and in alerting the

slumbering South to the peril of that challenge. The pent-up animosity Ruffin harbored towards Northerners for their humiliation and mastery of Southerners and towards Southerners for their base submission to this mastery and their scornful neglect of his repeated admonitions could be safely displaced upon a weaker target--the Southern free blacks. If Southerners could not subjugate the Northern abolitionists, whose insults and aggressions exposed their vulnerability, they could enslave the Southern Negro. Moreover, Ruffin viewed the wholesale banishment of the Southern blacks not only as a boon for Southern whites but as a burden for Northern whites. Should the Yankees refuse to welcome the black refugees, their professed concern for the oppressed Southern slave would be exposed as brazen hypocrisy.[38] Should the North incorporate the degraded Southern blacks into their community, the South would have achieved ironic retribution upon antislavery Yankees, who dared to meddle in Southern affairs. Thus Ruffin's enmeshment in the sectional conflict as well as his perception of the decline of border state slavery heightened his determination to exorcise the endemic demons haunting Southern slavery.

* * * * *

The twin impulses of ideological consistency and practical exigency also spurred Ruffin, albeit gradually and cautiously, to espouse the revival of the African slave trade. For many years the proslavery zealot was not only

plagued by doubts about the expediency of renewing the illicit traffic but considered the African slave trade a moral abomination. Typically, Ruffin would contrast Northern vilification of the benevolent Southern slavery with her condonation of, if not active participation in, the malevolent foreign slave trade. For example, in his December 1852 speech to the Virginia Agricultural Society, Ruffin charged Northerners with engaging in the nefarious traffic despite its illegality and misery: "No furious popular and philanthropic indignation has been aroused against these detected pirates--neither the crews and their commanders, nor the rich capitalists, who were the owners and real traders, torturers and murderers." Likewise, in his secessionist essay, "Consequences of Abolition Agitation," published four years later, Ruffin denounced the African slave trade as an "enormity, and infamous breach of both moral and statute law, . . . which seems neither to shock nor disturb the Greeleys and Tappans, and the other numerous abolitionists or fanatics--and indeed seems to be of no concern to but a few of that community."[39]

Although Ruffin's strictures against the African slave trade were primarily made to expose Yankee hypocrisy, they were not devoid of strong and genuine conviction. It was not merely another instance of Northern commercial dominance of the national economy or additional evidence of antislavery reticence about flagrant oppression; Northern sponsorship only compounded Ruffin's repulsion towards the

traffic in human flesh. The "positive good" ideologue minced no words in denouncing the slave trade as a species of barbarous savagery and its participants as torturers and murderers. His stark terminology was as much reflective of his depth of feeling as a rhetorical weapon against abolitionists. Indeed, well into the 1850s the flaming fire-eater endorsed the 1808 federal proscription of the African slave trade and echoed the supplemental 1820 statute which condemned the slavers as pirates. His censure of the trade was reminiscent of a previous generation of British abolitionists. The compunctions Ruffin had harbored during the 1820s about the morality of slavery had been canalized into a disgust with the slave trade alone; Ruffin's continuing antipathy towards the African slave trade was a legacy of his earlier opposition to slavery itself. Evidently, Ruffin had some demons of his own to exorcise.

Many Southerners did not share Ruffin's revulsion. In the 1850s a movement, centered in the cotton states, arose to reopen the African slave trade. The South Carolinian editor Leonidas W. Spratt was its most prominent and steadfast supporter. But some individuals in the tobacco states, most notably the Irish immigrant and Tenessee resident John Mitchel, advocated the scheme as well. The movement to renew the slave trade grew stronger with each passing year. Originally desired by isolated journalists and ambitious merchants, by the latter half of the decade slave trade revivalism became a serious debating topic in

several Southern state legislatures and the most important issue discussed in the annual Southern Commercial Conventions. In December 1856, for example, Governor James H. Adams of South Carolina recommended the renewal of the slave trade or at least the repeal of the federal "piracy" proscription, which implied that Southern slave property was "plunder." The legislative committee which investigated the expediency of reviving the prohibited commerce filed a positive report, James J. Pettigrew being the lone dissenter.[40]

Slave trade proponents offered a variety of arguments to support their position. Fundamentally, Spratt and his cohorts contended, the African slave trade, the indispensable means for Southern acquisition of slaves, was morally justified if slavery was truly a positive good; federal proscription of the trade was an archaic remnant of the necessary evil school, an enduring reproach upon the morality of slavery itself. If fidelity to the positive good creed required Southern opposition to federal prohibition of the African slave trade, sectional economic and political interests made its actual revival expedient. By stimulating the production of more cotton, the slave trade would enable the South to fill the projected growing international demand for cotton and retain her monopoly of the European market. By lowering the price of slaves, the new supply of Africans would enable nonslaveholding Southern whites to buy slaves and thus unite the South behind the

peculiar institution. Also, the increased labor supply would enable the South to industrialize her economy and overcome her dependence upon Northern manufacturing. Furthermore, since the influx of slaves would augment Southern population and promote territorial expansion, the foreign slave trade renewal would either restore Southern political power in the Union, or, should the North veto the project, induce Southern secession.[41]

Sensing the growing popularity of the African slave trade issue in the South--a popularity which Ruffin nonetheless exaggerated--the fire-eating crusader reconsidered his longstanding and deep-seated aversion to the infamous enterprise. By the spring of 1857, Ruffin believed that a majority of men in the lower South favored reviving the slave trade. A recent editorial by Roger A. Pryor in The South which strongly objected to the federal ban indicated to Ruffin that the slave trade scheme could become acceptable to Virginians as well. The political radical wondered whether the growing Southern sentiment favorable to the trade could be harnessed in the secessionist cause. Flushed with victory in the 1856 presidential contest and confident about the slave destiny of Kansas, in early 1857 Southerners were complacent about their political safety in the Union. Agitating the seemingly popular slave trade issue could galvanize Southern sectional ardor. Ruffin had no doubt that the North would stymie the renewal of the foreign slave traffic. For the

ultra fire-eater, Northern opposition to a measure was an argument in its favor. Ruffin privately speculated that Northern frustration of the Southern yearning for African slaves could exacerbate sectional tensions and engender secessionist aspirations among disappointed Southerners.[42]

The strategic calculations of a resolute fire-eater as well as the increasing incongruousness of a positive good propagandist impugning the ethical propriety of the slave trade impelled Ruffin to shed most of his moral qualms about the international commerce in human flesh. Ruffin did not deny the evils of the slave trade; he rationalized them. The cruelties of the notorious "middle passage," for instance, were not an inherent aspect of the dehumanizing traffic which treated persons as objects; rather, they largely stemmed from the illegal nature of the foreign slave trade. Seeking to escape detection by the authorities, slave traders cramped Africans into small, quick vessels, the overcrowded conditions conducive to the transmission of disease. Whereas the interdiction of the trade had put a premium on undetected voyages instead of the health of the passengers, the legalization of the trade would make the welfare of the trade coincide with the self-interest of the slaver. Governmental regulation, enabled by legalization, would further ensure the well-being of the slave. Moreover, the complete suppression of the African slave trade was not feasible. A regulated licit commerce was better for the Africans than the current unregulated and illicit commerce.[43]

Significantly, Ruffin admitted that even the old legal slave trade had not been exempt from abuses. But he argued that the cases of misery and cruelty during the period of legality had been exceptional. All great historical movements--such as the American Revolution--contained instances of individual suffering, which were outweighed by the overall long-term benefits. "And the cases of greater unhappiness of individual African slaves, when brought to this country, by a legalized trade, however much to be deplored, as of all other undeserved human suffering, would be as nothing in comparison to the greater benefits thereby produced in all other cases, to the first slaves & to their posterity." Given the "brutish feelings" of Africans and the delicate sensibilities of Europeans, the incidental horrors of the foreign slave trade were no worse than the abuses suffered by the destitute hordes of free immigrants to the United States in the course of their transatlantic voyages. Most blacks, moreover, had been slaves in their native continent. The occasional capture and enslavement of a free African native was dust in the balance of the civilizing and Christianizing achievements of Southern slavery. Through such rationales Ruffin's moral outrage about the slave trade dissipated.[44]

The candid admission but minimization of abuses, the comparative perspective, the supposed harmonization of the discordant interests of oppressor and oppressed, the racist presumptions, and, above all, the utilitarian calculus--the

very arguments Ruffin had employed to exalt slavery as a blessing--were now enlisted to rationalize the African slave trade. In the course of elaborating and systematizing his proslavery creed in The Political Economy of Slavery, Ruffin realized that the arguments which sanctioned slavery could also sanction the slave trade. In fact, Ruffin presented the revival of the slave trade as part of the positive good ideology. Nevertheless, his arguments in support of the slave trade were more an apologia than a paean. He was not so much calling for the legalization of the illicit traffic as trying to overcome his own moral antipathy. Ruffin did not become an avid crusader for reviving the slave trade or even for repealing the federal interdiction. Neither the possible instrumentality of slave trade agitation in hastening the dissolution of the Union nor the supposed entailment of the legitimacy of the slave trade from proslavery ideology sufficed to convert him completely.

Whatever reservations Ruffin still harbored about renewing the notorious traffic were not assuaged by his perusal of Pettigrew's minority report for the South Carolina legislative committee in December 1857. Pettigrew contended that the revival of the foreign slave trade would have deleterious economic and social consequences. Pettigrew conceded that renewal would expand Southern cotton production. But he argued that the influx of African slaves would both lower slave prices and increase the costs of slave maintenance. Thus the expanded cotton output would

not compensate planters for the expected reduction of cotton prices. The true beneficiaries of slave trade renewal would be the British cotton manufacturers, who would buy the Southern staple at a lower price, not the Southern slaveholders, whose capital assets and net profits would decline. The diminution of slave values, Pettigrew pointed out, would lessen the master's economic stake in slavery and his interest to resist emancipation. Yet the reduction of slave prices would not diffuse slave ownership to the white masses because the increased supply of African laborers would cheapen the value of all Southern labor, black and white; the poor white laborer would thus still be unable to afford the cost of a slave. Indeed, the diffusion argument was "the most dangerous" of the rationales to revive the slave trade as it incited the poor against the rich.[45]

Furthermore, Pettigrew argued, the infusion of slothful and unruly African savages would corrupt the productive and contented Southern slaves and thereby subvert the delicate equilibrium of paternalistic master-slave relationships. The African slave trade would transform Southern slavery into its horrid Caribbean counterpart, marked by the chronic unrest and misery of slaves along with a corresponding insecurity and cruelty of slaveholders. Nor would the reopening of the slave trade end the shortage of slave labor in the Atlantic seaboard states. The imported Africans would simply gravitate to the fertile Southwestern lands. The way to stop the westward migration of slaveholders was

by scientific rejuvenation of the exhausted Southeastern soil, not by slave replenishments from Africa. Pettigrew's call for educating farmers struck a responsive chord in the longtime agricultural reformer. But Ruffin must have also appreciated Pettigrew's admonition that the restoration of the slave trade would exacerbate, rather than mitigate, the perceived economic and moral declension of slavery in the Southern border states.[46]

A different view of the effects of renewing the slave trade was propounded by Southern radicals in May 1858 at the annual Southern Commercial Convention, which Ruffin attended as a Virginia delegate. The indefatigable propagandist for the slave trade Leonidas W. Spratt bluntly called for the revival of the forbidden traffic. The leading Alabama secessionist William L. Yancey limited his demand to the repeal of federal laws barring the slave trade. Both men contended that renewal would diffuse slave ownership to the nonslaveholding masses, who were particularly prominent in the border states. The erstwhile Virginian proponent of the slave trade Roger A. Pryor--whose reversal on this issue foreshadowed his volte face on sectional politics in general--rose with air of self-righteous indignation and affirmed the axiomatic fidelity of nonslaveholding whites to the peculiar institution, the contrary presumption being the "foul libel" of abolitionists. Yancey pointedly remarked that Eli Thayer could plant an "abolition colony" only in the congenial domain of Virginia. Likewise, only the upper

South could support such antislavery leaders as Cassius M. Clay and Henry Winter Davis. Pryor argued that the renewal of the trade would lower cotton prices and reduce the profits of Southern planters. Yancey insinuated that the border state opposition to renewal had little to do with cotton: Virginians feared that an influx of cheap African slaves would destroy their lucrative business of selling high-priced slaves to the lower South. The Alabamian declared that he would prefer to buy a Cuban slave for $600 than a Richmond slave for $1,500.[47]

Virginians were resentful. Ruffin deviated from his customary public reticence to respond to Yancey's aspersions. The overwhelming majority of Virginian slaveholders, Ruffin insisted, sought to retain its slaves. Virginia planters were forced to sell their slaves out of economic necessity; they were not allured by financial profitability. To demonstrate his sincerity, Ruffin declared that he wished that all indigenous Virginia slaves as well as their progeny were back in the Old Dominion. Another Virginia delegate, William B. Preston, protested that Yancey's position was identical with Northern abolitionism, which charged the border states with slave-breeding.[48] The abrasive Yancey had touched a nerve.

The Montgomery convention's debate about the expediency of renewing the slave trade became inevitably entangled with the issue of secession. Spratt presented the slave trade as a means of bolstering Southern power within the Union.

Ascribing Southern territorial inferiority to the federal proscription of the African slave trade, which deprived slaveholders of the opportunity of obtaining the labor supply required to populate the West, Spratt contended that the reopening of the traffic would enable the South to appropriate all remaining Western territories. Spratt denied that the scheme would sever the Union. The objections of Northern politicians would be drowned by the applause of Northern manufacturers and merchants, whose income would be increased by the project. Since economic interest dictated Northern political positions and moral values, eventually even "abolitionist emissaries" would be converted into slave traders and proslavery propagandists![49]

Pryor was as suspicious of Spratt's portrayal of the slave trade as a Unionist instrument as he was skeptical of Spratt's exaggerated claims about the beneficial consequences of renewal. The agitation for reviving the slave trade, Pryor warned, would alienate Northern Democrats still loyal to the South, shock world Christian opinion, and divide the border states from their southerly neighbors. The South would be politically enervated. Furthermore, the North would never accede to the proposal of reopening the iniquitous traffic. Spratt's call for renewal was really a proposition to dissolve the Union. Virginia, Pryor announced, would not leave the Union in order "to kidnap cannibals upon the coast of Congo. . . . If you intend dissolution, declare it boldly and manfully."[50]

Yancey accepted Pryor's challenge. He vigorously denounced the federal laws inhibiting the slave trade as a violation of the constitutional spirit of sectional equality and a defilement of the honor of the South. Pryor's concerns of placating Northern Democrats and appeasing Christian sentiment earned Yancey's scorn: Northern Democrats had betrayed the South on Kansas and Christiandom was permeated with abolitionism. That the North would effectively stymie Southern efforts to repeal the prohibition of the slave trade was irrelevant: Southern Honor was at stake. Indeed, Northern refusal to remove her obnoxious stigmatization of the African slave trade would furnish the South with yet another ground for disunion. Yancey vowed to agitate all sectional grievances to rouse the slumbering South and spur secession zeal. While he would not singlemindedly pursue the repeal of the demeaning federal statute to the exclusion of other issues, he would not fastidiously eschew the issue to please border state sensibilities. Pryor suggested an alternative issue justifying Southern secession, namely the election of a Republican president. Yancey retorted that the presidential contingency was an "inferior issue": the loss of a presidential election conducted in accordance with constitutional law involved no sort of principle whatsoever. But the African slave trade involved the lofty "principle of equality, the principle that our government should not be able to brand our institutions as unworthy of extension."[51]

Ruffin generally sought disunion with the eagerness that Yancey displayed at Montgomery. But the heated exchange between Southerners on the convention floor, sparked by Spratt's injection of the slave trade issue and fuelled by Yancey's innuendoes about Virginian slaveholders, greatly distressed him. Frustrated by the lack of Southern outrage over the English bill, an inglorious denouement to the Kansas episode, Yancey turned to the slave trade issue to galvanize the South behind secession. But whereas the Alabamian radical could appear somewhat casual about border state sensitivities, the Virginian fire-eater could not afford such a luxury. For Ruffin, the support of secession by the upper South was vital to secure the successful departure of the lower South. The withdrawal of the Gulf States over the slave trade issue or even the agitation for the repeal of the restrictive federal legislation would hardly induce the border states to serve as a military buffer shielding the nascent confederation of cotton states. Moreover, Ruffin was still emotionally attached to his beloved Virginia: he could not envision the Old Dominion remaining permanently aligned with the hated Yankees.

True, Yancey himself proposed that the border states should function as a military barrier protecting the seceded cotton states. Yancey viewed the slave trade as a means of strengthening border state commitment to slavery. His major objective was to save the South by wrecking the Union; he had no desire to alienate the slaveholders of the upper

South. But the Alabamian had committed the cardinal error of impugning Southern honor. Ruffin felt personally affronted by Yancey's aspersions. Indeed, Yancey's insinuations about Virginian participation in the domestic slave trade rankled Ruffin more than federal legislation forbidding the foreign slave trade. In a sense the question whether economic embarrassment or greed propelled Virginian slave sales was beside the point. The decline in the price of Southern slaves would both allay the financial difficulties of the indebted planter and discourage the slave sales of the avaricious slaveholder. In any event, the upper South would retain her slaves. And the thoughtful Virginia slaveholder capable of subordinating his own immediate pecuniary gain to the larger, long-term interests of his class could support the slave trade scheme. But for the moment, Yancey's imprudent imputations of Virginia motivation in liquidating slaves to the Southwest overshadowed his important intimation that an infusion of African slaves could invigorate border state slavery, a central concern of Edmund Ruffin.[52]

Yancey's incisive barbs and Virginian vexation exposed the cleavages between the upper and lower portions of the South and made Ruffin wary about the secessionist value of the slave trade issue. In a letter to his son Julian, Ruffin complained that the slave trade theme had monopolized Southern discussion at Montgomery. Disunion sentiments, wrote Ruffin allusively, were "improperly . . . uttered by

different speakers." The futility of his past exertions to inspire the South to secede and the wrangling of Southern rights men at the convention left Ruffin gloomy about the prospects of disunion in the near future. "I see no issue likely to be offered--& communities do not revolt, or change their political connections merely for abstract reasoning & principles. But when there is more general & strong feeling entertained against the northern people, (& also by the abolitionists towards us,) & desire for separation, it is impossible that union can last long." If the South had not been stirred by the principle of slavery in the territories, she would not be aroused by the principle of the African slave trade. Abstract issues had to be concretized and related to sectional feelings: it was a profound observation. Hence, Southern inability to implement the slave trade was a liability. Instead of inciting Southern animosity against the North, the hypothetical slave trade issue only provoked acrimonious controversy among Southerners themselves.[53]

The rift at the commercial convention was not only between the Southern border and interior states. Cotton state moderates opposed both the renewal of the slave trade and secession upon outstanding grievances. Henry W. Hilliard of Alabama, for instance, affirmed the constitutionality of the federal prohibition of the slave trade and contended that its renewal was both impractical and inexpedient. Hilliard denied the fire-eater claim that

the South was degraded in the Union; the Dred Scott decision testified to the rising position of the South in the Union. Yet Hilliard echoed Pryor's declaration that the election of a Republican president would be met swiftly with Southern secession. For the quintessential fire-eaters Rhett, Ruffin, and Yancey, disunion was already justified by previous and ongoing Northern aggressions such as the admission of California, the Kansas affair, and Northern violations of the fugitive slave law. The federal laws proscribing the foreign slave trade were but another infringement of Southern rights, which Yancey hoped would prove "the last feather on the camel's back."[54]

The classic fire-eaters accommodated themselves to the mood of the convention. Forcing the slave trade or secession issue would alienate the reservoir of potential disunionists who avowed their intention to resist the election of a Republican executive. Accordingly, Ruffin called for the tabling of a resolution by a Georgia radical which proposed a popularly elected Southern convention to devise measures securing Southern rights within the Union or leave the Union. The convention responded unanimously. Similarly, members of the South Carolina delegation prevailed upon Spratt to postpone his resolutions for another year. Rhett himself called for the printing but tabling of the divergent committee reports on the slave trade. The convention's unanimous tabling of Spratt's proposal surprised and relieved Ruffin. At least the

appearance of Southern unity could be maintained.[55]

In the wake of the Montgomery convention, Ruffin was ambivalent over renewing the slave trade: he was eager to foment sectional antagonism but fearful of dividing the South over an abstraction. His reservations diminished as the issue became practical. In August 1858 the United States navy captured the Echo slaver off the Cuban coast. But in December 1858 Charles A.L. Lamar, an enterprising planter-merchant, smuggled scores of Africans into Georgia aboard his swift schooner the Wanderer and sold them as slaves. This flagrant flouting of federal law led Ruffin to predict the renewal of the slave trade. In both cases the federal government prosecuted the slave traders but was rebuffed by Southern jurors, who were reluctant to indict, much less convict, the principals and crew. In the Echo case, a determined district attorney changed the venue from Columbia to Charleston, South Carolina in order to obtain a grand jury indictment. In the Wanderer case, the Savannah grand jury which indicted Lamar for violating federal law filed a protest vitiating its own indictment. Claiming that they had acted under judicial compulsion, the Savannah jurors denounced the restrictive federal statutes as an unjust imputation upon the moral integrity of Southern slaveholders. Whatever trials were held resulted in acquittals; sympathetic Southern jurors simply refused to convict slave traders as pirates.[56]

Ruffin regarded these events as heralding the revival

of the African slave trade. The federal laws barring the slave traffic, Ruffin boasted, would prove nonenforceable; Southern states would as effectively nullify the laws proscribing the foreign slave trade as the Northern states nullified the law requiring the return of fugitive slaves. Ruffin conceded that the importation of slaves would lower cotton prices. But the growing popularity of the African slave trade--at least in the lower South--restored Ruffin's faith that the issue may have "political advantages," which, for a zealous fire-eater, could supersede economic disadvantages. The Echo and Wanderer episodes had transformed a hypothetical abstraction into a concrete reality; no longer was the African slave trade a mere debating point producing fissures within the South. The South had shown that she would no longer bear Northern insults with sheepish submission. The downtrodden South had acted; she had defied the arrogant Northern oppressor. Southern radicals, moreover, could now use these events as symbolic rallying points to dramatize the sectional conflict and channel mass animus against the North. Southerners might argue, even strenuously, about an abstraction; but they would rally behind a fait accompli.[57]

Indeed, the very logic of events which the Virginian fire-eater hoped would suppress internal Southern bickering in a common struggle against the North affected Ruffin as well. The fate of those Africans rescued by the United States authorities aboard illicit slave vessels (e.g., the

Echo victims) remained a moot question. Colonizationists called for their return to Africa while slave-trade proponents favored their sale to Southern slaveholders. His deep-seated opposition to colonization schemes aligned Ruffin with the position of the slave-trade advocates. Granted, objecting to the repatriation of Africans already transported to Southern shores was not technically equivalent to urging the South to dispatch ships to Africa for the purpose of kidnapping and enslaving free natives. But the adoption of the former position could gradually lead to the advocacy of the latter. More importantly, if the public opinion of the South condoned the activities of slave traders--if Southerners supported the acquittal of the perpetrators and the enslavement of the victims--then the sections could be arrayed into a hostile confrontation.[58]

It was no accident that Ruffin overcame his residual humanitarian compunctions about the cruelties of the infamous transatlantic traffic at the time of the Echo and Wanderer incidents. Although about half of the Africans transported by these vessels had died on the voyage, Ruffin accepted the convenient figure of a 9% death rate. Also, Ruffin relied on the testimony of Colonel J.E. Farnham, a factor of the Wanderer, that the internecine African wars, stimulated by the slave trade, were relatively bloodless. Assuaging his conscience became easier as the slave trade issue became politically expedient. Yet it is noteworthy that in January 1859 the fervent proslavery champion still

found it necessary to rationalize privately the humanity of the slave trade; on almost the eve of secession and civil war, twinges of conscience--however weak, oblique, and ephemeral--intruded upon the disciplined equanimity of the "positive good" ideologue.[59]

Signifying Ruffin's increasing proclivity to support the African slave trade was his new friendship with the notorious slave-trade journalist John Mitchel. Whereas in May 1858 Ruffin had silently sulked over a resolution awarding Mitchel an honorary seat at the Montgomery convention, in January 1859 Ruffin tried to enlist financial support for Mitchel's fledgling newspaper, the Southern Citizen. Mitchel's endorsement of secession as well as his opposition to colonization doubtless facilitated the association between the Irish emigrant and the Virginian patrician. But Mitchel was primarily an unabashed propagandist for renewing the slave trade. A major argument of the Southern Citizen was that the importation of Africans would so drastically reduce slave prices as to enable all Southern whites to become slaveholders. Mitchel warned Ruffin privately and his readers publicly that the Virginia slaveholders' selfish desire to maintain high slave prices and their consequent opposition to reviving the foreign slave trade would spur mass unrest, if not revolution.[60]

But many Virginians had a different opinion. William H. Harrison, head of the Amelia Academy (a preparatory school attended by Ruffin's grandchildren), was shocked by

Mitchel's avowed class perspective and his brazen attempt to bully slaveholders into acquiescence. Mitchel, Harrison warned his friend Ruffin, sought to divide Southerners by waking "the slumbering venom of the folded Snake that is in the midst of us unless forsooth we consent to a course which many think criminal, & nearly all impracticable." Clearly frightened by the potential danger of white nonslaveholders, Harrison believed that the hegemony of the slaveholding aristocracy hinged on the muffling of class issues. The academician anxiously informed Ruffin that the Republicans had financed the dissemination of Hinton Helper's The Impending Crisis in the South, an "atrocious book" which avowedly sought the abolition of slavery by the white Southern masses. That Mitchel sought to solidify slavery while Helper sought to demolish slavery was irrelevant. The effect of their writings would be identical: the arrayal of the poor nonslaveholders against the rich slaveholders. In fact, Harrison deemed Mitchel more dangerous as his paper was more accessible than Helper's book. Sensing Ruffin's growing attraction to Mitchel, Harrison warned his friend, "Let not his concurring with you on one subject, a Southern confederacy, blind your eyes to the fact that the course he is now pledged to follow will render that confederacy a rope of sand steeped in blood."[61] But Harrison could not persuade Ruffin that Mitchel's program would be counterproductive. Though Ruffin's aristocratic pretensions were wounded by the prospect of erasing all social distinctions among Southern

whites, his analysis of Southern slave economics from the standpoint of the Virginian slaveholder impelled him to adopt Mitchel's precise argument.

The early summer of 1859 saw the publication of a fairly sophisticated essay, "The Effects of the High Prices of Slaves," in which Ruffin overcame his economic misgivings about renewing the slave trade. The high prices of slaves in Virginia, Ruffin argued, did not reflect a flourishing slave economy in the upper South. The doubling of slave prices in the last fifteen years had not been accompanied by a corresponding increase in Virginia's agricultural productivity or her investment in farming improvements. Rather, the high prices of slaves were a reflection of the declining profitability of agriculture in the border states vis-à-vis the Southwestern states. The price of any movable commodity was determined by its maximum value at any locality, however remote. The great profitability of staple production in the fertile cotton and sugar fields of the Southwest had increased the demand and inflated the value of slaves throughout the South. Now given the high prices of slave labor without the prospect of a proportionately high crop yield in the border states, Virginian slaveholders were loath to purchase more slaves. Since slaves constituted the largest capital investment by the Virginian planter, agriculture in the Old Dominion stagnated.[62]

Furthermore, instead of buying more slaves to till their farms, Virginians were selling their slaves to the

lower South. These sales, Ruffin scrupulously noted, were made by improvident masters to liquidate the indebtedness they had incurred through agricultural mismanagement, not by enterpreneurial masters who sold or bred slaves. Ruffin dismissed Northern charges of slave-breeding as an abolitionist calumny, "odious, abhorrent, indefensible." The typical slave sold to the Southwest was vigorous and robust; had the disposal of Virginia slaves been prompted by crass greed, rather than dire need, aged and decrepit slaves would have been sold. Far from indicating a surfeit of slaves in Virginia, the southward flow of slaves was causing a serious labor deficiency in the state. The natural procreation of Virginia slaves could not keep pace with the increasing exportation of Virginia slaves. If this process continued, unabated, the aims of the abolitionists would be realized: "Sooner or later the operation must remove so many of our slaves, as necessarily to destroy the institution of negro slavery within the limits of Virginia."[63]

The high price of slaves in Virginia, Ruffin argued, was not an economic boon but an economic bane, the Achilles heel of border state slavery. Ruffin conceded that slaveholding farmers who contemplated neither the expansion nor the constriction of agricultural operations were relatively unaffected by high slave prices. But for the industrious planters who sought to increase their output by acquiring more land or by implementing scientific reform, the rising price of slaves was a grave impediment.[64] And

Ruffin sensed that the wealth of the commonwealth, quite apart from the preservation of slavery, depended upon the continuation of agricultural reform. Ruffin did not consider the possibility that the agricultural improvements in Virginia hinged on the sale of slaves to the Southwest. Instead of viewing slave sales as vital to supply the capital for the rejuvenation of Virginian agriculture, Ruffin viewed the failure of Virginian farmers to improve their soils on a sufficient scale as responsible for the declining profitability of agriculture in the state and the sale of slaves to the fertile fields of the Southwest. Indeed, Ruffin singled out the high prices of slaves, caused by the profitability of Southwestern soils, as responsible for impeding agricultural improvement in Virginia.[65]

Besides inhibiting entrepreneurial slaveholders in the Old Dominion from expanding agricultural production, the high costs of slaves, Ruffin argued, prevented the class of nonslaveholding whites, especially prominent in western Virginia, from ever becoming slaveholders. A great shortage of slaves afflicted western Virginia--the focal point of antislavery sentiment in the state. Ten times the number of slaves currently available, Ruffin estimated, could be profitably employed on the large stretches of open land beyond the Blue Ridge Mountains. The reduction of slave prices, therefore, would benefit not only the upwardly mobile planter but the masses of poor whites as well. Notwithstanding his typical smug indifference towards poor

whites and implicit conviction of the loyalty of nonslaveholders, at this juncture Ruffin seemed to perceive that the allegiance of the masses required to be bound, or at least reinforced, by economic interest: "The number of slave-owners would be greatly increased (perhaps doubled), if the prices of slaves were greatly reduced. It is not needed to set forth the advantages to the commonwealth, and to the slaveholding interest, of increasing the number of additional proprietors of slaves." Even those who would still be unable to afford slaves at the reduced cost, Ruffin noted, could reasonably aspire to become a slaveholder in the future. The actual or prospective ownership of slave property would concretize the intangible abstractions of the positive good ideology. The diffusion of slaves would enable the white masses to reap tangible dividends from their racial supremacy, the myth upon which the hegemony of the plantation aristocracy rested.[66]

Although Ruffin's essay made no mention of the slave trade, the revival of the forbidden commerce in African slaves was the vital implication of his analysis of the socioeconomic trends of Virginian slavery. A large supply of slaves was essential to counteract the inflationary spiral engendered by the mounting demand for slaves in the virgin lands of the Southwest. The reduction of slave prices would promote the expansion of agricultural operations by the enterprising planters of Virginia and the diffusion of slaves among the numerous class of

nonslaveholders in the state. Furthermore, only a huge influx of Africans could halt the growing depletion of border state slaves to the cotton states. Ruffin's dissection of the Southern economy transmuted what had been the Virginian slaveholder's principal objection to renewing the slave trade, namely the expected diminution in slave values, into its major attraction: lower slave prices would maintain the profitability and viability of the Virginian slave economy.

Ruffin had tried to invigorate Virginian agriculture by urging farmers to replenish their exhausted soils scientifically. But agricultural reform had been too sparsely undertaken in the border states to compete with the productivity of the abundantly fertile Southwestern soils. Now, only a massive transfusion of African slaves could save the ailing Virginian economy; only a renewal of the foreign slave trade could overbalance the debilitating drain of the domestic slave trade upon Virginia's labor resources. Ruffin claimed that a larger supply of slaves would stimulate slaveholders to undertake agricultural reforms. But he may also have viewed the slave trade revival as a means of punishing Virginia for her laxity in implementing agricultural reform on a sufficient scale. Notwithstanding Ruffin's indignant denials of the slave-breeding allegation, the reduction of slave prices would be poetic justice for those dubious slaveholders who had been more solicitous about the fecundity of their slaves than the fertility of

their soils.

Interestingly, Ruffin had previously perceived the danger of the gradual erosion of slavery in the upper South. In the past, however, Ruffin's anti-abolitionist and secessionist writings had attributed the decline of slave agriculture in the border states to the nefarious infiltration of Yankee abolitionists who enticed slaves to flee to the nearby North for refuge. Now, Ruffin's scholarly article contended that the internal dynamics of the Southern slave economy--rather than the invasive Northern interloper--were responsible for the declension of Virginian slavery. The downward drift of Southern slavery, therefore, could not be stopped by such expedients as permitting slaves to testify against abolitionist agents; it required major socioeconomic engineering, albeit within the confines of the slave labor system. Ruffin, of course, did not expect Northerners to sit back idly while Southern slavers violated federal law with impunity. Unlike the allowance of slave testimony, the renewal of the African slave trade could not be achieved within the Union. Ruffin clearly understood that Southern agitation and implementation of the notorious traffic would outrage the Northern conscience and hasten sectional confrontation. Thus, ironically, the solution dictated by Ruffin's fairly objective analysis of the difficulties of border state slavery was more radical than that reached through his sectionalist polemics.

Ruffin's essay also conflicted with his customary views about the demographics of slavery and his consequent fears of freesoil aggrandizement. Previously, Ruffin had been haunted by the specter of slave suffusion: the proliferation of the black population would render slavery uneconomical and foster the conversion to free labor. But the proposal to renew the African slave trade was predicated upon an alleged existing and continuing shortage of slave labor. Ruffin's fears of an excess and deficiency of slaves were patently inconsistent. In Ruffin's mind, Virginian slavery was a very delicate institution. Either an abundance of slaves in the border states or a scarcity of slaves in the cotton states and the resultant high prices would doom Virginian slavery. But surely the South could not be simultaneously afflicted with both maladies. Furthermore, if the South truly suffered from an insufficiency of slave labor, then Ruffin's fear that the North could suffocate Southern slavery by territorial encirclement was exaggerated, if not unwarranted. In fact, from the standpoint of Ruffin's article on high slave prices, freesoilism could unintentionally benefit Southern slavery. The diffusion of slaves into the Western territories would only increase the demand for slaves and raise their prices even higher, a circumstance detrimental to slave agriculture in the upper South. But the geographic confinement of slavery could encourage Virginian slaveholders to improve their soils and cultivate the "large spaces" of land in the

western portion of the state. Granted, Northern appropriation of the Western territories would enable the abolition of slavery by constitutional amendment. Nevertheless, "The Effects of High Prices of Slaves" had unwittingly made the North less threatening; high slave prices, not abolitionist emissaries, were endangering border state slavery; and freesoilism could not annihilate slavery by economic strangulation. Yet Ruffin's secessionist ardor was undiminished. The intended conclusion of his sophisticated essay was not the possibility of reaching a sectional rapprochement but the desirability of reviving the foreign slave trade.

But Ruffin refrained from openly calling for revival in his essay. Ruffin's growing alarm about the southward flow of slaves as well as his anxious pursuit of another issue to widen the sectional rift made slave trade renewal appear attractive. But the staunch opposition of border state slaveholders to renewal, illustrated by their peevish boycott of the 1859 Southern Commercial Convention at Vicksburg, threatened to crystallize the Southern fissure at Montgomery into an ominous schism. Ruffin cautiously launched a trial balloon. To dampen Virginian repulsion to the slave trade, Ruffin wrote a scholarly article on a tangential topic, the high prices of slaves. His circumlocution reflected his political circumspection. Virginians would be less offended by the subtle intimations of a political economist than by the shrill appeals of a

slave trade polemicist. Indirect argumentation would also enable Ruffin to abandon the issue hastily without the slightest embarrassment in case of adverse reaction.[67]

That the renewal of the African slave trade was the unstated but unequivocal corollary of Ruffin's article is confirmed by his private correspondence with John Mitchel. The controversial slave trade propagandist deemed Ruffin's arguments against high slave prices "most excellent & unanswerable"; he could not understand how the Virginian could still object to renewal. Ruffin quickly corrected Mitchel's misapprehension: my longstanding views on the slave trade, Ruffin confided, "certainly vary from what I have <u>indirectly</u> but not the less strongly argued for in the late publication. I am free to confess a great and gradual change of opinion as to the policy of reopening the African Slave Trade--& still more, & recently as to the expediency of agitating the question." Another avid advocate of reviving the slave trade, James D.B. DeBow, whose famous review published Ruffin's essay, did not misinterpret the fire-eater's intention: "Your article in June No is capital. It is exactly to our purpose & proves <u>we must have africans</u>."[68]

Was slavery in the Southern border states in danger of gradual extinction? During the nineteenth century the white population grew at a much faster pace than the slave population in the border states. Between 1820-1860, the number of slaves in the upper South rose 58.5% and the

number of whites rose 129%. The disparity was even more striking in Virginia, where the white growth rate (73.3%) was almost five times as rapid as the slave growth rate (15.5%). (By contrast, from 1820-1860 the slaves of the lower South increased more than fourfold.) Given the swifter growth rate of the whites, the proportion of slaves in the upper South relative to the total population declined. In Virginia, for example, slaves composed 38.7% of the population in 1830 but only 30.7% by 1860. In the Virginia Tidewater region during this thirty-year period, the number of slaves decreased absolutely as well as relatively. As Ruffin noted, slave prices climbed sharply in the 1850s: the average price for a young adult male slave rose from about $750 in 1850 to $1,500 in 1860. In the mid 1850s Virginia annually shipped about 20,000 slaves to the Deep South--a large percentage of them coming from the Tidewater. Ruffin would argue that high slave prices stimulated sales to the cotton states by making border state agriculture increasingly unprofitable rather than by making slave selling highly profitable. In any case, the domestic slave trade was siphoning off slaves from the upper to the lower South. Further, slaves were drifting southward within the border states. In Virginia the downward descent of slaves was most salient in the Piedmont and Trans-Allegheny regions. Bu 1860 northeastern Virginia (the "Panhandle") was virtually depleted of slaves. In fact by the time of Lincoln's election, some border states were closer to

freedom than to slavery. Delaware had few slaves and about half of Maryland's blacks were free. The classic fire-eater who pondered these long-term trends was understandably perturbed.[69]

From another vantage point, however, slavery in Virginia and the upper South was hardly imperilled by progressive abolition in 1860. Over a million and a half of the South's almost four million slaves were located in the border states. Delaware and Maryland were atypical. In 1860 Virginia still had more slaves--nearly half a million--than any other state of the entire South. If slaves composed less than 10% of the population of western Virginia, in eastern Virginia slaves were almost as populous as whites. In several Tidewater counties, including Hanover and Prince George wherein Ruffin resided in the 1850s, slaves still outnumbered whites. And slavery in the southern Piedmont counties was flourishing. In the 1850s Virginia was employing slaves in her diversified agricultural and nascent manufacturing enterprises.[70] The domestic slave trade can be seen not so much as a siphon draining slaves to the Deep South but as another lucrative enterprise in Virginia's increasingly diversified slaveholding economy. Indeed, the slave trade provided an additional incentive for the border states to raise slaves. Given the hereditary nature of Southern bondage, a regulated sale of field hands to the cotton states was not incompatible with the viability of slavery in the border

states. But as a longtime agrarian reformer and paternalistic master, who recoiled from the prospect of breeding slaves, Ruffin could only view the profitability of slavery from the narrow perspective of agricultural production. Perhaps Ruffin feared that border state slaveholders, possessing unprofitable soils, would simultaneously try to fill their purses and salve their consciences by selling their valuable slaves. Nevertheless, slavery in the upper South faced no imminent danger of economic demise in 1860; whatever danger existed was in the distant future. Even for a fire-eater accustomed to surveying long-tern trends, the fear of slave depletion in Virginia was exaggerated. Ruffin's fear that slavery would be economically extinguished in the border states was less reasonable than his apprehension that slavery would be politically abolished everywhere.

One potential danger Ruffin generally refused to acknowledge at all was the loyalty of nonslaveholding whites. Many individuals belonging to this slaveless group struggled to eke out a subsistence from the poor soils they inhabited. They engaged in the lifelong drudgery which aristocrats like Ruffin could afford to despise. Even when they were politically flattered, they were socially denigrated. The nonslaveholders' loyalty to slavery hinged partly upon their economic dream of becoming slaveholders. But in the 1850s the proportion of slaveholders in the South declined from 31%-26%, including a 33%-26% drop in Virginia.

The growing concentration of slave ownership increased the relative number of nonslaveholders and decreased the likelihood of achieving slaveholder status. How long would the majority of nonslaveholding whites support the class supremacy of the slaveholding gentry? Furthermore, the Republicans directed their egalitarian appeals precisely to the large body of slaveless Southerners, whom they tried to enlist against the "Slave Power." With the shrinking opportunities for social mobility, the nonslaveholding masses seemed ripe candidates for Republican propaganda. Secession could eliminate the danger of Republican recruitment of nonslaveholders but precipitate another, a greater, danger. Would upcountry yeomen stoically bear the shattering disruption of their communal autonomy entailed by grueling civil war? In fact, would the slaveless militarily defend slave institutions from Yankee invasion at all?[71]

As Ruffin himself sensed in the late spring of 1859, the diffusion of slaves to the masses could narrow the growing rift between the classes: the importation of Africans could promote social mobility among Southern whites or at least maintain the mythology by appearances. But Ruffin's concern about the allegiance of nonslaveholding whites--only a secondary motive behind his implicit endorsement of reopening the African slave trade in the first place--proved short-lived, propelled perhaps by the economic perspective of his essay on high slave prices. The Virginian patrician soon reverted to his usual complacency

about the loyalty of poor whites to slavery. Although quite alarmed by the "BROWN-HELPER party," as he termed the Republicans, Ruffin was unperturbed by Hinton R. Helper's The Impending Crisis, which posited class divisions among Southern whites.[72]

Several acquaintances tried to alert Ruffin about the poor white danger. In late 1859, for example, John A. Thompson, a perceptive west Virginian, warned Ruffin that the nonslaveholders residing beyond the Blue Ridge, envious and resentful of eastern planters, would side with the North and abolish slavery if Virginia seceded. In the spring of 1860 a concerned a North Carolinian acquaintance, J.M. Jordan, informed Ruffin that the platform of the Raleigh Working Men's Association, which called for the taxation of all slaves below fifty years of age at value, had been adopted by the Opposition party in the 1860 state election. Such an internal rift on the eve of the national election was quite inauspicious. Even eastern Virginia was not free from evidence of internal dissension. After Lincoln's election, W.H. Janson, a Petersburg editor, wrote Ruffin about the discontent of poor whites in two northern Virginian counties, especially Nottoway, where "disaffection is quite extensive." Propertyless men, including overseers, openly avowed that in case of civil war or slave insurrection, "they would not lift a finger in defence of the rights of slaveholders."[73]

Ruffin discounted all such admonitions. He dismissed

the idea of internal Southern dissension as an alien antislavery calumny. For Ruffin, the Republicans' view that the poor whites were hostile to slaveholders was as much a "delusion" as their view that the slaves themselves were discontented with bondage. Ruffin was as much a prisoner as a propagator of the proslavery mythology of a monolithic consensus embracing slaveholders and nonslaveholders. Ruffin did not see that the yeoman's acceptance of slavery was conditional. The class conflict between Virginia slaveholders and nonslaveholders, which expressed itself regionally as a political struggle between the eastern and western parts of the state, ultimately shattered the Old Dominion. As Thompson had foreseen, the secession of Virginia from the Union sparked the secession of the Trans-Allegheny and the Valley from Virginia.[74]

Yet, notwithstanding his outward complacency about the poor whites, Ruffin betrayed deep fears about the fidelity of the masses to the classes. His persistent fears about mass democracy, subjecting all state offices to universal suffrage, and electoral reapportionment, giving greater political power to the populous western Virginia counties, largely reflected his desire to safeguard the slave aristocracy from popular plunder. Also, Ruffin's repeated warning that the Republicans' would subvert the border states by executive patronage was partly, if not largely, founded on his fear of poor white disloyalty. The fifth column inside the South, which Ruffin envisioned, would be

largely composed of poor whites led by ambitious demagogues. Thus, Ruffin's verbal dismissal of the poor white danger, like his assertion of slave contentment, was a matter of self-deception.

Ruffin's support of the African slave trade proved almost as ephemeral as his concern for poor whites. The internal cleavage which consciously concerned the Virginian secessionist was not between the upper and lower classes but between the upper and lower Southern states, a cleavage which Ruffin tended to view as a division between the the slaveholders of these regions. The slave trade issue, Ruffin perceived was driving a wedge between the upper and lower South, whose cooperation was vital for the success of secession. Agitating the slave trade issue would aggravate the sectional chasm but divide the South as well, perhaps irreparably. Ruffin hastily abandoned the issue. Rather than defiantly demand the revival of the slave trade, Ruffin's next article, "Slavery and Free Labor Defined and Compared," defended the merits of slavery itself. Ruffin realized that if prominent Virginians welcomed slave sales to the cotton states as a means of ridding the state of slaves, then it was pointless to call for the importation of Africans in order to preserve the slaveholding character of the state. Instead, Ruffin found himself arguing that abolition would be an economic catastrophe for the upper South. On the eve of secession, the fire-eater had to reiterate the arguments of Thomas Dew! He turned to less

controversial tactics to widen the sectional breach such as demanding the imposition of license taxes upon Northern goods. Secessionist imperatives cast the foreign slave trade into oblivion.

Ruffin's support of the slave trade, however transient, represented the extreme limit of his proslavery creed. It was not that the justification of slavery as a moral value logically entailed approbation of the slave trade. A proslavery ideologue could consistently uphold hereditary bondage in the South as an established, self-perpetuating institution preferable to African primitivism and European capitalism and, at the same time, condemn the African slave trade as a horrendous outrage. Ruffin himself had done so for years. For many Southrons, the benefits of slavery outweighed its abuses but did not outweigh the horrors of the African slave trade. The justification of the foreign slave trade was an extension not a derivative of the proslavery ideology. But the terminological misnomer by which the new proslavery orthodoxy styled itself--the "positive good" school--made the slave trade seem like a logical corollary of the moralization of slavery. Moral opposition to reviving the slave trade seemed inextricably linked to the discredited "necessary evil" school, which had viewed slavery as an unfortunate imposition.

On the ideological level, advocacy of renewal was more a matter of psychological compulsion than logical deduction. Ruffin could dramatically separate himself from his past

view of slavery as a moral evil by translating the theoretical abstractions of the positive good school into practical imperatives. Anti-abolitionism was not enough. Jeffersonians too had opposed abolition--on utilitarian grounds. Other positions were better attestations of the new faith. Hostility to schemes of individual manumission, gradual emancipation, and African colonization was a way of repudiating the natural rights ideology of the American Revolution. The congenital and immutable incapacity of the black to live in freedom necessitated his permanent enslavement. Ruffin went further. Not only was the liberation of the Southern slave wrong, but the enslavement of the Southern free black was right. Ruffin extended the utilitarian net. The blessings of slavery, he calculated, would outweigh the sufferings which the deprivation of liberty would inflict upon those accustomed to its enjoyments, especially since the subjected race lacked a keen appreciation of the pleasures of freedom. Revival of the foreign slave trade was the capstone of Ruffin's proslavery edifice. Unlike Southern free blacks, Africans would be forcibly uprooted from their native environment and transported to an alien continent. Additionally, whereas Ruffin's program allowed Southern blacks to choose exile instead of enslavement, slave traders would not be so gracious to African natives; the latter would have no institutionalized escape hatch. The captured African would be shackled, brutalized, and exposed to the dreadful "middle

passage." But in Ruffin's mind, black sensibilities had become so "brutish" and Southern slavery so blissful as to override the miseries of the traffic in human flesh. Thus Ruffin's espousal of reviving the African slave trade was the ultimate conclusion of the "positive good" ideology, reached by stretching utilitarian and racial premises to their utmost limits.

The impulse to authenticate the positive good creed and divest himself of all remnants of the necesary evil perspective did not by itself lead Ruffin to endorse revival in 1859. Practical considerations propelled ideological dynamics. The potential instrumentality of slave trade agitation in fomenting secession and the necessity of ending the labor shortage impeding border state agriculture spurred the fire-eater to support renewal of the forbidden commerce. Ruffin's proslavery ideology stretched and his moral compunctions shrank as the secessionist value of the issue rose. Still, Ruffin refrained from fully embracing revival. He excused the iniquities of the old legal slave trade. Further, he openly favored the enslavement of the Africans who had been rescued from illicit slave ships as far preferable to their repatriation at federal expense. But Ruffin never explicitly and clearly advocated dispatching vessels to the African shore to kidnap natives. His call for a policy of renewal was allusive and ephemeral. It was not so much a question of moral squeamishness--though Ruffin's longstanding antipathy to the trade is quite

significant. Rather Ruffin avoided a frontal assault against the Virginia slaveholding aristocracy, whose vested economic interests dictated opposition to renewal. Ruffin's proposal to limit the enslavement of Southern free blacks to criminals and idlers had been avowedly designed to accommodate public sentiment. Similarly, Ruffin's call for the enslavement of the rescued Africans, who were already on Southern soil, implicitly deferred to popular opinion. But Ruffin's concessions were insufficient. Virginians remained adamantly opposed to renewal. Fearful of alienating the prospective secessionist constituency in the upper South, Ruffin dropped the slave trade issue completely. Ruffin realized that the external danger of a hostile North bent on eradicating Southern slavery superseded the internal troubles afflicting Southern slavery, which included the declining production and growing depletion of border state slavery. Thus practical considerations shaped Ruffin's moral rationalization of the slave trade, the cautious nature of his advocacy of revival, and his abandonment of the controversial issue.

Notes

(1) "THE COLONIZATION SOCIETY AND EMANCIPATION," by "CALX," (written Oct. 10, 1857 and published in Richmond The South), appended to Ruffin's MS Diary, Feb. 5, 1858, 262-263, LC. Ruffin was not alone in deeming Southern women particularly vulnerable to antislalvery sentiments. See, for example, Dew, Review, 36. For historical assessment of the antislavery feelings of Southern women, see Anne Firor Scott, The Southern Lady: From Pedestal to Politics 1830-1930 (Chicago and London, 1970), 46-50, & Mathews, Religion, 115-118, 184. Southern antislavery writers also noted the great disparity between Northern and Southern land prices. See Kenneth M. Stampp, "The Southern Refutation of the Proslavery Argument," North Carolina Historical Review, XXI (Jan., 1944), 38.

(2) Edmund Ruffin, "Slavery and Free Labor Defined and Compared," No. 6, Charleston Mercury, July 1, 1859; "THE SOUTHERN COMMERCIAL CONVENTIONS," "DISUNION FOR THE SAKE OF THE SLAVE TRADE," "VIRGINIA AND THE SOUTH," Daily Richmond Enquirer, May 24, June 4, 21, 1858; Otis K. Rice, "Eli Thayer and the Friendly Invasion of Virginia," Journal of Southern History, XXXVII (Nov., 1971), 580-586, 590; Patricia Hickin, "Gentle Agitator: Samuel M. Janney and the Antislavery Movement in Virginia, 1842-1851," Journal of Southern History, XXXVII (May, 1971), 175-177.

(3) Edmund Ruffin, "Slavery and Free Labor Defined and Compared," No. 6, Charleston Mercury, July 1, 1859.

(4) Ibid.

(5) Edmund Ruffin, "Slavery and Free Labor Defined and Compared," No. 4, Charleston Mercury, June 28, 1859.

(6) Ibid.

(7) Edmund Ruffin, "The Effects of High Prices of Slaves; Considered in Reference to the Interests of Agriculture, of Individuals, and of the Commonwealth of Virginia," DBR, XXVI (June, 1859), 649-650.

(8) Edmund Ruffin, "Slavery and Free Labor Defined and Compared," No. 4, Charleston Mercury, June 28, 1859.

(9) Edmund Ruffin, "Slavery and Free Labor Defined and Compared," No. 7, Charleston Mercury, July 4, 1859.

(10) Ibid; Ruffin, "Effects of High Prices," 651.

(11) Edmund Ruffin, "Slavery and Free Labor Defined and Compared," No. 7, Charleston Mercury, July 4, 1859.

(12) Ibid.

(13) Ruffin, "Effects of High Prices," 651-652.

(14) Freehling, Drift, 247-249; P.J. Staudenraus, The African Colonization Movement 1816-1865 (New York, 1961), 242-244; Ira Berlin, Slaves Without Masters: The Free Negro in the Antebellum South (New York, 1974), 355-356; Also see Penelope Campbell, Maryland in Africa: The Maryland State Colonization Society, 1831-1857 (Chicago, 1971), 201-205, 210.

(15) Edmund Ruffin, "Liberia and the Colonization Society," No. I, DBR, XXVI (April, 1859), 420-428; "SUGGESTIONS CONCERNING FREE NEGROES AND POST-OBIT EMANCIPATION," by "CALX," (dated Jan. 25, 1858 and published in Richmond The South), appended to Ruffin's MS Diary, Jan. 30, 1858, 256, LC; Edmund Ruffin, "The Colonization Society and Liberia," DBR, XXVII (July, 1859), 56-57, 63.

(16) Edmund Ruffin, "Liberia and the Colonization Society," No. I, DBR, XXVI (April, 1859), 425-427.

(17) "SUGGESTIONS CONCERNING FREE NEGROES AND POST-OBIT EMANCIPATION," by "CALX," appended to Ruffin's MS Diary, Jan. 30, 1858, 256, LC; "THE COLONIZATION SOCIETY AND EMANCIPATION," by "CALX," appended to Ruffin's MS Diary, Feb. 5, 1858, 262-263, LC.

(18) Edmund Ruffin, "Liberia and the Colonization Society," No. I, DBR, XXVI (April, 1859), 418-421; Berlin, Slaves, 367-368.

(19) Ruffin, Diary, I, Entries for Jan. 20, Sept. 25, 1858, 147-148, 232; Edmund Ruffin, "Equality of the Races," 29-30; Edmund Ruffin, "The Colonization Society and Liberia," DBR, XXVII (July, 1859), 57-64; Edmund Ruffin, "African Colonization Unveiled," DBR, XXIX (Nov., 1860), 639-640; Edmund Ruffin, "Liberia and the Colonization Society," DBR, XXVII (Sept., 1859), 339-343.

(20) Ruffin, Diary, I, Entry for Jan. 20, 1858, 147; Ruffin, Political Economy, 10; Ruffin, "Colonization Unveiled," 644-647.

(21) Ruffin, "Colonization Unveiled," 646-649. In a similar vein, Ruffin called for the enslavement of African natives by the repatriated Liberian blacks in order to make Liberia economically self-sufficient and convert heathens. See Edmund Ruffin, "Liberia and the Colonization Society," DBR, XXVII (Sept., 1859), 343-344. Here, Ruffin was not so much seriously advocating that Liberians become slaveholders as maintaining the efficiency of the slave principle. Ruffin

did not deem blacks fit for self-mastery, much less the mastery of others.

(22) "SUGGESTIONS CONCERNING FREE NEGROES AND POST-OBIT EMANCIPATION," by "CALX," appended to Ruffin's MS Diary, Jan. 30, 1858, 256, LC; Ruffin, Diary, I, Entries for Jan. 28, Feb. 1, 4, 8, Mar. 8, Apr. 9, 1859, June 8, 1860, 276-280, 292, 296, 427; J.L.M. Curry to Edmund Ruffin, Feb. 18, 1859, Edmund Ruffin Papers, SHC. Also, Senator Clement C. Clay of Alabama requested material on colonization to thwart federal appropriations for the Echo victims. See Ruffin's diary entry for Feb. 15, 1859, 282; Clement C. Clay, Jr. to Edmund Ruffin, Feb. 11, 1859, Edmund Ruffin to Clement C. Clay, Jr. Feb. 15, 1859, Edmund Ruffin Papers, SHC. See also the newspaper clippings of the Congressional debate about the colonization of the Echo victims appended to Ruffin's MS Diary, Jan. 28, Feb. 1, 18, 1859, 557-559, 579, LC.

(23) Ruffin, "Colonization Unveiled," 641-642.

(24) Ibid., 642-644.

(25) Ruffin, Diary, I, Appendix C: "SUGGESTIONS FOR THE SOUTHERN STATES. No. III. The Free Negro Nuisance and How to Abate It," 621; Berlin, Slaves, 146-148, 183, 202-204, 355-359.

(26) Berlin, Slaves, 136-137, 174, 354-355.

(27) Ibid., 343, 360-363.

(28) Ruffin, Diary, I, Appendix C: "SUGGESTIONS," 623-624; "SUGGESTIONS CONCERNING FREE NEGROES AND POST-OBIT EMANCIPATION," by "CALX," appended to Ruffin's MS Diary, Jan. 30, 1858, 256, LC. In the 1840s Delaware and Maryland had programs of temporarily enslaving black criminals and passed laws authorizing compulsory labor of free blacks who lacked visible means of support. See Berlin, Slaves, 208-209, 334-335. For Virginian proposals similar to Ruffin's, see "REMOVAL OF THE NEGROES," by "G.F.H." [George Frederick Holmes], & especially "FREE NEGROES--WHAT SHALL BE DONE WITH THEM?" by "CIVIS," Daily Richmond Enquirer, Aug. 15, 1857, Feb. 11, 1858.

(29) Ruffin, Diary, I, Appendix C: "SUGGESTIONS," 621-625. Though he concentrated on Virginia, Ruffin proposed his program for the entire South. See ibid, 626.

(30) Berlin, Slaves, 371 notes that the Virginia legislature was more radical than previously during the 1857-1858 session as some legislators called for the enslavement of blacks as an end-in-itself, rather than as a

mere ancillary policy to stimulate colonization. But more representative of Virginia opinion was the Richmond Enquirer, which voiced moral objections to the expulsion/enslavement scheme. See "THE PROBLEM OF THE FREE NEGRO AND ITS PROPOSED SOLUTIONS," Daily Richmond Enquirer, June 23, 1858.

(31) Berlin, Slaves, 136-137, 400-403.

(32) In 1860 the lower South had about 37,000 free blacks in a population of almost 5½ million, consisting of nearly 2½ million slaves and almost 3 million whites. Thus free blacks composed 1.5% of the black population and .7% of the total population of the lower South in 1860. see Berlin, Slaves, 136-137, 396-401.

(33) Ruffin, Diary, I, Entry for Sept 13, 1859, & Appendix C: "SUGGESTIONS," 340, 626.

(34) Berlin, Slaves, 368-369. Proslavery theorists held that blacks themselves would prefer slavery to freedom. The blacks' refusal to enslave themselves affronted the proslavery logic. If the blacks could not discern the benefits of slavery, then the white paternalists would impose slavery on them for their own good. Southern states passed legislation facilitating the transition from slavery to freedom. See Berlin, Slaves, 367. Orlando Patterson argues that Southerners overreacted to free blacks due to their guilt over violating their own Puritanical sexual mores. See Patterson, Slavery, 261.

(35) "THE COLONIZATION SOCIETY AND EMANCIPATION," by "CALX," appended to Ruffin's MS Diary, Feb. 5, 1858, 262-263, LC; "SUGGESTIONS CONCERNING FREE NEGROES AND POST-OBIT EMANCIPATION," by "CALX," appended to Ruffin's MS Diary, Jan. 30, 1858, 256, LC. Ruffin, of course, also called for ending the practice of freedmen enslaving themselves to nominal owners in order to evade rhe deportation laws. On urban slavery in the South, see Richard C. Wade, Slavery in the Cities: The South, 1820-1860 (New York, 1964).

(36) On the Southern hysteria about domestic security during sectional crises, see Steven A. Channing, Crisis of Fear: Secession in South Carolina (New York, 1974), 17-57, 264, 273; Berlin, Slaves, 374-375.

(37) The need to adopt a militant posture in the sectional conflict had played a key role in stimulating the development of positive good ideology in the 1830s. See Sellers, Jr. "Travail," 51. An April 1856 issue of the Charleston Mercury contained an anonymous letter from an "honored" Virginia correspondent who contended that the

South's adoption of a strong moral position on slavery was a prerequisite to her adoption of a strong political stance on slavery. Southerners should not merely argue that slavery was constitutional but declare that the institution was moral per se--not an exception peculiar to the United States but historically pervasive and legitimate. If Ruffin did not author the letter, he concurred with its sentiments. See "State Equality," Charleston Mercury, Apr. 1, 1856.

(38) Ruffin singled out shipping Southern free blacks to the North as the novel element in his scheme. Some Southerners who supported such a policy hoped that the Northern experience of living amidst masses of Negroes would make Northerners more sympathetic to the Southern predicament and allay sectional tensions. Ruffin, of course, had no such goals in mind. Ruffin, Diary, I, Entry for Sept. 13, 1859, 340. Berlin, Slaves, 370-371.

(39) Ruffin, Address to Virginia Agricultural Society, 14; Edmund Ruffin, "Consequences of Abolition Agitation," No. II, DBR, XXIII (Sept., 1857), 269-270. Ruffin's favorite proslavery ideologue, T.R. Dew, had been ambivalent about the African slave trade. On the whole, however, Dew inclined decidedly against it; he even cited the British abolitionist William Wilberforce as a source. Dew, Review, 39-42.

(40) Schultz, South Carolina, 130-131; Ronald T. Takaki, A Proslavery Crusade: The Agitation to Reopen the African Slave Trade (New York, 1971), 1-4, 146-159, 164-165. On Governor Adams' call for renewal, see "MESSAGE No. 1" Charleston Mercury, Nov. 26, 1856. The South Carolina legislature printed but tabled both the favorable majority report by Thomas A. Mazyck as well as the minority report by Pettigrew. Also, Southern representatives in Washington overwhelmingly voted for an Orr resolution which declared renewal to be inexpedient and contrary to the "settled policy" of the country. See Schultz, South Carolina, 132.

(41) The standard arguments in behalf of renewing the slave trade are discussed in Takaki, Crusade, 25-85. I do not share Takaki's inference that Ruffin as well as other advocates of renewal were trying to compensate for their guilt about slaveholding; it is likelier that they were trying to purge the guilt of others by their aggressive course. Spratt's arguments were echoed by Governor Adams and Edward Bryan, who had penned the majority report for South Carolina's legislative committee on the slave trade. See "MESSAGE No. 1," & "Mr. Edward Bryan's Report," Charleston Mercury, Nov. 26, 1856, Dec. 19, 1857.

(42) Ruffin, Diary, I, Entry for May 15, 1857, 67.

(43) Ibid; Ruffin, Political Economy, 11, 14.

(44) Ruffin, Diary, I, Entry for May 15, 1857, 67-68; Ruffin, Political Economy, 11.

(45) James J. Pettigrew, "Protest Against a Renewal of the Slave-Trade," DBR, XXV (Aug., 1858), 174-180, 184-185.

(46) Ibid., 181-184; James J. Pettigrew, "Protest Against the Slave Trade Revival," DBR, XXV (Sept., 1858), 291-301. The Charleston Mercury published a synopsis of Pettigrew's argument in "Mr. Pettigrew's Report," Jan. 11, 1858. Pettigrew's report impressed Ruffin: "Mr. Pettigrew's report is an able argument--& impresses on me sundry great evils of the renewal, to which before I had not given due weight." Ruffin, Diary, I, Entry for Dec. 24, 1857, 139.

Pettigrew also argued that the slave trade question was logically distinct from the morality of slavery. He denied that the 1820 federal "piracy" statute against the slave trade either stigmatized Southerners or challenged their title to the ownership of slaves. Southern slaves, Pettigrew noted, had been acquired when the slave trade was legal. The impetus behind the legal termination of the traffic had not been Northern antislavery hostility but slaveholding Southerners who feared importing more Africans into the South. Any Southern agitation to repeal the federal ban, Pettigrew reflected, would aid Yankee slave traders, who monopolized the illicit commerce. See Pettigrew, "Protest Against Renewal," 170-173; Pettigrew, "Protest Against Revival," 306-307. Additionally, Pettigrew contended that agitation for revival would divide the South and alienate the North at a time of sectional tranquillity. Moreover, Pettigrew warned fire-eaters not to agitate the slave trade issue for the sole purpose of sowing sectional discord; a dishonest issue would weaken the Southern cause. See Pettigrew, "Protest Against Revival," 304-306. Though Ruffin did not share Pettigrew's political moderation, his reluctance to agitate for repeal and renewal may have been strengthened by Pettigrew's arguments.

(47) L.W. Spratt, "Report on the Slave Trade, Made to the Southern Commercial Convention at Montgomery, Alabama, by L.W. Spratt, Chairman of the Special Committee," DBR, XXIV (June, 1858), 487-488, 491; "Late Southern Convention," 580-581, 583-587, 601-602. Yancey pointed out the inconsistency of Virginia slaveholders routinely selling slaves to the Southwest but opposing the renewal of the foreign slave trade. Yancey quoted a Georgia delegate, "If it is right to raise slaves for sale, is it not right to import them?" See "Late Southern Convention," 585.

(48) "Late Southern Convention," 588, 595. Later, Yancey apologized. He had not intended to impugn the moral integrity of Virginia. He had merely used the Old Dominion as an example of a Southern border state which contained

groups of antislavery whites and sold slaves to the cotton states. See ibid., 596. But the damage had been done. Yancey's barbs at Pryor doubtless spurred the latter's hostility to the League of United Southerners, the organization Yancey founded in the months after the convention.

(49) Spratt, "Report," 481-482, 490-491. Spratt believed that economics determined political policy in general. The classic fire-eaters like Yancey and Ruffin considered the North peculiarly motivated by material concerns. The obsessive materialism of the North, they contended, would prevent the Yankees from injuring a Southern confederacy. Yancey even predicted that the trade between the Southern confederacy and the North would convert Yankees who resided in the Northern border states into "slave-catchers." See "Late Southern Convention," 601.

(50) "Late Southern Convention," 582-583. Pryor, incidentally, accepted the morality of the slave trade. See ibid., 579-580.

(51) Ibid., 583-587, 597, 600; DuBose, Yancey, I, 362-363. Yancey was also glad to have extracted from Pryor the declaration that the election of a Republican president would justify secession--but the dynamics of the slave trade debate led Yancey and Pryor to cross swords over Southern politics in general.

Yancey had the same ideas about Manhood, Resistance, and Honor as Ruffin. The Alabama fire-eater articulated these themes at the Montgomery convention:

> The North has the power and will not repeal these laws. That is no reason why the South should not resist. Nations should be actuated by the same high sense of honor as individuals. If a man spits in my face, I will strike him, though he may thrash me. I know we cannot wrest this justice from the dominant North. They have fastened the shackles upon us, and will not loose them. But let us stand up and resist like men. If the principle of submission is to sway the councils of the South it will not be long before will be fulfilled the boast of Seward, that the whole American continent would soon be under the flag of this Union, and there would not be upon it the foot of a slave.

See "Late Southern Convention," 587.

(52) Yancey's remarks could have been construed as offering a remedy for preserving slavery in the border states. But the contentious atmosphere of the convention and Yancey's innuendoes about slaveholders of the upper South made Virginians ignore the substance of Yancey's remarks. Ruffin had long admitted that Virginia bred and sold slaves to the lower South. The mild treatment and plentiful food

supply, Ruffin had argued, promoted the rapid rate of slave reproduction. But Ruffin had vehemently denied that masters bred slaves deliberately "as a regular business." For the paternalist Ruffin, the intentional breeding of slaves was inhuman: "No man is so inhuman, as to breed and raise slaves, to sell off a certain proportion regularly, as a western drover does with his herds of cattle." See Ruffin, Calcareous Manures, Appendix B, 162. The incisive Yancey thus exposed the sordid economic aspects of border state slavery and impugned the paternalistic pretensions of Virginia slaveholders. The source of the allegation--Northern abolitionism or Alabama radicalism--was subsidiary to Virginia honor. Ruffin had to respond.

(53) Edmund Ruffin to Julian Ruffin, May 18, 1858, Edmund Ruffin Papers, SHC. In spite of his growing appreciation of the benefits of the actual revival of the slave trade, Ruffin lamented the discussion of this controversial subject at the convention and joined the other Virginia delegates in opposing Spratt's resolution: "Many persons, & embracing some who would approve of this policy if it were practicable, strongly opposed the introduction of this subject for discussion, because no effect can be produced, except to divide the Southern people. All our delegation will act on this opinion." Ruffin, Diary, I, Entry for May 10, 1858, 186.

(54) "Late Southern Convention," 591-593; DuBose, Yancey, I, 362. Other cotton state delegates who spoke out against renewal included Robert G. Scott of Alabama and George R. Hunter of Alabama. See their speeches in the Daily Richmond Enquirer, June 10, 24, 1858.

(55) "Late Southern Convention," 602, 605; Ruffin, Diary, I, Entry for May 14, 1858, 188. The convention, however, also tabled a resolution which forbade every Southern state and citizen from trying to renew the slave trade while that particular state remained in the Union. Certain eager slave traders exploited this opening.

(56) Takaki, Crusade, 201, 209-211, 213-219; Nevins, Lincoln, I, 434-436; Ruffin, Diary, I, Entries for June 5, 1858, Jan. 3, 1859, 199, 261-262.

(57) Ruffin, Diary, I, Entries for Jan. 16, Apr. 22, 26, 1859, 267, 299-301.

(58) On Ruffin's call for enslaving Africans captured aboard illicit slavers, see Ruffin, "Colonization Unveiled," 643-644.

(59) Ruffin, Diary, I, Entries for Jan. 16, 17, 1859, 269-271. Ruffin confessed lingering qualms about the

repercussions of the foreign slave trade upon Africa but claimed that the assurances of Col. Farnham had dispelled them. On the death rate aboard the Echo and Wanderer, see Takaki, Crusade, 213, and Nevins, Lincoln, I, 436.

(60) Ruffin, Diary, I, Entries for May 11, 1858, Jan. 8, 14, 16, 18, 1859, 187, 264-267, 273; Nevins, Lincoln, I, 438. Ruffin apparently sounded out Mitchel about founding a stridently sectional Southern weekly, but the editor was pessimistic about the viability of any journal openly espousing political extremism. Indeed, the Southern Citizen had only 3,000 subscribers, mostly in South Carolina, Georgia, Alabama, and Mississippi. See John Mitchel to Edmund Ruffin, May 15, 1859, Edmund Ruffin Papers, SHC. Mitchel's paper floundered, folded, and finally merged with Van Evrie's proslavery New York Day-Book. Ruffin, Diary, I, Entries for Aug. 9, 19, 1859, 328, 331.

(61) William H. Harrison to Edmund Ruffin, Feb. 1, 12, 1859, Edmund Ruffin Papers, SHC.

(62) Ruffin, "Effects of High Prices," 648-650.

(63) Ibid., 650-651, 653, 655-656.

(64) Ibid., 653-654. Ruffin conceded that the improvident masters compelled to sell their slaves would benefit from high slave prices; but he argued that the gain of the individual seller would be greatly outweighed by the loss to the community as a whole. A reduction in the price of slaves would admittedly hurt these sellers, but many more individuals such as the industrious planters and nonslaveholders would benefit. Here, Ruffin, in effect, revealed his indifference, if not repugnance, towards the pecuniary interests of border-state slave-breeders. See ibid., 652-653.

(65) Genovese incorrectly asserts that Ruffin appreciated the internal contradiction of the Southern slave economy posited by the eminent historian: the slave sales whereby Virginian farmers acquired capital to invest in agricultural improvements depleted the state of the labor force necessary to implement them. Ruffin saw only one side of this phenomenon: the depletion of Virginia slavery. He viewed slave sales as entirely negative. He did not see capital accumulation as an impediment to agricultural reform. Land and slaves were the two major capital investments for the farmer. And any farmer possessing them could by an act of will fertilize his soil and diversify his crops. Thus, for Ruffin, the high price of slaves was the primary obstacle to agricultural reform in Virginia. For Genovese's views, see his Political Economy, 136-140.

(66) Ruffin, "Effects of High Prices," 654, 656.

(67) Ruffin would have probably attended the Vicksburg convention, largely composed of cotton state delegates, if not for minor surgery on his hand. Ruffin, Diary, I, Entries for Apr. 27, May 8, 10, 28, 1859, 301-302, 304-305. An example of Ruffin's indirect argumentation was his claim that most Virginian slaveholders, who planned neither to buy nor sell slaves, would be unaffected by the fluctuations in slave prices; neither higher nor lower prices would harm them. Thus Ruffin assured Virginian slaveholders that the price reduction ensuing the revival of the slave trade would not hurt them financially. Ruffin, "Effects of High Prices," 653.

(68) John Mitchel to Edmund Ruffin, June 12, 1859 & Edmund Ruffin to John Mitchel, June 14, 1859, Edmund Ruffin Papers, SHC.

(69) My percentages on the growth rates are based on the population figures in Berlin, Slaves, 396-399, and Freehling, Drift, 245-247, 287. Also see Berlin, Slaves, 400-403.

(70) Freehling, Drift, 245-247, 279, 287.

(71) Shore, Capitalists, 42-49. Also see Elizabeth Fox-Genovese and Eugene D. Genovese, Fruits of Merchant Capital: Slavery and Bourgeois Property in the Rise and Expansion of Capitalism (New York and Oxford, 1983), 249-264.

(72) Ruffin, Diary, I, Entries for Dec. 16, 1859, Mar. 1, 1860, 408-409.

(73) Ibid., Entry for Dec. 4, 1859, 373; J.M. Jordan to Edmund Ruffin, Mar. 1, 1860, W.H. Janson, to Edmund Ruffin, Nov. 28, 1860, Edmund Ruffin Papers, SHC.

(74) Ruffin, Diary, I, Entry for Mar. 1, 1860, 408-409. On the sectional struggle between east and west Virginia, see Ambler, Sectionalism, & Freehling, Drift.

Chapter Seven: The Harpers Ferry Raid

After accommodating himself to political realities by dropping the controversial slave trade issue and calling for license taxes on Northern goods to save Southern rights within the Union, Ruffin, in the summer of 1859, penned a traditional fire-eating essay, aptly titled "Cassandra's Warnings." The article reiterated the familiar radical view about the past failure of Southern concessions to the abolitionist North and the inevitability of Southern doom within the Union. The history of sectional relations, according to the fire-eater gospel, was a self-perpetuating and cyclical pattern of Northern aggression and Southern submission under the snare of "compromise." Southern surrender only whetted the Northern appetite for further infringements upon Southern rights. The 1820 Compromise had admitted Missouri into the Union as a slave state but had otherwise reserved the vast domains of territories lying above the 36° 30' parallel for free labor. But the South's "disgraceful" acquiescence in the exclusion of slaveholders from the northern portions of the federal territories did not appease the voracious abolitionists. Many Northerners opposed the entrance of Florida, Arkansas, and Texas as slave states despite the southerly locations of these territories. Furthermore, the 1830s had witnessed a proliferation of abolitionist agitation. Northern antislavery organizations circulated "incendiary publications" throughout the South and dispatched "secret

incendiary agents" to instil discontent in the hitherto happy slaves.

The passage of time did not mollify the abolitionist temper. In 1850 Northern votes secured the hasty and fraudulent admission of California into the Union as a free state in violation of the spirit of the Missouri Compromise, which offered the South the opportunity of colonizing territories located below the stipulated latitudinal demarcation. The 1850 Compromise gave the South nothing of substance. The fugitive slave law, intended to enforce a constitutional provision, aroused great Northern animosity. Slaveowners and their agents, attempting to recover runaway slaves, were greeted by the violent--sometimes deadly--resistance of Northern mobs. And the expenses of recovery generally exceeded the value of the slave. Recovering a fugitive slave from the hostile Northern sanctuary was a costly and risky proposition. Indeed, Northern opposition in the forms of mob violence, complicity by federal marshalls and commissioners, and the enactment of personal liberty laws rendered the fugitive slave law a dead letter. The North had effectively "nullified" the only measure of the 1850 Compromise considered favorable to the South.

The future was more dismal still. The North had won the critical war for the western territories; all future states would be freesoil. The higher proportion of destitution in the free states and the Northerners' greater adeptness in forming associations had facilitated their

swift settlement of western lands. These Northern advantages in colonizing the western territories made the Kansas-Nebraska Act's repeal of the Missouri Compromise's restriction of slavery above 36° 30' practically worthless. Moreover, the Kansas-Nebraska Act, under the guise of sectional fairness, gave official sanction to abolitionist efforts to capture the Southwestern territories, which the 1820 Compromise had tacitly allotted to the South. The next Congressional session, Ruffin predicted, would admit Kansas as a free state. And all the Southwestern territories, which could be carved up into twenty or forty states depending upon the predilection of the abolitionists, would also eventually enter the Union as free states. The South could do nothing to maintain its modicum of political power. The division of Southern states was not feasible. Texans, for instance, were against splitting their state. And the addition of a few more slave states could not stop the ineluctable abolitionist avalanche. Nor could the South rely on her Northern allies. The "wise and worthy" members of the Northern community, who were faithful to the South and appreciated the value of slavery to the entire country, were few in number; they were politically nugatory.

Indeed, the power of antislavery in the North was annually rising. Ruffin conceded that the senators from California and Oregon, two nonslaveholding states, upheld Southern rights; but he believed they would soon meet the fate of other Northern representatives who dared sympathize

with the South, removal from office by their antislavery constituents. Geographic lines would harden; the entire North, including the newly and recently admitted Northwestern states, would become suffused with antislavery feelings. After achieving territorial mastery, the North would consummate her true design, the extirpation of slavery in the South itself. Within fifteen years, "Cassandra" prophesied, the North would obtain, through territorial admissions, the necessary preponderance to abolish slavery by constitutional amendment--even if slavery remained extant in such marginal border states as Maryland and Missouri and even if the North refrained from dividing large free states such as California and Minnesota. But if the Republicans swept the presidency and the Congress in the 1860 elections, then, flushed with victory, they would quickly admit several freesoil territories into the Union and abolish slavery within a year.[1]

The scenario Ruffin depicted was hypothetical. In the placid summer of 1859, a Republican triumph in 1860 seemed to many Southerners an improbable contingency rather than an imminent inevitability. Ruffin could not connect his dire forebodings to contemporary events. The Kansas episode was history. The entire essay, moreover, dwelt on the well-worn theme of freesoil expansion into the western territories, an issue which seemed remote from the mundane concerns of most Southerners. "Cassandra" tried to rouse the lethargic South to "vigilance," to awaken her dormant "spirit of

resistance." He warned Southerners that unless they quickly prepared for the "earnest defence" of their interests, they faced "misery," "degradation," "utter ruin." But Ruffin issued no clarion call for secession; he could not point to any immediate grievance; he merely alerted the South of "approaching danger."[2] Ruffin was planting disunionist seeds which he hoped would blossom in 1860 after a Republican presidential victory. At the very least, Ruffin was affirming his continuing allegiance to fire-eater orthodoxy--while other radicals such as Roger Pryor and James Henry Hammond spoke optimistically about the security of Southern interests in the Union.

The surface tranquillity of the summer was abruptly shattered by the drama of October. On the evening of October 16, a dauntless abolitionist militant, distinguished by his sanguinary excesses on the Kansas plains, led a group of twenty-two men into northern Virginia, cut the lines of communication, and, encountering little resistance, seized the armory and rifle works at Harpers Ferry. The leader of this band then dispatched some of his men to capture a couple of slaveholders and their slaves. Announcing himself as their liberator, John Brown gave the slaves pikes to fight for their freedom. The following day, while the Virginia and Maryland militias mobilized, Brown patiently waited--for a slave insurrection to materialize. Sharing the prevailing abolitionist conception, Brown expected the Southern slaves, burning with resentment, to grasp freedom

eagerly at the earliest opportunity by any available means. In fact, six prominent Northern abolitionists including the Unitarian ministers Theodore Parker and Thomas Wentworth Higginson, the social reformer Samuel Gridley Howe, and the wealthy philanthropist Gerrit Smith had been privy to the operation. Brown apparently intended to arm the hundreds of neighboring slaves who, he expected, would flock to the arsenal and ignite a massive servile rebellion. No slaves came. Instead, federal and state troops surrounded the armory and easily quashed the paltry force of invaders and captured its notorious leader. The number of casualties was few. No slave insurrection occurred. Yet Harpers Ferry sent shock waves across the South.[3]

The timing of the raid was quite auspicious for Ruffin. In contrast to its predecessors, 1859 had thus far been an uneventful year in national politics and, accordingly, dull and frustrating for a vocational fire-eater. For someone whose life revolved around sectional affairs, 1859 was almost catastrophic. Private musings and effusions to his diary could not relieve his boredom. "Cassandra" had caused hardly a ripple. October found Ruffin in one of his self-pitying, melancholy moods. On the fourth of the month, Ruffin reluctantly attended the wedding of his "most beloved" daughter Mildred, whose attention and affection he had hoped to monopolize until his death. Ruffin's fear that his new son-in-law would move his family to a distant locale compounded his worries. Anticipating the loss of

emotionally intimate female companionship, Ruffin's morbid disposition returned. Earlier in the year Ruffin had declared that he preferred death, if sudden and peaceful, to an elongated life of physical infirmity and mental senility. And now, on the eighteenth of October, the very day of Brown's capture, Ruffin, oblivious about the momentous event, confided his dread of the "idleness and wearisomeness" of old age to his diary.[4] The news about Harpers Ferry reached him the next day. For Ruffin, it was a godsend.

Upon hearing that some Northern men had invaded the federal arsenal, Ruffin hoped that the raid had been planned and executed by Northern abolitionists trying to foment a slave rebellion. "Such a practical exercise of abolition principles is needed to stir the sluggish blood of the south." Ruffin was not surprised to learn later that the abolitionist John Brown had led the invasion and that no slaves had joined him voluntarily. But the widespread sympathy Northerners lavished upon Brown caught him off guard. Not only abolitionists, Ruffin noted, but Quakers and women--groups he had deemed harmless--as well as conservative Unionist newspapers such as the New York Journal of Commerce called for the pardoning of Brown and his men. Ruffin confessed that even he had underestimated Northern hostility towards the South: "It is astonishing even to me, & also very gratifying to me, that there should be so general an excitement & avowed sympathy among the

people of the North for the late atrocious conspiracy & outbreak, & for the villains engaged therein." Those Northerners previously loyal to the South were now either silent or sympathetic and forgiving of the abolitionist Brown. The failure of most Northerners to condemn the raid emphatically revealed to Ruffin their complete indifference to race war in the South; further Northern attempts to incite slave insurrection would spark race war. Here Ruffin revealed his deep insecurity about the loyalty of Southern slaves, his protestations to the contrary notwithstanding. Ruffin feared that Southern slaves would join emulators of Brown or, at the very least, panic-stricken Southern whites would go on a rampage against blacks. But Ruffin did consciously realize that Harpers Ferry had given the fire-eaters a way of surmounting two major impediments to the receptivity of their secession message. The dramatic raid itself could be used as a concrete political issue to highlight the abolition menace and galvanize Southern passions. And the unexpectedly insensitive Northern reaction to the raid could be used to discredit the oft-repeated claim of Southern Unionists that the majority of Northerners was trustworthy and friendly to the South.[5]

Newertheless, Ruffin exaggerated Northern support for the Harpers Ferry raid. Northern conservatives such as Edward Everett led Union meetings which defended the South and denounced Brown. Northern moderates such as Stephen A.

Douglas unequivocally condemned the raid as well. Solicitous about the Southern fear of slave insurrection, Douglas proposed federal protective legislation to avert such invasions in the future. Even important Republicans including William H. Seward and Abraham Lincoln denounced the Harpers Ferry raid. But these voices of disapproval were drowned out by the ornate encomniums heaped upon Brown by leading New England Transcendalists such as Henry David Thoreau and abolitionists such as Wendell Phillips. Furthermore, some Northerners called for pardoning Brown not out of hostility towards Southerners and slavery but out of the Unionist fear that the execution of Brown would transform him into a martyr and widen the sectional chasm. Also, many Northerners admired Brown's courage but deplored his deed.[6]

But Ruffin ignored the complexity of the Northern response to Harpers Ferry. Viewing the North as an abolition monolith, he construed every expression of sympathy for Brown as an endorsement of the violent overthrow of slavery. In particular, he mistook Northern admiration for Brown's daring boldness for approbation of Brown's plan. Ruffin thought that Brown was a "popular idol" above the Mason-Dixon line and that he could be elected president by Northern votes! Ironically, the Virginian fire-eater himself was very impressed with Brown's boldness: "He is as thorough a fanatic as ever suffered martyrdom. . . . It is impossible for me not to respect his

thorough devotion to his bad cause, & the undaunted courage with which he has sustained it, through all losses & hazards." In light of the lamentable cowardice and halfheartedness of Southern rights proponents--traits from which Ruffin himself was not entirely immune--the Southern radical could not help envying the courage and commitment of this Northern abolitionist. John Brown seemed to personify the fire-eaters' characterization of the abolitionists: audacious, dedicated, organized, and dangerous.[7]

The Southern judicial system dispatched of Brown with deliberate celerity. The would-be liberator was quickly arraigned, tried, and convicted. On December 2, 1859, less than two months after the invasion, John Brown was ceremoniously hung in Charlestown, Virginia. Ruffin did not miss the spectacle. Outfitted in military regalia, Ruffin stood about fifty yards from the gallows and watched the hanging. Not having been present at the Harpers Ferry raid, Ruffin compensated for his absence by journeying to Charlestown in late November and personally inspecting the arsenal. The fire-eater hoped that Northern abolitionists would attempt to rescue the felon who so fascinated him. Even a successful rescue in which many Southern men perished would be justified by the political benefits to the South: "If an armed attempt to rescue is made, accompanied by blood-shed, whether successful or not, it will be a certain cause of separation of the southern from the northern states." Ruffin would have loved to fight and slay

abolitionist rescuers. Craving to witness Brown's execution at close range "& to aid militarily if necessary," Ruffin enrolled as a cadet of the Virginia Military Institute. As his military services proved unnecessary, Ruffin reconciled himself with attentive observation of the hanging. The stoical manner with which Brown accepted his fate led Ruffin to praise, however grudgingly, his foe's unparalleled "animal courage." But the Southerner objected to the military escort of Brown's corpse, an incongruous show of honor to an "atrocious criminal." John Brown, Ruffin now assured himself, had been devoid of all humanity and integrity; his only "virtue" had been raw "animal courage."[8]

Ruffin did not rely solely on the possibility of a Northern rescue attempt to spur Southern secession. He realized that Harpers Ferry had given the fire-eaters a golden opportunity to agitate for disunion. The South was stirred. Vigilance committees sprouted in several states to ensure the enforcement of the patrol laws against blacks and to guard against suspicious white strangers. Many communities expelled their Northern visitors. The merits of popular lynch law versus the regular judicial system became a debating topic in some Southern states. Besides engendering social fears of abolitionist plots and slave uprisings, Harpers Ferry had important political repercussions, especially in Virginia. Whatever plans old-line Whigs in the upper South had of coalescing with the Republican party were undercut by Brown's raid. Southern

Democrats became more distrustful of their Northern counterparts and less willing to acquiesce in an evasive party platform and in a Northern presidential candidate. The Richmond Enquirer, for example, argued that Harpers Ferry showed the need for federal legislation to protect slavery in the states and the territories. The Virginian governor, Henry A. Wise, whom Ruffin considered a barometer of public opinion, adopted a radical posture to exploit the popular outrage. Wise portrayed Harpers Ferry as an attack by the North upon Southern slavery and called for arming the state. Wise's course prompted Virginia Senator Robert M.T. Hunter, a rival presidential aspirant, to reassert his own radicalism. Some Virginians called for a boycott of Northern produce. Others became openly pessimistic about the endurance of the Union. In the immediate aftermath of the invasion, utterers of secession opinions would not be dismissed as irrelevant eccentrics.[9]

Unsurprisingly, the deed of John Brown removed some of the fetters which had been shackling Ruffin's secessionist zeal. In the weeks after the raid, Ruffin eagerly enunciated his disunionism. Previously, Ruffin's disunion avowals had been sporadic and guarded. Now, while conversing with Southerners who visited the Harpers Ferry area, Ruffin maintained that the Northerners' animosity against the South, revealed in their lofty tributes of Brown, justified the severance of the Union. As Ruffin recorded in his diary, "I use every suitable occasion to

express my disunion sentiments." A week later Ruffin tried to spur the secessionist ardor of several Southern rights Congressmen in Washington, D.C.: "I maintained that the conspiracy of the abolitionists, its outbreak in the invasion of Harper's Ferry, & the very general sympathy of the northern people with the murderers, afforded the best practical ground for dissolution that the South had ever had--& that it ought not to be passed over. We ought to agitate & exasperate the already highly excited indignation of the south."[10]

Ruffin's most imaginative way of dramatizing the Harpers Ferry incident was sending the pikes which Brown had intended as slave weapons to nearly all Southern states. In letters to the Southern governors, Ruffin requested them to display the pikes prominently in their legislative halls as "eloquent" testimony of Northern fanaticism. Gazing at these concrete souvenirs of Harpers Ferry could have a deeper impact upon Southern complacency than reading several Northern abolitionist editorials or listening to a series of fire-eating harangues. Southerners residing in areas remote from the point of invasion could better appreciate the common danger. To ensure that the symbolism of the pikes was understood, Ruffin had each pike inscribed with two radical labels: "Sample of the favors designed for us by our Northern Brethren" and "The most precious benefit derived from the Northern States by the Southern, if, rightly using it, out of this nettle danger, we pluck the flower <u>safety</u>."

But due to the lack of a fire-eating organization as well as the laxity of the Harpers Ferry superintendent, the pikes did not reach their destinations until the summer of 1860. In late June 1860 Ruffin hurriedly distributed the mementos to a cross-section of Southern representatives he tracked down at the Democratic national convention and Washington, D.C. Still, during the critical months before secession, the pikes served as poignant reminders of Harpers Ferry.[11]

Ruffin also used more conventional means to exploit the aroused Southern temper in the weeks after Harpers Ferry. In December 1859 Ruffin wrote an essay for the Virginia Index whose thesis was starkly expressed by its title, "Subversion of Negro Slavery, or the Dissolution of the Present Union, The Only Alternatives for the South." If the South remained in the Union, Ruffin warned, slavery would be doomed by either violent abolitionist raids or peaceful and legal constitutional amendment. The Harpers Ferry raid was no isolated incident but part of a deliberate Northern conspiracy to extirpate slavery by bloodshed. The North did not scruple in choosing raiders but selected "the most desperate outlaws and villains . . . who had previously, and on another theatre of action, been distinguished as robbers, house-burners, and midnight murderers of innocent and defenceless victims." Such raids would continue. The election of John Sherman, a Republican, to the speakership of the House of Representatives, an event Ruffin deemed imminent, would be an official condonation of antislavery

violence. The Republicans, in fact, were responsible for the Harpers Ferry raid: John Brown, argued Ruffin, was a fanatical abolitionist practitioner of the designs of Republican theoreticians. The Republicans had endorsed Hinton Helper's Impending Crisis. Brown was merely executing the program contained therein. Moreover, many Northerners, including those sympathetic to the South, had called for the pardoning of Brown and his criminal colleagues. Southern comity with the North was absurd: had an event like Harpers Ferry occurred between separate nations, war would have been justified.[12]

Sensing that he had revealed too much about Southern weakness, Ruffin declared that the South was militarily prepared to repel future abolitionist raids. "But we cannot, under existing connection with the North, prevent the ingress and passage, or sojourning, of secret emissaries, and their instilling discontent and the spirit of insubordination into the minds of our slaves--of house-burning, and of constant irritation, and loss, and danger that will not cease until all is lost."[13] Whereas the South could defend herself against frontal assaults by abolitionist invaders, she was powerless against the clandestine agents of abolition whose stealthy machinations insidiously enervated slavery. Southern military might could overwhelm John Brown and slave rebels but could not suppress disguised antislavery intruders and invisible slave arsonists and thieves.

Ruffin's essay seems flagrantly inconsistent. If the South could squelch abolitionist raiders such as John Brown, then how could these raids destroy slavery? Also, after discussing the danger of abolitionist raids to Southern slavery, Ruffin virtually reduced the significance of Harpers Ferry to the unwanted presence of abolitionist interlopers in the Southern states, a seemingly unrelated and lesser issue. On the one hand, Ruffin's claim about the formidable Southern military capacity was not merely a rhetorical exclamation of Southern pride; he truly believed that the South could parry Northern abolitionist thrusts on the battlefield. On the other hand, Ruffin's admonition of actual danger from abolitionist raids did not merely connote his unwillingness to stay in the Union on these terms; besides resenting the indignity of being subjected to antislavery assaults which received the tacit approval of many Northerners, he inwardly feared that abolitionist raids could destroy slavery. Ruffin's inconsistency is difficult to reconcile.

What Ruffin may have feared was that the persistence of John Brown style raids, despite their facile suppression by the Southern militias, would be such an annoyance to the border states--much more so than slave flight, theft, or arson--that slaveholders would be induced to liquidate their slaves to the cotton states or even relinquish the institution entirely. In Ruffin's mind, the antislavery emissary and Harpers Ferry were not separate issues but

intimately related. The Virginian believed that John Brown and "hundreds" of his agents had previously infiltrated the South and carefully prepared a slave revolt. The docility of the Negro and the contentment of the Southern slave wrecked Brown's plans. Harpers Ferry, Ruffin pointed out, had been predicated on the widespread abolitionist misconception that pigmentation alone separated blacks and whites. The abolitionist mistakenly expected offers of land and freedom would incite blacks to slay their masters just as offers of plunder would induce the "vile rabble" of New York and London to pillage their capitalist oppressors.[14] The spell of the proslavery ideology led Ruffin to deny that the slaves would revolt and the mystique of Southern honor to assert that the South was capable of stifling slave rebellions should they occur; but the desire to stimulate secession had led Ruffin to express his innermost fears of slave rebellion. It was not merely a question of the whittling away of slavery by a multiplicity of petty annoyances or antislavery incursions; Ruffin feared the eradication of slavery by cataclysmic servile revolt. Indeed, beneath the veneer of casual self-congratulation, Ruffin was surprised and relieved that the slaves had not joined Brown. Ruffin was afflicted with a gnawing, though generally dormant, suspicion that behind every faithful Sambo lurked a treacherous Nat Turner. The fire-eater exemplified in acute form the Southern slaveholder's paradoxical insouciance and paranoia about his black slaves.

Ruffin's strained attempt to maintain the myth of slave contentment in the face of confuting evidence can be glimpsed from his changing reaction to the incendiary drama which beset his household in the late 1850s. That Ruffin had singled out "house-burnings" to illustrate slave resistance was no accident. Starting in 1857, a series of mysterious nocturnal conflagrations erupted on the Ruffin family estates. Destroying barns, stables, livestock, crops, farm equipment and machinery, these fires caused several thousands of dollars in damages. Initially, Ruffin was loath to suspect slave arson: "We have nothing to induce suspicion. It may have been accidental, by the dropping of fire from a passing & careless negro's pipe--or it may have been the incendiary act of a secret enemy." After another fire occurred under similar circumstances, Ruffin suspected that some nefarious white man, a "malicious incendiary," had ignited both blazes. Ruffin estimated the damages of this second fire at six thousand dollars. William B. Sayre, Ruffin's son-in-law who superintended and partly owned the charred Marlbourne plantation, offered a thousand dollar reward for the capture and conviction of the arsonist. Ruffin's concerned neighbors offered an additional five-hundred dollar reward.[15]

After a while, Ruffin's neighbors began to suspect that a black slave rather than a poor white was the culprit. Interpreting slave behavior as a reflection of slaveholder treatment, Ruffin strongly denied the allegation. The

family slaves, Ruffin noted, had always been provided with adequate food, clothes, shelter, and other indulgences. William Sayre, Ruffin added, was a firm but humane disciplinarian, the ideal manager of a Southern slave plantation. By November 1859, however, when the fifth fire in a couple of years erupted, Ruffin was prepared to believe the worst about his slaves: "There is every appearance that they were guilty of the designed burning--which is worse than the pecuniary loss." As only the slaves had been home on this occasion, denying their culpability was no longer plausible--even for the paternalist Ruffin. The pained slaveholder tried to absolve himself from guilt by reflecting that no fires had broken out during his longtime personal supervision of the farms.[16]

Ruffin's psychological need for self-exoneration powerfully reinforced, if it did not stimulate, his preoccupation with "abolitionist agents" infusing "incendiary" notions into happy slaves. If slave arson stemmed from the pernicious tampering of hostile outsiders, then Ruffin could maintain the illusion of happy slaves laboring for benevolent masters, the untarnished paternalist self-image. The conspiratorial operations of abolitionist intruders and the outbreak of suspicious conflagrations on the family estates may have ruffled Ruffin's equanimity; they did not alter his unflinching commitment to slavery. But Ruffin feared that the proliferation of slave mischief in the border states, the principal theater for abolitionist

infiltration, could further erode the already tenuous commitment of other resident slaveowners. Ruffin speculated that hundreds of antislavery emissaries had already provoked numerous slaves to commit thousands of offenses against slavery. Even without actual abolitionist raids or slave uprisings, slavery in the upper South could be gradually extinguished by "constant irritation." If chronic insecurity compounded slave abscondence and declining agricultural profitability, then many Virginian slaveholders might reassess the value of the peculiar institution. Thus the fire on Ruffin's farm which occurred in November 1859--a few weeks after Harpers Ferry--may have prompted the Virginian radical to accentuate the danger of abolition agents. He used Brown's raid to reiterate his chief fear: the "subversion" of Southern slavery by secret antislaverty emissaries stirring up slave unrest and inciting slave misconduct.

The special vulnerability of the Southern border states to abolitionist invasions as well as to subtler forms of antislavery penetration in general and the coincidental occurrence of Harpers Ferry on Virginia soil in particular inspired Ruffin to exhort his native state to depart from the oppressive Union. Previously, Ruffin had consistently called upon the Deep South to inaugurate secession; the stolid conservatism of the upper South disqualified it from initiating disunion and its strategic location uniquely suited it as a military buffer between the North and the

seceded Gulf States. Now, Ruffin tried to rouse the Old Dominion to lead the South to independence. Disunion, Ruffin assured the reader of his "Subversion" essay, would be bloodless. Several Southern states would swiftly follow Virginia out of the Union and "render the movement unassailable." Material interest would deter the North from a deliberate invasion of the South. The North would not risk fifty thousand lives and a hundred million dollars in an attempt to conquer the South. Nor would uncontrolled border skirmishes escalate into a full-scale civil war. The state's military vigilance, provoked by Harpers Ferry, precluded the accidental occurrence of lawless border skirmishes between Virginia and the Union. Virginia's military preparation made her role as a protective barrier for the cotton states dispensable and enabled her to resume her traditional leadership of the South. The Old Dominion could gloriously lead the South out of her bondage to the Yankees into the promised land of a Southern confederacy. Instead of sending her contingent of federal troops to patrol the freesoil frontier of the western territories, Virginia should leave the Union and deploy her well-trained militia along her northern border. Should Virginia content herself with paper proclamations and vapid resolutions, Ruffin--with perhaps himself in mind--declared, then her freedom-loving citizens should exile themselves to those states which recoiled from base submission and retained their heritage of liberty.[17]

Ruffin's claim that Virginia was militarily prepared for secession was a vain boast for public consumption. His diary was more candid. He admitted that the state was not prepared, but he sought secession anyway: "It is true that we are unprepared, in regard to military organization & discipline, & as to arms & all other equipments for defence. But I would prefer that Va. should secede, unprepared as we are, but with this noble spirit of resistance prevailing, to having a year of preparation, & losing that spirit." Though Ruffin expected the secession of Virginia would precipitate the departure of most Southern states, he was not relying on the celebrated military prowess of the South to rescue the Old Dominion from an invading Northern army. Ruffin confessed that the entire South, with the exception of South Carolina, was not militarily prepared for disunion. Moreover, Ruffin privately viewed Southern military readiness not as an ancillary factor supplementing Northern materialism to preserve the peace or as a safeguard preventing border clashes from flaring up into full-scale war but as vital to deter deliberate Northern invasion. He said nothing about Northern material interests sufficing to prevent a Yankee invasion. In fact, Ruffin wrote his son Edmund that the North believed that it could conquer the South in a few weeks. Ruffin must have realized that the North's subjective perception, not the objective reality, would determine whether she deliberately invaded the South. If the North expected victory to come swiftly and easily,

then her materialistic calculations would promote rather than deter civil war. Ruffin thus had publicly understated the importance of Southern military preparation to discourage Northern invasion and overstated the military readiness of the South to resist Northern invasion.[18]

Ruffin tried to justify his call for secession in spite of the absence of essential military preparation. He claimed that Southern unity in secession and her determination to resist would deter Northern invasion and enable the Southern confederation to maintain her independence should the North foolishly attack. The Calhounian faith in the political invincibility of a firm and united South inside the Union became Ruffin's faith in the military invincibility of a firm and united South outside the Union. Unity and nobility of spirit became substitutes for military readiness. Beneath such rationalization lay Ruffin's fear that the passing of time would return Virginia to her customary apathy: "Never has there been such an opportunity for secession. But I fear it will be allowed to pass unused--& that after the present fever of excitement & indignation, & spirit of resistance, there will succeed a general chill & collapse." Having waited so long for a practical issue, the ultra fire-eater could not let Harpers Ferry become a missed opportunity. Appreciating the evanescence of the popular temper, Ruffin knew he had to strike while public passions were torrid--whatever the risk. "Rather than let the existing

feverish excitement cool, I would be for making the move soon, even if not well prepared." He was tired of Northern taunts of the South's moral cowardice; Southern secession would refute such imputations. He was tired of Northern boasts that it could conquer the South with little difficulty; "if we had only arms for 100,000 volunteers, and ammunition & other equipment, I would wish them to have an opportunity to try." True, Ruffin hastily added that war would not follow disunion "if we were but prepared for its occurrence." And at one point at least, Ruffin qualified his call for the immediate secession of Virginia with the obviously unfulfilled condition of her having already made "sufficient military preparation." Still, an element within Ruffin's nature welcomed rather then shrank from a military showdown with the North. War, however hazardous from a practical perspective and undesirable from a material standpoint, would give the South a unique opportunity to refute Yankee aspersions definitively and dramatically display her lustrous honor. The travail of secession would metamorphose the humiliated and pusillanimous Southern mouse into a fearless, roaring lion.[19]

Alongside Ruffin's yearning to regenerate Virginia and redeem the South by dissolving the Union were incongruent impulses to eviscerate abolitionism and invigorate slavery within the Union. In the months after Harpers Ferry, Ruffin advocated a motley of reformist measures by conversing and corresponding with important political figures, writing

essays for the local newspapers, formulating and distributing petitions to the state legislature, and participating in Southern rights assemblies. Ruffin called upon the Virginia legislature to encourage domestic manufacturing and promote direct trade with Europe. Previously, Ruffin had futilely presented the license tax scheme as a means of ending Southern consumption of Northern products at inflated prices and indirectly obtaining sectional redress by showing the Yankees their economic dependence upon slavery. Now, Ruffin portrayed Southern economic independence as a way of curtailing the spread of abolitionism in the South. Northern trade, Ruffin claimed, was an abolitionist vehicle to disseminate antislavery propaganda and spark incendiarism among the slaves. Unmoved by appeals to their pocketbooks or political acumen, perhaps the sluggish slaveholders, alarmed by Brown's invasion, would be stirred by appeals to their security. In a similar vein, Ruffin sought to ban all Northern books and discourage Southerners from sending their children to Northern schools. The Virginian rejoiced when he learned that several Southerners had deliberately ceased their patronage of Northern businesses and that over two hundred Southern students had withdrawn from their medical college in Philadelphia. Virulent anti-abolitionism, more than inchoate Southern nationalism, propelled Ruffin to seek a comprehensive sequestration of the South.[20]

Ruffin, of course, did not neglect his longstanding

concern with abolitionist agents. Whereas Ruffin's "Subversion" essay prescribed secession to remedy the evil, his "Plain Dealer" articles advocated stricter police laws such as requiring all "suspicious strangers" to produce vouchers attesting to their trustworthy characters or to post bond ensuring their subsequent good behavior. Also, Ruffin again urged the allowance of black testimony in Virginian law courts. As only the slaves were privy to abolitionist agitation, the proscription of black testimony assured the immunity of antislavery emissaries from judicial conviction. Although emanating from a sense of racial superiority, the denial of juridical equality to the Negro had actually operated to undermine white supremacy in the South. Myopic Virginian legislators had given their abolitionist adversaries carte blanche to infuse "the spirit of insubordination" in the black population. Blacks, Ruffin complained, no longer automatically deferred to their social superiors; abolitionist agitators were blurring social demarcations in the border states. Ruffin was keenly sensitive not only to outright assaults against slavery itself but to the subtler erosion of the underlying racial structure. For instance, while attending religious services in a Washington church, Ruffin was shocked not only that a Northern preacher had been permitted to attack slavery in front of an interracial audience but that mulattoes had shared a pew with whites in middle of the church. Alien Northern interlopers, with the unintentional assistance of

Southern lawmakers, were insidiously damaging the very fabric of Southern slave society.[21]

For Ruffin, the free Negroes were the principal conduit of abolitionism. The free blacks not only manifested the spirit of abolitionism in their improper familiarity with their white superiors but they were also instilling dangerous notions in their slave brethren. Ruffin feared that both Northern and Southern free blacks were poisoning the minds and corrupting the morals of contented and civilized slaves. In particular, Ruffin believed that black sailors whose ships were docked in Virginia harbors were inciting slaves to abscond or rebel. Ruffin appealed to the Virginian governor, John Letcher, and to several state legislators to ban black crews from Virginia ports. He recommended fining those Northern vessels which defied the prohibition and imprisoning their black seamen. Equally threatening to Ruffin were native Virginian free blacks who engaged in illicit business transactions with slaves. He called for suppressing the unlicensed shops which sold liquor to slaves and bought their pilfered goods. Presumably, sober slaves would not commit arson. Further, Ruffin suspected that Southern free blacks who travelled to the North assimilated abolitionist doctrines. He, accordingly, urged Virginia to enforce its laws which restricted the mobility of free blacks. So fearful was Ruffin of abolitionist conspiracies in general and free blacks in particular that he advocated censoring all letters

addressed to Virginia's free blacks.[22]

Ruffin's fear of abolitionist agents underlay his various proposals. Everywhere Ruffin looked he found abolitionist infiltrators--Northern businessmen, merchants, factors, teachers, ministers, physicians, shipmasters, sailors, even visitors as well as all Southern free blacks, especially those who had commercial relations with slaves. Displaying an almost paranoid suspicion that every Northerner was a secret carrier transmitting the abolitionist plague to the South, Ruffin sought a sectional prophylactic to contain the antislavery contagion. In his various memorials to the Virginia legislature, Ruffin did not call for breaking all ties with the infected North but merely for ending those relations peculiarly hazardous to the welfare of the South. Boycotting Northern produce, banning Northern books, restricting Northern travellers, barring Northern vessels, shackling free black Southerners--all of these expedients were advocated by Ruffin within a Unionist framework. The core of the sectional marriage would be removed; only its shell would remain.

Other classic fire-eaters did not find Ruffin's reformist schemes palatable. For example, the Charleston Mercury, the journalistic incarnation of fire-eater orthodoxy, published Ruffin's "Harpers Ferry Memorial" at the request of its author but objected to its program: "We consider all these proposals of half-way measures as

trifling with the subject. The great evil we suffer is our false position towards the North." For Rhett, the only effective method of negating the influence of Northern abolitionist agents was preventing their entrance into the South. Requiring Northerners to post bond or present certificates for good behavior would not adequately safeguard Southern slavery. Abolitionist emissaries could, presumably, acquire or manufacture the necessary documents and pay the stipulated fee. Moreover, restricting the movement of Northerners in the South violated the constitutional guarantee of unimpeded interstate travel. Similarly, the imposition of license taxes upon the commodities of Northern states could not be justified by strict construction of the letter of the Constitution and flagrantly violated its spirit of commercial union among the states. While the South remained in the Union, Rhett counseled, let her honorably abide by the Constitution, "for better or for worse." Petty schemes and reformist nostrums were unavailing and unbecoming: "Let gentlemen, then, not piddle at the great evil that overshadows our civilization and safety, but lay their axe to the root itself."[23]

Interestingly, Ruffin's "Subversion" article had viewed disunion as the only genuine remedy for the South's afflictions. But in his other writings during the Harpers Ferry period, Ruffin fell into the reformist trap. A singleminded secessionist would have consistently portrayed abolitionist agents as the symptoms of an incurable Northern

malaise and Brown's invasion as a sign of ingrained and irreversible Northern enmity towards Southern slaveholders. Ruffin's obsession with the "abolitionist agent" as an inherent threat, the paramount danger facing the South, conduced to his espousal of stopgap measures. Vexed by the suspicious blazes at his family plantations, alarmed by the South's vulnerability to abolitionist reconnaissance and incursion, frustrated by the imperviousness of Virginia to his importunities for secession, Ruffin supplemented his disunionist exhortation with a program to obtain redress within the Union. Deeply committed to slavery in the precarious perch of the upper South, Ruffin did not have the luxury of punctilious adherence to the long-run perspective of fire-eater orthodoxy: his border state residence made him peculiarly sensitive to the danger of abolitionist encroachment; and his firm commitment to slavery made indifference to antislavery penetration and acquiescence in ultimate emancipation unthinkable. Ruffin was merely acting on the staple fire-eater belief that aggression had to be nipped in the bud. Ironically, those Southern regions most threatened by abolitionism were least responsive to the danger. Stronger devotion to the Union, lesser attachment to slavery, greater confidence in thwarting Republicanism by regular political channels, and fear of being the theater of military strife made the border states more reluctant than the cotton states to adopt extreme policies against the North. Virginia's past neglect of reformist remedies made

her unlikely to embrace secession. Ruffin thus concentrated his efforts on procuring anti-abolitionist legislation.

For a while, Ruffin seemed to be making headway. The paths of society and the alienated "outsider" increasingly converged. Ruffin made some strides towards integrating himself into the political process, albeit in his customary gadfly role. The people of Virginia and even the established political institutions seemed responsive to his overtures. Soon after Brown's raid, Ruffin formulated his reformist schemes into popular petitions and solicited the signatures of his fellow Virginians. Initially, Ruffin distributed the petitions in his usual improvised manner. For example, he used a neighborhood meeting on farm enclosures to advertise his "Harpers Ferry Memorial." During his visit to Charlestown to witness Brown's execution, Ruffin gave copies of his petition to sympathetic Southerners for their circulation elsewhere. When Southern rights associations, dormant since the 1850 crisis, resurfaced after Harpers Ferry, the individualistic Ruffin attended their meetings and endeavored to guide their course. In late November he persuaded a local Southern rights meeting to adopt his resolutions denouncing Brown's incursion in both means and ends as "malignant, atrocious, devilish." Proclaiming that Northern reaction to the invasion revealed its treachery, Ruffin called upon Southern legislatures to discuss modes of shielding their section from such outrages by "Northern enemies, fanatics, and

conspirators." Despite the severe terminology, Ruffin proposed no specific program, much less disunion. In early December the reorganized Central Southern Rights Association of Virginia selected Ruffin as one of its vice-presidents. Although Ruffin's position was largely ceremonial, the memorial to the state legislature framed by the association echoed Ruffin's sentiments: the promotion of direct European trade; the levying of excise or license taxes upon Northern goods; the expulsion of all suspicious Northern travellers; the enactment of stringent penalties for offenses against slavery; and the fortification of the state arsenal and militia.[24]

John Brown accomplished in one daring act what Ruffin's years of toil had been unable to achieve: he startled the Virginia populace out of its stupor. Many concerned citizens, including opponents of a discriminatory state tax upon Northern merchandise, undertook voluntary boycotts of Northern products. Across the state, numerous "Homespun Clubs" arose on the grass-roots level. Richmond merchants began buying their supplies from the South and Europe. The wearing of Virginian fabrics became fashionable at elegant parties and balls. Also, in many counties "vigilance committees" were formed to ferret out "suspicious characters" and "incendiary wretches." An alarmed John Tyler reported, "Virginia is armed to the teeth--more than fifty thousand stands of arms already distributed, and the demand for more daily increasing." Most counties saw the

formation of military companies, whose members trained on a daily basis. The politicians seemed to share the popular mood. The Virginia governor, Henry A. Wise, vehemently condemned Brown's raid and threatened retaliation against the North. Both the valedictory of the outgoing Wise in December and the inaugural of the incoming Letcher in January urged the General Assembly to strengthen Virginia's military resources. The Virginia legislature set up a special Harpers Ferry Committee to consider not only arming the state but almost the entire gamut of reformist measures which Ruffin had espoused in the late 1850s to bolster Southern slavery: banning Northern imports, restricting Northern travellers, legalizing black testimony, regulating hired slaves in towns, barring black sailors, prohibiting posthumous manumission, and removing or enslaving free blacks.[25]

Not even Ruffin's dream of Virginia spearheading Southern secession seemed quixotic in the wake of Harpers Ferry. Several of the programs undertaken with a reformist intention were conducive to disunion. The termination of economic relations with the North could promote the self-sufficiency required for political independence. Similarly, military companies could be enlisted to defend a Southern confederacy. Indeed, the Richmond Enquirer considered such measures as non-intercourse "disunion within the Union," a preparation for secession should it become necessary. The newly elected Letcher, a relatively moderate

Southerner, confided to Ruffin that he deemed disunion inevitable and impending. Furthermore, the practical politics of forging a secessionist revolution and an independent Southern confederation appeared to coincide with Ruffin's romantic aspiration to restore the lost prestige of the Old Dominion. The foremost bastion of Southern radicalism, fearful that unilateral secession would isolate her from the rest of the South, was willing to relinquish her leadership of the Southern rights movement to the state which currently was most aggrieved. South Carolina was ready to defer to Virginian leadership. As the Charleston biologist and clergyman John Bachman, whose lingering hopes for the Union had been shattered to pieces by Harpers Ferry, wrote his friend Ruffin, "We are all united here--there is but one voice in So Carolina--we look with longing & hopeful eyes to our sister Virginia. . . . you have had a fair specimen of Northern sentiments in the tender mercies of old Brown. Are you waiting for something more of the same sort?" In December 1859 the General Assembly of South Carolina called for a Southern convention to devise a concerted solution to Southern grievances. The architect of this cooperationist program, Christopher G. Memminger, was chosen commissioner to Virginia. His task was to persuade the Old Dominion to direct the movement to secure Southern interests.[26]

Ruffin welcomed the Memminger program. The Virginia fire-eater had himself privately urged Governor Letcher to

support a Southern convention. Ruffin had also endorsed the convention scheme in his "Subversion" essay, an indication that he did not seriously expect Virginia to leave the Union separately and immediately. On January 19, 1860 Ruffin heard Memminger's long address to the Virginia legislature. The Carolinian emissary dwelt on the declining security of the South in the Union as epitomized by the Harpers Ferry invasion. Invoking the Calhounite platitude that sectional unity alone could preserve Southern rights within the Union, Memminger earnestly appealed to Virginia to send commissioners to a Southern conference. Ruffin was so optimistic about Virginia's receptiveness to the project that he advised Letcher to appoint J.P. Holcombe as the state's commissioner and privately mused that his friends Willoughby Newton and James A. Seddon also merited consideration.[27]

Ruffin viewed the Memminger scheme as a disunionist vehicle. Granted, supporters of the Southern conference, led by its Carolinian sponsor, presented the program in Unionist garb. The Wise faction of the Virginia Democrats backed the Memminger plan on Unionist grounds. Virginian participation in the convention, Wise argued, was necessary to dampen the secessionist ardor of South Carolina. The Northern electorate, warned the Enquirer, would interpret Virginia's abstention as weakness and choose a Republican president, an event which would precipitate cotton state secession. The proposed Southern conference, the Enquirer

concluded, was vital to save the Union. In a striking volte face from his November posture, the erratic Henry A. Wise now extolled the virtues of the Union.[28]

These Unionist declarations did not dishearten Ruffin. His utter lack of faith in the North made him view all cooperationist-ultimatum programs, whatever the intention of their proponents, as disunionist in effect: "If acted out, I think that the thus bringing together the southern mind, & considering grievances, wrongs & remedies, will bring about the only remedy that is effective--as I have no idea that the fanatical people of the North will agree to secure anything to the South." A similar faith in the efficacy of joint discussion of Southern problems and solutions to produce sectional resoluteness had underlain Ruffin's own League of United Southerners project in 1858. Although Ruffin was disgusted by the political gymnastics of Wise, whom he deemed an unscrupulous demagogue, the fire-eater hoped that the latest antics of the popular politician would promote Virginia's participation in the Southern conference. Ruffin's son Edmund influenced a local Democratic meeting on presidential electors to endorse the convention scheme and sanction secession should a Republican win the presidency. Ruffin himself made one of his rare public speeches at a mass Democratic meeting in behalf of the Memminger project.[29]

But it was all for nought. The heated atmosphere of Brown's October raid had cooled by the winter. The extreme Unionists, who had consistently maintained that Harpers

Ferry was a paltry affair unrepresentative of Northern opinion, attacked the proposed conference as a disunionist ploy. More importantly, the Southern rights Whigs, their outrage and alarm dissipated, retreated from their initial call for action. And the Hunter Democrats feared Virginian subscription to the convention plan, indelibly tainted by its South Carolinian provenance, would hurt the presidential prospects of their leader. The Unionist arguments of the resourceful Wise clique could not dispel disunionist suspicions, which Ruffin's approval of the scheme only confirmed. For several weeks Virginian legislators dragged their feet. In early February, his patience severely taxed by the shuffling of Virginian politicians, a disappointed Memminger returned to Carolina. The perceptive Memminger realized what Ruffin had not: even if a Southern conference assembled, Virginian fears would prevent the adoption of "any strong measure."[30]

Virginia was not alone in the lukewarm support she accorded the Memminger program. Few Southern states showed any interest in South Carolina's recommendation. Only Mississippi enthusiastically supported the project. In February 1860, after the disconsolate Memminger had returned home, the Mississippi General Assembly suggested that the Southern conference assemble in Atlanta on the first of June. Governor John J. Pettus despatched Peter B. Starke, a moderate Whig, to persuade Virginia to join the convention. But the assurances of the Mississippi commissioner failed to

assuage the disunionist apprehensions of Virginian legislators. By late February Ruffin lost all hope of a Southern convention ever assembling, much less leading the South out of the Union under Virginian auspices. Privately, Ruffin advised Commissioner Starke that the cotton states had to inaugurate secession; the border states would serve temporarily as a military buffer before joining the Southern confederacy. Foiled in his bid to elevate his native state into her erstwhile leadership position, Ruffin reverted to his traditional secessionist strategy. In March the Virginia legislature formalized what Ruffin had foreseen; the Southern conference scheme was dead. By April the Harpers Ferry hysteria was over: "The violent agitation & impulse caused by the Harper's Ferry affair seems to have completely subsided."[31]

Not only did Virginia reject Memminger's proposal; it adopted no measures besides military preparation to strengthen slavery within the Union. The state legislature generally contented itself with vapid declarations. For example, the Harpers Ferry Committee called for domestic manufacturing and direct European trade. But this gesture at commercial independence, Ruffin perceived, was vitiated by the paranthetical qualification that all measures must be implemented "(without violating the provisions of the Constitution of the United States)." Since many legislators considered the levying of license taxes upon Northern commodities patently unconstitutional, Ruffin realized that

the committee's endorsement of commercial independence was hollow. Likewise, instead of legalizing black testimony against white abolitionists, the committee report simply called for "more prompt and effectual punishment of all foreign emissaries." In vain did Ruffin protest that the persistence of abolitionist subversion stemmed not from the mildness of existing penalties or the tardiness of their application but from the lack of evidence to obtain convictions in the first place. Thus the Harpers Ferry raid which Ruffin had greeted with fire-eating anticipation proved unable to stir the sluggish Old Dominion to adopt significant measures for self-protection within the Union, much less embark on a path which could lead to a secessionist destination.[32]

Ruffin's response to Harpers Ferry reveals the ambivalence of his fire-eating course in dramatic fashion. Ruffin tried to exploit the passions aroused by Brown's raid by agitating both reform and revolution. Indeed, Ruffin's most pronounced public reaction to Harpers Ferry was not his call for Virginian secession; his novel "Subversion" essay was written "under a sudden thought & impulse."[33] Ruffin's most persistent efforts in the winter of 1859-1860 aimed to insulate the vulnerable and peculiar institution from corrosive abolitionist infiltration by a panoply of legislation. Ruffin's reformism embraced both his petitions to the Virginian General Assembly and his support of the Memminger mission.

Now Ruffin's endorsement of Memminger's project of a Southern conference to save the Union does not impugn his secessionist commitment. The North, Ruffin believed, would utterly reject any substantive redress even if demanded by a united South and accompanied by a secession threat. For example, the North would never consent to constitutional amendments which unequivocally defined slavery as property and forbade the abolition of Southern slavery by future constitutional revisions. Thus, a consistent secessionist, convinced of the North's intransigent abolitionism, could champion reformist schemes to preserve the Union by Calhounian methods. In fact, the endeavor to unify the South behind a firm but moderate agenda would yield secessionist dividends: Northern rejection of Southern demands would drive many Southern rights Unionists to leave the Union as a last resort. The weakness of all cooperationist-ultimatum programs was not the expected Northern rebuff: from a fire-eating standpoint, that was precisely their strength. The problem with convention schemes was the perplexing Southern indisposition to unite on any sectional platform at all. True, repeated and fruitless efforts to unify the South could divert radicals from the only practical method of secession, namely separate state action. But South Carolina was not about to secede alone in the wake of Harpers Ferry. Consequently, the attempt to unite the South in the winter of 1859-1860 did not retard or stifle disunion. On the contrary, by showing

Southern rights men the futility of cooperationism, the failure of the Memminger mission narrowed the choice to separate state secession or submission.[34] Ruffin's espousal of such reformism was a disunionist tactic.

But Ruffin's call for Southerners to quarantine themselves within the Union seems conspicuously inconsistent with his secessionist commitment. He could not have been counting upon the North to forestall this type of reform movement for it did not require Northern approval; Southern states could unilaterally bar Northern books from their schools and black sailors from their ports. True, Ruffin seems to have regarded reform as conducive to disunion. In one diary entry, for example, Ruffin juxtaposed his distribution of the Harpers Ferry Memorial alongside his belief that Brown's raid would foster disunion. Additionally, Ruffin included in his year-end list of the portents of disunion the Virginia legislature's consideration of the miscellaneous protective measures.[35] Unfortunately, Ruffin did not explain how he expected reform to promote secession. He may have been hoping that anti-abolitionist legislation would incite countermeasures by the North. Some of the proposals Ruffin advocated, especially the imposition of license taxes upon Northern goods and the restriction or expulsion of Northern travellers, could provoke new Northern aggressions and fuel the secessionist flame. But other schemes which Ruffin urged were not directly aimed at Northern targets. For

instance, the suppression of the underground urban black economy and the acceptance of slave testimony in courts of law, the two principal demands of the Harpers Ferry Memorial, would have had few, if any, repercussions in Northern policy. Ruffin's indiscriminate inclusion of a variety of protective measures in his legislative petitions was not a matter of unthinking carelessness but an indication that his reformism was not designed merely to provoke Northern reprisals.

Other explanations fail to resolve the inconsistency between Ruffin's reformist and disunionist quests. Ruffin was not counting upon Virginia to sabotage unilateral Southern protective efforts and thereby compel those border state slaveholders whose devotion to slavery exceeded their devotion to the Union to turn to secession as a last resort; Ruffin desperately hoped and may have sincerely believed that the Old Dominion would adopt at least some of his pet schemes. To say that Ruffin became a secessionist crusader in the 1850s after Southerners had spurned his exhortations for agricultural reform in the previous decades does not explain the persistence of his reform labors. In the 1850s Ruffin veered back and forth from revolution to reform. And sometimes, such as in the Harpers Ferry period, Ruffin simultaneously sought to protect slavery within the Union and to take the South out of the Union. Ruffin's tortuous journey across the path of reform was not an isolated episode of aimless meandering or an unshakeable legacy of

his past political moderation but a deliberate and recurrent phase of his secessionist odyssey. Nor can his travels along these divergent roads be reconciled, however glossed over, by the observation that both were guided by the same signpost of Southern rights; reformism was a detour which could harm the long-term interests of the South.

A more sophisticated interpretation would be that Ruffin intended reformist measures as urgent palliatives for the ills of border state slavery in the interval before secession. Still, the effectual implementation of reform would obviate disunion--at least if the sentiment for secession was stimulated by the desire to safeguard Southern interests. Why would Ruffin risk the ultimate success of the secessionist crusade by espousing reform? Granted, none of the reformist measures which Ruffin urged in the wake of Harpers Ferry was directed against the ominous population growth of the North and her consequent domination of the western territories; none of Ruffin's schemes could countervail the expected mode by which the North would abolish slavery, namely constitutional amendment. But even partial reform might satisfy some Southern rights exponents and weaken the disunion movement. Moreover, Ruffin himself acknowledged that his proposals could save the South in the Union. Referring to the sundry reformist schemes being considered by the Virginia legislature, Ruffin privately declared, "If even half of these measures, affecting northern emissaries & trade, are put in force, we may

control the north, & save ourselves, even in the union."[36] So absorbed was Ruffin with the issue of abolitionist infiltration of the upper South that he apparently forgot about the danger of territorial encirclement and denied the primary contention of fire-eater ideology, the impossibility of upholding Southern rights within the Union. If Ruffin really believed that Southern protective measures could be efficacious, then the contradiction between his reformist and revolutionary quests is all the more flagrant. In that case, Ruffin's disunionism, rather than his reformism, requires explanation. Did Ruffin pursue secession in spite of his confidence that Southern interests could be maintained in the Union? Was he a secessionist per se?

Certain aspects of Ruffin's pursuit of disunion convey the impression of a zealous fanatic who deviously and recklessly strove to destroy the Union, irrespective of Southern interests. Consider the striking disparity between Ruffin's private feelings and public posture on the issue of Northern aggressions. For example, "Cassandra" pointed to Northern violations of the fugitive slave law to spur Southern withdrawal from the Union. Privately, Ruffin hoped that the North would continue passing personal liberty laws. Likewise, "Cassandra" pointed to the powerlessness of Northerners loyal to the South to show the hopelessness of the Southern position in the Union. Privately, Ruffin hoped that a sectional division of the Democratic party would force Northern Democrats, however sympathetic to the South,

to join the Republican party for their political survival. Similarly, Ruffin tried to excite disunion ardor over the Harpers Ferry invasion. But a reader of Ruffin's diary would know that its author welcomed Brown's raid as a means of "widening the breach, & forwarding the separation of the slaveholding states." Ruffin even hoped that Northern abolitionists would try to rescue Brown from Southern custody as such an event would be "a certain cause of separation." Thus Ruffin, in the late 1850s, privately craved for fresh Northern aggressions and sectional antagonism and then publicly used Northern encroachments and the ensuing sectional alienation as evidence of unremitting Northern hostility and the necessity of secession. Ruffin, in fact, was not beyond trying to provoke Northern aggressions by supporting such inflammatory Southern programs as the revival of the African slave trade. Indeed, despite his high regard for honor, Ruffin occasionally masqueraded as a reformist while pining for secession. He advertised license taxes, for example, as a means of saving the South in the Union; his goal, in part, was to provoke Northern retaliation and sunder the Union. In a similar vein, he supported the Memminger plan of a Southern conference only because he expected the North to reject Southern demands. And during the Civil War years, Ruffin confessed that he would not have accepted <u>any</u> Northern guarantees for Southern security in the 1860-1861 crisis. Ruffin's course seems most puzzling, even bewildering. If

he was hellbent for a secessionist revolution, then why did he repeatedly labor for reform? And if he generally believed that Southern rights could be preserved within the Union, then why was he so insistent upon disunion?[37]

It seems most probable that Ruffin's surprising declaration to his diary about the adequacy of reformist schemes to save both the South and the Union was not a revelation of his steady conviction but a momentary deviation from the theoretical postulates of fire-eating orthodoxy. Ruffin was trying to rationalize to himself his considerable reformist exertions, trifling by secessionist standards, as a significant enterprise in behalf of Southern rights. At first glance, classical fire-eater ideology rendered reformism worthless at best and dangerous at worst. Ruffin understood this at times. Yet he was addicted to reformist ventures. His lifetime residency in Virginia made him concerned about the peculiar set of problems plaguing slavery in the upper South: the perennial flight of slaves to the neighboring North, the penetration of antislavery settlements and disguised abolitionists, the prevalence of free blacks and nonslaveholding whites, the declining profitability of agricultural pursuits, and the waning morale of slaveholders. The Virginian fire-eater was keenly sensitive to these particulars, a sensitivity which neither border state moderates nor cotton state radicals fully shared. He anxiously sought remedies for these indigenous border state problems, whether in or out of the Union. The

urgency of these concerns was heightened by Ruffin's exaggeration of the danger. In his case, exaggeration of the abolitionist menace put a premium on the immediate adoption of anti-abolitionist programs, whatever their repercussions on the longevity of the Union. Some of Ruffin's character traits reinforced his reformist streak. His craving for popularity inclined him to experiment with the politically feasible. Virginia had ignored the secessionist message of "Cassandra"; perhaps she would heed the reformist pleas of "Plain Dealer." His temperamental impatience made him yearn for some form of action. The South had issued proclamations of her rights ad nauseam. Her passivity in deed betrayed her bellicosity in word. Something had to be done. Anything.

Unwilling to abandon his reformist campaign, Ruffin tried to integrate his concern about border state slavery into fire-eater ideology. But his assertion that reformist dosages could resuscitate the South within the Union went too far, needlessly. Ruffin did not have to deny the gist of Southern radicalism to justify his own course. Ironically, reformism could be derived from the very premises of fire-eater ideology: reformist remedies could be justified not as a prophylactic to contain the abolitionist virus but as a tonic to uplift the Southern spirit. Ruffin himself sensed this at times. After the Harpers Ferry invasion, Ruffin felt that unless the South took some form of retaliatory action, the spirit of submission would become

so ingrained in her consciousness as to preclude secession in the future. If the Virginia General Assembly adopted no measures whatsoever to defend slavery from Northern subversion, then "the next & certain thing will be to submit to northern dictation, in emancipation & in every thing else."[38]

Fire-eater ideology, permeated by assumptions about the nature and dynamics of social honor, held that submission to aggression bred further aggression by the assailant and submission by the victim. Some form of resistance by the victim was essential to snap this self-generating cyclical process. True, only decisive resistance would prevent further aggression by the assailant. But moderate resistance would prevent the progressive degeneration of the moral fiber of the victim and enable vigorous resistance in the future--even if it failed to quell further encroachments by the aggressor. Translated into the sectional context of the 1850s, reform was vital as a psychological stimulant to the debased Southern spirit. While reform could avert revolution if it temporarily stymied Northern aggression and encouraged complacency, submission certainly would stifle all possibility of a secessionist revolution by sapping the already enervated Southern will. From this perspective, reform was preferable to submission; the deflection of secession was a calculated risk. Ruffin had little choice.

Classical fire-eater ideology can also explain why Ruffin sought Northern aggressions and rejected all Northern

concessions beforehand. Fire-eater ideology depicted the North as implacably hostile to Southern slave institutions. The South could retard or accelerate her doom in the Union; she could not avert her destruction if she remained in the Union. The periods of relative sectional tranquillity were deceptive. Southern alertness and resistance to direct abolitionist threats had prompted the North to suspend her design of immediately extinguishing slavery and resort to insidious modes of weakening the South such as capturing the western territories and whittling away at border state slavery. Northern stoppages and retreats were tactical maneuvers. Indeed, Northern desist from aggressions and, even more so, Northern concessions to slavery were dangerous to the South: they would lull the South into a false sense of security in the Union and make her vulnerable to gradual and subtle encroachments which would culminate with the abolition of slavery. Northern offers to respect Southern interests were at best meaningless gestures. At worst Northern concessions were snares to entangle the South in a web of ultimate extinction. Time was an ally of abolitionism. Delay made the South progressively weaker as well as listless. The sooner the North removed her disguise and revealed her abolitionist features, the better for the South.

Ruffin, thus, sought Northern aggressions as the only means of arousing the languorous South to seek her own salvation. His lack of faith in the South made Ruffin adopt

seemingly incongruous positions: abolitionist aggressions by the North and reformist reprisals by the South could each rescue the demoralized Southern will. Southern blindness to Northern designs and supineness in resisting creeping antislavery encroachments made direct abolitionist assaults desirable from the standpoint of her long-term interests. The sufferings of slaveholders at the hands of abolitionists in the Union would be outweighed by their everlasting redemption in a Southern confederation. The same utilitarian principle by which Ruffin rationalized the pain of slavery for the black slave could be employed to rationalize the afflictions of abolitionist aggressions endured by the white slaveholder. Here at least Ruffin was remarkably consistent.

Ruffin's recognition of the utility of Northern aggressions to stimulate Southern secession did not entirely reconcile him to their occurrence. His denunciation of Harpers Ferry, for instance, was no mere affectation of wounded dignity. His expectation of a renewal of abolitionist hostilities did not noticeably mollify his sense of shock. Nor was his sense of outrage appreciably diminished by the reflection that such events were, on the whole, for the best. On an intellectual plane, Ruffin could rationalize Northern aggressions as predictable and beneficial; emotionally, he was humiliated and afraid. His virtual invitation for and condemnation of Northern aggressions were as much manifestations of his ambivalence

as of his duplicity; though Northern aggressions could lead to Southern salvation, they were injurious and insulting all the same.

If calculations of long-run Southern interests do not satisfactorily account for Ruffin's outright rejection of any sectional compromise and intransigent pursuit of secession, his course may be understood by the dictates of Southern honor. In Ruffin's mind, the South had meekly borne too many abolitionist insults, tamely submitted to too many abolitionist encroachments to settle for anything less than disunion. Even if the South could protect herself in the Union by unilateral reform, even if the North could devise trustworthy guarantees for slavery, dissolving the Union and forming an independent confederacy were the only means of vindicating Southern honor. Whether or not Southerners could retain their slaves in the Union, they could not possibly erase the stigma of their past disgrace by remaining within its confines. Southern severance of the Union would not only shield slavery from the abolitionist assailant but would also redeem her lost honor. The act of secession along with the establishment of a Southern confederation would retroactively compensate for the previous Southern pattern of vociferous protests followed by obsequious submission. Secession would enable defenders of Southern honor to ascribe her past acquiescence in Northern aggressions to magnanimous forbearance rather than to pusillanimous weakness. Thus, regardless of the security of

her interests, the South's priceless Honor required secession.

The devious course by which Ruffin at times pursued secession--his occasional posture as a reformist and denials of disunionism--does not belie his concern for honor. Southern honor was chiefly public, social. Honesty was a value, but it was not as valuable as the appearance of honesty. Deception as such was not as egregious as the exposure of deception. Lying to conceal an original lie was almost dutiful, especially when the integrity of others was at stake. Fidelity to friends and country transcended individual honesty. Thus Ruffin rushed to Yancey's defense when their League of United Southerners was attacked as disunionist. Furthermore, small sacrifices of individual honor were trivial if they spurred the South to uphold its collective honor. The means of instigating secession could be justified by the ends sought. A sort of utilitarian calculus could rationalize violations of Southern honor! The means could be justified by the ends. Despite his high regard for the purity of the political arena and his low regard for fisticuffs as unbecoming for a gentleman and degrading for a statesman, Ruffin would have been quite content if secession had been triggered by any of the violent altercations that periodically marred Congressional proceedings. Reacting to the incident between the South Carolinian fire-eater Lawrence M. Keitt and the Pennsylvanian radical Republican Galusha Grow on the

Congressional floor, Ruffin declared, "All such brawls are disgraceful to the body. But it seems to be as probable a manner of the beginning of a separation of the states [as] any other."[39] And though the act of secession could restore the luster of Southern honor only if achieved through her own agency, Ruffin (at one point at least) was more than willing to let the North withdraw from the Union.[40] Northern secession would clearly put the onus for dissolution upon Northern shoulders and circumvent the formidable opposition of Southern Unionists to disunion. Furthermore, if Northern secession could not remove the blot from the Southern escutcheon, it would end the humiliating spectacle of continual Southern submission to abolitionist encroachment. The allure of honor was less enticing than the shame of dishonor revolting. Finally, disunion, by any means, would force the South to be free and prove her mettle in an independent confederacy. Such was Ruffin's faith in the Southern will to resist abolitionism forcefully and his impatient yearning for dissolution in the late 1850s. Thus Ruffin's pertinacious pursuit of secession can be explained by calculations of long-term Southern honor and interests.

Nevertheless, it is possible that Ruffin gradually became so enchanted with the process of secession that he transformed this prescription for Southern safety into an end-in-itself. Certainly, Ruffin adhered to fire-eater ideology with the rigidity of a disunionist per se. He vieved periods of sectional calm not as contradictions to

his secessionist hypothesis but as confirmations. Rather than modify or even question his conviction of Southern doom in the Union, Ruffin assimilated Northern forbearance and concessions into his secessionist creed as dangerous snares, as further evidence of the wiliness of abolitionism. Such a dogmatic quality was a characteristic proclivity of the quintessential fire-eater. But it was not insurmountable. In the middle 1850s, for example, Yancey saw hopeful signs in the Democratic party's adoption of the principle of non-intervention to govern the federal territories, the very matter which had precipitated his withdrawal from the party in 1848. In the latter half of the 1850s Yancey, with the important exception of the League of United Southerners experiment in 1858, tried to work within the established political structure to safeguard Southern interests. For example, during the 1856 presidential contest, Yancey actively campaigned for Buchanan in Alabama. And during the presidential canvass of 1860, the eloquent Yancey, undaunted by the disruption of the Democratic party at the Charleston Convention, mounted a vigorous campaign tour of several strategic Northern states with the avowed purpose of preserving Southern rights within the Union through a Breckinridge victory. Despite his deep pessimism about securing Southern welfare within the Union, Yancey, for one, was willing to test his hypothesis.[41]

Edmund Ruffin, however, shared the self-righteous closed-mindedness of a Barnwell Rhett. While Yancey

celebrated Buchanan's election as a triumph for Southern rights, in late 1856 Ruffin and Rhett called on the South to prepare for secession. Ruffin was unwilling even to entertain the possibility that he had erred about the irrepressibility of the sectional conflict. The only instances in which Ruffin consciously admitted that he had been wrong about the North were those in which he had previously underestimated Northern hostility. In 1857, for example, upon learning that bribery had been used to obtain votes for Buchanan in Pennsylvania, Ruffin admitted that he had mistaken the Northern vote for the Democratic presidential nominee in the 1856 contest as an index of political moderation. Likewise, in 1859 Ruffin confessed that he had not expected so extensive an outpouring of Northern sympathy for the horrid John Brown. And after the outbreak of the Civil War in 1861, Ruffin confessed his error of trusting <u>any</u> Northern politician including such previously friendly Democrats as Daniel S. Dickinson.[42] Only those admissions which strengthened the fire-eater ideology were allowable. In the case of Ruffin, the fire-eater ideology calcified into a religious faith; what should have remained an empirical hypothesis, became an irrefutable dogma. Ruffin may have taken the further step of changing the means of secession into an intrinsically desirable goal. His exaggerated sense of self-consistency or his intense aversion to the North or some other factor may have propelled this transformation. At what point the means of

secession became an end is impossible to say. Indeed, it is difficult to say whether this transformation occurred at all. In an important way, the issue is academic. Ruffin's disposition and behavior were indistinguishable from secessionism per se: he would endeavor to provoke Northern aggressions in order to destroy the sectional peace and spur the South to leave the Union; and he categorically rejected any potential Northern concession presumably including unalterable constitutional guarantees. And for the sake of erecting a Southern confederacy, he was willing to risk destructive civil war. His extremism certainly approached, if it did not equal or surpass, the level of fanaticism which he attributed to his abolitionist foes.

Yet publicly Ruffin did not always avow his secession ideal. If Virginia, in particular, were to lead her sister slaveholding states out of the oppressive and degrading Union and redeem slavery and honor in a new nation of Southern states, she could only do so with the intention of saving the Union. Thus Ruffin presented the Memminger mission as a cooperative venture to preserve Southern rights within the Union. Likewise, Ruffin painted his various reformist schemes, including license taxes, in Unionist colors. But Ruffin had either misread Virginia's temper or underestimated her shrewdness. The jolt of Harpers Ferry stirred disunion talk among Virginian moderates. But rhetorical stridency ended as emotions cooled. Ruffin's activist program proved too radical for the Old Dominion.

Virginia not only rejected the chimera of immediate and separate secession but refused to join a Southern conference to reform the Union. Indeed, she would not even enact self-protective legislation.

Ruffin was dejected but not disconsolate. The resilient Virginian fell back upon another element of his fire-eating faith: the upcoming presidential election would lift the veil from the eyes of Southern politicians about their prospects of ascending to the highest office in the United States. A Republican victory would narrow Southern choices to abolition and disgrace inside the Union or slavery and honor outside of it. Ruffin could only hope that these alternatives would become stark before the South completely lost her will to resist. And he hoped that given these options, the South would choose Slavery and Honor over Union. Virginia would be confronted with a fait accompli, lower South secession. Unwilling to lead a Southern movement to reform the Union, Virginia would be driven to ratify South Carolina's demolition of the Union. Honor and safety, Ruffin hoped, would force Virginia to join the congenial Southern confederacy rather than remain aligned with the hostile North. The Charleston Convention was looming; Ruffin would not have long to wait.

Notes

(1) "Cassandra's Warnings," by "R." Charleston Mercury, July 21, 1859. The article is also available in Ruffin, Diary, I, Appendix D, 627-632.

(2) Ibid.

(3) Potter, Impending Crisis, 364-375.

(4) Ruffin, Diary, I, Entries for Jan. 5, Aug. 30, Sept. 22, 30, Oct. 4, 18, 1859, 262, 336-337, 343, 345-346, 348.

(5) Ibid., Entries for Oct. 19, 26, Nov. 10, 18, 349-351, 354, 356-357.

(6) Potter claims that Brown represented a significant body of Northern opinion but cites evidence showing considerable Northern dissent. Also, Potter concedes that Northern praise of Brown cannot be equated with full endorsement of his methods. Potter, Impending Crisis, 378-380. On Douglas' proposal, see Robert W. Johannsen, Stephen A. Douglas (New York, 1973), 723.

(7) Ruffin, Diary, I, Entries for Oct. 26, Nov. 27, 1859, 350, 363. Ruffin tended to read mostly abolitionists such as Wendell Phillips and Theodore Parker to ascertain Northern reaction to Harpers Ferry. See his diary entries for Jan. 24, 25, 1860, 396-397.

(8) Potter, Impending Crisis, 376, 378; Ruffin, Diary, I, Entries for Nov. 27, 30, Dec. 1, 23, 1859, 361-363, 366-369, 371.

(9) Shanks, Secession Movement, 85-102. The conservative Richmond Whig believed that Harpers Ferry had brought "almost a complete revolution in the sentiments, the thoughts, the hopes, of the oldest and steadiest conservatives in all the Southern States. In Virginia, particularly, this revolution has been really wonderful. There are thousands...upon thousands of men in our midst, who, a month ago, scoffed at the idea of a dissolution of the Union as a madman's dream, but who now hold the opinion that its days are numbered, its glory perished." The Richmond Enquirer expressed similar views. See Shanks, Secession Movement, 90. Also, the Charleston Mercury deemed Harpers Ferry a watershed in Virginia politics. See "Virginia" & "The Virginia Press," Charleston Mercury, Nov. 28, Dec. 30, 1859. Whereas Shanks notes that Brown's raid quashed the chances for a political coalition between the border-state "Opposition" and the Republican party, a recent study intimates that unification would never have been

achieved anyway since the "Opposition" all along insisted that coalescence occur on proslavery terms. See William S. Hitchcock, "The Limits of Southern Unionism: Virginia Conservatives and the Gubernatorial Election of 1859," Journal of Southern History, XLVII (February, 1981), 60-64. An excellent study of the Harpers Ferry hysteria in South Carolina is Channing, Crisis, 18-45. For a glimpse of the situation in Alabama, see "A BROWN'S PIKER CAUGHT AT PRATTVILLE--OUR POLICY" & "Words of Caution--Mobile Register," Montgomery Daily Mail, Nov. 28, Dec. 2, 1859.

(10) Ruffin, Diary, I, Entries for Nov. 28, Dec. 1, 8, 1859, 365, 368, 377. Also, Ruffin wrote his sons that he was preaching disunion everywhere--with some hope of success. Edmund Ruffin to Sons, Dec. 3, 1859, Edmund Ruffin Papers, SHC.

(11) Ruffin, Diary, I, Entries for Dec. 1, 7, 17, 18, 1859, June 15-17, 25, July 26, 1860, 368, 375-376, 381, 383, 431, 433, 438-439, 442-443, Edmund Ruffin to William H. Gist, Dec. 16, 1859, 382; Clement C. Clay to Edmund Ruffin, June 21, 1860, Edmund Ruffin Papers, SHC; "NORTHERN PIKES FOR SOUTHERN USE," by "E.R." appended to Ruffin's MS Diary, Dec. 14, 1859, 827, LC.

(12) "SUBVERSION OF NEGRO SLAVERY, OR THE DISSOLUTION OF THE PRESENT UNION, THE ONLY ALTERNATIVES FOR THE SOUTH," by "E.R." appended to Ruffin's MS Diary, Jan. 13, 1860 (misdated Dec. 13 by Ruffin), 850-852, LC.

(13) Ibid.

(14) "Remarks on the Report of the Harpers Ferry Committee--Addressed to the Members of the General Assembly of Virginia," No. III, by "PLAIN DEALER," appended to Ruffin's MS Diary, Feb. 21, 1860, 879-880, LC.

(15) Ruffin, Diary, I, Entries for Oct. 6, 11, 1857, Mar. 20, 21, 27, 1858, 111-112, 169-170.

(16) Ibid., Entries for Nov. 28, 1858, & Nov. 13, 1859, 249-250, 355. In July 1858 Ruffin built a fire-proof granary. See his diary entry for July 20, 1858, 215. By November 1858 he admitted that the slaves could have started the fire.

(17) "SUBVERSION OF NEGRO SLAVERY, OR THE DISSOLUTION OF THE PRESENT UNION, THE ONLY ALTERANTIVES FOR THE SOUTH," by "E.R." appended to Ruffin's MS Diary, Jan. 13, 1860, 850-852, LC.

(18) Ruffin, Diary, I, Entry for Dec. 21, 1859, 384; Edmund Ruffin to Edmund Ruffin, Jr., Dec. 18, 1859, Edmund

Ruffin Papers, SHC.

(19) Ruffin, Diary, I, Entries for Dec. 21, 31, 1859, 384, 386; Edmund Ruffin to Edmund Ruffin, Jr., Dec. 18, 1859, Edmund Ruffin Papers, SHC.

(20) "PETITION To the Legislature of Virginia, praying for Enactments in Aid and Defence of the Trade, Industry and Proprietary and Political Rights of the People of this Commonwealth," appended to Ruffin's MS Diary, Nov. 3, 1859, [7]68; Ruffin, Diary, I, Entries for Nov. 2, Dec. 23, 1859, Feb. 24, 1860, 354, 384-385, 406.

(21) Ruffin, Diary, I, Entry for Nov. 16, 1859; "Remarks on the Report of the Harpers Ferry Committee--Addressed to the Members of the General Assembly of Virginia," No. II, by "PLAIN DEALER," appended to Ruffin's MS Diary, Feb. 21, 1860, 878-879, LC; "The Harper's Ferry Memorial," Charleston Mercury, Nov. 23, 1859; "Correspondence of the Mercury," by "R." appended to Ruffin's MS Diary, Mar. 23, 1859, 612, LC.

(22) "Remarks on the Report of the Harpers Ferry Committee--Addressed to the Members of the General Assembly of Virginia," Nos. II & III, appended to Ruffin's MS Diary, 878-880, LC; "The Harper's Ferry Memorial," Charleston Mercury, Nov. 23, 1859; Ruffin, Diary, I, Entry for Jan. 4, 1860, 388. At a local political meeting, Ruffin's son Edmund sponsored a resolution against ships with free black sailors docking at Virginia harbors. Untitled newspaper clipping, appended to Ruffin's MS Diary, Feb. 13, 1860, 870, LC.

(23) "The Remedies" & "Measures for Securing Southern Safety," Charleston Mercury, June 22, 1857, Nov. 23, 1859. At one point, prior to Rhett's editorship, the Mercury had flirted with supporting license taxes to foster direct trade with Europe. "Direct Trade," Charleston Mercury, Dec. 29, 1856. In 1859 Barnwell Rhett, Jr., the Mercury editor, shrewdly used the Harpers Ferry affair to corroborate his long-held contention that antislavery passions would inexorably propel the North to seek the abolition of slavery in the South itself, not merely in the territories. "The Insurrection," Charleston Mercury, Oct. 31, 1859.

(24) Ruffin, Diary, I, Entries for Nov. 19, 25, 29, 1859, 357, 361, 366; Untitled report of Ruffin's resolution at a Richmond Southern rights assemblage, appended to Ruffin's MS Diary, Dec. 1, 1859, 801; "Central Southern Rights Association" & "Memorial of the Central Southern Rights Association of Virginia: being a Statement of Grievances and Suggestion of Remedies therefor," Daily Richmond Enquirer, Dec. 13, 23, 1859.

(25) Shanks, Secession Movement, 89-90, 92-96; Ruffin, Diary, I, Entry for Jan. 5, 1860, 388-389.

(26) "NON-INTERCOURSE BEFORE DISUNION," Daily Richmond Enquirer, Dec. 7, 1859; Ruffin, Diary, I, Entry for Dec. 17, 1859, 381; John Bachman to Edmund Ruffin, Jan. 18, 1860, Edmund Ruffin Papers, SHC; Channing, Crisis, 100-102.

(27) "SUBVERSION OF NEGRO SLAVERY, OR THE DISSOLUTION OF THE PRESENT UNION, THE ONLY ALTERNATIVES FOR THE SOUTH," by "E.R." appended to Ruffin's MS Diary, Jan. 13, 1860, 850-852, LC; Ruffin, Diary, I, Entries for Dec. 17, 1859, Jan. 19, 22, 1860, 381, 394, 396; Channing, Crisis, 122-123. Initially, Ruffin had feared that an open appeal by South Carolina to Virginia for joint secession would fail. Memminger's Unionist appeal must have relieved him. See Edmund Ruffin to Edmund Ruffin, Jr., Jan. 14, 1860, Edmund Ruffin Papers, SHC; Ruffin, Diary, I, Entry for Jan. 14, 1860, 392.

(28) "The Southern Conference" & "The Defeat of the Conference Elects a Black Republican President," Daily Richmond Enquirer, Jan. 28, 30, Feb. 1, 1860; Channing, Crisis, 120, 124.

(29) Ruffin, Diary, I, Entries for Jan. 19, 23, Feb. 9, 18, 1860, 394, 396, 399-400, 403.

(30) Shanks, Secession Movement, 97-99; Channing, Crisis, 125-126.

(31) Channing, Crisis, 126-127; Ruffin, Diary, I, Entries for Feb. 24, Apr. 14, 1860, 407, 415.

(32) Shanks, Secession Movement, 92-93, 96; "Remarks on the Report of the Harpers Ferry Committee--Addressed to the Members of the General Assembly of Virginia," Nos. I & II, by "PLAIN DEALER," appended to Ruffin's MS Diary, Feb. 21, 1860, 877-879, LC.

(33) Ruffin, Diary, I, Entry for Dec. 11, 1859, 378. Ruffin's "Subversion" essay may have been spurred by his reading of the strong Southern rights resolutions passed by the various county meetings across the state in the weeks after Brown's raid.

(34) Channing, Crisis, 127-128, adds that the failure of the Memminger mission demonstrated that the border states could not lead the South.

(35) Ruffin, Diary, I, Entries for Nov. 19, Dec. 31, 1859, 357, 386-387.

(36) Ibid., Entry for Dec. 31, 1859, 387.

(37) "Cassandra's Warnings," by "R." Charleston Mercury, July 21, 1859; Ruffin, Diary, I, Entries for June 5, 1857, Apr. 25, Nov. 19, 27, 1859, 80, 300, 357, 363, II, Entry for Jan. 22, 1863, 55.

(38) Ruffin, Diary, I, Entry for Dec. 31, 1859, 387.

(39) Ruffin, Diary, I, Entry for Feb. 9, 1858, 155.

(40) Ibid., Entry for June 5, 1857, 80.

(41) On Yancey's disaffection with the Democracy in 1848, see Chaplain W. Morrison, Democratic Politics and Sectionalism: The Wilmot Proviso Controversy (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1967), 140-143, 157-162. For Yancey's rationalization of his return to the Democratic fold in the mid 1850s, see his letter to William F. Samford in "Correspondence," Montgomery Advertiser and State Gazette, Feb. 27, 1856. Yancey's campaign for Buchanan in 1856 can be followed in the June-September 1856 issues of the Montgomery Advertiser. On Yancey's desire to test Northern loyalty one last time in 1860, see Thornton, Politics and Power, 397-398.

(42) Ruffin, Diary, I, Entries for Feb. 17, 1857, Nov. 18, 1859, 37, 356-357, II, Entry for May 17, 1861, 29-30.

Chapter Eight: Disunion at Last

In late April 1860 the National Democratic Convention assembled in Charleston, South Carolina. Southern Democrats, many of whom anxiously coveted the presidency, determined to block the nomination of the party's most formidable contender, Stephen A. Douglas. The Kansas episode in general and Douglas' anti-Lecompton stance in particular had indelibly tainted popular sovereignty as an antislavery instrument. Subsequently, the strained efforts by the "Little Giant" to maintain the antislavery potentialities of his cherished doctrine in the wake of its implicit invalidation by the Dred Scott decision only confirmed the worst Southern suspicions. The very friendship Douglas had previously displayed towards the South by his firm opposition to federal freesoilism and radical abolitionism, the very expectations of the territorial expansion of slavery in the northern latitudes which Douglas had raised by devising the Kansas-Nebraska Act made the Illinois senator's recent course all the more infuriating. Keenly sensitive to matters of betrayal, Southerners by 1860 widely denounced Douglas as a traitor.[1]

The fragile alliance between Northern and Southern Democrats, based on their common desire for the spoils of office, had been politically preserved by the compromise of equivocation. But a combination of presidential ambition, hatred of Douglas, and desire to compensate for the loss of Kansas made Southern acquiescence in a Douglas candidacy or

another ambiguous platform unlikely. Led by the Alabama fire-eater William L. Yancey, Southern Democrats at Charleston insisted on a clear platform to protect slavery in the territories. But the convention adopted an evasive platform, which handed over the controversial issue of territorial slavery to the Supreme Court. Thereupon the delegations of several cotton states left the convention. The Virginia delegation, however, remained in the convention and helped thwart the attempts of Northern Democrats to nominate Douglas.[2]

Ruffin did not attend the Charleston convention. But from Prince George County in Virginia, he expressed his delight at the breakup of the Democratic convention: "I rejoice at this, not only to defeat Douglas, but as I hope it may break up the present national democratic party. If it shall forward the election of Seward, or any other abolitionist, so much the better." Ruffin was pleased that the Charleston bolters considered Douglas' "squatter sovereignty"--as Southerners disparagingly referred to popular sovereignty--little better than abolitionism. Southerners appeared to be realizing that Northern Democrats were closer to the abolitionist than to the Southern position on slavery. The breakup of the national Democracy --partly stimulated by the presidential aspirations of Southern politicians upon which Ruffin was counting to wreck the Union--would free Southern politicians from the need of catering to Northern voters. As Ruffin put it, Southern

candidates would no longer have to "pander" to Northern "heresies" in the false hopes of winning Northern favor. Yet Ruffin rationalized the behavior of the Virginia delegates who had not bolted the convention as motivated by the desire of making Robert M.T. Hunter the candidate.[3]

Ruffin had increasingly come to regard Hunter as a true Southern rights patriot, who moderated his public utterances to suit a Northern constituency, a practical necessity for a presidential aspirant. By contrast, Ruffin viewed Henry A. Wise, Hunter's arch-rival in Virginia, as an unscrupulous and opportunistic demagogue and penned a newspaper essay against him. Ruffin believed that the nomination of Hunter by a sectional Southern rights party would enable the Virginia senator to display his true Southron colors. Ruffin's friendships with Lewis E. Harvie and James A. Seddon, two Hunter partisans, also inclined him towards Hunter. The fire-eating maverick, who boasted of his political independence and warned about political trimmers, harbored preferences of his own for a temporizing politician! But Ruffin's preference for Hunter did not affect his secessionist quest: he sought the permanent destruction of the national Democracy regardless of who emerged as the nominee. As Ruffin put it to Hammond: "I earnestly hope that the disruption of the democratic convention at Charleston can never be patched up, & that the south will be henceforth separated from & relieved of the insatiable vampyre, the northern democracy." He wanted a

sectional Southern party, not the national Democracy, to nominate Hunter. The bifurcation of the Democracy would end Hunter's deferential accommodation to Northern sentiment. And Ruffin believed that the Republican candidate would triumph in any case.[4]

In early May the regular Democratic convention at Charleston, unable to nominate Douglas, adjourned to convene again the next month at Baltimore. The Southern seceders, after organizing themselves in convention, likewise suspended their proceedings with plans to reassemble at Richmond in June. In the interim, the Republican convention at Chicago nominated Abraham Lincoln. Hoping for and expecting a Republican presidential victory, Ruffin was somewhat disappointed by the nomination of a dark horse: "I am sorry they did not nominate their ablest man, Seward, & so made their success more probable." Towards the end of May, Ruffin attended the South Carolina Democratic convention at Columbia, which selected representatives to the Southern convention at Richmond. Ruffin assured the Rhetts that though Virginia and the other border states would not initiate secession from the Union, they would serve as an "impregnable barrier of defence against any attack from the north" and would later join the lower South.[5]

Whereas the South Carolina Democracy had accreditted its representatives to attend the Richmond convention alone, most of the Democratic state organizations whose delegations had walked out of the Charleston convention

returned their bolting representatives to the regular Democratic convention so as to give the national party another chance to adopt a Southern rights platform. Realizing the significance of the Baltimore convention, Ruffin spent his June days commuting back and forth between Washington and Baltimore. Seeking to widen the Democratic party breach, Ruffin tried to persuade a Virginia delegate to bolt. With the same objective in mind, Ruffin urged cotton state representatives to back Hunter as the Southern candidate in order to entice Virginia and Maryland delegates to withdraw from the Baltimore convention. The secessionist strategy of forging Southern political unity and Ruffin's personal predilection for Hunter happily coincided. The political unification of the South under a Hunter banner, Ruffin hoped, would give the South valuable experience of united action, which could become vital in the secession movement after Lincoln's election.[6]

The main issues at Baltimore were whether the convention would readmit the seceders and reconsider the platform. As Ruffin had perceived, the adjournment of the Charleston convention in May had been designed by Douglasites to promote the seating of congenial delegates at the Baltimore convention in June. Douglas supporters had used the hiatus to constitute rival sets of delegations in four of the states whose Charleston delegates had withdrawn. For a while, Ruffin feared that the Baltimore convention would readmit the seceders. He was relieved when the

crucial New York delegation voted to admit the Douglas delegations and retain the platform. Virginia led a new exodus of border state and Far Western delegates. The enlarged body of Democratic secederes proceeded to adopt a Southern rights platform and select a ticket of John C. Breckinridge of Kentucky and Joseph Lane of Oregon. The truncated Democracy declared Douglas its candidate. Despite his preference for Hunter, Ruffin approved the Breckinridge and Lane ticket. His main goal had been achieved: the sectional Democratic rupture had been augmented and solidified. His direct contribution to this occurrence, however, appears to have been minimal.[7]

During the 1860 campaign, Ruffin disseminated his radical views in his accustomed individualistic fashion: writing newspaper articles, printing and distributing pamphlets, and advocating secession in private conversation. After the failure of the League of United Southerners in 1858, Ruffin had been forced to continue to finance and distribute his radical propaganda himself. For example, in late 1859 Ruffin printed 2,000 copies of his essay proposing the removal of free blacks from Virginia. Similarly, he had circulated most of his Harpers Ferry petitions without the benefit of organization.[8] His did, however, manage to get his secession novel published in 1860. Also, in the summer of that year, Ruffin made a token effort to form a secessionist organization at White Sulfur Springs in Virginia. Ruffin and five others, including Louisiana

secessionist John Perkins, formed a "Publication Society" to publish Southern rights material financed by $100 annual membership dues. A few days later the society was bolstered by the addition of three new members. Ruffin confessed to his diary that he was reluctant to increase the membership too much for fear that the organization would become unwieldy![9] Ruffin thus continued to operate as a one-man secession agency at the springs, his usual modus operandi.

Earlier in the year, Ruffin had let another opportunity of establishing a secessionist organization slip through his fingers. An ardent Alabama secessionist, S.D.F. Moore, had written the eminent Virginian to solicit his aid in setting up a Southern press. Moore wanted Ruffin to procure subscriptions for the projected newspaper and to serve on the executive commitee supervising the paper's operations. The Alabamian expressed the typical fire-eater view that Southern politicians were corrupted by their desire for federal patronage, the "forbidden fruit" skilfully used by national parties to bind their members to orthodoxy. The solution, for Moore, was mobilizing and institutionalizing Southern opinion in a sectional press, which would not be "seduced by temptation." "This my friend is the <u>truth</u> as the lamented Quitman & the able Fisher wrote us we must make <u>treason</u> at home afraid--we must build fires behind our representaives. But now the patriots of the South are like scattered sheep without a shepherd." It was an eloquent plea inviting Ruffin to take charge.

Moore hoped to make the executive committee, under Ruffin's leadership, the headquarters for Southern patriots, an organization enabling the "true men of the South" to meet and counsel each other on the issues, itself a "great & important gain." Ideally, the Southern rights men could achieve concert of purpose and devise policy; at the very least, they could become personally acquainted. Moore hoped to meet Ruffin at a Southern conference in Atlanta in June. The Alabamian thus sought to form a Southern rights organization to function as a popular pressure group steering politicians in the proper direction and to afford fire-eaters an opportunity to meet each other. If the radicals could not formulate a coherent strategy for secession, they could at least give each other moral support. Nothing materialized. The fiasco of the League of United Southerners made Ruffin wary about launching a new secessionist organization, especially one which entailed his active leadership.[10]

As Moore's letter to Ruffin so graphically reveals, the fire-eater movement was marked by a huge organizational void. The movement continued to be plagued by institutional problems during the presidential campaign. True, the Democratic disruption had yielded the South an established political body, the Southern Democracy. But while the fire-eater ultras considered the Southern Democracy a step forward, the sectional political party was hardly suitable as a vehicle to foment disunion prior to the November

election. At most, Southern rights Democrats supporting Breckinridge could point out that the election of Lincoln would be the death knell of the Union. But they could not appear as desirous of this event without gross inconsistency and the alienation of many Southern voters. That the Southern rights movement had nothing comparable to the abolitionist societies of the North had been a longstanding fire-eater grievance. In October 1860 Ruffin still echoed this theme.

In an article that appeared as a Mercury editorial, Ruffin dwelt on the lack of any Southern rights organization comparable to Northern abolitionism. Ruffin viewed the disparity as a product of divergent sectional cultures: the paucity of fire-eater organizations reflected a pervasive Southern individualism and the proliferation of abolitionist societies reflected the Northern penchant for association. It was a well-subsidized network of eloquent lecturers and skilfull propagandists which enabled the abolitionists to grow from a "few fanatics" to a pervasive Northern force. By contrast, individualism hampered the course of the Southern rights movement. Southern patriots, Ruffin--with perhaps himself in mind--lamented, had to work "alone, unassisted, and almost without even the encouragement of known sympathy." Individual efforts, however plentiful in times of crisis, could only produce temporary interest and excitement; organizations were essential to maintain the sense of urgency in quiescent times. If even a single state

had a Southern rights organization, Ruffin contended in fire-eater hyperbole, the entire South would be as impregnable as New England.[11]

Such sociological analysis palliated Ruffin's repeated failures to organize the Southern extremists. He castigated Southerners for their perverse individualism and urged them to emulate their abolitionist enemies. Yet Ruffin himself repeatedly refrained from leading by example. Instead of assuming personal responsibility, he exhorted South Carolinians to compensate for lost time by quickly establishing organizations for Southern redemption. Ruffin did not explain how the formation of Southern associations in 1860 could make up for lost time. The abolitionists, after all, had gained their followers by thirty years of perseverant inculcation. Ruffin was probably relying on the shock of Lincoln's election to spur Southern secession. But he wanted fire-eater organizations to indoctrinate Southerners with the necessity of disunion upon a Republican victory before the election and to mobilize the secession drive thereafter. He did not want the passage of time to temper Southern outrage. He did not want Lincoln's election to be like Brown's invasion, another lost opportunity for secession.

Around the time that Ruffin penned his plea for Southern organization, Barnwell Rhett Jr.--perhaps after receiving Ruffin's article--informed the Virginian that a new group had been formed in South Carolina, the

"Association of 1860," to publish and disseminate secessionist pamphlets to the South. Rhett wrote Ruffin that the organization would welcome his aid and suggested he contact General W.E. Martin. The association later sent Ruffin a few hundred pamphlets to distribute in Virginia. Ruffin was not enthusiastic. He believed that the Carolinian essays were too radical for conservative Virginia. And he had not conceived of a secondary role for himself in the Southern rights movement. Ruffin must have been relieved to dispose of many pamphlets by handing them to the passengers aboard his train from Virginia to South Carolina in early November.[12] Thus Ruffin's personal organizational efforts in 1860 amounted to founding a feeble "Publication Society" and serving as a halfhearted agent for the "1860 Association." Having failed completely as progenitor of the ambitious League of United Southerners in 1858, Ruffin found himself reduced to the status of a local distributor for the "1860 Association."

Ruffin was also a reporter who kept South Carolina informed of border state developments. During a September visit to his daughter Margaret Sayre in Kentucky, Ruffin wrote an article for the Mercury on the situation there. In Kentucky Ruffin found a fatalistic resignation to emancipation and Republicanism. Some Kentuckians, though, claimed they would resist Lincoln should he directly assault Southern slavery. Ruffin believed that such "submissionism" stemmed from the decline of slavery in the state. Ruffin

ascribed the relative decline of Kentucky slavery to abolitionist agitation, which rendered slavery tenure insecure. Ruffin claimed that Kentucky was climatically suited for slavery. In fact, he considered slavery so malleable an institution that even the cold North could use slaves in some capacity. Only abolitionist fanaticism and legal prohibitions prevented wealthy Northerners from substituting slaves for their wives and daughters as domestic laborers; slaves would free Northern women from performing debasing drudgery. Ruffin even conceded that Douglas' "squatter sovereignty" might operate to spread slavery across the West if not for the pernicious abolitionist agitation which rendered slavery tenure in the territories precarious and thereby discouraged slaveholders from territorial migration.[13]

Yet despite Ruffin's yearning for secession, he was hardly a flaming radical in Kentucky. For example, when meeting Governor Beriah Maggofin, who opposed secession unless Lincoln committed an "overt act" against slavery, Ruffin made no attempt to spur the governor to secession. He contented himself with eliciting Maggofin's vow to resist militarily any attempt by federal troops to pass through Kentucky and coerce a seceding state. To one Unionist, Ruffin did defend the ability of an independent Southern confederacy to sustain itself militarily. But Ruffin generally refrained from expressing his secessionist views. Even when specifically questioned about his reputed

extremism, Ruffin chose to convey his sentiments by "tacit admission" and "in a jocular manner, & sometimes with exaggerated expressions." Ruffin had been surprised by the extent and depth of Kentucky Unionism and accommodated himself accordingly. A sense of political realism doubtless tempered the fire-eater's radicalism. Since Ruffin did not expect the border states to initiate secession, Maggofin's moderation did not greatly perturb him. The governor had after all pledged to stop Union troops from crossing Kentucky soil, the very buffer role Ruffin had reserved for the upper South. Additionally, a sense of social propriety dictated Ruffin's reticence. Amidst the gracious Kentucky hospitality of Unionist planters who deemed him "a sort of speculative Benedict Arnold," Ruffin's radicalism lay dormant.[14] Nevertheless, Ruffin's failure to crusade aggressively for secession in Kentucky, as well as his reluctance to forge a secessionist organization personally, does not merely display his political shrewdness but reveals the limitations of his fortitude and audacity. It is hard to imagine a Garrisonian abolitionist being as apologetic and flippant about his antislavery convictions in the lower North as Ruffin was about his secessionist sentiments in the upper South.

Ruffin prudently channelled his extremism into exclamations in his diary and into essays written for the Mercury readership. While in Kentucky, Ruffin learned of the alleged slave insurrections in Texas and Alabama.

Instinctively blaming these plots on the abolitionists, he privately hoped that all Yankees who fomented slave rebellion were hung and that all Northerners except those of unquestionable virtue were barred from the South. And in typical fire-eating fashion, he wished that if further outbreaks of violence occurred, they be located in "lethargic" Georgia, which required to be goaded into secession.[15] In his articles for the Mercury, Ruffin refrained from engaging in virtriolic anti-abolitionist outcries and whipping up public hysteria against all suspicious Northerners visiting or residing in the South. He did not, for instance, call for the lynching of all abolitionist suspects--as some ultra radical editors did. His residency in a state with a relatively low slave population density, an aristocratic aversion to mob disorder, and a lingering streak of humanity restrained him.

Instead, Ruffin used the Texas panic to reinforce his longstanding contention that Southern secession could instantly avert "the greatest power for our injury possessed by our Northern enemies," namely the penetration of the South by abolitionist agents.[16] An independent Southern confederacy could "strictly exclude" all suspicious Yankees by requiring certificates of good conduct from all Northern travellers and sojourners. "As soon as any portion of the Southern States shall secede from the present Union, that portion will be safe--not only from any open or warlike attack from the North, but from the only means of greatly

injuring the South in the action of secret emissaries to corrupt and poison the minds of our slaves."[17] Ruffin thus suppressed his private desire to bar all Northerners from the South immediately. If abolitionist emissaries represented the greatest Northern menace to slavery, then the immediate exclusion of Northerners would lessen the value of an independent confederacy. Ruffin's secessionist quest overcame his antipathy towards the abolitionist. He accordingly reserved the imposition of sectional quarantine against the abolitionist virus for the Southern confederacy. Ruffin's very preoccupation with abolitionist agents infiltrating the South was in part a shrewd secessionist tactic. Obviously if slavery was declining in the border states and plantation discipline was being jeopardized solely by Northern abolitionists, Southern secession could be prescribed as a remedy for the problems afflicting the peculiar institution.

To a considerable extent, Ruffin was scapegoating Northern abolitionists for the internal difficulties of Southern slavery. His ascription of virtually all manifestations of slave resistance to abolitionist agents is the most glaring illustration of this tendency. His longest and deepest illusion was that the slaves, enjoying benevolent treatment by slaveholders, were content with their condition. The nefarious abolitionist saved the paternalist self-portrait from being tarnished by innumerable incidents of slave discontent. The supposed

permeation of the upper South with abolitionist agents also provided an alternative explanation for the common slaveowner practice of selling their slaves to the cotton states. This embarrassing but conspicuous occurrence, which smacked of capitalist avarice, became, in Ruffin's dexterous hands, the result of the meddlesome antislavery emissary, whose presence frightened slaveholders into parting with their slave property. Thus the abolitionist was blamed for slave-breeding! And Ruffin also blamed the ubiquitous abolitionist agent for the Southern failure to migrate to the western territories.

While the insecurity of slave property contributed to both the liquidation of slaves to the lower South by the border states and the dearth of slaves in the western territories, it was not the major factor. Ruffin himself had argued that the high prices of slaves made agriculture in the border states relatively unprofitable and necessitated the removal of slaves to the more fertile soils in the Southwest. Likewise, Ruffin had contended that the massive influx of European immigration and the relative economic want in the Northeast had facilitated and encouraged Northerners to flock to the territories. Thus demographic and economic factors were largely responsible for the decline of slavery in the border states and the absence of slavery from the territories.

But even these objective explanations were functional: they concealed Southern culpability. If Virginian slave

sales did not reveal a capitalist callousness, which belied the paternalist mythology, or the internal contradictions of a slave economy, the necessary connection between slave labor and soil exhaustion, they at least demonstrated the laxity of slaveholders to implement agricultural reform. Likewise, if the failure of the South to colonize the western territories did not reveal the tendency of slavery to inhibit population expansion by discouraging European immigration to the South, then it revealed a disturbing Southern blindness or indifference to the significance of the territorial struggle. Ruffin's economic and sociological explanations for the ominously increasing geographic confinement of Southern slavery concealed the endemic problems of slavery and the moral flaws of the Southern character.

While the domestic problems of Southern slavery and the shortcomings of the Southern character did not by themselves make Ruffin a secessionist, they accentuated the danger posed by the Northern abolitionist. Given the internal fragility of slave institutions, the slightest threat from outside interlopers became greatly magnified. Abolitionist propaganda could convert hesitant slaveholders harboring qualms about the morality or expediency of slavery. Abolitionist infiltration could intensify the slaveholders' fear of servile insurrection. Republican patronage could convert ambitious Southern politicians into abolitionists. Republican recruitment could array the nonslaveholding

whites against their privileged superiors. Abolitionist agitation could entice slaves to abscond or incite them to rebel. Antislavery influence could make free blacks more dangerously insolent. And Northern democratic innovations and political corruption could further subvert the aristocratic republicanism of the slaveholding states. The internal problems of slavery would not be removed by secession. Even if the independent Southern confederation were not subjected to continued outside intrusion, much less full-scale military invasion, she would still be beset with morally squeamish and periodically hysterical slaveholders, resentful nonslaveholders, discontented slaves, unruly free blacks, and opportunistic politicians. The South would still lack lebensraum to expand geographically, a rural market and a bourgeois ethos to develop industrially, liquid capital or innovative planters to progress agriculturally, African importations or European immigrants to grow demographically, virtuous statesmen to improve politically, and universal education to advance intellectually. But after his failure to transform the Eastern seaboard into a flourishing slave economy via agricultural reform, Ruffin, more than previously, ascribed Southern difficulties to Northern political oppression in general and the antislavery movement in particular.

Although the Northern antislavery threat was greater than the internal problems of slave society, Ruffin tended to exaggerate somewhat the magnitude and imminence of the

danger. And while Ruffin did not consciously seek to distract Southern attention from her endemic afflictions, his anti-abolitionist preoccupation had this effect. The ascription of the internal problems of the South to the Northern abolitionists made secession appear a panacea for the South's ailments. Ruffin generally argued that Southern problems would be solved by secession. Even when he conceded that abolitionism could be contained within the Union (by the legalization of slave testimony) or hinted that secession might not solve all Southern difficulties (since the North would retain the federal territories), he still opted for secession. Even if disunion brought the South no material advantage, it would avert certain disadvantage. From a rational standpoint, secession was preferable to remaining in the Union. At the very least, secession would terminate the disgrace of Northern insults and Southern submission. But in addition to warding off the external danger to Southern honor and interests, secession, on one level, was a psychological escape from the perplexing problems of Southern slavery.

The primacy of external fears and their confluence with internal anxieties are clearly evident in the political novel Ruffin wrote in 1860. The constitutional subversion of slavery by a Republican administration, primarily through the institutionalization of abolitionist emissaries, furnished the major theme of Ruffin's Anticipations of the Future to Serve as Lessons for the Present Time. Written as

a series of letters by a London newspaper correspondent commenting on American politics in the 1860s, the book foresaw Lincoln's victory in 1860 and the triumph of Seward in 1864. The South would acquiesce in both elections. These Republican administrations, especially Lincoln's, would cautiously and deliberately implement a moderate antislavery and anti-Southern program; rather than undertake any flagrantly unconstitutional measures, the Republicans would seek to erode slavery insidiously. The North's economic oppression of the South would be escalated. Republican rule would be characterized by higher tariffs, more fishing bounties, vast internal improvements, public land grants, waste, and corruption. More importantly, the Republicans would employ the spoils system to shatter the fragile proslavery consensus of Southern whites by limiting patronage among Southerners to thoroughgoing submissionists. The bait of lucrative and prestigious offices would entice politically ambitious Southerners to become renegades to their section.[18]

Additionally, the Republicans would subvert slavery itself through the patronage system by dispatching abolitionist appointees to the federal properties within the South such as forts, arsenals, and dockyards. Federal officers in these installations would serve as abolitionist agents and their domains temporary havens for absconding slaves, who would soon be safely conducted to Northern refuge by a vastly expanded Underground Railroad. No longer

would abolitionist emissaries have to disguise themselves! Meanwhile the Republicans would undermine white racial control by elevating blacks to social equality with whites. A new Republican Supreme Court would reverse the Dred Scott decision and declare blacks citizens. The Republican president would recognize Haiti and Liberia and welcome their black ministers to Washington social functions. The average black citizen, including black seamen on federal warships docked in the South, would start imitating white behavior. The delicate fabric of white supremacy as well as Southern slavery would be torn by Republican policy. Slavery would be subtly subverted, rather than dramatically uprooted.[19]

Nothing could stop this relentless march of resolute Republicans to eradicate slavery in the 1860s--nothing but secession. Northern Democrats would largely defect to Republicanism. The complete sectionalization of parties in a Republican North and a Democratic South would incapacitate the Democracy from safeguarding Southern interests. The faithful remnant of Northern Democrats would anyway be in no position to condemn the patronage policy of the Republicans--the chief weapon in the subversion of slavery--as the Jacksonians themselves had inaugurated the spoils system in American politics. The Southern submissionists would point to the initial Lincolnian forbearance as evidence of Northern magnanimity and Southern safety. The rhetorical fire-eaters would vociferate about

resistance to the next aggression at each Republican encroachment but would meet well-merited Republican contempt. The Southern politicians with presidential aspirations would not realize till 1864 that no Southerner--not even an apostate like Frémont--could again be elected president. The moderate but sincere Southern rights men who awaited an "overt act" of hostility would be paralyzed by Republican subtlety. The Southern masses who required a palpable injury to arouse them from their stuporous complacency would be lulled into a sense of false security by Lincolnian moderation. The clear-sighted secessionists would be few and powerless. Only when Seward placed the South in immediate danger of direct personal harm would the blind and sluggish South be galvanized into decisive action.[20]

Ultimately, the Republicans would seek to abolish slavery by constitutional amendment; this scheme--a "constitutional coup d'êtat" Ruffin termed it--would spur the South to secede. Although slavery would gradually perish in a Republican Union through persistent, indirect assaults, the Republicans would not wait. They would accelerate the natural trend of free-state increase by passing the Homestead Bill to induce the westward migration of European immigrants. And in December 1867, Ruffin speculated, the Republicans would announce their plan of dividing several Northern states to give themselves the coveted three-fourths majority. The Southern rights men in the cotton states would assemble, as usual in times of

crisis, and threaten to maintain their rights "at all hazards and to the last extremity." But the Southerners had blustered so often about resisting the "next aggression" that their cries would fall on deaf ears. The North would ridicule these threats and not retreat from its design. But this time the legislature of six cotton states would meet and secede from the Union. By 1868 the provisional government of a Southern confederacy would be formed. Federal attempts to invade the confederacy through Virginian soil would spur the border states to secede. And the united and independent South would vanquish the Northern invader. The dire predictions of Northerners such as an effective blockade and a slave rebellion would not materialize. The viability of a Southern confederacy was a major lesson of Ruffin's novel.[21]

The choice between abolition and independence would have to be made eventually. The Republicans would eventually force the South into disunion to avert abolition. The South could gain nothing by postponement. Many conditional Unionists did not think that a Republican victory would place the South in imminent danger; they accordingly relied on the Constitution to safeguard their interests and would wait for an "overt act" of abolition before embarking on the secession road. But Republican guile, Ruffin felt, would ensure that no over act blatantly violating the South's constitutional rights occurred. The moderate Southern rights position, therefore, was a snare,

not a viable defense at all. Moderate Southerners would ultimately have to choose between Union and Abolition or Disunion and Slavery; no middle ground was possible. Here was a second important "lesson" of Ruffin's Anticipations.

But the novel did not reveal the deepest fears of its author. Anticipations assumed that secession was merely a question of when the South realized that slavery was doomed in the Union. Actually, Ruffin's fire-eater ideology posited the inevitability of Northern aggressions and the necessity of Southern secession: it did not posit the inevitability of disunion. Southern secession could be averted by two related scenarios: the North would deliberately refrain from directly abolishing Southern slavery; and the enervation of the Southern will by repeated submission to piecemeal antislavery encroachments would incapacitate the South from resisting ultimate abolition. The Republicans could attain their abolitionist objective by carefully attacking slavery at a level high enough to extinguish the institution gradually but low enough to encourage Southern acquiescence. And when the Southern spirit had become so debased as to submit to any outrage, the Republicans could effectively deliver the virtually superfluous coup de grâce.

Now while Ruffin's Anticipations did forecast Republican resort to insidious incursions, it counted on the Republicans' arrogance and impatience to overcome their initial shrewd calculation, their antislavery fanaticism to

transcend their relish of power. In Ruffin's novel, the Republicans embarked upon constitutional abolition in seven short years. Privately, Ruffin feared that Southern submission to Lincoln would forever cripple the Southern will to resist abolitionism, particularly in the expected form of gradual assaults. Indeed, the constitutional scruples of the moderate Southerners embodied in the "overt act" mentality which dictated their acceptance of a legal presidential election would also logically entail their acquiescence in the obliteration of slavery by constitutional amendment. But in Ruffin's novel, the South submits to two Republican presidential victories as well as to a series of antislavery inroads and, nonetheless, stands ready to meet the challenge of constitutional abolition at the threshold!

Ruffin could not express his fear that Republican craftiness and Southern lassitude would ruin slavery in his Anticipations. On the one hand, he could not depict Southern submission to outright abolition in the last years of the 1860s because he sought to demonstrate the viability of a Southern confederacy and to uplift, rather than further deflate, the sinking Southern spirit. On the other hand, he could not portray Southern secession upon Lincoln's election because he wanted to show how Republican rule would endanger slavery and white supremacy. Nor could Ruffin narrate the gradual destruction of slavery by Republican subtlety over the course of a generation or more since he realized that

his readership would not be alarmed by distant forebodings. Indeed, this Southern apathy about remote antislavery contingencies was the very crux of the problem; it required Ruffin to accelerate the timetable of abolition. Thus Ruffin structured his novel as a comparatively brief period of gloom followed by salvation

In light of his beliefs about the irrepressiblity of the sectional conflict and the worthlessness of the Constitution to protect slave interests, Ruffin's disquietude about Yancey's campaign tour of the North during the fall of 1860 is hardly surprising. Speaking the language of political moderation, the ultra radical Alabamian firmly planted himself upon the United States Constitution and zealously urged the election of Breckinridge. Interestingly, Ruffin approved Yancey's widely-reported New York City speech when he first read it in October 1860. Since Ruffin himself to some extent suited his pronouncements to particular audiences, he appreciated Yancey's delicate predicament as a Southern secessionist campaigning for the triumph of the Breckinridge Democracy in the Northern latitudes and understood Yancey's tactful adaptation of rhetoric.[22] But several days later Ruffin wrote Yancey a constructively critical letter urging the talented orator to become the Patrick Henry of the Southern revolution. Now that the presidential campaign was nearly over and Lincoln's election seemed almost certain, Ruffin hoped to inspire Yancey to use his considerable powers of

persuasion to lead Alabama and the South out of the Union. He advised Yancey that as soon as the election returns showed a Republican victory to agitate secession at a public meeting in Montgomery and then spread the secession gospel across the South. Such a course, Ruffin assured Yancey, would earn him "imperishable fame." Ruffin confessed that his own inadequacies as a speaker had limited his contribution to the writing and publication of secession tracts, less effective modes of persuasion. Ruffin, a poor speaker, exaggerated the power of oratory; he predicted that Yancey's eloquence could sway hundreds of thousands of Southerners to secession.[23]

Ruffin's encouragement of Yancey to undertake a comprehensive tour of the South to stimulate secession partly reflected the Virginian's discomfiture with his lack of oratorical prowess in general and frustration with his secondary role in the 1860 campaign in particular; Yancey's oratorical efforts would be Ruffin's vicarious contribution to secession. But also Ruffin was perturbed by the Unionist implications of Yancey's course during the presidential canvass. Ruffin must have been quite disconcerted and alarmed by Yancey's repeated insistence that the South sought only its constitutional rights rather than secession. To Ruffin, standing on the Constitution was like awaiting an overt act. Both positions wrongly assumed that slavery could only be destroyed by some flagrant usurpation of the South's constitutional rights. In fact, Yancey's emphasis

upon the Constitution could deprive the South of any justifiable argument to meet Republican aggression at the threshold of presidential victory, as Lincoln would be constitutionally elected. Ruffin may have recalled Yancey's admission at the 1858 Southern Commercial Convention that a Republican presidential triumph would be an "inferior issue" upon which to exit the Union.

Yancey, of course, believed that the election of Lincoln would justify secession; he was far from sharing the "overt act" posture of the Southern moderates. But his position could be easily misinterpreted. Yancey viewed the Constitution differently than Ruffin. Yancey turned what he considered to be the spirit of the Constitution, sectional equality, into its very essence. Such a construction enabled him to reconcile--at least on the theoretical level--Southern rights and the Union. But Yancey held that the North's past violations of the South's constitutional equality in the Union, such as the admission of California as a free state and the rejection of Kansas as a slave state, justified secession at any time. Lincoln's election, for Yancey, would be but another confirmation of Northern hostility and another opportunity for secession. But unless one assimilated the nuances in Yancey's constitutional Unionism, his position could be construed as acquiescence in Lincoln's expected election. Whatever fears Ruffin may have had that Yancey's constitutional posture implied opposition to secession over a presidential election were groundless.

But Ruffin may also have feared that Yancey's vigorous campaign to enlist Northern voters behind Breckinridge could insidiously undermine Yancey's championship of Southern rights. The Virginian lamented the fact that Southern orators had devoted themselves to secure the election of Breckinridge with the enthusiasm and energy which should have been invested in secession agitation, a polite but firm rebuke of Yancey's course. Presidential politics, Ruffin reminded Yancey, had long drained Southern energies away from the staunch defense of sectional interests. Indeed, Yancey himself seemed to be succumbing to this fixation of electing a president, an obsession which inhibited the secessionism of Southern politicians. For Ruffin, the outcome of the election was subordinate to securing Southern rights by secession. The Breckinridge versus Lincoln contest was a transient issue which should not divert attention from the fact that the South could never be safe in a Union dominated by the abolition principles of the increasingly powerful North. "Your utmost success," Ruffin admonished Yancey, "would have served but to postpone the day of the death-sentence on southern institutions & welfare." Ruffin never lost sight of the fact that a Southern political victory in the Union would at best delay the inevitable abolition calamity. As Ruffin avowed to Southern rights men at Sulfur Springs, he favored secession even if Breckinridge won. Sensing that his Alabamian compatriot had become so caught up in political partisanship

that he would have difficulty returning to the fold of fire-eater orthodoxy, Ruffin prescribed a secession tour of the South as an antidote to Yancey's Union tour of the North. Ruffin hoped that his epistolary reminder to Yancey of some of the basic tenets of the radicals' ideology would set the errant Alabamian back on track.[24]

Unlike the ambivalent Yancey, Ruffin single-mindedly sought secession in 1860. And since he realized that a Breckinridge victory would only delay the crisis, Ruffin hoped that Lincoln would win. This sentiment lays strewn across the manuscript pages of Ruffin's diary. For example, on October 12 he "heartily rejoiced" that Pennsylvania, a key Northern electoral state, had elected a Republican governor, as it foreshadowed Lincoln's impending victory. Ruffin, however, was uncertain if Lincoln's election would be followed by Southern secession. At times he felt confident that South Carolina would initiate secession and the rest of the South would follow. At other times, he feared that even South Carolina would not depart from the Union. But at all times--even in his moments of despair about Southern secession--he hoped for Lincoln's election. He wanted Lincoln to win even if the entire South submitted. Read Ruffin's private declaration of October 12: "I wish the southern states to be forced to choose between secession & submission to abolition domination, though I greatly fear that, even if Lincoln be elected, not one state will thereupon secede." On November 3, three days before the

election, Ruffin recorded that his sons Edmund and Julian hoped for Lincoln's defeat since they expected complete Southern submission: "I have much fear that they may be right. Still I most earnestly & anxiously desire Lincoln to be elected--because I have hope that at least one state S.C. will secede, & that others will follow--& even if otherwise, I wish the question tested & settled now. If there is general submission now, there never will be future maintenance of our rights--& the end of negro slavery may be considered as settled."[25]

Here Ruffin revealed the essential irrationality which underlay his hope for Lincoln's election. From the standpoint of fire-eater ideology, the election of Lincoln was only valuable if it stimulated Southern secession--or at least invigorated the disunion movement. But if Lincoln's election elicited no Southern response and thereby sealed Southern doom, wherein lay its value? Surely, a Breckinridge administration would not end slavery. Nor would Southern honor be sullied by the acceptance of Breckinridge's election.

Ruffin could argue that another Democratic administration would lull Southerners--especially ambitious Southern politicians seeking the presidency--into tolerating Northern antislavery aggressions in the interim and thereby further degrade the Southern spirit. Ruffin could protest that if the South was not ready to resist a "Black Republican" triumph in 1860, she would never be ready; any

further fire-eater agitation to arouse the comatose South would be pointless. Ruffin could claim that even if the South could be prepared under a friendly Democratic administration to resist Republican elevation in 1864, Southern secession in 1860 was required to erase the stigma of her past disgraceful submissions, which became increasingly indelible with each passing year. Finally, Ruffin could point out that since the passage of time strengthened the North at the expense of the South, an independent Southern confederation would have a better chance of repelling any possible Northern invasion in 1860 than after the next quadrennial presidential election.

But beneath such possible appeals lay Ruffin's personal frustration. He was tired of playing the gadfly to an insensate South. He was tired of anticipating a sectional showdown with each sectional crisis. He was tired of consoling himself with the promise of eventual Southern redemption. That Ruffin had used the prospect of a Republican presidential victory sparking Southern secession to assuage his repeated failures to disrupt the Union in recent years made the occurrence of disunion in 1860 particularly urgent. The taut drama had been dragging on for too long; he wanted its resolution, one way or the other. His psychological needs, rather than ideological imperatives, made Ruffin willing to risk submission and abolition for the sake of having a sectional confrontation. Even if the Republicans liberated his slaves, his prophecy

of increasing Northern aggression, Republican ascendancy, and Southern catastrophe would be vindicated.

But even Ruffin's extreme fire-eating disposition had its limitations. He did not translate his personal desire for Lincoln's victory into action. Notwithstanding his anxiety for Lincoln's election, he voted for Breckinridge. Interestingly, aroused by the Kentuckian's reticence on whether Lincoln's election would justify secession and whether the Union should forcefully resist secession, Ruffin suspected Breckinridge of harboring latent Unionism in his bosom. Ruffin had wanted to be in South Carolina during the weeks preceding the election in order to confer with Carolinian radicals and agitate secession in that strategic state. Nevertheless, Ruffin remained in Virginia until election day to fulfill his "obligation" to vote for Breckinridge.[26]

Immediately after casting his vote for Breckinridge, Ruffin left his native state for the more congenial atmosphere of South Carolina. Ruffin knew that South Carolina would be the pivotal state in the secession movement. He hoped to lend his aid to the cause and witness the realization of his dream. In the Palmetto State, Ruffin enrolled in the "Minute Men" organization and donned the symbolic cockade on his hat. Later he officially joined the "1860 Association" by paying the five-dollar membership fee. Everywhere Ruffin went, he was warmly welcomed. The radical Carolinian populace hailed and honored the Virginian

fire-eater. The masses frequently cajoled Ruffin, in spite of his aversion to public speaking, into delivering short secession addresses. Perhaps the highlight of his November visit to South Carolina was being awarded an honorary seat in the state legislature and witnessing its adoption of an ordinance providing for a state convention. Ruffin also wrote a few secession essays for the Mercury, which Barnwell Rhett Jr. featured as editorials.[27]

Ruffin repeatedly called for the separate secession of South Carolina. Only this state could lead the secession movement as "the true and devoted southerners as yet make but a minority of the whole Southern people." The border states could not lead but would be "compelled to follow the leading of any more prompt states." Even the Gulf States could not initiate the movement as they feared isolation, but would zealously follow South Carolina's lead. South Carolina must act--and swiftly. Delay would be fatal, Ruffin warned: "It is all-important to the most perfect success of secession, and to the action being unassailable by, or being invulnerable to, enemies of every kind, that the first movement shall have been consummated and completed before the Abolition President shall be inaugurated, and before he and his BROWN-HELPER party and section shall have possession and control of the Federal treasury, and patronage of the army and navy, and of all the political power of the United States." Swift Southern secession would present Lincoln with a fait accompli and preserve the peace.[28]

Ruffin appealed to Southern political leaders to direct the secession movement in an organized manner. He distrusted the masses--their temper was too fickle, their behavior too unpredictable. A highly aroused populace might take matters into its own hands and assault symbols of federal authority in the South. An unorganized secessionist upheaval could unleash dangerous social forces; the separatist revolution could degenerate into a social revolution. Hence Ruffin sought a "deliberate & legal secession" officially implemented by duly convened government bodies such as state conventions to ensure that the slaveholding aristocracy remained in control. Organized leadership was required not only to prevent "disorder" and "anarchy" but also to ensure that secession occurred at all. The mass enthusiasm sparked by Lincoln's election could dissipate as it had after other instances of Northern aggression like the Harpers Ferry raid. Consequently, the quick implementation of secession by the constituted authorities was vital. Nevertheless, sensitive to Southern opposition to the leadership of the Palmetto State, Ruffin proposed that the South Carolina state convention should declare its intention to secede but delay adoption of a secession ordinance until February 1, 1861 in order to give other Southern states a chance to lead the disunion movement. Meanwhile, South Carolina should prepare herself militarily by constructing fortifications, purchasing arms and ammunition, and training her militia. If no Southern

state accepted her invitation to initiate secession, then South Carolina should leave the Union alone on the scheduled day.[29]

Realizing that South Carolina would probably be forced to secede alone, Ruffin contended that an independent Carolina would be able to sustain herself both economically and militarily. Upon declaring her independence, South Carolina could immediately rid herself of the pernicious presence of secret abolitionist agents, the greatest Northern threat to slavery. Ruffin minimized the danger of war. Conservative Northern Congressmen, who affirmed the right of secession, denied the expediency of invasion, or sympathized with the South in the sectional conflict, would restrain military action by the Union. But even if the North mounted a blockade or launched an invasion against her, South Carolina had nothing to fear. The North could not effectively blockade South Carolina: the numerous shallow passages dotting the extensive Carolinian coastline would enable massive smuggling through the use of small craft; Carolina's overland trade with neighboring states would not be affected by a naval blockade of her seaports; and South Carolina could always offer liberal trade terms to powerful European nations desiring her precious cotton staple and thereby induce them to reject any Northern blockade. A Northern invasion of South Carolina would be similarly ineffective: serving as a buffer state, Virginia would prevent federal forces from crossing her terrain and

reaching Carolina; should the North somehow surmount or circumvent the border state barrier, South Carolina could singlehandedly repel the paltry Yankee army of less than 19,000 troops; and, anyway, the first drop of blood spilled on Carolinian soil would bring the entire South to her aid. Thus the arguments which Ruffin had previously used to show the viability of a Southern confederacy, he now applied to South Carolina.[30]

Although Ruffin believed that South Carolina would initiate the secession movement and that the border states would later join her, he wanted his native state to leave the Union as quickly as possible. In a November communication to the Richmond Enquirer, Ruffin tried to stimulate Virginia action by alerting her to the future choice between a Northern United States and a Southern confederacy. Pointing to the alacrity and unanimity with which South Carolina had acted in summoning a state convention and to the telegraphic dispatches from several other Southern states including Maryland and North Carolina which indicated a growing secessionist temper, Ruffin professed confidence that a Southern confederacy would soon be formed. If Virginia remained in the Union, she would be imperilled from both sides: the Northern abolitionists would quickly acquire the requisite constitutional majority and abolish Virginian slavery; and the Southern confederacy would justifiably refuse to buy slaves from a renegade border state should the North allow Virginia to sell them.

At best, individual Virginians would be able to escape economic ruin by fleeing with their slaves to the South. But Virginia as a community would be desolated; a colony of abolitionist squatters would occupy her wastelands. On the other hand, if Virginia joined North Carolina and Maryland in seceding prior to Lincoln's inauguration, then the District of Columbia would necessarily become part of the Southern confederacy. Lincoln would not dare enter Washington, which would become the capital of the Southern confederacy.[31]

Ruffin's anxious solicitude about Virginia's course reflected his continuing attachment to his native state. But he was becoming increasingly vexed with Virginia and correspondingly pleased with South Carolina. Sojourning in the Palmetto State, Ruffin found himself in the awkward position of a Virginia representative compelled to rationalize the sluggishness of the Old Dominion. Privately, Ruffin noted that Virginia zeal lagged far behind that of other Southern states--including some border states. Yet Ruffin assured inquisitive and skeptical Carolinians that Virginia would choose secession, however tardily, when the issue became remaining with her Northern foes or joining her Southern friends. Ruffin perceptively ascribed Virginian conservatism to her fear that she would be the battleground in a civil war. But Ruffin pledged his life and honor that Virginia would ultimately align herself with the South: "If Virginia remains in the Union, under the

domination of this infamous, low, vulgar tyranny of Black Republicanism, and there is one other State in the Union that has bravely thrown off the yoke, I will seek my domicil in that State and abandon Virginia forever. If Virginia will not act as South Carolina, I no longer have a home, and I am a banished man." Ruffin's pledge was no mere dramatic gesture uttered in the heat of the moment; true to his word, Ruffin did not set foot in his native state during the period between Lincoln's inauguration and Virginia's secession. Ruffin identified with South Carolina not only because he believed she was acting courageously in the crisis, but also because he felt the Palmetto State appreciated him. He pronounced his November 1860 stay in South Carolina, where he was embraced as a fellow secessionist, "the most gratifying of my life." He contrasted the warm reception Carolina had accorded him to the calumny he had sustained in Virginia. "A prophet is not without honor, except in his own country," Ruffin lamented. Honor was what he craved. So long had he been denied honor and recognition in Virginia that he cherished each manifestation of it in South Carolina.[32]

Honor was a major stimulant of Ruffin's secessionist quest, more so even than Southern interest. Ruffin, of course, framed his arguments to appeal to Southern interest: he repeatedly assured Carolinians that their unilateral departure from the Union would peacefully eventuate in the formation of an enduring Southern confederacy, where slave

interests would be safeguarded. Ruffin's diary reveals that he did not really expect disunion to be peaceful; he was quite surprised by the peaceful nature of cotton state secession during the last months of the Buchanan administration. But perceptive contemporaries, not privy to Ruffin's diary, could have discerned that behind his sanguine assurances of peace lurked ominous visions of sanguinary strife. A careful reader of his Mercury articles would have perceived that Ruffin had implicitly acknowledged the possibility that the spilling of blood might be necessary to drive the border states out of the Union. Indeed, the federal attempt to invade the nascent Southern confederation by crossing Virginian territory had been the impetus to border state secession in Ruffin's Anticipations.

Anyone present at Ruffin's impromptu debate in the parlor of the Janney Hotel in Columbia on November 7, 1860 would have heard his implicit admission that the solitary withdrawal of the Palmetto State could prove disastrous. When his claim that separate Carolinian statehood was economically feasible was cogently challenged by a Roman Catholic bishop, Ruffin--unaccustomed to exchanges with skilfull debaters--lost his composure and declared that South Carolina should secede alone anyway. The unexpected applause by the Carolina onlookers emboldened the Virginian to make a public speech from the hotel veranda. Here Ruffin exclaimed that even if the South suffered all the dire calamities forecast by Northern abolitionists and Southern

submissionists, he would still favor disunion. Dying nobly like brave fighters was more honorable than perishing slowly like cowardly submissionists. To attest his commitment, Ruffin pledged to stay in South Carolina and share her woes.[33]

It is tempting to view Ruffin's secession quest as a reckless plunge into the abyss in a desperate bid to vindicate priceless Southern honor. But Ruffin did not view disunion as the deliberate sacrifice of Southern interests for the sake of maintaining Southern honor. In Ruffin's mind, Southern interests and honor harmonized. He truly believed that submission to Lincoln would bring certain ruin: "If there is general submission now, . . . the end of negro slavery may be considered as settled."[34] He perceived Lincoln's election as a critical historical moment: if the South submitted to Lincoln's election, she would submit to abolition as well--which the Republicans were bound to implement. Likewise, Ruffin truly believed that the South could repel any Northern military invasion. He did acknowledge the possibility of Southern destruction in a civil war. Still, for Ruffin, the ruin of Southern interests was certain inside the Union but uncertain outside of it: "If such ruin is to come upon the South, with all its efforts to defend itself, it will more certainly come from submission to abolition rule in a somewhat longer time."[35] Thus Ruffin considered secession the only means of saving Southern economic interests.

Nevertheless, honor underlay Ruffin's yearning for

secession. The Virginian told his Carolinian audience that even if secession utterly destroyed the South, secession was preferable to submission to the Republicans. Dying on the battlefield like heroic warriors was preferable to being slowly strangulated by the abolition python. His preference was not merely a reflection of his psychological disposition --which found the prospect of increasing physical debilitation and slow death unbearable--but an expression of his deepest values: death by resistance was noble, death by submission was base. His contention that Southern death inside a Republican Union was surer, though slower, than Southern death on the battlefield of an independent confederation paled alongside his exaltation of Honor. Even if secession injured Southern interests, Southern honor would be vindicated. The act of secession itself, the assertion of Southern honor, outweighed the practical consequences.

The loss of honor by the voluntary surrender of moral character was deeply embedded in the aristocratic aspect of Southern culture. The Southern gentlemen who meekly bore insults from his social peers or diffidently declined the challenge of a duel proffered by an adversary of similar social status was disgraced regardless of the size of his plantation or the number of his slaves. The code duello did exempt the patrician from encounters with his social inferiors. But Southern toleration of Northern insults could not be effectively rationalized by the denigration of

Yankees as social inferiors. Even the insults of inferiors required some response according to the honorific value code.[36] Moreover, on an emotional level, insults could deeply wound one's pride regardless of their source. The insults of inferiors probably irked insecure Southerners such as Ruffin all the more. Indeed, Ruffin's disparagement of Yankee culture and Northern politicians may have emanated from his gnawing suspicion of Southern inferiority. Ruffin and his fellow fire-eaters denounced Southern submission to Yankee insults as shameful and spoke boldly about valiant resistance to antislavery aggressions.

But did Southerners possess the character consonant with their code of honor or merely speak the language of honor? Northerners denigrated the Southern pretension to embody the values of honor in her character; Northerners dismissed Southern fire-eaters as blustering braggarts. The Chicago Democrat, for instance, predicted another Southern retreat: "The chivalry will eat dirt. They will back down. They never had any spunk anyhow. The best they could do was to bully, and brag and bluster." Ruffin interpreted such Northern taunts as signs of alarm about impending disunion.[37] But he inwardly suspected they might be right. Such disparagement required refutation by action. Southern retreat in the face of Northern ridicule would expose the hollowness of Southern pretensions and emblazon her shame. Southern submission to Lincoln after repeated threats to secede upon the election of a Republican executive would be

but another glaring example of the vacuity of her disunion bluster. It was thus the value of honor that both dictated the choice of ruin by gallant resistance instead of ignominious submission and endowed secessionism with a sense of compelling urgency.

Furthermore, Ruffin's arguments that submission would destroy slavery were based on the ideology of honor. Submission to Lincoln would not only weaken the South by the infiltration of abolitionism in the border states; it would also sap the vitality of the already enervated Southern spirit and render the Southern will morally incapable of future resistance. The will could not miraculously rise like a phoenix after its utter abasement. And for Ruffin, Southern acceptance of the political leadership of a "Black Republican" president--a position both honorable and powerful--would plunge her to the depths of degradation. Ruffin also feared that Republican domination of the federal apparatus would intensify the permeation of abolitionism in the upper South by instigating the disloyalty of blacks and whites alike. But even this practical fear was, in a way, a product of the ideology of honor. In fact, the entire framework of Ruffin's view of sectional relations--the perception that submission by the victim bred further aggression by the assailant as well as further submission by the victim--was founded on the suppositions of honor.[38] Thus, Southern submission to Lincoln would encourage Republican incursions.

Likewise, Ruffin's arguments that secession would serve Southern interests were predicated on Southern honor. That a Southern confederacy could militarily sustain itself against a hostile North was not so much a conclusion drawn from a comparative analysis of available sectional resources as a deduction from the concept of honor: a people endowed with honor would naturally survive and flourish. The character of the people, the justice of the cause, rather than the number of factories and railroads, were what ultimately mattered. And for Ruffin the Southern people and their domestic institutions were clearly superior to their Northern counterparts. The concept of honor clouded Ruffin's judgment about the consequences of disunion. His belief that the North would not dare invade a united South contradicted his premise about the fanatical nature of abolitionism but was consistent with his view that honor governed social relations: the moral superiority of the Southern people as demonstrated by their refusal to submit to the "Black Republican" humiliation would intimidate the spineless North into passivity and preserve the peace. If his contention that a Southern confederacy was viable had a semblance of plausibility, his claim that an independent South Carolina was equally sustainable--his boast that Carolina herself could successfully repel any federal invasion--was patently absurd. To dismiss such fire-eating statements as the foolish braggadocio of deluded megalomaniacs or the mendacious rhetoric of secessionist

zealots misses the point; such extravagant notions could not be seriously entertained or advanced without the underlying assumptions of Southern honor. Honor could make the absurd seem possible.

In fact, the very economic interest in slavery that Ruffin was anxious to protect was inextricably bound to honor. Of course, Ruffin had a deep economic stake in the ownership of slave labor; he doubtlessly enjoyed amassing a small fortune by extracting the highest possible output from his cultivated acreage and selling the product at the maximum price. He likewise enjoyed spending his money on many of the customary luxuries of the day. But beyond the tangible financial assets accumulated by the exploitation of slave labor lay his communal status and self-esteem. The convergence of the social recognition of Ruffin and his self-image as an independent aristocratic patrician rested on his command of slave labor. Ruffin's identity was linked to his institutional roles. Ruffin's various guises--diligent planter, benevolent patriarch, agricultural reformer, proslavery intellectual, and secessionist crusader--all hinged on his slaveholding status. Consequently, the threat posed by Republicanism was not merely the loss of his slave property and labor force but the loss of his very identity. Abolitionism would reduce Ruffin to the level of both the black freedmen and the poor white. The egalitarian implications of Republicanism threatened Ruffin at least as much as the financial

repercussions of abolitionism. The deprivation of slaves would be a loss of mastery: the elimination of slavery by an outsider would rudely dispel the illusion of independence. Even if the Republicans left the inanimate properties of the slaveholder intact, the plantation and mansion would become empty shells, painful reminders of a bygone era. Thus Ruffin's pursuit of secession was rooted in Southern honor.[39]

But many political leaders, particularly in the border states, hoped to avert the experiment of a Southern confederacy by effecting sectional compromise. Some called for a more stringent fugitive slave law and the repeal of the personal liberty laws. Others would prohibit federal intervention with slavery in the territories and states. Hunter proposed a series of structural changes in the federal government such as a dual executive which he believed would secure the political equality of the South in the Union. Most prominent among the various proposals was the Crittenden Compromise, whose salient feature was the extension of the 36° 30' demarcation to all current and future territories. In February 1861 representatives from the Southern border states and several Northern states met at Washington and adopted a diluted version of the Crittenden Compromise.[40]

Ruffin considered all Northern compromise offers worthless. No significant concession could be ratified by two-thirds of Congress and three-fourths of the states to become constitutional amendments. The Republicans, Ruffin

believed, knew full well that compromise was impractical. Hence he regarded such plans as the Crittenden Compromise and such assemblages as the Washington Peace Conference as mere delaying tactics to forestall Southern military preparation and stop the secession avalanche until Lincoln was inaugurated.[41] For Ruffin, moreover, the compromise proposals were grossly inadequate since they left Republican power and its insidious method of destroying slavery through the federal patronage apparatus intact. The provisions enabling Southern tropical expansion could not impress someone whose racial feelings found the assimilation of "inferior" Latin American peoples into the United States repulsive. Nothing but Republican abdication would have sufficed for Ruffin. Nay, even if Lincoln had handed over the reins of power to Breckinridge, he could not have erased the insult to Southern honor which his election represented nor permanently settled the sectional conflict. Ruffin thus opposed compromise under any circumstances. He hoped, however, that the North would refuse to make any meaningful concessions and thereby narrow the South's alternatives to secession or submission.

Ruffin's zeal for secession complemented his antipathy to compromise. During the winter of 1860-1861, the Virginian fire-eater travelled across the South as a peripatetic preacher of disunion. Attending the state conventions of South Carolina in December 1860 and Florida in January 1861, Ruffin was thrilled to witness the adoption

of secession ordinances by both states. At Florida Ruffin addressed the convention and urged quick secession to bring Virginia into the prospective confederacy of Southern states. Twice during the critical period, Ruffin was in Georgia, where he conferred with Governor Joseph E. Brown and the radical Henry L. Benning. Ruffin had intended to be present at Alabama's state convention but was in Georgia when Alabama left the Union in January 1861. So great was Ruffin's crusading zeal that only the limitations of nineteenth-century technology prevented him from personally witnessing the secession of the seven Southern states which left the Union in that fateful winter.[42]

Ruffin's appearance and activities during this period were best captured by Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper, whose February 1861 issue featured a striking portrait of Ruffin accompanied by a colorful description of the aged fire-eater, a portrait in words:

> EDMUND RUFFIN, Who is known for his ultra Southern sentiments, is by birth a Virginian and a Secessionist. For certainly, no one who had not imbibed with his mothers milk the desire to break up the compact that binds this great Confederacy together, could manifest such eager interest as he does in every attempt that is made to that end. Laden with years and having the air of a patriarch about him, Mr. Ruffin has not yet by any means reached the doddering state, and in all probability will not for some time to come. His form is not bent, nor is his step slow or uncertain. Were it not that his clothes (which by the way are of patriotic homespun) are of modern cut, he would seem like one... who had just stepped out of the Past into the new world of the Present. His hair, which you almost expect to see plaited into a queue, is perfectly white, and hangs in frosty locks over his shoulders. On the left side of his hat he wears the everpresent cockade, and so, with this symbol of resistance hoisted at the peak, the old man goes about from Convention to Convention, a political

Peter the Hermit, preaching Secession wherever he goes."[43] Ruffin was sufficiently impressed with this tribute--which provided him with some of the national notoriety he avidly craved--that he used the sobriquet "Peter the Hermit" for some Civil War essays he later wrote.

Though Ruffin relished the notoriety, he would not rest until every Southern state, especially Virginia, seceded from the Union and joined the new confederation of slave states. Chagrined by the slow pace of secession--which was far from being the simultaneous departure of cotton states of fire-eater visions--Ruffin realized that bloodshed would be required to spur the sluggish states, particularly the border states, to leave the Union. His advocacy of seizing federal forts in the South reflected his increasing militancy. He wanted Southern governors such as Joseph E. Brown of Georgia to take over the federal forts in their states. Ruffin viewed such action as a justifiable response to the transfer of Major Anderson's troops from Fort Moultrie to the more formidable Fort Sumter in Charleston harbor. Also, he sought preemptive seizures of federal forts to prevent them from being occupied by Union troops. But his primary objective was to commit those states which assaulted federal forts to secession. Governor Brown did seize Fort Pulaski in Georgia. But other governors, such as John W. Ellis of North Carolina, were hesitant.[44]

A more effective way of stimulating disunion was to spark military clashes between the general government and

seceded states over the continuing federal occupation of fortresses in their sovereign domains. Although many Southerners, particularly residents of the upper South, were reluctant to attack or leave the Union, they strongly opposed federal coercion of a departed state. Additionally, many South Carolinian fire-eaters regarded the continuing federal presence in their independent state as a badge of disgrace. Ruffin hoped to exploit the widespread subscription to the state rights ideology--the political expression of Southern honor--in the upper South and the visible humiliation of the seceded states in the lower South for the secession cause. In this instance, Ruffin would use Southern honor to advance Southern--or at least Virginian--interests. Accordingly, in January 1861 he wanted Carolina to seize Fort Sumter and Florida to take Fort Pickens. "The possession of these two forts, garrisoned by the soldiers of the federal power, is all-important to the South."[45] Not only did Ruffin deem the possession of these forts valuable military outposts shielding the nascent confederation of Southern states but he also hoped that the process of capturing these forts would drive the entire South, united by political ideology and sectional sympathy, out of the Union. He hoped that "collisions & war . . . , with bloodshed of the South Carolinians defending their soil & their rights, or maintaining the possession of their harbor & its defending fortifications, will stir doubly fast the sluggish blood of the more backward southerners, & must soon

draw all the southern states to secession, & to intimate alliance, in advance of a confederacy."[46]

On January 11 Ruffin and Rhett had a long discussion about the military situation in Charleston harbor and the possibility of seizing Sumter. Two days later Ruffin accompanied the South Carolina "Secretary of War," General D.F. Jamison, on an inspection tour of the Charleston forts. Aiding the fortification of Fort Moultrie's ramparts, Ruffin loaded some sand into a wheelbarrow "so as to allow me to commit a little treason to the northern government."[47] At times Ruffin tried to convince himself that the capture of Sumter and Pickens would spark massive secessions without igniting a full-scale conflagration. But Ruffin knew better: military collisions over the federal forts would bring war between the hostile sections.[48]

During the last two months of the Buchanan administration, the secession movement proceeded peacefully and crystallized into the Southern Confederacy. January saw five more cotton states--Mississippi, Florida, Alabama, Georgia, and Louisiana--withdraw from the Union. In February delegates of the seceded states assembled in Montgomery, Alabama and organized a provisional government with Jefferson Davis at its head. Several border states, including Virginia, scheduled state conventions to determine their fate. Meanwhile, Buchanan hoped that some compromise effort, such as the Washington Peace Conference, would succeed and restore the Union. The president deemed

secession unconstitutional but held coercion to be equally illegitimate. But as Buchanan did not consider the retention of federal fortifications and the collection of revenue in seceded states "coercion," his position could have easily led to war. Fortunately, his natural aversion to decisive action complementing his hopes for compromise and peace kept federal coercion attempts feeble and halfhearted. South Carolina, for example, easily turned back the small merchant vessel Star of the West, which the president had sent to reinforce Major Anderson at Fort Sumter. A fragile peace was thus preserved.[49]

Ruffin was surprised by the turn of events. Despite his persistent promises of peaceful disunion, Ruffin had expected--unless the entire South quickly and jointly seceded--federal coercion and war to be the immediate consequences of secession. Only the peculiar context of Southern secession, Ruffin confessed, only the four-month interregnum between the initiation of the disunion movement by South Carolina and the political ascendancy of the Republican party during which time Buchanan seemed mired in passive "imbecility"--circumstances which the disunionist had not anticipated--had prevented federal coercion and war. Nevertheless, here was a chance for the South to sever the Union peacefully. The key, for Ruffin, became inducing the border states to secede before March 4; Lincoln, Ruffin assured himself, would not dare attack a solid phalanx of fifteen states. But if the upper South was still in the

Union at the expiration of Buchanan's term, Lincoln, lacking the clemency of his predecessor, would try to subjugate the lower South militarily. True, Republican belligerence would drive the border states into the friendly confines of an expanded Southern Confederacy. But the fragile peace would be shattered. The same drawback--the risk of war--marred the strategy of sparking a military collision over Sumter or Pickens. But if some nonviolent method of enticing the hesitant states to withdraw from the Union were quickly found, then the entire South conceivably could be peacefully united in the Southern Confederacy.[50]

Notwithstanding a vigorous streak of militarism and a fierce determination to defend the territorial integrity of the independent Southern states, Ruffin--if only to vindicate his reiterated promises of peace--flirted with nonviolent methods of inspiring Virginia to leave the Union. For a while, Ruffin turned his attention to the February election of delegates to the Virginia state convention. Ruffin realized that the Virginia masses were not ripe for secession. In the western part of the state, where slaves were sparse, the convention was advertised as another opportunity to reform the internal political structure of the state, which still gave the east a disproportionate amount of power. Even in the slaveholding east, secession was not popular. Yet, Ruffin hoped that secessionist delegates would be elected and triumphantly march the state out of the Union. In fact, he persuaded his son Edmund, who

shared the radical propensity but not the odious notoriety of his father, to run as a convention delegate from the conservative Prince George and Surry counties. Ruffin was giving Virginia another chance to redeem herself by choosing secessionist delegates such as his son Edmund and his close friend Willoughby Newton.[51]

Significantly, Ruffin adapted his strategy of encouraging the seceded states to capture the federal forts in their jurisdiction to the election of convention delegates in Virginia. Now, Ruffin wanted South Carolina and Florida to remain passive (unless the federal government tried to reinforce the garrisons) until the critical contest in Virginia. If the Old Dominion chose secessionists, she would lead the border states out the Union peacefully. But if she chose "submissionists," then the seizure of the forts would be advisable:

> The shedding of blood then, in defence of the undoubted right of the Southern states to their soil & waters, will serve to change many voters in the hesitating states, from the submission or procrastinating ranks, to the zealous for immediate secession. If I could direct the course of things, I would, on these grounds,... attack these forts as vigorously as possible, as soon as it may be known that the disposition of this Convention is for submission or delay. The commencement of open war between the federal or northern power & the seceded states will quickly bring the remaining southern states to side with the seceded & attacked states.[52]

Ruffin's suspension of his aggressive military strategy would not only vindicate his reiterated promises of peace but accord his native state a final opportunity to redeem her honor. If the convention selected secessionists, then Virginian departure from the Union would attest to her

recognition that her moral position was degraded and her slaveholding status was jeopardized by a Republican Union. But if Virginia was remiss to her duty and chose "submissionists," then the crafty manipulations of the Confederates or the myopic provocations of the Federals would be required to lure the Old Dominion out of the Union.

Virginia disappointed Ruffin. Of the 152 convention delegates, voters chose about 50 Unionists, 70 conditional Unionists, and 30 disunionists. Both Ruffin and Newton were defeated. Virginia had squandered yet another opportunity to recognize Ruffin's contributions to the cause of the South, however vicariously, through the election of his namesake. Ruffin's only consolation was the hope that Northern misinterpretation of the election results as "Unionist" would "harden hearts" of Republicans against making concessions to the South and encourage them to further aggressions. Ruffin hoped that the Republicans would reject the compromise measures of the Washington Peace Conference and foist new sectional legislation upon the South. On the last day of February, Ruffin joined fellow radical James A. Seddon and ex-President John Tyler, two Peace Conference delegates, in denouncing compromise and urging Virginia to secede. The Republicans did exactly what Ruffin sought: they repudiated the Peace Conference formula and enacted such sectional measures as Pacific railroad legislation and a high tariff. But Virginia remained in the Union.[53]

In March Edmund Jr. and Julian informed their father, who had returned to South Carolina, of Virginia's disinclination to secede in spite of Lincoln's inaugural message avowing his intention to collect the federal revenues in the seceded states. Virginia's Unionists, Julian reported, sought to delay state action by such ploys as a border state convention. The Old Dominion's obstinate clinging to the Union returned Ruffin's focus to the Southern forts occupied by federal troops as potential pivots which could turn the border states' allegiance southward. Seeking to put the Confederacy on the defensive, Ruffin hoped that Lincoln would attempt some form of coercion such as sending reinforcements to Fort Sumter. In the meantime, Ruffin crossed into North Carolina--though the state still lingered in the Union--and, at a public meeting in Goldsborough, urged the state to occupy the federal forts to prevent them from being garrisoned by hostile Union troops. Privately, Ruffin intimated the same strategy to Governor Ellis. By April Ruffin was extremely impatient for military confrontation and border state secession. The embarrassing questions South Carolinians persistently asked Ruffin about affairs in Virginia only increased his restlessness. "I am wearied, pained & mortified," he complained, "by having to answer questions asked of me every day & almost every hour, by acquaintances & even strangers, as to the condition & designed action of Va, & the causes of her failure to unite with the South in defence of her own as

well as the common rights, against the wrongs & insults from the North." Ruffin longed for action; he wanted to end the stalemate.[54]

Events played into Ruffin's hands. South Carolina ceased supplying food to Major Anderson's troops in Sumter. Southerners expected Anderson to retaliate by firing on their ships which tried to cross the channel. Ruffin used his acquaintance with influential civil and military officials in South Carolina to get himself aboard a supply ship which routinely passed through Charleston harbor. On April 8 Ruffin packed a musket, ammunition, and accoutrements and boarded the steamship. "I greatly coveted the distinction & <u>eclat</u> which I might have acquired if the steamer had been fired upon, & we had refused to yield, & I deemed the danger to be incurred as very trifling."[55] He returned home disappointed. But a few days later Ruffin became a celebrity.

Events now moved quickly. The federal government dispatched a reinforcement expedition to Sumter. The Confederate government demanded the immediate surrender of the fort. Stymied by Major Anderson's refusal to surrender, the Confederacy resolved upon long-awaited military action. Sensing a showdown, Ruffin enlisted as a temporary member in the Palmetto Guards, a South Carolina rifle company. General Beauregard, quite fortuitously, chose the Palmetto Guards to fire the first shot at Sumter. The rifle company awarded the honor to their Virginian

compatriot, "who was highly gratified by the compliment & delighted to perform the service." Early in the morning of April 12, 1861, the aged fire-eater started the Civil War--literally. During the Confederate assault of Sumter, Ruffin not only fired several guns at the target, but, from an elevated perch above Cummings Point, he directed the aim of Confederate artillery and warned his unit of approaching enemy fire. After Anderson unconditionally surrendered, another twist of fate led to the selection of the Palmetto Guards to take possession of Sumter. Ruffin, of course, carried the company flag. His heroics did not go unnoticed by the Southern press. Some of the recognition he had sought was here at last. Moreover, as Ruffin had foreseen, Virginia and several other states soon seceded--though not before Lincoln had issued his call for 75,000 troops. Virginia departed from the Union, as Ruffin had so eagerly wished; but civil war had arrived.[56]

Notes

(1) Johannsen, Douglas, 600-601, 693-697, 710; Damon Wells, Stephen Douglas: The Last Years, 1857-1861 (Austin and London, 1971), 143-147, 192-193; Don E. Fehrenbacher, The South and Three Sectional Crises (Baton Rouge and London, 1970), 59-61.

(2) William B. Hesseltine, ed., Three Against Lincoln: Murat Halstead Reports the Caucases of 1860 (Baton Rouge, 1960), 44-108; Nichols, Disruption, 295-306.

(3) Ruffin, Diary, I, Entries for May 2, 4, 1860, 417-418.

(4) Ibid., Entries for Feb. 6, 8, 22, 1860, 398-399, 404; Edmund Ruffin to James Henry Hammond, May 21, 1860, James Henry Hammond Papers, LC.

(5) Ruffin, Diary, I, Entries for May 21, 30, 1860, 421, 423.

(6) Ibid., Entries for June 10, 14, 16, 1860, 428-429, 432. Ruffin also entreated South Carolinian delegates at Richmond not to go to Baltimore as such a dishonorable move could reunite the national Democracy. See his diary entry for June 22, 1860, 435. Also see John I. Middleton to Edmund Ruffin, June 22, 1860, Edmund Ruffin Papers, SHC.

(7) Hesseltine, ed., Three, 106, 186-234, 250-252, 273-274; Ruffin, Diary, I, Entries for June 22, 23, 1860, 437-438.

(8) Ruffin, Diary, I, Entries for Oct. 1, Nov. 29, 1859, 346, 366.

(9) Ibid., Entries for Aug. 29, 30, 1860, 453.

(10) S.D.F. Moore to Edmund Ruffin, Jan. 30, Feb. 24. Mar. 6, 1860, Edmund Ruffin Papers, SHC.

(11) "The Sinews of War," Charleston Mercury, Oct. 19, 1860.

(12) Robert Barnwell Rhett, Jr. to Edmund Ruffin, Oct. 20, 1860, William Tennent Jr. to Edmund Ruffin, Oct. 29, 1860, Edmund Ruffin Papers, SHC; Ruffin, Diary, I, Entries for Nov. 2, 6, 1860, 481-482.

(13) "From an Occasional Correspondent," by "E.R." Charleston Mercury, Sept. 22, 1860.

(14) Ruffin, Diary, I, Entries for Sept. 6, 7, 13,

1860, 458-459, 461, 465-466.

(15) Ibid., Entries for Sept. 11, Oct. 27, 1860, 464, 478-479.

(16) "What would a Seceding Southern State Suffer from Northern Invasion and Open Warfare?" by "E.R." Charleston Mercury, Nov. 6, 1860.

(17) "The Filibusterism of the Union," Charleston Mercury, Oct. 22, 1860.

(18) Edmund Ruffin, Anticipations of the Future to Serve as Lessons for the Present Time (Richmond, 1860), 7-10, 17-21, 36-40.

(19) Ibid., 45-47, 52-56, 64-65, 70, 72-76.

(20) Ibid., 8-9, 11-12, 31-33, 44-45, 57, 62, 71-72.

(21) Ibid., 12, 14-16, 35-36, 58-61, 77-80, 83-87, 94, 105-108, 119-122, 139-141, 146-178, 219-220, 234-264.

(22) Ruffin, Diary, I, Entry for Oct. 21, 1860, 476.

(23) Ibid., Appendix E: Edmund Ruffin to William Lowndes Yancey, Oct. 29, 1860, 634-635.

(24) Ibid., 633-634, Entry for Aug. 25, 1860, 450.

(25) Ibid., Entries for Oct. 12, 31, Nov. 2, 3, 1860, 473, 480-482.

(26) Ibid., Entries for Sept. 6, Nov. 1, 3, 6, 1860, 458-459, 481-482.

(27) Ibid., Entries for Nov. 7-10, 15-19, 1860, 483-489, 495-499; Edmund Ruffin to Sons, Nov. 11, 1860, Edmund Ruffin Papers, SHC.

(28) "WHAT SOUTH CAROLINA SHOULD NOW DO," appended to Ruffin's MS Diary, Nov. 7, 1860, 1,082-1,083, LC.

(29) Ruffin, Diary, I, Entries for Nov. 9, 1860, Jan. 31, 1861, 488, 539; "FROM SOUTH CAROLINA," appended to Ruffin's MS Diary, Nov. 18, 1860, 1,111, LC.

(30) "What would a Seceding State Suffer from Northern Invasion and Open Warfare?" by "E.R." "The Consequences of the Blockade of a Seceded State," by "E.R." & "Serenade to Edmund Ruffin, Esq., of Virginia," Charleston Mercury, Nov. 6, 7, 8, 1860; "Hon. Edmund Ruffin," appended to Ruffin's MS Diary, Nov. 9, 1860, 1,089-1,090, LC.

(31) "FROM SOUTH CAROLINA," appended to Ruffin's MS Diary, Nov. 18, 1860, 1,111, LC.

(32) Ruffin, Diary, I, Entries for Nov. 11, 12, 27, 1860, 491-493, 505; "IMPROMPTU SERENADE," Charleston Mercury, Nov. 17, 1860; Edmund Ruffin to Sons, Nov. 11, 1860, Edmund Ruffin Papers, SHC.

(33) Ruffin, Diary, I, Entry for Nov. 7, 1860, 484-485; "Hon. Edmund Ruffin," appended to Ruffin's MS Diary, Nov. 9, 1860, 1,089-1,090, LC.

(34) Ruffin, Diary, I, Entry for Nov. 3, 1860, 482.

(35) "Hon. Edmund Ruffin," appended to Ruffin's MS Diary, Nov. 9, 1860, 1,089-1,090, LC.

(36) Greenberg, Masters, 33-37, 139-141, 144-145; Wyatt-Brown, Honor, 350-360.

(37) "The Southern Braggarts," Chicago Democrat, appended to Ruffin's MS Diary, Nov. 18, 1860, 1,110, LC; Ruffin, Diary, I, Entry for Nov. 17, 1860, 498.

(38) It is also possible to interpret the framework of fire-eater ideology in republican terms. See, for example, Greenberg, Masters, 107. Holt views even Southern resentment of dishonor by the North in republican terms. See Holt, Crisis, 52-56, 240-243. But I share Patterson's view that the longing for freedom and, accordingly, the republican ideology were outgrowths of slavery and dishonor. See Patterson, Slavery, 27-28, 340-342.

(39) On the psychosocial dimensions of honor, see Peter Berger, Brigitte Berger, & Hansfried Kellner, The Homeless Mind: Modernization and Consciousness (New York, 1973), 85-93, esp. 90. On Southern honor being rooted in slave ownership, see Wyatt-Brown, Saints and Sinners, 202-203.

(40) Nichols, Disruption, 394-402, 414-415, 433-434, 437-438, 449, 475.

(41) Ruffin, Diary, I, Entries Jan. 12, Feb. 4, 13, 18, 1861, 530-531, 543, 549, 551-552.

(42) Ibid., Entries for Nov. 21, Dec. 20, 1860, Jan. 5, 7, 10, 11, 1861, 500-501, 511-513, 525-529.

(43) "FRANK LESLIE'S ILLUSTRATED NEWSPAPER," appended to Ruffin's MS Diary, Feb. 10, 1861, 1,206, LC.

(44) Ruffin, Diary, I, Entries Dec. 30, 1860, Jan. 3, 1861, 519, 523.

(45) Ibid., Entries for Jan. 28, 30, 1861, 537, 538.

(46) Ibid., Entry for Jan. 2, 1861, 521-522.

(47) Ibid., Entries for Jan. 11, 13, 1861, 530-532.

(48) Ibid., Entries for Jan. 31, Feb. 3, 18, 1861, 540, 542, 552.

(49) Potter, Impending Crisis, 494-499, 517-521, 542-547.

(50) Ruffin, Diary, I, Entry for Jan. 31, 1861, 538-541.

(51) Ibid., Entries for Dec. 13, 1860, Jan. 17, 1861, 509, 534-535.

(52) Ibid., Entry for Jan. 31, 1861, 541-542.

(53) Ibid., Entries for Feb. 8, 28, 1861, 543-545, 558; Shanks, Secession Movement, 153-157.

(54) Edmund Ruffin, Jr. to Edmund Ruffin, Mar. 20, 1861, Julian Ruffin to Edmund Ruffin, Mar. 9, 14, 30, 1861, Edmund Ruffin Papers, SHC; Ruffin, Diary, I, Entries for Feb. 22, Mar. 14, 22, Apr. 6, 1861, 555, 566, 570-571, 580, Appendix F: Edmund Ruffin to John W. Ellis, Mar. 20, 1861, 636-637.

(55) Ruffin, Diary, I, Entries for Apr. 7, 8, 1861, 581-582.

(56) Ibid., Entries for Apr. 9-15, 18-19, 1861, 583-602, 606-608. D.H. London, a Richmond merchant and a longstanding Southern rights man, revealed his naivete in the process of praising Ruffin's Sumter exploits: "The eloquence of action is above words written or spoken. go ahead--there will be no farther interference with South Carolina by Lincoln or any other Yankee." D.H. London to Edmund Ruffin, Apr. 17, 1861, Edmund Ruffin Papers, SHC. A more prominent Southerner who lauded Ruffin's "heroic devotion to the cause of the South" was Jefferson Davis. See Jefferson Davis to Edmund Ruffin, Apr. 22, 1861, Edmund Ruffin Papers, SHC.

Chapter Nine: The Martial Exuberance of Edmund Ruffin

Hardly had the Southern Confederacy been born before the Northern invasion threatened to destroy it. Instead of enjoying the peace, prosperity, and glory envisioned by the fire-eaters, the Confederacy fought for its very life for four long years. The patent falsity of Ruffin's prophecies did not make fire-eater ideology irrelevant. On the contrary, Ruffin clung to his prewar suppositions with intractable obstinacy. Explaining the outbreak of war as largely the product of insufficient Southern resistance, Ruffin's inveterate faith in the benefit of resistance and the detriment of submission remained unimpaired. Indeed, the Civil War endowed the old Southern rights shibboleth, "resistance to the last extremity," with heightened significance. Yet Ruffin's ambivalent view of the North as dominated by both abolitionism and materialism persisted as well. Fanaticism would inflexibly fight until the South was conquered, but materialism was pliable. Thus Ruffin's advocacy of fierce Southern resistance and aggressive warfare was supplemented by his reliance upon Northern self-interest to end the bloody conflict. Ruffin's oppressive anxiousness about the seemingly endless duration of the war made him embrace the seemingly contradictory formulas of intrepid military resistance by the Confederacy and political accommodation with the Peace Democracy of the Northern border states with desperate urgency. And Ruffin tenaciously held onto these formulas for most of the war

years as a deeply religious man holds onto his articles of faith. The old fire-eater displayed a remarkable intellectual rigidity. Instead of shedding his illusions, Ruffin cleaved to them more firmly.

The grueling ordeal of war tried the souls of its contemporary participants. In the course of the war, as Southern lives, fortunes, and honor became increasingly imperilled, the deeper layers of the fire-eater character unfolded. The attainment of vengeance and the avoidance of humiliation became Ruffin's consuming passions. His cultivation of the Northwestern Copperheads did not diminish his abhorrence of the Yankee. In fact, his revulsion from the North reached such staggering new heights in the course of the war that it may have even surpassed his abiding and rising devotion to the South. These twins factors--aversion towards the Union and immersion in the Confederacy--made Ruffin ready to sacrifice all he held dear to the Confederate cause. The huge sacrifices necessitated by the protracted nature of the war compelled Southerners to set their priorities, whether by conscious deliberation or instinctively. In spite of the outward signs of slave disloyalty and the disruptions of slave labor occasioned by the war, Ruffin, for one, perversely adhered to the proslavery dogma. He was as unrepentant a proslavery ideologue as he was an impenitent fire-eating ultra. Yet when forced to choose between saving slavery or the Confederacy, Ruffin opted for the latter. And ultimately,

several weeks after Appomattox, Ruffin made his final sacrifice--himself.

The tension between the fire-eater objective of preserving slave institutions and the perceived method of achieving the objective, namely the Southern Confederacy, became acute during the Civil War years. Although this tension did not reach a climax until the winter of 1864-1865 when the Confederate Congress debated the issue of freeing the slaves to fight against the North, it existed from the very beginning of the Confederacy. The viability of the Confederacy required the incorporation of the border states. The inclusion of the border states required their appeasement. Accordingly, certain important compromises were written into the Confederate constitution. For example, instead of counting slaves as whole persons for representational purposes, the three-fifths compromise of the United States Constitution was retained, to the detriment of the political interests of the cotton states, where slaves were populous. Moreover, the fundamental instrument of the Confederacy forbade the foreign slave trade, but allowed the purchase of slaves from the slaveholding states of the Union. Inimical to the economic interests of the cotton states, the proscription of the African slave trade conformed to the perceived interests of the border states and allayed their fears about a revival of the transatlantic traffic. The Confederate constitution, however, also gave Congress the power to bar the importation

of slaves "from any State not a member of . . . this Confederacy." The Confederacy's absolute proscription of the African slave trade and conditional acceptance of the border-state slave trade were at once an assurance to Virginia that the cotton states would continue to buy her highly-priced slaves if she joined them and a warning that they would refuse to make such purchases should Virginia recreantly remain in the Union. Additionally, the Confederacy deliberately selected moderate Southern rights men to head the new government. And in an apparent bid to pacify Southern Unionist sentiment, the Confederate constitution did not categorically bar the admission of nonslaveholding states. A two-thirds vote in the Confederate Congress could readily admit any new state into the Southern constellation.[1]

Edmund Ruffin voiced no objection to many of these expedients. In spite of his belief that a large influx of Africans was required to save Virginian slave agriculture, Ruffin did not protest the proscription of the African slave trade by the nascent cotton state confederation. In fact, Ruffin himself had virtually advocated such a policy in order to entice Virginia into leaving the Union and joining the Confederacy. The establishment of a viable confederation embracing the entire South overrode the long-term interests of border state slavery. Likewise, Ruffin approved the selection of Jefferson Davis and Alexander Stephens as chiefs of state despite his previous

regard for them as "traitors." He apparently appreciated the importance of reconciling conservatives from both the upper and lower South to the new polity.[2]

On the whole, Ruffin was quite pleased with the formation of the Confederate government and the framing of the Confederate constitution. He considered the latter an improvement over the Constitution of the United States, presumably because it affirmed state sovereignty and the legitimacy of slavery. The primary flaw of the Confederate constitution, for Ruffin, was its failure to include an "absolute prohibition" against the admission of nonslaveholding states. If Northern states joined the Southern Confederacy, then the Union would be reconstructed. And reunion, under any terms, would merely reenact the sectional strife over slavery. But Ruffin's fears of reconstruction led him to favor rather than oppose the speedy ratification of the admittedly imperfect Confederate constitution. In the spring of 1861, the danger of reunion was not that nonslaveholding states might, at some future point, gain entrance into the Confederacy but that the failure of the seceded slave states to solidify themselves into a polity would make them vulnerable to Northern appeals that they return to the Union. Furthermore, the failure of the cotton states to establish a government would only increase the reluctance of Virginia to leave the stable Union. That the Northern states would join the Southern Confederacy was but a hypothetical contingency; but the

danger of Southern states being enticed back into the Union seemed an imminent exigency. Ruffin opted for the lesser evil. He would not let a few imperfections of the Confederate constitution thwart the realization of his longstanding dream.[3]

A far greater danger to the Southern Confederacy than the constitutional impurities was the massive Northern military onslaught. Ruffin had repeatedly assured Southerners that secession would be peaceful; he had confidently expected a swift and easy Southern victory if war did result. Disunion brought a long and difficult war. The slaughter, devastation, suffering, and seemingly interminable duration of the Civil War exposed secessionist promises as reckless braggadocio. Unionist admonitions about the cataclysmic consequences of secession seemed vindicated. The turn of events had made Ruffin appear as a false prophet. The crafty old fire-eater grasped for explanations to vindicate the prophecy.

Ruffin tried to exonerate himself from responsibility for the carnage of the war by blaming Virginia and her sister states for failing to heed his warnings. Virginian tardiness in seceding and Southern neglect of military preparation had encouraged the North to war upon the South. His Anticipations of the Future, Ruffin claimed, had emphasized Southern unity and military preparedness to avert Northern invasion. Ruffin admitted that he had neither expected nor desired the border states to leave the Union

immediately after the departure of the Gulf States; but he argued that they should have united themselves in a firm determination to resist Northern invasion of the cotton states. The hesitant course of the upper South fed the Republicans' "absurd delusion" that most Virginians were Unionists and, accordingly, that a quick military victory was attainable. The lack of Southern military preparation reinforced these Northern perceptions. Some Southern states had been egregiously remiss in this department. Governor John Letcher of Virginia, for example, had bought no weapons until after the Confederate attack upon Sumter. Thus Southern neglect of the prophetic fire-eater was responsible for the the tragic war; far from deserving censure for provoking secession, the prophet himself merited encomniums for his indefatigable crusade to lead the South into independent nationhood peacefully.[4]

Ruffin's analysis was not without foundation. The North may have thought twice about invading an armed South. Also, the failure of the border states to unite firmly behind the secession of the cotton states and warn the federal government that any attempt to coerce the departed sovereignties to return to the Union--even under the guise of collecting the revenues--would precipitate their own withdrawal probably figured in Republican calculations about enforcing the laws in general and reinforcing Sumter in particular. Lincoln's course was partially based upon his inflated conception of Unionist strength in the border

states. The eruption of war may be seen as a tragic irony. Virginia's fear of being the theater of sanguinary strife made her loath to secede. And her very reluctance to leave the Union encouraged both the Republican illusion of border-state Unionism and the Confederate resort to bloodshed to lure Virginia into the Southern constellation. Had Lincoln been confronted by a united Southern confederation of fifteen militarized states, the peace may have been preserved. Thus the very course Virginia designed to avert her enmeshment in war only promoted it.[5]

Principally, however, it was the border states' refusal to exit the Union after Lincoln's election, rather than their failure to firmly support cotton state secession from within the Union, that fed the illusion of an unshakeable Virginian Unionism. The Republicans, as Ruffin usually understood, responded to deeds not words. The North interpreted Virginia's disunionist rhetoric in light of the Old Dominion's Unionist behavior. But the more acute Southern Confederacy perceived that genuine attachments and commitments underlay Virginian rhetorical stridency and acted accordingly. Ruffin may have responded that the two-stage secession was strategically dictated to avert border clashes and accidental war. Actually, the postponement of border-state secession was an accommodation to the Unionism therein. The ingenious Ruffin found secessionist advantages in Unionist necessities. Of course, Ruffin could still place ultimate blame for the eruption of

war upon misguided Virginians who, for whatever reason, remained in the Union throughout that fateful winter. But a thoughtful Virginian Unionist could just as well blame Ruffin for urging the manipulation of the backward border states into secession by cotton state initiative. A Republican "overt act" may have stimulated the peaceful secession of the entire South. But fearing the insidious destruction of slavery by Republican subversion and the progressive moral and material degeneration of the South, Ruffin could not wait until Virginians were ready to secede.

Ruffin, of course, had virtually advocated war in order to bring the upper South into the Confederacy. The horrors of the Civil War did not alter Ruffin's decided preference of war to union: "If it were fully true, & established in public opinion, I would desire no more glory & fame, than to be truly believed to have been the chief cause of effecting the separation of the Southern from the Northern states, even at all the general expense of blood & property, & ruin to individuals, which it will cost."[6] Even in his less megalomaniacal moments, Ruffin not only endorsed the war but came perilously close to seeking its prolongation. Ruffin and his fellow fire-eater John Perkins feared that the undercurrent of Southern Unionism, which had impeded border-state secession, would resurface as a desire for reconciliation with the North. Now though Ruffin hoped the North would speedily withdraw its troops from the South, he wanted to delay an official peace treaty for years after the

actual cessation of hostilities in order to terminate all Southern economic relations with the North. Commercial liasons with the North, for Ruffin, meant the "commercial vassalage" of the South.[7] Ruffin thus hoped that wartime events would so embitter popular animosities against the North that all forms of conciliation with the North, including economic comity, would be permanently squelched. The fire-eater realized the disunionist benefits of the Civil War.

Furthermore, Ruffin had not stressed the themes of Southern unity and military readiness to avert war as he claimed; rather, he had relied primarily on Northern material interests to preserve the peace. The North, Ruffin had argued, would not spend millions of dollars and risk thousands of lives in an attempt to conquer the sizeable Southern terrain and extirpate the agricultural system from which it profited. The financial interests of Eastern businessmen, however, may have operated to promote war. The very value of the agricultural economy of the South to the industrial and mercantile economy of the North made important segments of Northern society reluctant to let the South go. Northern merchants did not wish to relinquish their lucrative monopoly of coastal shipping. Northern manufacturers feared losing Southern customers for their processed goods. The prospect of direct trade between Europe and the Southern Confederacy on the basis of minimal or nominal tariffs alarmed both Northern manufacturers and

merchants. Additionally, some Northerners may have feared that payment of the newly-passed, high Morrill Tariff would be evaded by the massive smuggling of European goods into the North through the contiguous South. Northern economic interests were malleable: the same impulses which engendered compromise proposals to coax the South back into the Union fostered military invasion to force the South back into the Union after compromise efforts proved abortive.[8]

Instead of conceding that Northern economic interest had promoted war, Ruffin contended that Republican party leadership subverted the well-being of the North. The political interests of the Republican hierarchy transcended the material interests of the Republican constituency. Lincoln and Seward, Ruffin charged, had plunged the North into a destructive and expensive war to maintain their political ascendancy. Capitulation to Southern secession would have ended Republican domination. Ruffin, of course, had not envisioned that the political abolitionists would knowingly cripple the North. Nor had he foreseen that the Republican president would summon troops and invade the South. Ruffin had expected a combination of Northern conservatives and Southern border state representatives to block plans of military invasion in Congress. But Lincoln's brazen usurpation of Congressional authority upset the Virginian's calculations. The Republican administration had defied Congressional will as well as Northern interests by launching a suicidal invasion against the Confederacy in

order to retain political power. Indeed, Ruffin believed that Lincoln's neglect of Congress and his contravention of Northern welfare were closely related: Lincoln's "despotism" enabled him to inaugurate and prosecute the war unilaterally. Even the cynical fire-eater had not "anticipated" such knavery.[9]

Ruffin did not use his disavowals of responsibility for contributing to the outbreak of civil war as excuses to avoid contributions to the war effort. Ruffin had long yearned for some form of real action; the Civil War gave him ample opportunity. As a member of the Palmetto Guard, Ruffin participated in the first major battle of the war. The sixty-seven year old, gray-haired Virginian, sporting his uniform and carrying his musket, marched alongside the young, robust Confederate troops. Physical exhaustion did not stop Ruffin from reaching Manassas. When his legs could no longer carry him, he rode on the gun-carriage or on top of a cannon with the same youthful exuberance that he had displayed during the Sumter drama. Indeed, Ruffin showed more courage than some other soldiers. At one point on the road to Manassas, Ruffin met some Confederate soldiers who told him of military loss. Despite his naive acceptance of the tale of these deserters, Ruffin joined a group of reinforcements and continued his journey. When yet another coterie of skulkers told Ruffin of a complete rout by the Union army, the old man would have retreated "but for shame" of the previous group of deserters, whom he had just tried

to coax into joining him.[10]

By the time, Ruffin arrived at the scene of battle, the Confederate victory was well underway. Still, the aged warrior did his utmost to make the Southern triumph decisive. Ruffin had the privilege of firing the first cannonade at Yankee troops attempting to retreat across a bridge. The following day Ruffin desperately searched the battlefield to identify which and how many Union troops his particular shot had struck; he sought concrete, physical evidence to measure his contribution to the Confederate cause. Yet Ruffin was compassionate towards wounded Union troops. The professional Yankee-hater was annoyed by the sight of Confederate soldiers insensitively interrogating gravely wounded Union troops who lay dying on the battlefield about why they invaded the South. Even the rabid fire-eater found it difficult to countenance the infliction of gratuitous psychical cruelty upon the prostrate foe. Instead, Ruffin gave water and comfort to the wounded Yankee. But almost as if he were embarrassed by--or afraid of--his streak of humanity, the diarist prefaced the acknowledgement of his humaneness with a reaffirmation of his hatred: "No one more bitterly hates the northerners as a class than I do, or would be more rejoiced to have every invading soldier killed--but all my hatred was silenced for the wounded, seen in this long continued & wretched state of suffering." Animosity, not humanity, was his ruling passion.[11]

Ruffin's hatred of the North manifested itself in his repeated calls for Confederate reprisals against Northern war "atrocities." Ruffin's reaction to the first Confederate casualty in the spring of 1861 reveals his temper: "May every drop of the blood of this first martyr in our cause be avenged by the slaughter of a northern invader." The two major targets of Ruffin's schemes of Confederate vengeance, the civilian population of Northern cities and the Northern troops captured by the South, were revealed in the article he wrote in the summer of 1861 for the Richmond Whig, bluntly titled "RETALIATION." Outraged by the Union army's plunder and destruction of Southern property, ravishment of Southern women, and enticement of slave abscondence, Ruffin urged the Confederacy to send punitive guerrilla expeditions to accessible areas of the North.[12]

Specifically, Ruffin wanted the Confederacy to invade Maryland and spark an uprising of Southern sympathizers. Ruffin hoped the Confederacy would liberate Maryland from Unionist clutches and use the state as a springboard for the invasion of Philadelphia or Pittsburgh. Likewise, Ruffin hoped to use Kentucky as a base for the invasion of Cincinnati. To ensure the utter devastation of these Northern cities, Ruffin would invite their working-class inhabitants to join the South in sacking them. The proslavery ideologues' dogmatic conviction that poor white laborers were suffused with class hatred for their

capitalist oppressors parallelled the equally misguided abolitionist belief that Southern slaves seethed with such resentment that they would eagerly slay their masters at a moment's notice. Fearing that the North was determined to spark slave revolts as part of its military strategy, Ruffin sought to reciprocate in kind. Only the annihilation of a Northern city, Ruffin felt, would be commensurate to the "national dignity" of the Confederacy. To further encourage Northerners to aid the Confederacy, Ruffin used another proslavery myth: the North's peculiar and complete obsession with materialism. The Southern patriot advised the Confederacy to offer a hefty reward to those Northern citizens who would sack and burn their own cities. Ruffin would provide the same monetary bait to induce Northern soldiers to surrender the forts they occupied on Southern soil and to persuade Northern sailors to destroy their ships which blockaded Southern harbors. In such fantasies did Ruffin indulge from almost the very outset of the war.[13]

The issue of the Northern blockade furnishes the background for the other plan of vengeance Ruffin urged in his "RETALIATION" essay. In April 1861, the Confederate President, Jefferson Davis, anticipating an imminent Union blockade, commissioned privateers to prey upon Northern vessels. It did not take long for the North to capture a couple of privateering vessels and imprison their crews in New York penitentiaries. The North regarded privateers as pirates and treated them as common criminals. The South,

lacking a navy, considered privateers a legitimate military force. Lincoln threatened to hang the captured Confederate privateers. Davis responded by threatening to hang Union troops. Ruffin perceived that both of these threats were empty; Lincoln had no more intention of hanging privateers than Davis had of hanging soldiers. The real issue, which Lincoln's threat effectively diverted, was the ongoing suffering of Confederate privateers in Union prisons. Ruffin expended his creative energy devising a scheme of torture to meet this indignity. The outraged Virginian called for immediately imprisoning high-ranking Union officers and political dignitaries in unventilated, pestilential dungeons, shackling them in chains, and depriving them of food and water. Subjected to such horrendous conditions, the Northern captives would suffer disease, starvation, and a slow, agonizing death--a fate Ruffin deemed worse than hanging.[14]

In the years ahead, Ruffin mellowed somewhat. He no longer demanded the torture of Northern troops; his thirst for vengeance seemed satiated with their summary execution. Union troops who invaded his beloved South were not a legitimate military force at all but a pack of savage criminals, "robbers, incendiaries, & murderers." Had they not engaged in pillage and brigandage, in wanton and malicious destruction? Had Union troops not abducted Southern slaves, induced their flight, and incited them to rebel? Why, their meddling with slavery alone justified

their execution as criminals rather than their detention as prisoners of war![15] Throughout the Civil War, Ruffin frequently and ritualistically urged the Confederacy either to execute all Union soldiers or to demolish Northern cities. He veered back and forth between these options as his mood or the occasion dictated. But whether he called for the execution of Northern prisoners of war or the invasion of Northern urban centers, Ruffin persistently yearned for some form of Confederate retaliation against what he deemed Yankee "outrages."

For Ruffin, Yankee "outrages" were those perpetrated on Southern civilians. Northern plunder and destruction of civilian property were "violations of the laws of war." The worst form of Yankee outrage against Southern property was the contemptuous interference with the peculiar species of Southern property: the theft of slaves, the encouragement of slave escape, and the incitement of servile insurrection. It was no mere coincidence that some of the Virginian's most vitriolic denunciations of Northern outrages and most urgent demands for punitive reprisals occurred during those periods when his family plantations were overrun by Yankee troops and the family slaves were fleeing in droves. For example, during General George B. McClellan's Peninsular campaign, Union forces looted, ransacked, defaced, and destroyed the estates of Ruffin's children; the family slaves, meanwhile, deserted en masse. In August 1862, an embittered Ruffin elaborated his

comprehensive scheme of retaliation in a letter to his old fire-eating friend Judge John Perkins, now a Confederate Congressman representing Louisiana. The angry Virginian called for outfitting three expeditions, each containing ten to twenty-five thousand troops, under such men as the popular and successful Stonewall Jackson and the dashing cavalry leaders Nathan Bedford Forest, James E.B. ("Jeb") Stuart, and John Hunt Morgan. These practitioners of mobile warfare would lead their compact armies into such Northern border states as Pennsylvania and Ohio and, with the aid of the Northern proletariat, annihilate every Northern town refusing to pay an exorbitant ransom to the South. And after Union troops once again plundered the rehabilitated Marlbourne estate in the spring of 1864, Ruffin called for the execution of Yankee soldiers.[16]

Additionally, Ruffin was outraged by Northern treatment of the persons of Southern civilians. For instance, early in the war the North attempted to prevent the secession of Maryland by arresting and imprisoning several Southern rights members of the state legislature. Ruffin denounced this imprisonment of civilians as a "Reign of Terror" and referred to the New York facility in which they were held as the "Bastille." Similarly, in the winter of 1862-1863, Ruffin was incensed by General William Tecumseh Sherman's policy of deporting ten Memphis families, preferably those whose male members were serving in the Confederate army, for every molestation of a Union steamer within his

jurisdiction. Likewise, Ruffin was appalled by General Henry W. Halleck's order in the summer of 1863 at Centreville which provided for the impressment of Southern civilians to repair sabotaged railroads and, as a last resort, the deportation of the people living along railroad lines and the confiscation of their property. That such sabotage was the work of civilian guerrillas was irrelevant for Ruffin; Federal "atrocities" justified Confederate guerrilla warfare. Northern efforts to combat Southern guerrillas were <u>new</u> atrocities! Ruffin was especially galled by the Federal policy of forcing Confederate civilians in the areas under military occupation to take loyalty oaths to the hated Union. In New Orleans, any citizen who refused to take this degrading oath risked the confiscation of his property and the banishment of his person. In Norfolk, Ruffin complained, the Union army instigated black insolence and depredations against those proud Virginians who refused to cooperate with their supercilious conquerors. For Ruffin, General Sherman's deportation of Atlanta residents was but a capstone to a long series of Northern atrocities.[17]

Ruffin realized the profound contribution, both material and spiritual, that the civilian sector made to the war effort. He suspected that the destruction of the Southern economy was part of the North's military strategy. And he urged Confederate invasions of Northern cities in order to break Northern morale. Furthermore, Ruffin had

long recognized that military abuses, though officially unauthorized, were part of modern warfare: "Pillage, house-burning, murder of defenceless men, and worse outrages on helpless women, are the always unauthorized acts of the military force." The legalistic Virginian had long objected to the "laws of war" which enjoined civilian passivity as these were established for the interests of combatants. Moreover, Ruffin had gloried in the guerrilla exploits of his ancestral namesake who had distinguished himself in the American Revolution by pestering British troops in Virginia.[18]

Nevertheless, Ruffin felt genuine outrage at Northern military abuses. He found Union attacks upon the Confederate civilian sector incomprehensible except as "outrages" or "violations of the laws of war." Ruffin denounced as war atrocities not only such gratuitous cruelties as the dishonoring of Southern womanhood and the wanton desecration of Southern mansions but also the purposeful plunder and destruction of Southern agricultural resources. Ironically, in spite of his contempt for Yankees, Ruffin expected--or at least wanted--the North to act as if the Civil War were a chivalric encounter between knight-errants or a grand duel between principled gentlemen adhering to a recognized protocol. His passionate denunciations of Yankee military abuses were at odds with his implicit understanding that the Civil War was a total war between the Northern and Southern people. His outrage against Yankee abuses was more appropriate to an outmoded,

medieval conception of the nature of warfare, in which wars were conducted by rival armies according to established military rules.

In part, Ruffin's outrage reflected his civilian perspective. Despite his occasional donning of the military uniform, Ruffin viewed the war primarily through civilian eyes. His outrage also reflected his consternation at the outbreak of war and realization of Southern vulnerability. Ruffin's righteous indignation against the Yankee functioned as a defense mechanism displacing from his consciousness his own failure to anticipate the calamities of disunion. Finally, Ruffin's attack on Northern military abuses would enable him to release his pent-up animosity against the Yankees and his Southern compatriots to remove their chivalric garb with clear conscience.[19] For Ruffin, Northern violation of the "rules of war" rationalized any Southern course--including the butchery of helpless Northern war captives.

Ruffin did not present his calls for stern Confederate action as mere vindictiveness. He advocated offensive war on grounds of military strategy as well as naked vengeance. A Southern invasion of the enemy territory would show the Northern people the liabilities and hazards of sending their troops into the Confederacy. The Union would be forced to withdraw her troops from Southern territory in order to protect the Northern civilian population. Otherwise, the Northern citizens would experience the weakness of ordinary

citizens fighting an invading army. Also, a Southern invasion of the North could solve or at least alleviate the Confederacy's worst wartime problem, the scarcity of vital resources. Instead of the Northern army sponging off the South, the Southern army would live off the North. Even his drastic call for the execution of all Union war prisoners was more than a plan of retribution. Experiencing the dreadful horrors of war, the North would rally behind the Democratic party and end the war. Thus in Ruffin's mind, Confederate harshness towards the North would demoralize the Northern people and pave the way for peace.[20]

Nevertheless, visceral vindictiveness fuelled Ruffin's many calls for vengeance. Significantly, Ruffin did not indulge in euphemistic expressions or military metaphors. Both privately and publicly he openly demanded "retaliation" and "vengeance." Moreover, his demands for reprisals often followed his recital of Union "outrages"; and he tried to devise retributive measures to meet particular Union "atrocities." Thus, for example, in June 1862 when General Benjamin F. Butler hung young William B. Mumford for pulling down the United States flag from the New Orleans mint after the occupation of the city by Federal forces, Ruffin called upon the Confederacy to randomly select and execute a Yankee officer and declare its determination to hang "the brutal murderer" Butler for this "atrocious outrage" as well as for his previous "violations of the laws of war." Similarly, a month later, when General George B. McClellan arrested

Virginian civilians on the pretext that the successful raid by Jeb Stuart against his troops had been committed by guerrilla forces, an indignant Ruffin urged the Confederacy to arrest two Yankee civilians, during the invasion of the North, for every civilian arrested by McClellan. Likewise, Ruffin was enraged by the policy of Union General John Pope in Virginia in the summer of 1862. Pope proclaimed that the occupied territory must supply the invading army and that civilians would be held accountable for guerrilla destruction of the roads and bridges in their vicinity. Ruffin called upon the Confederacy to declare that it would hang all Union commanders who ordered or even permitted such policies. In the autumn of 1864, outraged by General Philip H. Sheridan's plunder and destruction of the Shenandoah Valley, Ruffin urged the Confederacy to execute all Yankee troops associated with such devastation as common criminals. Even at this late date, Ruffin claimed, Southern retaliation would be beneficial.[21]

Ruffin's attempt to tailor the mode of the Confederate response to the specific Northern violation was less a matter of his utilitarian calculation of deterring its recurrence than an expression of his irrepressible need for vengeance. When Southern interests clashed with Southern honor--the refinement of the primal urge towards vengeance--Ruffin became less fastidious about the means of retribution selected. Consider his convolutions on the subject of executing Northern prisoners of war. In the fall of 1861,

Ruffin favored the execution of Northern soldiers as criminal participants in an unjust war. But in the summer of 1862, Ruffin realized that the wholesale execution of all Union prisoners would be counterproductive: rather than quailing, the North would increase its outrages against the South. The enormity of the Confederate reprisal, Ruffin sensed, would justifiably outrage the North. Thus he reverted to his earlier call for invading Northern cities. The harming of Northern civilians by the Confederate army would be a more appropriate penalty for the harming of Southern civilians by the Union army. But when a Southern invasion of the North failed to materialize, Ruffin became impatient. In early 1863 Ruffin renewed his call for the indiscriminate slaughter of captured Yankee soldiers. Given the defensive strategy hitherto pursued by the Davis government, the South, Ruffin argued, could not retaliate against Northern civilians. The Confederacy's only recourse was liquidating Northern prisoners of war![22]

Ruffin, of course, claimed that such Draconian measures were in the Confederate interest. The wholesale execution of Northern prisoners of war would persuade the Yankees to adhere to the rules of civilized warfare. Ruffin, however, admitted that extreme forms of Confederate retaliation could provoke savage Federal reprisals. But Ruffin found arguments to show that even a "war of extermination" would be advantageous to the South or would, at least, be more disadvantageous to the North. As the North was conducting

an outrageously cruel war while her adversary fought honorably and humanely, the descent to mutual savagery would be far worse for the North. Moreover, since there were more Federal than Confederate prisoners of war, the mutual slaughter of captured soldiers would be a net loss for the North. Finally, Northern execution of Confederate captives would instill a greater incentive in Southern troops to fight to the death. Ruffin did not explain why the threat of summary execution by enemy captors would not have the same effect upon the morale of Northern troops. Conceivably, such a "war of extermination" could demoralize the Confederate army, chronically plagued by desertion. Furthermore, Ruffin conveniently ignored the substantial overall numerical superiority of the Northern population. Even from a strictly military standpoint, the South could not afford to sacrifice her troops needlessly. Additionally, since the war was being fought on Southern territory, the North could avenge the execution of its captured soldiers by massacring defenseless Confederate civilians--a more dreadful fate than confiscation or deportation to which Ruffin so vehemently objected.[23]

Complementing Ruffin's portrayal of retaliation as beneficial was his depiction of submission as injurious. Southern submission merely encouraged greater Northern aggressions. Jefferson Davis' periodic threats to retaliate against the North did not satisfy Ruffin. The Confederate president responded to the infringements of civilian life

officially sanctioned by Union generals with the order that all officers serving under their command be confined as felons. Davis reserved a special fate for the "Beast," General Benjamin F. Butler--execution. Ruffin protested that all Union officers should be held responsible; Northern violations were ubiquitous. Commanders like Pope merely proclaimed general Federal policy. Moreover, Ruffin deemed the imprisonment of Union officers as pointless, given Davis' policy of "tender mercy, pardon, & exchange or parole." The Confederacy, Ruffin urged, should execute all criminal Federal officers, including those already captured, not merely the abominable Butler. Indeed, the heavily-guarded Butler, Ruffin sardonically noted, would probably elude Confederate capture.[24]

Indeed, Davis' hollow threats, Ruffin charged, only provoked fresh Northern outrages. Davis, for example, responded to the Emancipation Proclamation by threatening to execute all Northern troops as criminal instigators of slave insurrection; needless to say, Davis did not implement his threat. Consequently, when Confederate leaders, outraged by the Union's employment of black troops in 1863, discussed the re-enslavement of every black Union soldier who was formerly a Southern slave, Northerners were not intimidated. Lincoln simply responded by threatening to subject a Confederate prisoner to hard labor for each black soldier the South enslaved and to execute a Confederate prisoner for every black soldier the South killed. Lincoln had outplayed

Davis at his own game. Davis' conduct during the war must have reminded Ruffin of those prolix Southern rights proclamations in the prewar period, which had proved mere bombast. Rhetorical flourishes were contemptible, worse than silent submission.[25]

But Ruffin evidently thought that the resolve the South had displayed in seceding from the Union and forming the Confederacy had transformed her character: she had decisively shed her disgraceful submissiveness. Thus the old fire-eater was initially nonplussed by the Confederacy's toleration of Yankee abuses: "Why our government has so far submitted to this outrageous policy of the Yankee authorities in taking or treating our civilian citizens as prisoners of war--& even in some cases exchanging for them lawful Yankee prisoners--is to me inconceivable." The valor the Southern soldier exhibited on the military front was antithetical to the cowardice the Southern statesman exhibited on the political front. But after Davis underwent a religious conversion in the spring of 1862, Ruffin ascribed much of the "imbecility" of the Confederate leader to the "morbid tenderness of conscience" afflicting recent converts. Ruffin did not view his disagreement with Davis about Confederate retaliation as a rational difference of opinion about policy but as a matter of character. Davis' forbearance was "weak & childish." His sickly sentimentalism kept him from executing his own threats.[26]

For Ruffin, Davis' fears that Confederate reprisals

would intensify the cycle of war atrocities were not so much unwarranted as irrelevant. The president's logic would entail complete submission: the fear of Northern countermeasures could paralyze the Southern war effort. It was not merely that Confederate passivity would encourage the Federals to continue military abuses. Unless the South took forceful measures of retaliation, the bloated Yankee bully, sensing Southern weakness, would boldly increase his outrages. If the South did not retaliate against the Northern practice of holding her civilians responsible for guerrilla actions, the intimidated Confederacy would cease guerrilla activities entirely. Indeed, the North could use threats against Southern civilians to stop any Confederate military operations it pleased:

> The instant discharge of all Yankee prisoners captured in open battle, may be required, or the future capture of all others prohibited by the Yankee commanders condemning to be bayonetted two or ten of our women & children, for every such prisoner held. They may extend the like retaliatory punishments, varied or increased by general burnings, & laying waste of certain spaces of our territory, for every Yankee killed or wounded in battle. And if we are to submit to what they have already so required--i.e. to avoid molesting their vessels, defending our property from marauders, obstructing our roads & rivers against invaders, burning our own cotton, to prevent its being their booty--then they can as well compel us to avoid every means of warfare & of defence. 27

Davis' halfhearted course was tantamount to military surrender; complete and immediate submission was preferable to Davis' bluster.

Thus Ruffin used the staples of fire-eater ideology to analyze the Civil War. Whether in the political conflict

between sections in the antebellum period or in the military conflict between the Union and the Confederacy, the same dynamic operated: unchecked aggression begat further aggression; continued submission by the victim eventuated in total domination by the assailant. Submission was not merely against the long-term interests of the victimized party but base and dishonorable--the mark of a slave or coward. The insult of aggression required a manly response. Whereas retaliation erased the stigma of the insult, submission left it incandescent. Indeed, passivity in face of aggression was self-imposed humiliation, an additional insult as degrading as the original, inflicted insult. Indulging in gasconading threats without implementing them was, in a way, the worst possible reaction: the threat acknowledged the victim's consciousness of humiliation and raised the expectations of his sympathizers; the emptiness of the threat betrayed the victim's cowardice and dashed the hopes of his intimates.[28] Although the aggressor could be temporarily deterred by such a course, his contempt for the victim would rise and his assaults would multiply when he realized the vacuity of the threat. Thus the secessionists had reserved some of their harshest strictures for Southern Unionists, whose tame submission to antislavery encroachments humiliated the South. Thus the classical fire-eaters like Ruffin were driven to exasperation by the ritualistic disunion threats of Southern rights men. Thus Ruffin sharply attacked Davis' vacillating course towards

Federal excesses.

Despite his portrayal of resistance as beneficial and submission as injurious, Ruffin's calls for barbarous military reprisals were ulimately rooted in his psychological disposition, which interpreted and internalized Southern honorific values. Just as he had tried to rationalize the political destruction of the Union on grounds of Southern interest, he now tried to rationalize savage military destruction on grounds of Confederate interest. In both cases Ruffin attempted to rationalize what was essentially an emotional reaction. He tried to convince himself and others that Southern interests conformed to his psychological needs. Ruffin could not bear aggressions passively; he sought convenient targets at which to lash out--the civilian population of the Northern border states, helpless Union captives in Confederate prisons, or, for that matter, Southern free blacks. Granted, Ruffin's calls for offensive warfare into the North had a legitimate military basis. But his temperamental impatience underlay his strategic calculations. His fervid longing for reprisals exuded the same air of desperation that had marked his quest for secession. A war of annihilation was Ruffin's exaggerated response not only to Northern military abuses but to his perception of the settled Confederate policy: "Full retaliation on our part for all the enemy's outrages & violations of the laws of war--even if that stern course should have resulted in a war of extermination, would have

been more merciful to our people, & far more beneficial for our defence, than the miserable & contemptible course of patience & forbearance pursued (after threats,) by President Davis."[29] Extreme retaliation, however suicidal, would not only satiate Ruffin's thirst for vengeance but also allay his dread of humiliation.

The persistence of Ruffin's fire-eating mentality into the Civil War era is also evident in his welcoming of Northern aggressions. He still saw abolition aggressions as means of removing any lingering Southern illusions about the compatibility of slavery and Union. He hoped that certain Union wartime policies would quash the chance for reconstruction and spur greater Confederate military resistance. Ruffin, accordingly, found the Radical Republican program of immediate, uncompensated abolition preferable to Lincoln's scheme of gradual emancipation. Outright abolition would be more likely to enrage those border states which had tarried in the Union. Yet Ruffin hailed Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation--which left slavery in Unionist areas intact--for openly proclaiming de facto Federal military policy in the South. Likewise, Ruffin appreciated General Pope's declarations that the Union would hold Southern civilians responsible for Confederate guerrilla activities and that the occupied territory must supply the Federal army. These open avowals could convince blind or ignorant Southerners that depredations against civilians and the extirpation of

slavery were deliberate and systematic Northern policies.[30]

But Ruffin also claimed that actual Northern aggressions, not merely the open avowal of ongoing aggressions, would aid the Confederacy. Thus Ruffin claimed that General Halleck's policy of impressing Southern civilians as auxiliary laborers for the Union army would prove beneficial; aroused against the North, Southern civilians would become valuable spies and informers. In a similar vein, Ruffin argued that forced loyalty oaths would prove counterproductive to the enemy; the practice of oath-taking by Confederate civilians would lull the Union into relaxing its vigilance and stimulate those who consciously perjured and disgraced themselves by taking the oath to rebel against their hated oppressors. Ruffin even discovered advantages in the rapacious policies of the notorious "Beast" in New Orleans. Butler"s "heavy requisitions," Ruffin reasoned, "will show clearly that no city will gain any alleviation of its worst fate, by surrendering to Yankee forces--& that the property-holders will lose no more by resisting to the last extremity . . . than by submitting without resistance, to the entrance & occupation by the enemy troops." Submission would yield no dividends; resistance could prevent the subjugation of the South. Ruffin actually expressed regret when General Nathaniel P. Banks, who was reputed to be more lenient, replaced Butler in New Orleans. Perhaps Ruffin subconsciously wanted the "submissive" residents of New

Orleans to get their just deserts. Also, while Ruffin never welcomed Confederate defeat in battle, he interpreted the first few Confederate losses in the spring of 1861 as providentially designed to strengthen Southern unity and resolve to defeat the North. Likewise, in the winter of 1862, after a series of Southern reverses, Ruffin speculated that the recent military disasters would make Southerners more willing to sacrifice their personal interests to the holy cause of the Confederacy. His belabored efforts to ferret out advantages from Confederate wartime setbacks were an expression of the human disposition to seek consolation from distressing events beyond his control. Ruffin had not anticipated to see numerous battlefields strewn with Confederate corpses.[31]

The fire-eating prophet had not envisioned a protracted war. He had expected the superior martial capacities of the Southerner to quickly dispatch the invading Yankees. Ruffin maintained this cavalier attitude when hostilities erupted. In the spring of 1861, he believed that the Confederacy would crush the Federals within six months. But the year ended and the war continued unabated. Ruffin remained optimistic. The South, he pointed out, had won all of the major land battles and most of the minor ones. Only overwhelming Northern numerical preponderance or Southern treachery had enabled the Federal forces to score any victories at all. Though the Northern army outnumbered the Southern by a three to two ratio overall, the patent

superiority of the Southern soldier resulted in Confederate victories. Why, Northern troops, consisting of immigrants, foreigners, and "mercenaries," did not have the same incentives and patriotic impulses which impelled the Southern volunteer army! The spirit of the Southern people was demonstrated by those South Carolina planters who burned their own homes and crops when the Federals invaded the sea-islands in the fall of 1861. Ruffin lauded the deed as the most "patriotic & noble" instance of self-sacrifice in modern times. Even if the Yankees proved increasingly triumphant on the battlefield--even if the quantitative superiority of the Northern army overcame the qualitative superiority of the Southern one--the Federal forces would still have to contend with the Southern civilian populace. And the subjugation of a people endowed with such a sacrificial spirit of relentless resistance was impracticable. "Such a people may suffer defeats--but they cannot be conquered."[32]

Having such faith in the Southern morale, Ruffin seemed undismayed by the series of important reverses the Confederacy suffered in the early months of 1862. In February, Fort Henry, Roanoke Island, Fort Donelson, and Nasville fell in rapid succession. In March General George B. McClellan began his Peninsular Campaign aimed at capturing the Confederate capital. The Virginian fire-eater remained optimistic about the ultimate victory of the Confederacy:

> The claims of superiority of the northern forces over the southern, are not far wide of the truth, so far as numbers, arms, naval power, & the present means for applying force are concerned in the question. But our superiority to our enemy is in the much higher moral & intellectual grade of the Southern people, & of the superior principles by which they are actuated, & the holy cause which supports their patriotism & courage. The southern people are defending their just & dearest rights, their property, their families, their very existence, against the fierce & violent assault of enemies who are impelled mainly by the greedy desire to rob us of all that we possess, to our complete impoverishment & ruin, & at the same time glut their fanatical hatred in our blood, remunerate their ruinous expenditure, & loss, incurred in their flagitious war, by the confiscation of all the property of the south. Their impulses, & reasons for pursuing the war with vigor, are indeed strong--but they are but those which actuate banditti & pirates in their pursuit of plunder by means of murder. The impulses which direct our defence are still stronger, in the necessity of preserving all that our enemies aim to take from us--& the means must be the patriotism & courage which directed the like resistance by the patriots who followed Marion....If physical force & present means for using it, can overcome moral superiority, patriotism, principle, & the courage thence inspired, then the North has even now, every prospect of success. But on the reverse grounds, in which I & most others of my countrymen confidently trust, there can be no question of the final & complete triumph of the arms of the South. [33]

Here was perhaps Ruffin's clearest statement that he expected Southern honor to win the war.

Ruffin thus transposed the popular faith in the ultimate triumph of Truth, Principle, and Morality--the faith which had underlain Calhoun's optimism about securing Southern interests within the Union--onto the military plane. Ruffin, of course, had not deemed Southern moral righteousness a sufficient guarantee of her political safety within the Union. He had repeatedly pointed to the growing numerical predominance of the North and its consequent

inevitable territorial monopoly to persuade the South to leave the Union. But his pessimism may have stemmed less from a denigration of the ability of Will to counteract Numbers as from his lack of faith in the Southern will to resist abolition encroachments. For Ruffin, the chief danger to slavery within the Union, antislavery emissaries, had not arisen as much from the growth of the Northern population as from the growth of abolitionist activism in the face of Southern lassitude. But now the Southern spirit was manifestly superior. If the noble deed of secession had not uplifted her sagging spirit and purified her polluted soul, the crucible of war would complete her transformation. Southerners could no longer evade their responsibility by dismissing Northern abolitionism as insignificant and irrelevant and by ridiculing fire-eater warnings as exaggerated and hysterical. The enemy was no longer an abstract freesoiler trekking westward or a disguised abolitionist agent visiting Virginia; he was a Yankee warrior, brandishing his rifle, invading Southern soil. The very defensive nature of the war would compel the Southern spirit to ascend to new heights or literally perish. The Civil War would achieve what years of fire-eating exhortation had failed to accomplish. The classic fire-eaters had often attempted to inspire their fellow Southerners to emulate their heroic revolutionary ancestors; now the war itself would force glorious leaders to emerge a la Francis Marion, famed for his guerrilla exploits in South

Carolina during the Revolutionary War. The war would embolden the Southern character. And the Southern will would vanquish Northern numbers.

But the Confederate government, Ruffin charged, had failed to efficiently harness the Southern will. Davis was foolishly pursuing a dilatory, defensive military strategy and selecting incompetent generals to boot. Fighting was essential to maintain Southern morale; waiting for Northern forays could deflate the fragile Southern spirit. Hence, Ruffin repeatedly urged military advances and battles. He ascribed most of the Confederate losses to "West Point "red-tape" & strategy," the ambitious but cautious planning of intricate and elaborate military operations, whose implementation hinged upon the materialization of propitious conditions. Such a strategy produced endless waiting and delay. Ruffin persistently called for piecemeal, offensive Confederate campaigns, both in the North and in the South. He had an implicit faith that rapid engagements would aid the Confederacy; he had a deep-seated fear that delay would cripple her. War, after all, was a two-edged sword: a series of short campaigns could invigorate and ennoble the character of the combatants but a protracted struggle could demoralize and enervate it. Indeed, at the outset of the war, the South had had the upper hand, but had let precious opportunities slip away. The Confederacy, for example, had not followed up its Manassas victory by invading Maryland and Pennsylvania.[34]

Davis compounded his poor military strategy by appointing unfit generals. Despite his objection to West Point strategy, Ruffin, like other critics of the Davis administration, opposed the practice of appointing civilians to military positions. But Ruffin was even more disturbed by the selection of professional generals with Unionist backgrounds. Civilians made loyal but incompetent generals; officers with longstanding Northern attachments made disloyal generals. Thus Ruffin blamed the fall of Roanoke Island in February 1862 on General Benjamin Huger. The fact that this native South Carolinian had not left the employ of the United States army until after Virginia seceded utterly discredited him in Ruffin's eyes. Likewise, Ruffin blamed General Mansfield Lovell for the fall of New Orleans in April 1862. Another Southerner by birth, Lovell had resided for years in New York City and had not left the North until after Manassas! The incompetence of these generals, Ruffin suspected, was treasonous.[35]

The fall of New Orleans visibly shook the old Virginian. Ruffin fully appreciated the strategic significance of the loss of the gateway to the Mississippi. The Federals, Ruffin realized, would use New Orleans as a springboard to capture the entire Mississippi River as well as the forts and cities alongside her. The Confederacy would be cut in half. Communications with the states west of the great river would cease. But Ruffin did not despair. The Union would not glean any of the economic benefits it

hoped to acquire by virtue of controlling the strategic waterway. The South would stymie the Northern design of shipping Northwestern produce to Southern markets along the river by patriotically refusing to buy any Northern wares. Similarly, the South would thwart the Federal plan of shipping Southern cotton to Northern or European manufacturers via the port of New Orleans by burning her cotton or at least by withholding it from the marketplace. Should any selfish Southerners of the lower Mississippi region engage in such ignoble commerce with the Yankee foe, then patriotic partisans would capture or destroy all Northern trading vessels travelling along the great river. Also, Southern guerrillas would assassinate Yankee soldiers guarding any captured towns along the Mississippi. Popular Southern resistance would make Northern military successes Pyrrhic victories.[36]

For Ruffin, popular resistance, an expression of popular morale, was the pivot which would determine the outcome of the war. Whatever fantasies Ruffin may have had of the Confederate army scoring a resounding triumph against the Northern forces were dashed by the events of 1862. His goal imperceptibly changed from gaining a Confederate victory by conventional military forces to staving off defeat by popular resistance and sacrifice.[37] Guerrilla expeditions into Northern cities or partisan raids upon Federal gunboats in Southern rivers would not defeat the North; rather they would show the North the costliness of

the war. Ruffin yearned not for another George Washington but for a Francis Marion; his heroes were not the Robert E. Lees but the Nathan Bedford Forrests. Ruffin realized that losses of troops and territory would not ipso facto end the war. The South did not have to defeat or even repel the invading Northern army. She did not even have to defend her territorial integrity successfully. She had merely to show her unrelenting will to resist subjugation and the North would yield--eventually. The civilian sector became even more important than the battlefield. Ruffin, accordingly, hoped that every threatened city would resist the Federal army to the last extremity. Thus when Richmond stood in danger of being captured by McClellan in May 1862, Ruffin hoped that the Virginian as well as the Confederate capital would prefer being bombarded and burned by the Yankees to shamefully surrendering without a struggle. Thus Ruffin hailed the "noble example" of Vicksburg, which endured months of heavy Union bombardment in the latter half of 1862. He hoped that Vicksburg would not be abandoned until the Federals had captured every fort and destroyed every building.[38]

Oblivious to the vastly different military situations of New Orleans and Vicksburg (e.g., the much greater fortification of Vicksburg and the presence of many more troops in the Mississippi city), Ruffin attributed their different fates (the fall of New Orleans within a few weeks versus the endurance of Vicksburg for several months) to

divergent civilian responses: the submissive spirit of the New Orleans residents versus the resistant spirit of the Vicksburg inhabitants.[39] Therefore, the fall of New Orleans was acutely distressing to Ruffin not merely because of its strategic significance on the military level but because of its crushing blow to Southern morale. Far from offering desperate resistance to the gunboats of Admiral David G. Farragut, the citizens of New Orleans had submitted practically without a whimper. But Ruffin could not admit to himself that some Southerners were ripe for Yankee conquest. He focussed on the strategic aspects of the New Orleans debacle and discussed means of containing its repercussions. But if the Southwestern farmers had the spirit of New Orleans, they were hardly likely to practice economic asceticism, much less immolation. Nor could Ruffin escape the issue by insinuating that the Unionist sympathies of General Mansfield Lovell were responsible for the loss. Thus, for the first time during the Civil War, Ruffin privately admitted "the <u>possibility</u> of the subjugation of the southern states & the ruin of their cause."[40]

In the fall of 1862, Ruffin professed that New Orleans' example of passive submission would prove just as beneficial to the South as Vickburg's example of staunch resistance by showing Southerners the pointlessness of submission.[41] Resistance would pay important dividends or at least not incur gratuitous losses. But try as he did to rationalize desperate resistance by Southern interests--as inspiration

to other Southerners and which, if pervasive, would persuade Northerners to end the war--his appeal was rooted in the dictates of Southern honor. Though he gave the honorable course utilitarian value, the consequences of resistance, however important, were secondary. The deed itself was what really mattered: the display of Southern honor. Submission was ignominious. Even if the North never yielded, even if defeat were inevitable, Southerners should die fighting rather than submit to Yankee rule. The loss of New Orleans spurred Ruffin's speculations about the nature of Yankee rule. For Ruffin, Northern despotism over the South would be akin to the barbarians overrunning the Roman Empire. The mere thought of the eventuality brought his blood to the boiling point:

> But whatever may be my despondence, it does not dispose me (or I trust our people,) the least to submission--but rather increases the determination to resist by every possible effort, & at every sacrifice. Rather than submit to Yankee domination, such as it would be after victory, & our complete submission, it would be better for all to be killed in battle. If we are to be held as subject provinces, I would prefer that our despotic ruler & master should be any power of Europe, even Russia or Spain, rather than the Northern States. [42]

But would his Confederate compatriots feel similarly? Ruffin had a blind spot about the spirit of the Southern people. Just as he had been prone to exaggerate Southern secessionist sentiment during the prewar period, he tended to magnify Confederate patriotic sentiment during the war. Such chronic problems as draft evasion and desertion should have given Ruffin pause. But the fire-eater's faith was intransigent. He had a simple solution for the problem of

deserters: he called for their execution. Had all deserters been summarily shot at the start of the war, Ruffin argued, the Confederacy would have been spared the debilitating plague. Ruffin, of course, had always placed great faith in the merits of harshness. But the physical liquidation of Confederate deserters would also have removed the most glaring refutation of the superior patriotism of the Southern people. Ruffin, interestingly, prescribed the same remedy for incompetent generals. His formula amounted to this: win battles or be shot![43] Beneath his belief in the practical efficacy of toughness lay Ruffin's own hostility and frustration seeking an outlet, a scapegoat to bear the responsibility of the gruesome war. Instead of admitting that his prophecies--peaceful secession and quick Southern victory if war came--had been false, instead of admitting that his assessment of both Northerners and Southerners had been wrong, Ruffin blamed others: Lincoln, Davis, ignorant Northerners, submissive Southerners, incompetent generals, deserters, traitors--not himself.

Notes

(1) E. Merton Coulter, The Confederate States of America 1861-1865, Vol. VII of A History of the South, ed. by Wendell H. Stephenson and E. Merton Coulter (Baton Rouge, 1950), 27-29; James M. McPherson, Battle Cry of Freedom: The Civil War Era, Vol. VI of The Oxford History of the United States, ed. by C. Vann Woodward (New York and Oxford, 1988), 257-259; Robert F. Durden, The Gray and the Black: The Confederate Debate on Emancipation (Baton Rouge, 1972), 4-5.

(2) Ruffin, Diary, I, Entries for Feb. 13, 15, 1861, 548, 551; "FROM SOUTH CAROLINA," appended to Ruffin's MS Diary, Nov. 18, 1860, 1,111, LC.

(3) Ruffin, Diary, I, Entries for Mar. 20, Apr. 2, 4, 1861, 565, 576, 578.

(4) Ruffin, Diary, II, Entry for June 5, 1861, 41; Ruffin's MS Diary, Entry for May 23, 1864, 3,265-3,267, LC.

(5) That the swift secession of all fifteen Southern states could have saved the peace is a point made by Fehrenbacher: "It is possible that seven was the optimum number of secessions for starting a civil war, and it may be that Virginia's initial failure to secede, was as much a cause of war as South Carolina's headlong leadership in the secession movement." Fehrenbacher, South and Three Crises, 5.

(6) Ruffin, Diary, II, Entry for Feb. 8, 1863, 573.

(7) Ibid., Entry for July 31, 1861, 102.

(8) "WHAT WILL BE THE RESULTS OF THE NORTHERN ABOLITION ACTION?" by "A VIRGINIAN," No. II, Richmond Enquirer, Jan. 25, 1850; "Consequences of Abolition Agitation," No. V, DBR, XXIII (Dec., 1857), 601, 604; Kenneth M. Stampp, And the War Came: The North and the Secession Crisis 1860-1861 (Baton Rouge, 1950), 223-238.

(9) Ruffin, Anticipations, 125; Ruffin, Diary, II, Entries for June 22, Dec. 23, 1861, 50, 198.

(10) Ruffin, Diary, II, Entry for July 23, 1861, 83-85.

(11) Ibid., Entry for July 23, 1861, 89-95.

(12) Ibid., Entries for May 27, Aug. 17, 1861, 36, 109.

(13) Ibid., Entry for July 26, 1861, 98; "RETALIATION," No. II, by "PETER THE HERMIT," appended to Ruffin's MS Diary, Aug. 29, 1861, LC.

(14) Coulter, Confederate States, 296-297; "RETALIATION," No. I, by "PETER THE HERMIT," appended to Ruffin's MS Diary, Aug. 29, 1861, LC.

Barnwell Rhett, who praised Ruffin's "RETALIATION" essay, rivaled the Virginian in creatively designing schemes of vengeance. The treatment of Southern privateers as common criminals especially incensed Rhett as indicative of the fact that the North deemed the Confederates rebels rather than belligerents. To avenge the confinement of Southern privateers in New York penitentiaries, where they suffered the "torture of humiliation," Rhett would subject one group of Yankee prisoners of war to "a condition of the sternest privation and the keenest misery, with the continual threat of the halter before their eyes." Additionally, Rhett would manacle a couple of thousand others--New England captives preferably--in anklets, organize them in gangs supervised by strict overseers, and force them to labor on Confederate public works. Here was Rhett's poetic retribution for Northern "slave-stealing": the reduction of Northern war captives to virtual slavery. See "Treatment of Our Privateer Prisoners," "What is to be Done with our Prisoners?" "Retaliation," "Our Privateersmen," "Bloody Intentions," Charleston Mercury, July 3, Aug. 30, Nov. 2, Dec. 9, 1861.

(15) Ruffin, Diary, II, Entry for July 8, 1861, 61.

(16) Ibid., Entries for May 10, July 26, Aug. 14, 1861, Aug. 24, 1862, 23-24, 98, 106, 428; Ruffin's MS Diary, Entry for Mar. 9, 1864, 3,247-3,249, LC.

(17) Ruffin, Diary, II, Entries for July 8, Sept. 1, 27, 1861, Jan. 3, May 27, 1863, 61, 118, 137, 528-529, 667; Ruffin's MS Diary, Entries for Aug. 6, Dec. 31, 1863, Sept. 12, 1864, 2,880-2,881, 3,139, 3,576-3,577, LC.

(18) Ruffin, Diary, II, Entries for June 19, 1862, Apr. 2, 1863, 348-349, 614; "The Blackwater Guerrilla: A Tradition of Revolutionary Times," esp. 37-38, MS in Edmund Ruffin Papers, SHC.

(19) Rhett stressed that the South had to abandon her "sickly humanitarianism" and "mawkish sentimentality," her misguided military "CHIVALRY," which Southrons had imbibed "from the Waverly Novels." Instead, the South had to fight "with fire and sword." "Panderers," "RETALIATION," by "SOUTH CAROLINA," "Vanity vs. War," Charleston Mercury, Aug. 2, 1861, Aug. 12, 1862, May 18, 1863.

(20) Ruffin, Diary, II, Entries for Oct. 2, 1861, June 19, 1862, Jan. 18, 1863, 141, 347-349, 539.

(21) Ibid., Entries for June 25, July 22, 24, 1862,

354, 385-387; Ruffin's MS Diary, Entry for Oct. 11, 1864, 3,624, LC. Similarly, Ruffin approved Colonel Mosby's execution of several Yankee war captives as retaliation for Northern execution of seven of his men. See Ruffin's MS Diary, Entry for Nov. 15, 1864, 3,684, LC. Ruffin actually regretted the fact that Confederate raids into the North did not practice systematic destruction. See, for instance, his reaction to Jeb Stuart's incursion into Pennsylvania in the fall of 1862 in Ruffin, Diary, II, Entry for Oct. 25, 1862, 473-474.

(22) Ruffin, Diary, II, Entries for Oct. 31, 1861, Aug. 24, 1862, Jan. 3, 1863, 158, 428, 528-530.

(23) Ibid., Entry for Jan. 18, 1863, 538; Mitchell, Ruffin, 231-232.

(24) Ruffin, Diary, II, Entries for Dec. 24, 1862, Jan. 3, 1863, 519-520, 529-530.

(25) Ruffin's MS Diary, Entry for Aug. 6, 1863, 2,877, 2,879, LC. Rhett lodged precisely the same criticism at the Davis administration. Making empty threats was the worst possible policy, as it encouraged more Northern aggressions. See "RETALIATION," by "SOUTH CAROLINA," "Paroling the Yankees," "The Wisdom of Decision in Difficulty," & "Negroes," Charleston Mercury, Aug. 12, Oct. 3, 4, 1862, Aug. 12, 1863.

(26) Ruffin, Diary, II, Entries for Aug. 14, Oct. 9, 1862, 413, 460; Ruffin's MS Diary, Entry for Aug. 6, 1863, 2,877, 2,879, LC.

(27) Ruffin, Diary, II, Entry for Jan. 3, 1863, 529-530.

(28) Perceptive Southern radicals realized that the consciousness of the insult by the victim as well as the assailant was an important element in the submission-aggression dialectic. See, for example, R.B. Barnwell to R.B. Rhett, Jan. 23, 1841, in John Barnwell, ed., "Hamlet to Hotspur: Letters of Robert Woodward Barnwell to Robert Barnwell Rhett," South Carolina Historical Magazine, LXXVII (Oct., 1976), 240.

(29) Ruffin's MS Diary, Entry for Aug. 6, 1863, 2,881-2,882, LC.

(30) Ruffin, Diary, II, Entries for Dec. 16, 1861, Feb. 15, Mar. 24, July 28, Oct. 14, 1862, 191, 235, 261, 390, 464.

(31) Ruffin's MS Diary, Entries for Aug. 6, Dec. 31,

1863, 2,881, 3,140, LC; Ruffin, Diary, II, Entries for June 18, 1861, Feb. 21, Oct. 8, Dec. 29, 1862, 47, 241, 460, 520.

(32) Ruffin, Diary, II, Entries for May 31, Dec. 3, 7, 23, 1861, 38, 180-181, 184-185, 196, 198.

(33) Ibid., Entry for Apr. 9, 1862, 278-279.

(34) Ibid., Entries for July 26, 31, Oct. 2, 1861, May 24, 25, July 21, 1862, 98, 101, 141, 314-315, 381. Ruffin, like other civilians, was often ignorant of military factors inhibiting Confederate offensives. For the reasons why the South did not follow up the victory of First Manassas, see McPherson, Battle Cry, 346.

(35) Ruffin, Diary, II, Entries for Oct. 31, 1861, Apr. 30, 1862, 158, 290-291.

(36) Ibid., Entry for Apr. 28, 1862, 288-290.

(37) In 1862, Ruffin continued to profess that the South could win a military victory--but more from habit than conviction. For example, see his diary entry for Oct. 12, 1862, 461, in ibid.

(38) Ibid., Entries for May 5, 15, July 28, Dec. 31, 1862, Jan. 23, 1863, 295, 304-305, 390, 522-523, 556.

(39) McPherson, Battle Cry, 418-422, 577-579, 586-588, on the technical and logistical factors responsible for the much longer endurance of Vicksburg.

(40) Ruffin, Diary, II, Entry for Apr. 30, 1862, 291.

(41) Ibid., Entry for Oct. 8, 1862, 460.

(42) Ibid., Entry for Apr. 30, 1862, 291-292.

(43) Ibid., Entries for May 12, Sept. 26, 1862, 301-302, 451; Ruffin's MS Diary, Entry for Dec. 12, 1863, 3,116-3,117, LC.

Chapter Ten: Ruffin's Inner Demoralization

Ruffin professed that the superior morale of the Confederacy would foster strong military resistance and Confederate victory. But he was not seeking to win the war so much by dramatic and decisive victories in battle as by wearing down the enemy's will to fight by a strategy of attrition. This strategy consisted of two essential elements: small-scale Southern military successes or stalemates by conventional troops or chronic irritations by guerrilla forces; and Northern realization that the conquest of the Confederacy was militarily impractical and financially unfeasible. Military setbacks of Confederate soldiers and economic burdens of Confederate civilians had to be borne patiently, quietly, and stoically for the strategy of attrition to succeed. Ruffin, unfortunately, had a short supply of these commodities. The Virginian avowed that Confederate reverses would not incline him to submission, that even despondency would only fortify the Southerners'--certainly his own--spirit of resistance. But the type of resistance Ruffin advocated bordered on military recklessness. Beside his frequent calls for slaying all Union prisoners were calls for swift collisions, irrespective of military circumstances. And despite his professions of Confederate self-reliance, Ruffin increasingly pined for outside succor--from England, France, and even segments of the hated North.

Ruffin's hope of foreign intervention to break the

Federal blockade testifies to the legacy of fire-eater ideology during the Civil War. The disunionist propagandist had assured the South that a Northern blockade would be impractical given her extensive coastline marked by numerous indentations. A week after Sumter, Lincoln instituted a blockade. A few months later, the Confederacy declared the entire coastline, including the many inlets, legal ports of entry. Ruffin rejoiced. Evasion would be easy. At least this part of the prophecy would be salvaged. The blockade was merely nominal anyway; the North lacked the ships to enforce it. But Ruffin's eagerness for European intervention to quash the blockade belies his nonchalance about the matter. He anxiously sought European aid because he felt that the blockade was effective. The resilient Ruffin fell back upon another staple of the fire-eater faith: King Cotton would compel Great Britain to break the Northern blockade. Not only did he believe that Britain would recognize the Confederacy, he also believed that Britain would become her military ally.[1]

Ruffin's hope of British intervention reached its pinnacle during the Trent Affair. On the first day of November 1861, the North intercepted the British mail steamer Trent and forcibly removed two of her passengers, James Mason and John Slidell--the Confederate commissioners to Britain. The North had not only insulted the sovereign Confederacy but the mighty British state as well. Why, the proud British lion must resent this humiliation and declare

war against the North! So thought the Virginian who attached so high a value to affairs of honor. Interestingly, however, Ruffin was careful to point out that Britain's economic interests--her consumption of Southern cotton and her industrial-commercial rivalry with the North--predisposed her to side with the Confederacy. The Trent episode would merely reinforce British interests. Britain had to intervene, Ruffin convinced himself.[2]

Britain, however, contented herself with demanding the release of the Confederate commissioners. The North refused to surrender the Confederate diplomats. The Northern press even boasted of Yankee military supremacy. Ruffin was elated. Britain would find the temptation to use the Trent Affair as the occasion for her intervention irresistible. Britain cautiously issued an ultimatum: unless the North apologized and freed the Confederate diplomats, grave economic and military repercussions would ensue. Finally, the North capitulated and surrendered Mason and Slidell. Ruffin lamented the North's "abject humiliation" as otherwise war would have occurred. But Ruffin doubted "whether England will be pacified & conciliated by this act of submission--& will forget that the now humble apologist, lately, & in regard to the same act of insult & wrong-doing, played the part of the boastful & threatening bully, before changing to that of the timid poltroon. It is natural to nations as well as to individuals to presume on the fears & submission of an adversary." England and the North, Ruffin

thought, were on a collision course. Exposed as a hollow braggart, the North had earned British contempt. The mighty lion would exercise less restraint on her other grievances against the North.[3]

But Ruffin soon shed his illusions about British intervention. The pensive Virginian now theorized that Britain sought to destroy the Southern slave economy as well as the Northern capitalist economy. British abolitionism, Ruffin conceded, was a potent force. But he imputed an ulterior motive to British antislavery. Britain's aspiration to uproot Southern slavery emanated not from a humane sympathy for the plight of the slave but from her quest to monopolize world cotton production through her Indian colony. Britain would be quite content to sit back idly and watch her North American rivals crush each other. But since she feared a consolidated Union and Northern economic competition above all, England would help the Confederacy if the latter were on the brink of military destruction. Such was not the kind of aid that Ruffin sought. The Confederacy, Ruffin concluded, had to rely on her own resources to win the war.[4]

Nevertheless, Ruffin still harbored hopes of foreign intervention throughout 1862. He merely shifted the scope and direction of his expectations. Instead of seeking the military alliance of Britain, Ruffin hoped that France would break the blockade. In the summer of 1862, he urged his friend Congressman John Perkins to propose that the

Confederacy offer France reciprocal trade agreements if she became the first nation to recognize the Confederacy and break the blockade. Ruffin was mystified by Napoleon III's deference to the British. Why was France under the British sway? Did she not realize that the extirpation of Southern slavery would elevate her political and economic rival to the cotton monopoly? Moreover, Ruffin noted, France was not as vulnerable to Northern reprisals as England. Britain understandably feared Yankee confiscation of her American stocks, depredations upon her numerous merchant ships, and incursions upon her colonial holdings. But what did France fear? Besides, the North, which had backed down in the Trent Affair, would not war upon France if she broke the blockade. Ruffin did not seek direct French military involvement. The Confederacy would benefit immensely if France merely raised the blockade and allowed Southern privateers to enter her ports.[5]

Ruffin repeatedly misconstrued Napoleon's tentative gestures towards mediation of the North American conflict as ploys for unilateral intervention. In the fall of 1862, for instance, France called upon Britain and Russia to arrange a six-month armistice between the North Amercican combatants and temporary suspension of the blockade. When the British and Russians declined the French invitation of joint intervention, Ruffin was surprised why Napoleon did not do so alone. Likewise, in early 1863, Ruffin interpreted Napoleon's call upon the belligerents to negotiate at a

peace conference as a strategem for French intervention. Napoleon, Ruffin thought, expected Northern rejection and sought a pretext for breaking the blockade. Clearly, Ruffin, by 1862 at least, believed the Union blockade was very effective. He held the blockade responsible for the high prices of goods in the Confederacy. And he singled out inflation as the most serious danger facing the South--more hazardous than Federal troops. He feared the Confederacy could lose the war due to the high prices of goods. Removing the blockade seemed urgent to him. His expectation of European intervention, his interpretation of every overture as a signal of imminent rescue was a product of his despair.[6]

The Confederate army, Ruffin claimed, could defeat the Federal army if only Europe relieved the blockade; the victory of the Confederate forces was inevitable, he boasted, if only the South could resolve its economic problems; the South, he asserted, must rely on herself.[7] But such claims were superficial--made more from habit than deep conviction. The facade of Southern martial supremacy became increasingly perforated as the war continued. Every important battle--Shiloh, Corinth, Perryville--tarnished the mystique of Southern invincibility. Ruffin's goal realistically became avoiding defeat rather than gaining victory. Accordingly, he increasingly relied on Southern guerrillas rather than on conventional forces. Moreover, Ruffin sought aid not only from Europe but also from--the

North! From the summer of 1862 onward, Ruffin entreated the Confederacy to forge a separate peace with the Northwest.

In late August 1862, Ruffin wrote an article for the Richmond Enquirer in which he applauded the recent proposal of Senator Henry S. Foote to make peace with the Northwest on generous terms. But Ruffin was willing to give the Northwest not only the right of free navigation of the Mississippi River as Foote had proposed but the privilege of free trade as well. Ruffin appealed to the economic interests of the Northwest to leave the Union. It would be more profitable, he argued, for the Northwest to ship her high bulk agricultural products such as wheat and corn to the South via the Mississippi River than to ship her produce to the Northeast and pay the high prices of overland transportation. Additionally, since the Northwest was more a consumer than a manufacturer of finished goods, she would bear the brunt of the high Morrill Tariff if she remained in the Union. Secession from the Union would enable the Northwest to obtain European goods cheaply through the low tariffs of New Orleans. Furthermore, inside the Union the Northwest would be economically devastated by the heavy taxation required to pay Northern war debts. Only by withdrawing from the Union could the Northwest avert economic doom.[8]

Thus in midst of the Civil War, Ruffin reverted to the old strategy of John C. Calhoun of weaning the Northwest away from the Northeast and coaxing her to ally with the

South. So powerful was Ruffin's belief that the North was consumed by materialism that he fully believed that economic inducement alone would suffice to lure the Northwest out of the Union. As Northwestern friendship with the South was economically advantageous while her association with the Northeast was economically detrimental, Ruffin seriously expected the Northwest to secede from the Union and make a separate peace with the Confederacy. The Virginian's expectations were not pure fantasy. Composed of descendants of ethnic Southerners, the "Butternut" regions of the Northwest sympathized with the South, resented Yankee economic domination, and even flirted with ideas of a Northwestern confederacy. Nevertheless, Ruffin exaggerated the strength of the Copperhead movement in the Northwest. And he seemed oblivious to the fact that deserting the Northeast at the moment of extreme peril to ally with the slave South would be an act of supreme dishonor. Only the Southern character, presumably, could transcend material calculations. Such was the fire-eater dogma.[9]

Still, the cultivation of a Southern-Northwestern axis was a deviation from fire-eater orthodoxy. That citadel of Southern purity, the Charleston Mercury, repeatedly thundered about the dangers of reunion and specifically inveighed against the scheme of a separate peace with the Northwest. Such a program, Rhett warned, would vitiate the benefits of the Civil War of driving a permanent wedge between the North and the South and of forging a separate

Southern nationalist identity. The contemplated Southern-Northwestern alignment would lead to the "commercial reconstruction" of the Union.[10] Now Ruffin shared the Mercury's concerns. In 1861, he had strongly opposed Northern overtures to end the war and restore the Union on Southern terms. For Ruffin, reunion on any terms was pointless; the fanatical antislavery Northern majority would inevitably capture all governmental branches and brazenly violate the terms of the Confederate constitution. Deep sectional differences made constitutional guarantees worthless.[11]

Ruffin was willing to make peace with the North, but on his own terms: the withdrawal of all Northern military forces from the Confederacy; the cessation of all commercial relations between the two nations; and the restriction of Northern travel within the Confederacy. The generous Virginian, however, would allow the Yankees the privilege of trading with the Confederacy provided they reimbursed the South for her share in the federal navy and public lands as well as for her prewar and wartime casualties including slave abductions. Of course, Ruffin did not expect the North to accept such terms. As Ruffin believed that Northern economic survival hinged on commercial intercourse with the South, his terms were a recipe for the economic destruction of the North--far more powerful than his license tax scheme had been. If he could not destroy the hated enemy by war, he would destroy her by peace. Such was his

fantasy. Realistically, Ruffin knew that the North would not accept the independence of the Confederacy. It was not the first time that the fire-eater had designed unacceptable terms for the North under the guise of compromise.[12]

Ruffin also sensed that the crucible of war was necessary to break the customary, sentimental attachment which bound Southerners to Northerners--an attachment forged by a previous war in which the sections had been allies. The South had to learn to hate Yankees as much as Ruffin did in order to quell reconstruction schemes forever. Offensive war into the North was consistent with this objective; bloodshed was a potent means of arousing venomous hatred. The avoidance of military clashes, as some acute observers perceived, conduced to the reconstruction of the Union; sanguinary struggles, which some of the same observers sought, promoted permanent separation.[13]

Yet, notwithstanding his absolute rejection of Northern peace proposals which smacked of reconstruction, his realization that a protracted war would engender ineradicable animosities between the belligerents, and his advocacy of punitive Confederate invasions of the North, Ruffin strongly favored a separate peace with the Northwest. In fact, Ruffin elaborated his most ambitious plan for retaliation, which included the invasion of Ohio, Illinois, and Indiana, just three days before he endorsed the plan of separate peace with the Northwest. How could Ruffin almost simultaneously urge the dispatch of three sizable

expeditions to annihilate major Northwestern cities and offer economic incentives to the Northwest in exchange for ending all hostilities with the Confederacy? True, Ruffin may not have seen his course as contradictory: subjecting the Northwest to military invasion could spur her yearnings for peace. But such rationales were secondary. Ruffin's hatred of the North sparked his calls for destroying her accessible portions. Moreover, even if his advocacy of punitive invasions was primarily dictated by strategic considerations, why did he seek an accommodation with the Northwest at all?

In part, Ruffin's willingness to reach an amicable settlement with the Northwest reflected his intense aversion to the Northeast. Although the Virginian professed to hate all Northerners equally, he especially loathed New England--the source of Puritanism and abolitionism, the center of the North's vibrant intellectual life, the home of the despicable "Yankees." Ruffin believed that the departure of the Northwest would trigger the secession of the Middle Atlantic states. The entire Union would be in shambles. New England would be left alone. Settling with the Northwest would enable the Confederacy to concentrate her artillery on New England. Interestingly, Ruffin had viewed the Northwest as a quasi-ally even in the antebellum period. He had expected Northwestern Democrats to join the border state bloc after the withdrawal of the cotton states to block all plans of Northern invasion. And, in the

contigency that war erupted, he had expected a Southern blockade of the mouth of the Mississippi River to induce the Northwest to forge a separate peace with the South. By making a separate peace with the Confederacy, the Northwest could endow Ruffin's anticipations with partial and belated vindication.[14]

Fundamentally, however, Ruffin's proposals of punishing or allying with the Northwest proceeded from the precarious military situation of the Confederacy in the summer of 1862. New Orleans had fallen in April. The Confederacy stood in imminent danger of losing the strategic advantage of controlling the lower Mississippi. It was but a matter of time before Federal forces slashed the Confederacy in two. The Confederacy had to inveigle the Northwest--and thereby neutralize some of the best Northern regiments--while she still had something to offer. Ruffin, it is worth noting, had not proferred generous economic inducements to the Northwest until after the loss of New Orleans. Defeat made him gracious. Moreover, the Virginian theater was in serious trouble. McClellan's Peninsular Campaign, which almost succeeded in capturing Richmond, unnerved the old Virginian. Significantly, Ruffin made his proposals after Union troops had overrun his family estates, desecrated his mansions, and stolen some of his valuables while demolishing others.[15] The Virginian wanted to lash out at his foes; but he also wanted to end the war. He did not want his plantations defiled again. He would crush the Northwest

militarily and/or ally with it economically, whichever course best promoted his basic objective--the independence of the Southern Confederacy, the independence of Edmund Ruffin.

By 1863 Ruffin was ready to infuse the superior Southern spirit with a healthy dose of Northwestern numbers. He was willing to enter into a military alliance with any Northwestern state which left the Union. And he believed that Illinois and Indiana would leave. Ruffin, to be sure, opposed the incorporation of any seceded Northwestern state into the Confederate constellation unless it adopted a constitution and enacted legislation which protected slavery. Proslavery laws, Ruffin claimed, would foster actual slavery. Slaves would be valuable field laborers in the praries of southern Illinois and Indiana. And even in Michigan and Minnesota, slaves could serve as domestic laborers.[16] The important point is not that Ruffin required the safeguard of protective laws as a sine qua non for the entrance of Northwestern states into the Confederacy but that he would admit them at all. Legislative condonation alone would not convert free states into slaveholding ones despite Ruffin's attempt to convince himself otherwise. And unless the incorporated Northern states became actual slave states, the "irrepressible conflict" would reemerge. Ruffin came very close to supporting a scheme which could--at least in part--reconstruct the old Union. Rhett warned that commercial reconstruction would be the harbinger of

political reconstruction. But Ruffin again fell for the snare of short-term solutions which could jeopardize his long-range goal namely, an independent slave confederation. The same factors, personal and situational, which had propelled his demands for reform in the 1850s--his temperamental impatience and his Virginian residency--disposed him to compromise with the Northwest during the 1860s.

An equally striking illustration of Ruffin's waywardness from the paths of fire-eating purity and one closely related to his quest for a separate peace with the Northwest was his hope for relief from the Northern Democracy. From 1862 onwards Ruffin considered the Democrats as a peace party and believed their ascendancy was inevitable, if not impending. In early 1862 Ruffin admitted that the Democrats were a minuscule group in Congress but claimed Democratic convictions were more pervasive among the Northern populace. An important segment of the Northern people sought peace, Ruffin believed, but was intimidated into silence by Lincoln's despotism. Lincolnian "despotism," Ruffin contended, enabled the defiance of Northern material interests: Lincoln's neglect of Congress had enabled him to inaugurate the war and his suppression of free press allowed him to prosecute the war. Ignorant about the massive costs of the war, both in lives and dollars, and unaware of the monumental difficulties of conquering the South, the majority of Northerners supported Lincoln's

policies. But eventually the Northern people would learn the truth and cease financing the war. Bankers would stop lending money to the government and the masses would resist the resort to direct taxes. The Northern people, however base, would overthrow the iniquitous Republican regime and install a Democratic government. The Northern Democrats, Ruffin carefully pointed out, were motivated by self-interest rather than by sympathy for the South; initially, the Democrats had favored war. It is nevertheless ironic that the old fire-eater now relied upon the institution which had been the main hope of the old Southern Unionists to save Southern slavery. Ruffin's faith in the Northern Democracy, then, was but another manifestation of his convictions that the North was dominated by material concerns and that the war upon the South was inimical to Northern interests.[17]

Ruffin consistently exaggerated the strength of Democratic sentiments in the Union. He was particularly pleased by Democratic inroads in several Northwestern and Middle Atlantic states in the Congressional elections in the fall of 1862. A lower tier of six Northern border states saw the election of Democratic Congressmen. And some of them saw Democratic triumphs in the governorship and state legislature as well. But Ruffin did not realize that the margin of Congressional Democratic victory in most of these states, especially Pennsylvania and Ohio, was quite slim. Moreover, the absence of soldiers on the front, amongst whom

Republican convictions predominated, skewed the elections in favor of the Democrats. And yet the Republican loss of thirty-four Congressional seats was the lowest net loss of Congressional seats, in an off-year election, by the dominant party in twenty years. The Republicans still had a comfortable majority in the House and had even gained five Senate seats. The party of Lincoln still retained control of seventeen of nineteen governorships and sixteen of nineteen state legislatures.[18]

Ruffin also saw hopeful indications in the relaxation of the Northern press censorship at the time. He viewed every public expression diverging from Lincolnian orthodoxy as a sign of the growing popular opposition to the Northern war effort. Ruffin conceded that Northern Democratic dissenters typically supported vigorous prosecution of the war and reconstruction of the Union. But the arguments they employed to justify these positions showed the complete hopelessness of subduing the South. Their general posture of war and reunion reflected their political circumspection; their rhetoric was tailored "to blind the ignorant & fanatical multitude." They would remove the mask when the time was right. Ruffin had himself camouflaged his secessionist objective in the more respectable aura of Southern rights; he was hardly a stranger to the art of political deception. Ruffin could not help believing that all Democrats secretly longed for peace. He did not acknowledge that a substantial segment of Democrats, though

deploring Republican excesses such as the emancipation of Southern slaves, endorsed the Union war effort. He tended to equate Democratic opposition to particular aspects of Lincoln's policy with opposition to the war itself.[19]

If Ruffin erroneously construed all Democratic calls for vigorous war prosecution as disguised means of articulating peace aspirations, he was equally misguided in discounting Democratic claims for reunification as mere rhetoric. Interestingly, in 1861 Ruffin realized that Northern peace advocates who sought a convention of all states to negotiate a settlement seriously but absurdly thought that the South would return to the Union if the North offered her something akin to the Crittenden Compromise. But by the following year Ruffin viewed all Northern schemes for reunion as covert programs for an independent Confederacy. No intelligent Northerner, Ruffin declared, could possibly believe that the South would agree to reconstruction under any terms. The Northern Democrats, Ruffin convinced himself, were merely biding their time till a majority of their constituents could accept separation as permanent.[20]

As Ruffin's pessimism about the Confederate military plight increased, his optimism about the Democracy grew. During his period of acute despondency in the fall of 1862, Ruffin predicted that within two months the Northern Democrats would openly espouse peace. Even if the Democrats won only three or four states, they could force Lincoln to

sue for peace if they had a substantial minority in the rest of the North. When the arrival of 1863 did not bring peace in its train, Ruffin assured himself that the Congressional session convening the following December would make peace. Ruffin eagerly grasped all material he could muster from the newspapers of local Northern meetings or state legislative resolutions criticizing aspects of Lincoln's policies, such as attacks on the Emancipation Proclamation and calls for peace with reunion, as evidence of a mounting Northern sentiment for peace and separation. That even the most important and outspoken Copperhead leader Clement L. Vallandigham advocated eventual reunification after sectional passions subsided did not perturb Ruffin. The Virginian was quite ready to accept Vallandigham's proposal. He would not make eternal separation a condition for peace. Let the Northern armies leave the South. The South will not be obligated to reunite with her enemies! Here at least, Ruffin was astute: there was no need to dispel Copperhead illusions of eventual reunion prematurely.[21]

But Ruffin had illusions of his own. And these persisted well into 1864. In June he rejoiced at the splitting of the Republican party. The abolitionist candidate, John C. Frémont, would increase the chances for Democratic victory. Ruffin even mused that the radical abolitionists, such as Horace Greeley, who backed Frémont out of hatred for Lincoln would coalesce with the Northern Democrats and grant the South peaceful independence. But in

September the Virginian expressed his disappointment with both the Democratic platform and candidate. Although the Democrats called for peace "at the earliest practicable moment," they sought a convention of all states with a view to restoring the old Union. Ruffin had evidently hoped that the Northern Democrats would openly adopt the Confederate position on the war. Moreover, George B. McClellan, the Democratic nominee, was a "war Democrat," who repudiated the peace sections of his party's platform. Nevertheless, Ruffin tried to convince himself that the Democrats would opt for peace with an independent South. His utter distrust of Northern politicians, his "unlimited confidence in the rascality of all northern parties" enabled him to dismiss political platforms and campaign stances as mere rhetoric. McClellan's calls for military victory and reconstruction were designed to win votes. Once elected, the former head of the Army of the Potomac and General-in-Chief of the Union army would end the war and let the South live independently![22]

But after Sherman captured Atlanta and Frémont withdrew from the contest, Ruffin realized that Lincoln would be difficult to defeat. Northern Democratic politicians, such as Governor Horatio Seymour of New York, Ruffin lamented, seemed indisposed to resist Lincolnian highhandedness. The increasing likelihood of a Republican victory and the decreasing zeal of Northern Democrats for peace made Ruffin wonder whether the South would not fare better if Lincoln were reelected. Ruffin speculated that Lincoln would have

to crush free elections in states such as West Virginia and Tennessee in order to ensure his triumph. The Northern people would surely realize that Lincoln sought permanent dictatorial power. The desperate Democracy would lead the entire Northwest out of the Union to preserve freedom. Certainly one Northern state would revolt. And the desertion of even a single Northern state would wreck the Northern war effort. The Confederacy would have peace at last. On election day, Ruffin hoped that the Northern people, if they had "anything remaining of the spirit of free men," would overthrow Lincoln by a massive rebellion![23]

Such fantasies were a measure of Ruffin's own desperation. They are far more revealing of his wartime mood than his sporadic, ritualistic welcoming of fresh Northern aggressions such as the Emancipation Proclamation. His intense yearnings for Northwestern secession and Democratic accession reveal the shallowness of his faith in the Southern will. Granted, Ruffin would not have been willing to sacrifice Southern slavery and independence for peace; but he deluded himself into thinking that all three could be had. True, Ruffin realized that a vigorous war effort by the Confederacy in general and an invasion of the North in particular would stimulate Northern peace sentiment. At times, he perceived that Confederate defeats in battle would lead many a Northern Peace Democrat to rally around the Union war effort.[24] And he never considered the Northern peace movement as a substitute for the

Confederacy's vigorous prosecution of war; he never advocated military passivity or even respite. Still, Ruffin spent a great deal of time culling the press for evidence of internal Northern dissension. And his hopes for relief from Northern quarters were expressed frequently, passionately, and urgently. Significantly, his hope for salvation by the North was most intense after Confederate military defeats as well as his personal wartime losses. Rather than abandoning his illusions after their repeated frustration, he clung to them more desperately. Despair was the engine of his illusions.

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Supplementing his faith in the indomitability of the Southern will, the materialization of European assistance, and the inevitability of Northern disintegration was his faith in the loyalty of the Southern slave. The loyalty of the slave to his master was a basic and axiomatic tenet of the proslavery creed. To the "positive good" ideologue, slave fidelity signified the benevolent treatment by the slaveholder and the slave's contentment with his condition. Ruffin's Anticipations had assured the reader that all Northern attempts to incite slave flight or rebellion in the course of war would fail miserably. The natural timidity of the black, his distrust of the Yankees, and his implicit deference to the authority of his master would doom all Northern efforts to rouse the slaves. Besides, the slave loved his master and would never slay him. Ruffin conceded

the possibility of an insurrectionary conspiracy led by a group of invasive Northern abolitionists; but some loyal blacks would betray the plan to whites. The South would easily quell the abolition force and hang the culprits, including William Lloyd Garrison. Likewise, Ruffin conceded that some slaves may flee and join Northern black regiments led by abolitionists. But, Ruffin promised, many blacks, realizing the superiority of slavery over freedom, would desert the Union army and beg forgiveness from their erstwhile masters. Indeed, Ruffin envisioned many Northern blacks deliberately enlisting in the Union army to return to their previous condition of Southern bondage! The Civil War, however, presented mounting evidence of slave disloyalty. Many slaveholders lost their illusions about their slaves during the war. Ruffin tried hard to retain his.[25]

An element of self-deception enabled Ruffin to maintain his illusions from the very start of the war. He claimed that the South needed no security system. But he joined the Home Guard in his neighborhood. He professed that he did not fear his slaves; he slept with unlocked doors and open windows. But he was really afraid that new safeguards would be interpreted as a confession of fear by his slaves and his neighbors; he slept with a loaded gun at his bedside. He explained that he feared attacks from Yankee troops. But he taught his granddaughters how to fire guns in order to protect themselves from the "small existing danger of

insurrectionary or other attacks, of negroes." The early wartime flight of slaves to the Union army in regions under its control should have dispelled some of Ruffin's illusions. Ruffin was surprised but not flustered. He ascribed the considerable abscondence of slaves to Fort Monroe, Virginia to the longstanding abolitionist influence in the area. But he implausibly offered the same explanation in the case of Port Royal, South Carolina. He admitted, however, that the sea-island slaves had a previously unsuspected "mutinous disposition"--which the abolitionists exploited.[26]

Not even personal exposure to various forms of slave discontent on his family farms could shatter Ruffin's illusions. Superintending the Beechwood and Ruthven plantations for his drafted sons Edmund and Julian in the spring of 1862, Ruffin reported "thieving" and "skulking" on both properties. The Marlbourne slaves stopped working. William Sayre, the manager of the Marlbourne estate, abandoned ship. He doled out several months worth of food and clothes, including winter wear, to the slaves, put one of the strikers, Jem Sykes, in charge of the plantation, and left. As the Union troops under McClellan penetrated to the Virginia interior, the Ruffin family slaves departed--first in trickles, then in droves. Within a few weeks, all adult male slaves except for Sykes and another man had left Marlbourne. All adult males left Beechwood and Evelynton. His childrens' farms, Ruffin admitted, were the worst hit in

the county. But, he could not fathom, why his family properties "should be especially losers of slaves . . . for nowhere were they better cared for, or better managed & treated." The paternalist was befuddled. The massive slave departures and, more pointedly, the Union army advances forced Ruffin himself to abandon Beechwood temporarily in the early summer of 1862.[27]

Ruffin's son Edmund took his remaining slaves to Petersburg and sold those whose family members had absconded. Ruffin, paradoxically, justified the sale of these twenty-nine slaves as punishment for concealing the departure of their kin and by the callousness of blacks for their families. Ruffin viewed the desertion by husbands and fathers as evidence of black indifference to family attachments rather than as a sign of black eagerness for freedom. And Ruffin viewed the concealment of desertion by wives and children not as evidence of strong family loyalty amongst blacks but as slave infidelity to white slaveowners, as behavior which merited the breakup of families. Those who had not fled would be punished! Ruffin never considered that close family attachments may have restrained many "skulkers" from leaving the neighborhood. Furthermore, Ruffin had himself acknowledged that most slaves fled with their families. Racism was a convenient rationalization for slaveholder actions dictated by economics. The dislocations of crop cultivation ensuing from the departure of prime field hands and the depredations of Yankee soldiers made the

support of youthful, elderly, infirm, and female slaves particularly burdensome. Behind the paternalist patriarch lay the self-interested, capitalist businessman.[28]

After Northern troops left the area, Edmund tried to rehabilitate the economic operations of the Marlbourne plantation. He promised an amnesty to quick returnees in consideration of their past good behavior and their delusion by the Yankees. But virtually none returned to plow the fields. Sayre suspected that many slaves had committed other transgressions besides absconding and feared punishment. And, indeed, Ruffin later ascertained that the Marlbourne slaves had not only engaged in "quiet rebellion" but had actively participated in Yankee marauding. The slaves had sold stolen wheat to poor whites and had sold pork, made from the hogs they slaughtered, to Yankee troops! The slaves were behaving most unusually. Their entrepreneurial practices belied their supposed indolence, obtuseness, and fidelity. Ruffin had tried to explain slave work stoppages and departures in his traditional fashion: abolitionists had deluded his slaves with promises of high wages and indolence in the North. But he realized the insufficiency of this explanation and groped for another.[29]

By January 1863 he had found a new scapegoat. Ruffin settled upon the mismanagement of the Marlbourne plantation as the cause of both the prewar arson and the wartime mischief of the slaves. He now pronounced his distribution of Marlbourne to several owners and his selection of his

son-in-law William Sayre as superintendent of the estate the "worst blunder" of his life. The slaves, Ruffin explained, could not understand joint ownership; they required a single master for "protection & control." They would have gladly belonged to Edmund or Julian but not to all of his childrean together. They set fire to Marlbourne, Ruffin fancied, in order to induce the division of the property and their distribution among several individual owners. Moreover, Sayre knew little about farming and was instantly disliked by the slaves. Jolted by Ruffin's sudden retirement as master, the slaves resented the appointment of Sayre. The new supervisor was a "stranger" to them and there was no time for "loyalty" to develop. Thus Ruffin blamed his own insensitivity to the delicate paternalist equilibrium characterizing master/slave relations for the misdeeds of the Marlbourne slaves. He had erred; the slave system was sagacious. The slaves had understandably, though unjustly, hated Sayre; but they loved him and his children. Ruffin, of course, could not explain why Edmund's familiar and judicious governance of his Beechwood plantation had cost him proportionately more losses of slaves than he suffered at Marlbourne. The paternalist was genuinely puzzled.[30]

Ruffin's conviction that he retained the love of his old slaves must have been powerfully reinforced by an incident in the spring of 1863. On the morning of May 4, a few Yankee soldiers looking for some "Ruffin men" to kill searched the Marlbourne plantation. An apprehensive Ruffin

hid in the shrubbery and held his breath. The Marlbourne slaves told the Yankees that Ruffin had left the estate. The disappointed Northerners left. The notorious fire-eater was safe. Ruffin's slaves bore their master no hostility. Like many other Southern slaves, they shirked labor, pilfered food, fled the plantation, and even aided the Union army; but they protected the person of their master from Northern troops. Here, at least, Ruffin's prognostications proved accurate: the Southern slaves did not butcher their masters. But their refusal to kill their masters, actively or even passively, did not signify their approval of slavery; it indicated that Southern slavery had not reduced them to savagery.[31]

The policy of the Confederate government, Ruffin complained, exacerbated the problem of slave labor discipline. The secessionist prophet had argued that slave agriculture was a military advantage since it would enable the South to recruit a greater proportion of its white population than the nonslaveholding North. But during the Civil War, Ruffin repeatedly protested that Confederate conscription was a myopic policy. The wholesale draft of overseers and planters depleted the farms of supervision. Without proper surveillance, the slaves engaged in work slowdowns. Agricultural output dwindled drastically. The army as well as civilians lacked food. Ruffin spoke from personal experience. In mid 1863, when the extension of Confederate conscription subjected Julian to military

service, Ruffin reluctantly assumed the duties of superintending his son's Ruthven plantation. But the aged Ruffin could not handle passive slave resistance. The Ruthven slaves increasingly malingered. By January 1864 Ruffin lamented that work had declined to two hours a day. For Ruffin, of course, such behavior reflected the black's indolent nature, not his hatred of bondage. In October 1864 Ruffin still blamed slave disloyalty on the years of exposure to disguised antislavery emissaries intensified by the invasion of Yankee soldiers and their entourage, each being a "diligent missionary and abolition agent." Emotionally, Ruffin felt that the paternalist bonds which tied him to his slaves had been seriously eroded; he could not look at his old slaves without feeling pain. But Ruffin clung to his rationalizations: the longstanding machinations of abolitionist agents; his imprudent division of the Marlbourne estate and appointment of Sayre as manager; and the comprehensive nature of Confederate conscription.[32]

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Ruffin's own civilian status sensitized him to the significance of the civilian sector in wartime. He realized that the health of the economy was vital to supply the military and to maintain civilian morale. Ruffin claimed that he did not fear clashes with the Northern military despite its numerical superiority; rather, he feared that economic scarcity and inflation would destroy the Confederacy. With the prime necessities of life in short

supply, Ruffin did not see how the government could provide food, blankets, shoes, and ammunition for the army. How would the government feed the horses? He was deeply concerned about the financial predicament of the Confederate treasury. As economic conditions worsened, Ruffin feared the Confederate Congress would repudiate the public debt, an act "more disgraceful than bankruptcy" and shatter popular morale.[33]

Further, Ruffin realized that economic adversity was already demoralizing the civilian population. The skewed distribution of burdens compounded the difficulties. Those proprietors who had suffered the ravages of the Union army and the loss of their fleeing slaves could not afford the exorbitant prices to obtain the very necessities of life. But other farmers whose agricultural operations had continued undisturbed were reaping huge profits. Additionally, Ruffin complained, "the whole country was overrun with speculators & extortioners" who hoarded their stockpiles of produce and accelerated the inflationary spiral. Worse still, brigandage parties often composed of stragglers from the Confederate army roamed the countryside and pillaged plantations at will. But Ruffin ascribed such behavior to "low rascals," not to gentlemen-soldiers. Likewise, Ruffin with aristocratic smugness dismissed the Richmond bread rioters in the spring of 1863 as vile mobs driven by greed rather than by hunger. Still, he feared the degeneration of the moral fiber of the Confederacy. The

morally superior Southerners were increasingly behaving like loathsome Yankees.[34]

In the fall of 1862, Ruffin had tried to forestall the economic and moral decline of the Confederacy by entreating Southerners to make immediate and heavy sacrifices to defeat the North:

> It is true that, even as a question of pecuniary self-interest, we had better give everything, & be reduced to universal & complete destitution, for defence, than to yield to the enemy. But I fear that not many of our countrymen will so reason. For my part, I wish the greatest & earliest possible general contributions & sacrifices to be made, & the strongest efforts, to enable us to conquer a peace speedily. It is delay, more than the arms of the enemy, that will do our cause most harm.[35]

And, indeed, Ruffin deemed the monetary contributions exacted by the Confederate government inadequate. Thus in October 1862, when the Confederate Congress was considering a forced loan of 20% on annual income, Ruffin declared that he would not object paying 50%. The patriotic Virginian periodically made voluntary monetary contributions to the Confederacy.[36] He demanded similar sacrifices from the slaveholding aristocracy, whom he esteemed as the peculiar repository of public virtue. But he also expected sacrifices from the lower classes.

In December 1861 Ruffin, who believed that the lower orders of society obsequiously followed their demagogic leaders, was surprised to learn that many poor whites in the tidewater region were apathetic or even secretly hostile to the Confederate war effort. Had not their political champions like Henry A. Wise ardently rallied to the

Confederate cause? The problem, Ruffin perceived, was economic. Many of these poor whites had earned their livelihood by carrying oysters and wood along the Potomac and selling them to Northerners. The Civil War disrupted their commercial relations with the Yankees, a relationship which only made them suspect in Ruffin's mind. Moreover, the prevention of massive slave desertions had forced the Confederacy to confiscate or destroy their small vessels. Deprived of their source of income, these fisherman, sailors, and dockworkers could hardly afford the extravagant costs of basic goods. But instead of reacting with sympathy, Ruffin felt only aristocratic contempt for their utter lack of patriotism. Did they not understand that the military interests of the Confederacy required the sacrifice of their small craft? Likewise, the aloof Ruffin was perplexed by Willoughby Newton's revelation that the lower classes residing in the Northern Neck of Virginia regarded the Civil War as a fight to save the land and slaves of the wealthy planter. Did they not realize that slavery benefited them? The poor white, Ruffin concluded, was ignorant about the lofty issues of the war; he was narrowly preoccupied with his selfish pecuniary interests. But the Southern slaveholder, Ruffin believed, had an elevated conception of the purpose of the war; he understood that the Confederacy was defending the principles of free government and Negro slavery. Patricians like himself were, accordingly, willing and even desired to make sacrifices.[37]

Ruffin did not realize that the distinction between the higher and lower classes was not one of moral character or even political education but one of divergent perceptions of class interest. It was not a matter of selfishness versus patriotism but a difference of selfish interests. Ruffin's blindness is apparent in his facile identification of slavery with Southern patriotism. Ruffin's willingness to contribute substantial portions of his assets derived from slave labor to the Confederacy was not necessarily the mark of superior patriotism but another indication of his customary appreciation of long-term interests. Why, the old fire-eater had himself acknowledged that early sacrifices for the Confederacy were preferable from the standpoint of "pecuniary self-interest" than later destruction by the Union.

Furthermore, Ruffin was not quite a paragon of sacrificial patriotism. Beneath his expressions of eagerness to make sacrifices lay discernible undercurrents of resentment. His contrast between those plantations which had been subjected to Yankee depredations and slave desertions and those which had escaped such dislocations was not so much disinterested social commentary as a thinly veiled lamentation of his own afflictions. Ruffin was paternalistically solicitous about the plight of his children's plantations. In 1861 the voluntary enlistment of his son Edmund and the conscription of the best Evelynton overseer left the farm without capable supervision. The

vexed patriarch predicted that the resultant agricultural losses would exceed those of government taxation. The patriotic Virginian nonetheless declared that "private losses . . . will be yielded ungrudgingly for the public good." Prospective overseers, perceiving their dire need on the Ruffin properties, demanded high wages. In 1862 the elder agriculturalist overcame his "repugnance" towards overseeing and assumed the management of Edmund's Beechwood estate. Thus, initially, Ruffin viewed conscription as an issue between private interests and the common weal. Later, he transformed conscription into a controversy between the narrow military interest of maximizing the number of soldiers--which his faith in spirit enabled him to minimize--and the broader Confederate interest of food production for both civilians and the army. The productivity of the Ruffin family plantations had become identified with the public good. Ruffin was not as appreciative of the industrial sector of the civilian economy. He protested against the exemption status the Confederacy granted to mechanical and manufacturing pursuits. Not only was the privilege widely abused by idlers, Ruffin asserted, but the very policy discriminated against agriculture. The Confederacy's provisions for exemptions for planters and overseers in the fall of 1862 did not dampen Ruffin's disaffection. The Virginian agriculturalist exhibited both the insight and blindness which his plantation perch accorded him.[38]

Ruffin, of course, did contribute funds to the Confederate treasury. Although a sizable portion of these contributions was invested in Confederate bonds, Ruffin's contributions were more patriotic than entrpreneurial. The modest interest offered by the Confederacy was overwhelmed by the skyrocketing rate of inflation. "Investments" in Confederate bonds were virtual donations.[39] True, Ruffin may not have foreseen the depreciation of Confederate bonds at the time of purchase. But Ruffin continued buying government bonds in the later war years when the prospects for the survival of the Confederacy became increasingly dimmer. If Ruffin's contributions augmented his sensitivity to the financial distress of the Confederate government, they were nonetheless voluntary.

Some sacrifices disturbed Ruffin very little, if at all. Ruffin favored the Confederate ban on the importation of luxuries. And his deeds corresponded to his words. Pronouncing ostentation morally irresponsible during the Confederacy's wartime ordeal, Ruffin's will, written in May 1864, provided for a simple and inexpensive funeral. Accustomed to displaying his homespun garb, Ruffin easily acclimated himself to modest clothes. Food was a different matter. His periodic diary notations of the specific prices for miscellaneous grocery items were not penned merely for the historical record; they were a means of venting his frustration. Wartime inflation and scarcity forced the

Ruffin family to give up coffee entirely and to curtail its consumption of butter and tea. And the Ruffin clan drank only "cheap" black tea at that. Ruffin proclaimed his ability to "live on as little & as humble food as any one accustomed to plenty & luxury." He bore the deprivations "cheerfully"; he was not "complaining." He protested too much--to his diary. Had anyone accused him of complaining?[40]

His displeasure occasionally surfaced, albeit in muted tones. In March 1863, for instance, Ruffin remarked that times were very hard for people "like us" who had "everything to buy, & nothing to sell." The Yankees had, after all, broken his farm implements and stolen his crops. But why had there been crops left for the Yankees to steal? Notwithstanding his awareness of the impending danger, Ruffin did not burn the corn on Edmund's Beechwood plantation. And he estimated that the Yankees gathered enough corn from the fields to feed McClellan's whole army! Ruffin failed to practice the scorched-earth policy he preached. He failed to display that sacrificial spirit which he deemed vital to prevent Northern conquest. He was far from being a martyr.[41]

Ruffin's longing for military collisions and his desire to hurl himself into their midst were not signs of his superior spirit; on the contrary, they reflected his profound demoralization and despair. Ruffin was extremely despondent in the fall of 1862 after the military fortunes of the Confederacy, which had risen in the summer, received

a series of rude setbacks. In the spring of 1862, the Union had been on the verge of conquering Richmond and the Mississippi Valley as well. But Confederate prospects brightened in the following months. In the Virginian theater, Stonewall Jackson mounted a successful campaign in the Shenandoah Valley and Lee scored strategic victories in the Seven Days' Battles and at Second Manassas. In early September, Lee prepared to invade Maryland and Pennsylvania. Similarly, on the Western front, Sterling Price and Earl Van Dorn prepared to invade western Tennessee from Mississippi while Braxton Bragg and Kirby Smith moved respectively from Chattanooga and Knoxville into the heart of Kentucky. But in September Lee's invasion of Maryland was halted at Sharpsburg. In October the contemplated Tennessee invasion was stopped at Corinth, Mississippi and the Kentucky invasion was repulsed at Perryville. The failure of the Confederacy's northward thrusts must have been particularly distressing to one who had so urgently advocated them.[42]

Moreover, Ruffin sensed that the war was no closer to its termination than at its inauguration. He realized that most of the great battles like Shiloh, Seven Pines, and Sharpsburg had been virtual stalemates. And the Confederacy had failed to follow up even its nominal victories such as Manassas. There seemed to be no end in sight. The seemingly endless nature of the war made its vissicitudes more difficult to bear. Ruffin's despondency over the military fortunes of the Confederacy accentuated by the

devastation of his family plantations made him extremely anxious for peace: "I cannot help believing that the last of our great & bloody battles has been fought--& that negotiations for peace will be on foot before the winter is over." Thus Ruffin placed his faith in Europe breaking the blockade, the bankruptcy of the Union, the secession of the Northwest, the ascendancy of the Democracy: it was a hope generated by despair.[43]

But Ruffin could not wait for peace to materialize. In the interim, he sought quick and decisive military engagements--but not for the purpose of stimulating the peace movement in the North. Ruffin, of course, rationalized his yearning for battles in military terms. He contended that swift encounters would aid the Confederacy, whereas delay would be fatal. Ruffin understood that battles were an antidote to the demoralization of an army. He also realized that military defeats fostered demoralization. Hence, he had called for invading Northern cities to expose the weakness of the Union and boost Southern morale. Nevertheless, his pleas for haste did not stem so much from tactical or strategic military considerations or even from his appreciation of the declining economic fortunes and waning moral spirit of his countrymen; most fundamentally, they proceeded from his own demoralized spirit. Ruffin's temperament was at odds with the strategy of attrition the Confederacy required to avoid conquest. He could not bear the progressive attrition of

his civilian existence and the terrible uncertainty of the war's denouement. Consequently, he sought battles, regardless of their outcome.[44]

True, sometimes Ruffin's calls for haste were sensible. For example, at one juncture during the Peninsular Campaign in the spring of 1862, Ruffin sought a quick clash between the forces of McClellan and Joseph E. Johnston. He feared that delay would enable Union reinforcements to arrive from Fredericksburg. But later that year when the Union army mounted another offensive in Virginia, Ruffin wished that McClellan's successor, General Ambrose E. Burnside, would soon try to reach Richmond from the north--though he feared that the Federals would simultaneously send a flotilla up the James River and attack Richmond from the south.[45] Ruffin found the increasingly dire economic condition of the Confederacy and the seemingly interminable military strife in the 1860s as unpalatable as he had found the increasingly weaker political position of the South in the Union and the seemingly endless series of abolitionist aggressions in the 1850s. Thus he sought either peace or all-out war--"a war of extermination"--but not the unheralded, unnoticed, mundane sacrifices of civilian life, about which he professed indifference.

Ruffin yearned for an opportunity to escape from the prosaic to the heroic theater of the war. In the summer of 1863 Ruffin bemoaned his feeble attempt to supervise the Ruthven farm. He complained of the disrespectful manner of

Julian's slaves and their sluggish work habits. He even suspected them of sabotaging farm equipment. He complained of "agitated & disordered" nerves. Yet he sought a stimulant not a tranquilizer. Why? His old enemy had returned--boredom. In the early autumn he went to his beloved Charleston to be amidst the exciting scenes of Northern siege and bombardment. The fate of Charleston, he thought, was hanging in the balance. The old fire-eater promptly enrolled in the irregular city troop. Ruffin occupied his time by visiting the military companies, including the Palmetto Guards, sketching the forts, and perusing the newspapers. But after four weeks, he was exceedingly bored and disappointed: "I have remained here now more than a month without the enemy's doing anything to relieve the dull monotony of the time & scenes." He had expected a showdown, analagous to Vicksburg, but nothing had transpired. Interestingly enough, Ruffin realized that he should be thankful for the absence of hostilities; peace, was, after all, in the Southern interest. "But personally," he confessed, "I cannot help being wearied with the inaction"; he wanted an all-out Union assault on Charleston. Finally, when the Federals bombarded the city in mid November Ruffin distinguished himself by fearlessly and diligently gathering fragments of Union shells for his collection of Civil War mementoes. But Ruffin's boredom returned with the cessation of Northern bombardment in December. Disliking the "general languor of the siege," he

returned to the Old Dominion. A siege, Ruffin learned, was not the ideal arena for exhibitions of military valor.[46]

Ruffin doubtlessly would not have minded dying gloriously in an epic battle at Charleston. However solicitous about his financial and social status, Ruffin was quite willing to sacrifice his life for the Confederacy on the field of battle. For Ruffin, the death of a warrior fighting the enemy was the epitome of Southern honor. Virtually everything else paled by comparison. Such patriotic sacrifice was at the apex of individual achievement. Only military victory outshone it. This one noble deed could erase a lifetime of disgrace. Thus Ruffin genuinely wished that his prodigal son Charles would save the family honor by dying in battle. Ruffin had long lamented that his youngest son, Charles, led a frivolous and extravagant life. He welcomed Charles' enlistment in the Palmetto Guards early in the war. He hoped that his son would achieve distinction in battle. "But if not--an early & honorable death in fighting for his country's rights & defence is preferable to a useless & inglorious life extended to old age." When Ruffin learned about Charles' desertion the following year, he felt the sting of personal shame. He implored Charles' commanding officer, Captain Cuthbert, to treat his son as a common deserter, who, presumably, merited execution. But Ruffin offered his wayward son a final chance to redeem the family honor: his death in battle could remove the blot of his past disgrace.

"His honorable death," Ruffin declared, "would be to me a blessing compared to his continuing to live & act as he has done."[47]

But why would Charles' illustrious father seek his own death in battle? Edmund Ruffin had by no means led a disgraceful life. But he increasingly saw himself as useless. At times, Ruffin confessed that all he lived for was to see the outcome of the war. Only the war interested him. He evaluated himself by the terms of utilitarian morality. And he assimilated the contemporary secular creed with the rigorous literalism of a Puritan zealot. His life was not meaningful or justified unless he acted in accordance with his enlightened self-interest: contribute to the public happiness and enjoy individual pleasures. Given the neglect of his secessionist literature, Ruffin could no longer retain the delusion that his writings benefited the public. The public, Ruffin complained, hailed the late Nathaniel Beverly Tucker's Partisan Leader as prophetic but ignored his more recent Anticipations. Only his fortuitous selection to fire the first gun upon Fort Sumter saved him from complete oblivion among his contemporaries. Not even his children had appreciated his secessionist contributions. They rarely discussed, much less commended, his various proslavery and disunionist writings. "A prophet," Ruffin lamented, "is not without honor, but in his own country, and among his own kin, and in his own house." Furthermore, the infirmities of old age hindered his enjoyment of his

customary pleasures. Partial deafness forbade normal conversation. And other problems interfered with reading. What else could he do? In the fall of 1861, Ruffin reflected on his bleak future: "I see nothing before me but days & nights of decreasing capacity & means of enjoyment, & increasing sources & causes of pain. Would that I may be soon relieved of the continuance, by a sudden, unexpected, & painless death! If a cannonball, at Bull Run, or Manassas, had then been the means, it would have been the most desirable termination of my life." Such was the stuff Ruffin's courage was made of. Suicidal impulses propelled his quest for military martyrdom. Beneath his heroism lay his depression.[48]

Notes

(1) Ruffin, Anticipations, 119-122; Ruffin, Diary, I, Entry for Feb. 8, 1861, 545-546, II, Entries for June 3, Sept. 3, 1861, 40, 122.

(2) Ruffin, Diary, II, Entries for Nov. 17, Dec. 18, 1861, 167-168, 193.

(3) Ibid., Entries for Jan. 1, 3, 1862, 204-206; On the Trent affair, see McPherson, Battle Cry, 389-391.

(4) Ruffin, Diary, II, Entries for Feb. 19, Mar. 27, Aug. 5, 1862, 239, 265-266, 406.

(5) Ibid., Entries for Aug. 16, 30, Dec. 2, 21, 1862, Jan. 9, 1863, 415, 436, 502, 517, 534.

(6) Ibid., Entries for Dec. 2, 1862, Feb. 20, 27, 1863, 502, 582-583, 589-590; On the effectiveness of the blockade, see McPherson, Battle Cry, 380-382.

(7) Ruffin, Diary, II, Entries for Dec. 23, 1861, Aug. 5, Oct. 12, 1862, 199, 406, 461.

(8) Ibid., Entries for Aug. 27, 29, Sept. 5, 1862, 431-433, 440; "TERMS FOR A SEPARATE PEACE WITH THE NORTHWESTERN STATES," Richmond Enquirer, Sept. 5, 1862, appended to Ruffin's MS Diary, Sept. 5, 1862, LC.

(9) McPherson, Battle Cry, 593. In the winter of 1863, Ruffin was certain that the Northwest would secede. Ruffin, Diary, II, Entry for Feb. 16, 1863, 578.

(10) "Commercial Reconstruction," "Save us from our Friends and we can take care of our Enemies," "Reconstruction," & "SPEECH OF THE HON. R. B. RHETT, DELIVERED IN THE CONVENTION OF THE STATE OF SOUTH CAROLINA ON THE 13TH DAY OF SEPTEMBER, 1862, ON THE FOLLOWING RESOLUTIONS OFFERED BY HIM," Charleston Mercury, Oct. 21, 1861, Feb. 5, Oct. 2, 29, 1862.

(11) Ruffin, Diary, II, Entries for Aug. 21, 1861, Nov. 22, 1862, 110, 494-495.

(12) Ibid., Entry for Apr. 3, 1863, 616-617.

(13) The Charleston Mercury claimed that old-time Unionists favored a passive, temporizing, defensive military strategy as they harbored hopes for reconstruction, while longstanding disunionists sought aggressive, offensive warfare as they deemed the intensification of hatred between the North and the South "the grand compensating utility of

the war." "What Congress Has Done, and What it Has Failed to Do--Commercial Independence--Navigation Acts," Charleston Mercury, Sept. 18, 1861.

(14) Ruffin, Diary, II, Entries for Feb. 7, 20, 1863, 566, 584; Ruffin, Anticipations, 125; Edmund Ruffin, "Consequences of Abolition Agitation," No. V, DBR, XXIII (Dec., 1857), 603.

(15) Ruffin, Diary, II, Entries for Aug. 17, 20, 22, 1862, 416-421, 425-427. Messages scrawled by Union troops on the walls of the Beechwood mansion included "You did fire the first gun on Sumter, you traitor son of a bitch" and "Owned by Old Ruffin, the basest old traitor rebel in the United States. You old cuss, it is a pity you go unhanged."

(16) Ibid., Entry for Jan. 31, 1863, 560-561.

(17) Ibid., Entries for Dec. 24, 1861, Jan. 13, 15, Sept. 12, Oct. 4, 1862, Jan. 22, 1863, 200, 212-214, 443, 458-459, 477, 551-552. In 1862 Ruffin sensed that the North's financial investment in the war dictated perseverance till victory to enable debt repayment. And he feared the Northern treasury would be replenished by the confiscation of Southern property. He even perceived that many Northeastern Yankee contractors were profiting through the war. Yet he clung to the panacea of the Northern Democracy. See his diary entries for Feb. 14, June 14, Nov. 4, 1862, 235, 342, 479.

(18) Ibid., Entries for Oct. 28, Nov. 8, 1862, Jan. 31, 1863, 475, 485-487, 562-563; McPherson, Battle Cry, 561-562.

(19) Ruffin, Diary, II, Entries for Sept. 19, Oct. 28, Nov. 8, 1862, Jan. 21 ,22, 1863, 446, 474-475, 485-487, 549-551.

(20) Ibid., Entries for Aug. 21, 1861, Nov. 22, 1862, Jan. 1, 1863, 110, 494-496, 525. Strangely enough, in the fall of 1862, Ruffin realized that New York Democrat John Van Buren's offer of peace and reunion was seriously intended. But a few weeks later, Ruffin convinced himself that it was a covert program for Confederate independence.

(21) Ibid., Entries for Oct. 28, Nov. 11, 1862, Jan. 16, 21, 22, 31, Apr. 3, 1863, 474-475, 488, 537, 549-551, 563, 616. Ruffin, interestingly, opposed the admission of the exiled Vallandigham into the Confederacy since it would play into Republican hands by associating the Copperhead leader with the South. See his diary entries for May 20, 27, 1863, 662, 667.

(22) Ruffin's MS Diary, Entries for June 13, July 27,

Sept. 3, 1864, 3,431-3,432, 3,516, 3,567-3,568, LC. Ruffin pronounced the Democratic platform "very ambiguous" but proceeded to interpret the platform implicitly as prowar or reconstruction. Still, he believed the Democrats would opt for peace on Southern terms.

(23) Ibid., Entries for Oct. 11, 31, Nov. 8, 1864, 3,621-3,622, 3,656-3,657, 3,672-3,673, LC.

(24) Ibid., Entry for July 27, 1864, 3,517, LC; Ruffin, Diary, II, Entry for Feb. 20, 1863, 584.

(25) Ruffin, Anticipations, 234-264. Ruffin reiterated his faith in slave loyalty on the eve of the war; Edmund Ruffin, "Fidelity of Slaves to Their Masters," DBR, XXX (Jan., 1861), 118-120; On the wartime disillusionment of the master class, see Genovese, Roll, 97-112.

(26) Ruffin, Diary, II, Entries for May 26, 30, June 4, 22, Nov. 21, 1861, 35-36, 38, 40, 50, 173.

(27) Ibid., Entries for Apr. 6, 15, 17, May 26, 29, June 11, 12, 18, 21, 22, July 4, Aug. 3, 1862, 273, 282, 284, 317-320, 323, 337-339, 345-347, 350, 367-368, 401-404.

(28) Ibid., Entries for June 18, 23, 25, 1862, 346, 351, 353.

(29) Ibid., Entries for June 18, July 4, 7, Oct. 23, 29, 1862, 346, 367-368, 371, 470-471, 475-476.

(30) Ibid., Entry for Jan. 26, 1863, 553-555.

(31) Ibid., Entry for May 4, 1863, 633-635; On the complexity of slave behavior during the Civil War, see Litwack, Storm, 7-9, 18-23, 41, 49-59, 136-143; Genovese, Roll, 130-133, 149-151.

(32) "WHAT WILL BE THE RESULTS OF THE NORTHERN ABOLITION ACTION?" by "A VIRGINIAN," No. II, Richmond Enquirer, Jan. 25, 1850; Ruffin's MS Diary, Entries for July 16, Aug. 22, 1863, Jan. 11, June 4, Oct. 30, 1864, 2,218, 2,902-2,903, 3,157-3,158, 3,401, 3,648-3,650, LC; Ruffin, Diary, II, Entry for Oct. 23, 1862, 471.

(33) Ruffin, Diary, II, Entries for Oct. 12, 1862, Mar. 16, 17, Apr. 2, 17, 1863, 461-462, 600, 603-604, 613-614, 624.

(34) Ibid., Entries for Aug. 30, Oct. 12, 1862, Apr. 2, 10, 11, 17, 1863, 435, 461-462, 613, 621-622, 624-625.

(35) Ibid., Entry for Oct. 12, 1862, 462.

(36) Ibid., Entries for Oct. 1, 1862, Mar. 17, 1863, 455, 603-604.

(37) Ibid., Entries for Dec. 11, 1861, Feb. 8, 1863, 187-189, 573.

(38) Ibid., Entries for June 19, 1861, Apr. 15, 1862, 48, 282; Ruffin's MS Diary, Entries for Aug. 22, 1863, Jan. 11, 1864, 2,902-2,903, 3,157--3,158, LC.

(39) McPherson, Battle Cry, 438.

(40) Ruffin's MS Diary, Entries for Feb. 11, May 17, 1864, 3,193, 3,355-3,356, LC; Ruffin, Diary, II, Entry for Aug. 8, 1862, 409.

(41) Ruffin, Diary, II, Entries for Aug. 17, 1862, Mar. 25, 1863, 416, 607. Northern troops may have also taken an additional 200 bushels of stocked corn from the Beechwood estate. See Ruffin's diary entry for Aug. 17, 1862, 420.

(42) McPherson, Battle Cry, 454-460, 464-471, 511-545.

(43) Ruffin, Diary, II, Entries for Oct. 28, Nov. 4, 6, 474-475, 479, 482-483.

(44) Ibid., Entries for May 24, 25, 1862, 314, 315. Ruffin's impatience for action partly spurred his calls for invading the North. See his diary entry for July 21, 1862, 381.

(45) Ibid., Entries for May 24, Dec. 7, 11, 1862, 314, 506-507, 509-510.

(46) Ruffin's MS Diary, Entries for Sept. 14, 18, 25, Oct. 24, Nov. 17, Dec. 10, 1863, 2,937-2,938, 2,946-2,947, 2,958, 3,016-3,017, 3,064-3,068, 3,112, LC; Mitchell, Ruffin, 236-238.

(47) Mitchell, Ruffin, 89, 206; Ruffin, Diary, II, Entries for May 29, 1861, May 21, 1862, 37-38, 310-311.

(48) Ruffin, Diary, I, Entry for Aug. 1, 1860, 445-446, II, Entries for Sept. 30, 1861, Jan. 20, 1863, 139, 545-549; Ruffin's MS Diary, Entry for Oct. 3, 1864, 3,609-3,610, LC.

Chapter Eleven: Sacrifices

Ruffin claimed that patriotic Confederates fought for white liberty and black slavery. The ordeal of the war tested these claims. Some of the traditional liberties enjoyed by Southern whites became casualties of the war. And towards the end of the war, the South cautiously embarked upon a program of converting her slaves into soldiers and freemen. Many Southerners felt that their independent nationhood superseded meticulous adherence to their domestic liberties and retention of their domestic slaves. Ruffin went further: without Confederate independence, Southern life was valueless. Devastated by Yankee victory, Ruffin ended his life ten weeks after Appomattox.

Ruffin's detestation of the North reached its zenith during the war years. His hope for peace from the Northern Democracy did not attenuate his revulsion from the Northern people and their politics; on the contrary, his aversion intensified. Ruffin had long denigrated Northern political culture. Universal suffrage, which Ruffin associated with the Northern states, had perverted republicanism into a "government of the worst." The massive enfranchisement of the ignorant and avaricious multitude had elevated incompetent, wasteful, and corrupt opportunists to high political station. So repelled had Ruffin become by the democratizing trend of the nineteenth century, which he believed was spearheaded by the North, that in the

penultimate winter of the war he confided to his friend and distant North Carolinian cousin Thomas Ruffin that Southern secession would have been necessary to prevent infection by the virus of universal suffrage even if the North had never infringed upon Southern rights. Although passionate hatred doubtless underlay Ruffin's exclamation, his selection of Northern political culture as the object of his antipathy was not accidental. The extension of the electorate, Ruffin had warned, would not expand popular sovereignty but confine real power to wire-pulling demagogues. The diffusion of the franchise would centralize political control. Republican domination seemed to verify his analysis.[1]

From the outset of the war, Ruffin lambasted the Lincoln government for blatantly violating civil liberties. Lincoln, Ruffin charged, launched the military invasion of the Confederacy by ignoring Congressional authority to raise armies, buy warships, institute blockades, and declare war. The executive's unilateral maneuvers made the North "an unlimited despotism, sustained by military force." Dissent was unceremoniously suppressed. The Northern government squelched free press by military edict, mob demolition of printing establishments, and interference with the mail. The Northern president not only suppressed the free speech of individuals sympathetic to Southern slavery but also of those who opposed the absurd attempt to conquer the South by war and even of those who dared protest against the subversion of the Constitution. Ruffin pronounced Northern

sanctions against draft evaders, forced service and fines, despotic. He was galled by Lincoln's threat to imprison all Northern men who by speech, writing, or otherwise discouraged enlistment in Federal forces or offered aid and comfort to the enemy. In fact, Ruffin viewed Northern conscription itself as despotic. Lincoln, Ruffin pointed out, could draft males between twenty and forty-five years of age without state mediation. Northern suspension of habeas corpus, the very basis of republican liberties, especially aroused Ruffin's ire. Individuals even mildly critical of Republican policy were subject to imprisonment for indefinite periods of time--even if they committed no act of disloylaty: "'Disloyal' individuals in their words--or even private opinions--who have done or attempted no act, have been imprisoned, without charge of the offence, or limit of time." Suspicion alone was sufficient for arrest and imprisonment. Ruffin conceded that Lincoln had not fully exercised his "power of supreme dictatorship"; in Ruffin's mind, its existence alone made the North a consummate despotism.[2]

Moreover, the Northern people's submission to Lincoln's tyrannical regime corroborated Ruffin's longstanding opinion that the North had no comprehension of constitutional government. The North viewed a constitution as merely a documentary delineation of the structure and arrangements of the government. Northerners had not the faintest idea that constitutions existed for the purpose of preventing

majorities from oppressing minorities. They regarded constitutions as grants of power, not as limitations. They were under the delusion that majorities could overrule the constitution. The North, in brief, equated republicanism with unbridled majoritarianism. Ruffin, nonetheless, professed surprise that the Northern populace passively acquiesced in Lincolnian "despotism":

> But notwithstanding this low estimate of mine of the northern political intellect, I had not supposed it possible that the northern people . . . should have consented, & even approved & applauded, the complete abrogation of their chief constitutional safeguards of personal liberty & rights, & the establishment of an unlimited despotism by usurpation & force. No free people, however ignorant, has ever before submitted at once, & willingly, to such deprivation...of their most solemn & precious constitutional safeguards, the writ of habeas corpus, the liberty of the press & of speech, & the exclusive right of Congress to raise & maintain armies. Yet all these rights have fallen, within a few months, before the ostensible dictum & will of a president, who is neither wise, nor brave, nor even very popular, but a low & vulgar black-guard & buffoon. Other countries have yielded their constitutions & liberties to great statesmen, warriors, & popular leaders--such as Caeser, Cromwell, & Napoleon. But . . . no people have so yielded . . .to such arbitrary rule & usurpation of a fool.

Freed from the sagacious and conservative influence of Southern political representatives, who vigilantly guarded popular liberties, the decadent North had succumbed to the beguilement of a fool, "a tool in the hands of others," who was himself ignorant of the immense political revolution he represented. The North had become a majority tyranny.[3]

The Confederacy too committed its share of violations of civil liberties and constitutional infractions. Although the Confederacy's transgressions of constitutional barriers

may not have equalled those of the Union, they were not inconsiderable. Military exigencies forced the Confederate government to adopt innovative policies which many Southerners viewed as flagrant usurpations. During the Civil War the Confederacy impressed precious resources, including slaves, with only partial reimbursement to owners, conscripted white male citizens into the army, and levied direct taxes. Additionally, the Confederacy periodically imposed martial law on militarily sensitive regions and suspended habeas corpus privileges as well. For example, in the late winter of 1862, Davis, armed with Congressional authorization, applied martial law to major Virginia cities. The military police under General John H. Winder, the provost marshal for the Richmond district, arrested not only inebriated soldiers and common criminals but also the prominent Whig Unionist John Minor Botts. Some generals, in fact, proclaimed martial law without authority. For instance, in the summer of 1862, General Earl Van Dorn declared martial law for parts of Louisiana and Mississippi. Furthermore, the system of provost marshals, originally intended to maintain order in the vicinity of armies and to arrest stragglers and deserters, interfered with the customary travelling rights of Southerners. The marshals routinely stopped travellers to inspect their passports and arrested those who could not produce the required document. Also, not only did the Confederate government seize the railroads but Congress appropriated funds for their

construction. And the Congress conducted its sessions in secret.[4]

Now Ruffin claimed that Southerners were the peculiar custodians of republican liberties. They had preserved the integrity of the republic from Northern corruption. The slaveholding aristocrats, in particular, understood the purpose of the war: they fought for the principle of free government. The fire-eaters, moreover, had been the vigilant sentinels of Southern rights; ever alert to even the most impalpable of Northern aggression, they had insisted that encroachment had to be resisted at its inception. As a fire-eating Southern slaveholder, Edmund Ruffin--who so passionately assailed the Union's wartime violations of the United States Constitution--would, presumably, have zealously guarded the liberties of the Southern people and maintained the purity of the Confederate constitution from the slightest infringement by the Davis administration. But such was hardly the case.

Many eminent Southerners vehemently protested against these novel Confederate policies. The Georgia governor, Joseph E. Brown, cloaking himself in the mantle of state rights, vociferously objected to the extension of Confederate authority in general and to conscription in particular. The Vice-President of the Confederacy, Alexander H. Stephens, maintained that the mere suspension of civil liberties terminated them forever. Two classic fire-eaters eloquently condemned Davis' policies. William

Lowndes Yancey and Robert Barnwell Rhett argued that the Confederacy's encroachments upon popular liberties and states' rights subverted its very basis. True, Yancey was not a consistent state rights zealot in the Confederate era; but he drew a sharp boundary around constitutional liberties. He tolerated impressment but sought to curtail its abuses by governmental regulations. He supported conscription but attacked the proposal to draft state officers as subversive of republicanism. He had no patience for those who would surrender their liberties to obtain their security: "There is hope for a people who are crushed by superior power in their brave struggle for right. There is no hope for a people so destitute of courage and virtue, and wisdom, as to flee to a despotism of their own to render their conflict with an invader easier." Accordingly, when some Southerners, depressed by a series of military defeats in 1862 contemplated dictatorship, Yancey reacted angrily--despite, or, perhaps, because of the fact that some Alabama newspapers bandied his own name about as a suitable candidate. Southern resort to despotism, Yancey declared, would graphically demonstrate "our unfitness for self-government." [5]

Even more consistently than Yancey, Barnwell Rhett clung to his principles of state rights, constitutionalism, and civil liberties. Rhett persistently advocated the opening of Congressional sessions to the public. He denounced Congressional funding of railroads as internal

improvement. He attacked the establishment of the provost marshals as a military bureaucracy inimical to republicanism. He opposed direct taxes as unconstitutional. He found conscription acceptable only if implemented by the states. He reserved his harshest strictures for the suspension of habeas corpus. He pointed out that the arguments advanced by the Davis administration to justify the deprivation of this fundamental republican right (e.g., "public safety" & "temporary" suspension) had been often used by tyrants. Rhett faithfully transposed the fire-eating strategy of nipping abolitionist aggression in the bud to the Confederate wartime oppressions: "The liberties of a people cannot be laid down or taken up again to suit temporary emergencies. It is a delicate plant, usually watered by blood and tears, and grows and flourishes only under the continued watchfulness and guardianship of the people. The voice of all history, through the vista of ages, proclaims that once surrendered by a people, it is gone forever. Despotism knows this; and, therefore, usually at first seeks authority only temporarily." Like Yancey, Rhett found the prospect of surrendering to a despot to save the Confederacy "abhorrent to every free man. Those are fit to be slaves who voluntarily seek a master. If we are to have a Despotism over us, let it be the result of force." Rhett forthrightly compared the Lincoln and Davis administrations--to the detriment of the latter. Lincoln, Rhett noted, could only imprison individuals without due

process; Davis had the power of life and death. Rhett realized the irony that the Confederacy had instituted some of the very measures the South had seceded to avoid. By the spring of 1864, he viewed the Confederacy as a consolidated despotism akin to the Union. Rhett thus used the staples of classical republican ideology to indict the Davis administration.[6]

Edmund Ruffin was unperturbed by these controversial Confederate policies. The Virginian did not record his feelings about the impressment of material goods. In September 1861 he did wonder why the military impressment of Virginian slaves to construct fortifications was necessary as whites in the army could perform the chore. But two months later Ruffin advocated that Virginia draft slaves (as well as free blacks) for noncombatant military labor in the same proportion as it drafted whites for military service. His call upon the state rather than the Confederate government to implement this policy did not stem from a concern for states' rights or, for that matter, a spirit of lofty patriotism but from pragmatic political calculations. Ruffin hoped that the Virginia Constitutional Convention, assembled at this time, would adopt his pet anti-democratic measures: disqualify non-taxpayers from suffrage and make the executive and judicial branches appointive. Fearing that the disenfranchised poor whites who resided in heavy slaveholding areas would refuse to guard the slaves of their privileged neighbors, Ruffin sought to assuage their

resentment by compelling slaveholder contributions to the war effort. His proposal amounted to uncompensated impressment. Ruffin was silent when impressment received official Confederate sanction in March 1863, an indirect indication that he harbored no strong objections to the policy.[7]

Nor did the Confederacy's resort to direct taxes to finance the war effort disturb Ruffin. In fact, far from attacking Confederate taxation as a usurpation, Ruffin's proclivity of analyzing matters from the long-range perspective as well as his considerable economic acumen impelled him to call for greater levies. Modest but early sacrifices, the fire-eater perceived, could obviate later but larger ones. Also, Ruffin realized that the Confederacy's massive issuance of treasury notes depreciated the currency and contributed to runaway inflation. He called, instead, for heavy taxation. Similarly, Ruffin approved of the Confederacy's ban on the importation of luxuries. He objected, however, to Congressional removal of the exportation of staples from the determination of individual planters and relegation of the authority to bureaucrats. No governmental functionary, Ruffin complained, should have such broad discretionary power. For once, Ruffin spoke the language of civil liberties.[8]

Ruffin also, of course, strongly and repeatedly objected to conscription. But he did not oppose conscription per se as a glaring abridgement of individual

liberties or as a gross insult to the honor of Southern men, who would naturally volunteer for military service. For all his exaltation of Southern manhood, Ruffin, at times, could be acutely realistic. Nor did Ruffin care which governmental agency enacted or executed the policy. He opposed both Virginian and Confederate conscription upon identical grounds: the comprehensive conscription of Southern whites left the plantations without the supervision essential for productive slave labor. His opposition was thus based upon expediency rather than principle. He considered Governor Brown's disruptive antics in Georgia quite unfortunate. For Ruffin, military necessity justified conscription, pure and simple.[9]

Much more distressing to Ruffin than the obstructionism of the Georgian governor was the turmoil in neighboring North Carolina, where William W. Holden, editor of the Raleigh Standard and gubernatorial aspirant, demanded an end to the war and a state convention. Ruffin suspected Holden's design was secession from the Confederacy and alliance with the North. Acknowledging the legitimacy of secession under the Confederate constitution, Ruffin deemed North Carolina's exercise of this right in a time of war treasonous. Even North Carolina's neutrality, Ruffin feared, would destroy the Confederacy by cutting off Virginia from the rest of the South. If North Carolina seceded, Ruffin proclaimed, the South should treat her like a Northern foe.[10]

Few states' rights exponents carried their principle so far as to allow the secession of a Confederate state in midst of the war. But many strongly protested Davis' sporadic imposition of martial law and periodic suspension of habeas corpus. Ruffin uttered not a syllable of complaint. His remarkably scanty diary entries on the subject approved the abridgement. In fact, quite early in the war Ruffin wrote Davis a letter in which he urged the Confederate executive to hang all spies and expel or imprison all "suspicious sojourners or residents," especially Northerners. Ruffin believed that "such characters" were present in every county and abounded in towns. The Virginian's antebellum fear of abolitionist emissaries became a wartime fear of Northern spies. Although Ruffin was particularly suspicious of Northern infiltrators, his fears were easily transferable to old Southern Unionists. For example, in late February 1862, Ruffin approved the imposition of martial law in major Virginian cities (Norfolk, Portsmouth, and Richmond) in order to ferret out "disloyal residents, spies & traitors," who had eluded civilian authorities. In particular, Ruffin hoped that Virginia's most prominent Whig Unionist, John Minor Botts, along with his cohorts, would be swiftly tried and punished by military court-martial. Ruffin could not point to any traitorous act committed by the Botts circle, but he had no doubt of the "treasonable sentiments & disposition of these, & very many more." Thus, instead of

objecting to the partial militarization of the civilian sector and the attendant curtailment of civil liberties, Ruffin would have desired the effective exposure and extirpation (or at least imprisonment) of individuals he suspected of harboring disloyal opinions. By January 1865, when the Confederate military situation was desperate, Ruffin's commitment to republicanism had become so eroded that he sought salvation from a Confederate dictator. He privately lamented the facts that the Confederate constitution had not provided for temporary dictatorship in emergencies and that most Southerners who favored a dictatorship opposed Davis. But Ruffin, for one, in spite of his disparagement of the character and ability of the Confederate president, was ready to hand over the reins of despotic power to Jefferson Davis.[11]

What is particularly striking about Ruffin's attitude towards civil liberties under the Confederacy was his casual willingness to jettison them as excess baggage encumbering the war effort. He does not appear to have wrestled with his conscience over sacrificing constitutional scruples, states' rights, and civil liberties. He did not act as if he were torn between conflicting commitments to the integrity of republican principles and the survival of the Southern Confederacy. His candid diary reveals no sign of internal struggle. He accepted the casualties to republicanism in the political arena with the same facility that he accepted the casualties to soldiers in the military

arena--routinely. It is hard to avoid the conclusion that Ruffin's devotion to republicanism had been superficial. For Ruffin, constitutionalism and states' rights were principally rhetorical weapons to shield slavery within the Union and to pummel the North during the Civil War; they were not guiding principles. He was anxious to unleash the forces of Northern dissent to cripple the Union war effort; he had no desire to jeopardize the Confederacy's prosecution of the war by encouraging dissent. Hence Ruffin's impassionate critique of Northern violations of civil liberties was complemented by his thunderous silence about Southern violations of the same. Hence the criticisms he lodged against the Davis administration--softness towards the Northern enemy and towards fellow Southerners--were generally confined to his diary. His pretension that the slaveholding aristocracy had a superior attachment to political liberty was betrayed by his own indifference.

Retrospectively, the shallow nature of Ruffin's commitment to republicanism is discernible in the prewar period. True, Ruffin had axiomatically interpreted the United States Constitution as a states' rights document; he had shared the fire-eater conviction of the unconstitutionality of Northern abolitionist aggression on the one hand and the constitutionality of Southern secession on the other. But unlike the other classic fire eaters, Ruffin had seldom indulged in constitutional or states' rights argumentation after becoming a secessionist. At

most, he echoed such arguments in a perfunctory fashion. By contrast, Yancey stood squarely on the Constitution throughout the antebellum era; the Alabamian lawyer constantly justified his course by appeals to the nation's fundamental instrument.[12] The doctrine of states' rights had few more ardent or consistent champions than Barnwell Rhett; for the Carolinian radical, the states' rights stance was not merely a convenient defensive strategy but a deeply-held creed. Rhett had, in fact, often subordinated slavery to the issue of states' rights: the Mercury often portrayed federal aggressions upon slavery as an illustration of the consolidation of the United States government.[13] Granted, Ruffin's avoidance of constitutional rhetoric was partly a matter of expediency. The Virginian regarded constitutional appeals as pointless and dangerous: the North would not cease her antislavery encroachments and the South could be deluded into relying on the Constitution to safeguard slavery. But also Ruffin viewed slavery as the central issue, not abstract principles. Ruffin, unlike Rhett, never veered from directly citing slavery to justify disunion.

True, Ruffin had long viewed submission to despotism as unworthy of freemen. He had appealed to the spirit of freemen to rouse Southern resistance to Northern aggrandizement: base slaves truckled to superior force, not meritorious freemen. It is arguable that Ruffin had a blind spot for the Davis administration. Notwithstanding his strictures against Davis, Ruffin viewed Southern acceptance

of the Confederate government not as servitude but as vital to avert enslavement to the North. But as his yearning for a despot in 1865 illustrates, it was not dictatorship as such which repelled him but domination by haughty and hostile Northerners, who impugned his inflated pretensions to independent mastery and threatened to deracinate the basis of his honor. Indeed, Ruffin would have acquiesced in any political regime which protected his slaveholding status. He even admitted his preference of limited monarchy to democracy. It was no accident that Ruffin, unlike some of the other classic fire-eaters such as Quitman and Yancey, had for years resented the increasing democratization of nineteenth-century American political culture.[14] The Virginian patrician measured himself not merely by his superiority over the black slave but also by his superiority over the white yeoman. He treasured the prerogatives of the slaveholder far more than he did the liberty of the citizen. Well before the war, Ruffin had reflected that the aristocracy might have to relinquish its liberty to preserve its property from the avarice of the democracy. Thus, it is not surprising that when the Confederate plight became desperate in the final months of the war, Ruffin was far more unwilling to sacrifice slavery than republican liberty. And yet the proud slaveholder, albeit reluctantly and painfully, proved ultimately willing to sacrifice even slavery to save the Confederacy.

As General William T. Sherman plowed his way through

Georgia in 1864, Southerners increasingly pondered liberating their slaves and employing them as soldiers. The successful utilization of slaves in auxiliary military capacities and the effective use of black troops, including runaway slaves, by the Union army led many Southerners to see the feasibility and desirability of the project. If the slaves could construct fortifications, haul the supplies of white Confederate soldiers, and nurse the wounded on the battlefield, then they could serve as troops. If Southern slaves were anyway escaping bondage and serving in the Union army, then they might as well fight for the Confederacy. Also, some Southerners, including Jefferson Davis, believed that emancipation would remove the cardinal obstacle to European recognition of the Confederacy. In his message to Congress in November 1864, the Confederate president stated that he would advocate using slaves as soldiers if he could not get enough white men to join the army. Ironically, white opposition to federal conscription in both the North and the South led their respective statesmen to support the usage of black troops.[15]

The slave-soldier scheme aroused a storm of opposition. Many Southerners objected to the measure on the well-trodden ground of states' rights. The South Carolinian devotee of states' rights was shocked. State sovereignty, Rhett cried, was the very foundation of the Confederacy! The South had seceded because the federal government had indirectly subverted states' rights by proscribing slavery from the

territories. Not even the most rabid Northern abolitionist had dared to assert the constitutionality of federal abolition in the states. An anguished Rhett found himself dissecting the Confederate constitution from the standpoint of strict construction to combat the stultifying slave-soldier scheme.[16]

Moreover, many Southerners perceived that the project of slave soldiery struck at the heart of the positive good ideology and the related suppositions of Southern honor. Converting the Southern blacks into soldiers presumed their military capacity. But proslavery propagandists had long depicted the black as timid, meek, and fearful. How could the cowardly slave metamorphose into the courageous soldier? If the black could effectively defend himself in the army, then why could he not govern his life independently of the tutelage of his white master? As Howell Cobb put it, "If slaves will make good soldiers our whole theory of slavery is wrong." The conscientious slaveholder who adhered to the positive good creed may have subconsciously feared that the successful employment of black soldiers would shatter his entire rationale for having held blacks in bondage. The postulates of Southern honor, furthermore, made the courageous warrior the ideal personification of the free and superior white master. Cowardly submission was the mark of the slave. If the black successfully fought for the independence of the Confederacy, he would at once vindicate his entitlement to liberty and eradicate the pretension of

the Southern white to mastery. "The day that the army of Virginia allows a negro regiment to enter their lines as soldiers," bellowed Robert Toombs, "they will be degraded, ruined, and disgraced." What a humiliating spectacle for the proud Southern cavalier to have his nationhood achieved by the manhood of his slaves! Indeed, the relentless mind of Rhett carried the proposition to its logical conclusion. If the slaves won the Civil War for their masters, then their positions demanded reversal: "The freemen of the Confederate States, must work out their own redemption, or they must be the slaves of their own slaves."[17]

Even if black slaves failed miserably as Confederate soldiers, the advocacy of the project repudiated the paternalistic racial assumptions upon which slavery rested. The proposition to bestow freedom upon black slaves as a reward for their military contribution to the Confederacy diametrically contravened the proslavery contention that slavery was a blessing and liberty a curse to the Negro. The very proposal was a confession of moral bankruptcy. Some proponents of the scheme responded that the emancipation of slave-soldiers was not an admission that freedom was beneficial for blacks but a mere acknowledgement that the blacks perceived freedom as a boon and required an incentive to fight faithfully for the South. Additionally, some proponents noted that virtually all Southern states permitted the manumission of slaves for meritorious service, either through the state legislature or individual owners.[18]

But any intelligent, thoroughgoing proslavery ideologue should have perceived the feebleness of this retort. That the South allowed manumission was hardly an argument for its moral propriety. Indeed, Ruffin had long called for ending this practice precisely because it diverged from proslavery orthodoxy. The distinction between the perceptions of the white slaveholder and the black slave about the value of freedom for the Negro was irrelevant. Even though positive good theoreticians like Ruffin posited the fiction that the slave himself preferred his bondage to freedom, it was a misleading and superfluous ornamental capstone of the proslavery edifice, not its cornerstone. The racial underpinning of the proslavery ideology made an egalitarian interpretation of utilitarianism eminently dispensable. What really mattered was not the belief of the slave, a mere child, but the objective reality as understood by the master. If freedom was truly deleterious for the black, then it was incumbent upon his benevolent master to preserve him from that fate, regardless of the delusions of the slave or the self-interest of the slaveholder.

Ruffin, like many other fire-eaters, proslavery ideologues, and planters, initially opposed this drastic policy. Predictably, Ruffin voiced no states' rights objections to the slave-soldier scheme. But quite surprisingly Ruffin did not contend that the project vitiated the proslavery ideology. In fact, he ignored this vital aspect of the debate, which raged in the Southern

press for months, entirely. His major concerns were the preservation of Southern slavery and the feasibility of slave soldiery. The arming of slaves, Ruffin recognized, would seriously undermine, if not completely destroy, the institution of slavery. True, Ruffin discussed the inferiority of the black as an argument against the project. But his objective was not to show the incompatibility of the slave-soldier scheme with the positive good creed but the incapacity of the black for military service. The natural timidity of the Negro, Ruffin argued, rendered him unfit for soldiery. The experience of the Union army, Ruffin claimed, had demonstrated that blacks were poor fighters who shrank from combat. Only when intoxicated with whiskey and threatened with summary execution if they retreated did black Union troops show "the desperate courage of martyrs for a time." The paternalist did not contemplate Confederate emulation of such sordid Yankee disciplinary practices. Besides, Ruffin feared, the slave-soldiers enrolled in the Confederate army would desert to the enemy at their first opportunity. Even the offer of liberty at the termination of their faithful service to the Confederacy, presumably, would not suffice to ensure their loyalty. Sensing perhaps that he had conceded the slaves' disaffection with bondage, Ruffin soon added his ritualistic ascription of slave disloyalty to years of abolitionist infiltration. Thus, Ruffin initially opposed the slave-soldier project on pragmatic rather than on

ideological grounds: the scheme would necessitate emancipation without fortifying the Confederate defense.[19]

Gradually, Ruffin grew more amenable to the controversial measure. In the autumn of 1864, Ruffin, who had previously resented Confederate requisitions of his family slaves as military auxiliaries, pronounced the recent Confederate policy of impressing one of every five slaves for non-combative military labor an "excellent measure"--though he still believed the ratio was higher than necessary. Also, Ruffin speculated that the slaves may be more likely to obey the commands of Confederate officers, their traditional masters, than the orders of alien Yankee leaders. Racial assumptions could thus be utilized to qualify blacks as Confederate soldiers; the blacks' docility could ostensibly overcome their timidity. At this juncture, Ruffin intimated a willingness to acquiesce in the project as a last resort.[20]

In the winter of 1864-1865, Confederate military options narrowed as General Sherman captured Savannah and invaded South Carolina while General Sheridan ravaged the Shenandoah Valley in Virginia. John Bell Hood's Army of Tennessee virtually disintegrated at Nashville. In the Virginian theater, General Robert E. Lee's army, plagued by hunger, disease, and desertion, stood as the last barrier to General Grant's march towards Richmond. The loss of Fort Fisher and Wilimington, North Carolina--the chief avenue of blockade runners and the last supply source for Lee's

army--exacerbated the Confederate plight. Noting the numerical weakness of the Confederate army and the continuing recruitment of fugitive slaves by the Union army, the highly respected General Lee pronounced the slaves fit troops and endorsed the scheme of slave-soldiers, including the provision for slave emancipation. Under these circumstances, Ruffin grudgingly relented. He did not relinquish his misgivings about the demise of slavery and the suitability and fidelity of slave soldiers; he simply realized the Confederacy had no other military recourse to avert Union victory.[21]

Ruffin, however, sought to mollify himself by pretending that slaves would fight faithfully for the Confederacy. He professed that the offer of amnesty to all fugitive slaves serving in the Union army would not only entice them to desert to the Confederate army but would also ensure the loyalty of the Confederate slave-soldiers. Additionally, Ruffin flirted with the idea that the administration measure, which limited the number of slave-soldiers, could preserve Southern slavery. Betraying his continuing doubts about the military feasibility of the scheme, Ruffin suggested that twenty to fifty thousand of the anticipated two hundred thousand slaves to be recruited by the Davis government be put in battle as a test case. If, on the one hand, they panicked or deserted, then the South could cancel the program. If, on the other hand, they proved capable and loyal soldiers, then the South could

confine liberation to the limited number of slaves conscripted. These freedmen would die eventually and slavery as an institution would endure.[22]

But Ruffin realized such hopes were illusory. The public discussion of the measure and its implementation on even a limited scale, Ruffin argued, would render the bulk of the slave population, which remained in bondage, so unruly as to subvert the entire system. In fact, Ruffin claimed that the repercussions of the war had gravely wounded slavery already. The North had assaulted slavery by inducing abscondence, stealing slaves, employing black troops, and issuing the Emancipation Proclamation. The South had crippled the slave economy by drafting overseers and undermined the residue of slave contentment by openly debating the merits of the slave-soldier scheme. The mood of a slave awaiting his impending liberation would hardly be conducive to labor discipline.[23] Ruffin's portrayal of slavery as a moribund institution was not so much an abandonment of his illusions about slave contentment as a desperate attempt to reduce the magnitude of the sacrifice. If slavery was a tottering institution, then the slave-soldier scheme would merely deliver the coup de grâce. That he still clung to the myth of slave contentment is apparent in his continuing ascription of slave disaffection to extraneous causes--meddlesome abolitionists, mischievous Republicans, myopic Southerners. That he desperately sought to mollify the blow is evident in his contradictory

rationalizations: the future preservation of slavery via the confinement of emancipation to a limited number of slave soldiers versus the past virtual destruction of slavery by a series of Northern and Southern thrusts. Ruffin was not engaging in lucid intellectual analysis but grasping for any type of psychological assuagement.

The desperate cast of Ruffin's psyche as well as the superficiality of his flirtation with limited emancipation-soldiery is further attested by his avowed preference for outright abolition to partial emancipation. If the Confederacy resorted to the slave-soldier expedient, Ruffin argued, then slavery should be immediately and entirely abolished without any compensation to the owners. Otherwise, the scheme should not be undertaken at all. The Confederacy had too often procrastinated on vital policies, especially those entailing Southern sacrifices. Further delay would be fatal; immediacy was imperative. Additionally, Ruffin pointed out that partial liberation would do greater harm to the pecuniary interests of slaveholders than would wholesale emancipation. The conscription of adult male slaves would leave the slaveholder with the burden of providing for the elderly, the women, and the children.[24] Thus when the survival of the Confederacy hung in the balance, the paternalist Ruffin, who had self-righteously contrasted the benevolence of slavery to the heartlessness of capitalism as well as the cultural refinement of the Southern slaveholder to the crass

materialism of the Yankee businessman, still thought about his pocketbook. Ruffin may have also figured that the immediate emancipation of all slaves would inspire the freedmen in Confederate uniforms with more patriotism than the mere hope of individual manumission after the expiration of their military service. The South, Ruffin must have perceived, faced a painful dilemma: Confederate emancipation and the possibility of Confederate independence or Union military victory and the certainty of Northern abolition. A halfway policy, he realized, would foster the hope of military salvation and slavery preservation while achieving neither. Immediate abolition was the only hope, however slim, of saving the South. If slavery was doomed anyway, let it perish immediately and completely by Southern hands. Thus the proud slaveholder and proslavery crusader yielded to the fire-eating disunionist and Southern nationalist--and became an abolitionist!

Nevertheless, Ruffin's call for sudden abolition was more a matter of his psychological disposition than his rational calculation of Southern interests. The failure of the rational course to subserve his objectives after long periods of trial made Ruffin desperately plunge into the irrational. It was the same desperate mentality which had made him crave for Northern antislavery aggressions, including the election of Lincoln, regardless of the Southern response; which made him eager for secession, regardless of the military consequences; which made him

ready for war, regardless of Southern unpreparedness; and which made him anxious for wartime battles and sacrifices, regardless of Southern losses. Now, likewise, he stood ready to perform a supreme act of self-mortification: he would extirpate slavery, regardless of the social upheaval or even military utility.

The other living classic fire-eater passionately opposed the slave-soldier-emancipation measure as the height of self-stultification. Robert Barnwell Rhett vociferously denounced the proposal as a border-state measure. The upper South, the Mercury argued, could afford to dispense with slavery. Given the suitability of the border state economy to small-scale farming and the relatively small percentage of slaves in the population, abolition would only produce temporary economic dislocations. Thus Governor William Smith of Virginia was in the vanguard of the movement to arm slaves. But the cotton states would face utter economic ruin and miscegenation. Only those who harbored doubts about the viability of slavery or compunctions about the morality of slavery--such as Jefferson Davis--could espouse the slave-soldier project in the lower South. Although he acknowledged the right of any sovereign state to abolish slavery, Rhett warned Virginia and heterodoxical Southerners that South Carolina would never endorse emancipation: "We want no Confederate Government without our institutions. And we will have none.--Sink or swim, live or die, we stand by them, and are fighting for them this day. This is the

ground of our right. . . . We are fighting for our system of civilization . . . We intend to fight for that, or nothing." Though he had bordered on secessionism per se, Rhett, at this crucial juncture, realized that the Confederacy was but a means to preserving slavery. Southern independence was worthless if she could not choose to retain her form of civilization. Indeed, independence without slavery was no independence at all. If the South were vanquished by the abolitionist North which forcibly proceeded to uproot slavery, so be it. But the South should not be the agency of her own degradation. Without the kernel of slavery, the vaunted Southern Confederacy would be a hollow shell. So reasoned Rhett.[25]

At first glance, Ruffin appears to have exhibited the characteristics that Rhett assigned to proponents of the slave-soldier scheme. Although Ruffin had been a "positive good" ideologue, he seemed oblivious to the repugnance of the measure to the proslavery creed. Had he lost faith in the moral propriety of slaveholding? And though he had advocated the permanency of bondage, he observed that the Civil War seriously eroded slavery. Had he not conceded the inevitability of slavery's demise? Moreover, Ruffin had long claimed that abolition would produce economic desolation and ignite racial conflagration in the South. Yet when pondering the merits of the slave-soldier scheme, Ruffin's anticipations of the aftermath of abolition sounded much less dire: "The destruction of our negro slavery system

would be a wound to our economical interests, to refinement of manners, & civilization, which would not be cured & recovered from in a century."[26] He alluded to the evils of a large free black population; he said not a word about race war. Was Ruffin thinking about the border states? Had the fate of Virginia become his sole concern? Ruffin had long worried about the lukewarm nature of the border state commitment to slavery. Had he succumbed to his own fears?

It is tempting to view Ruffin's acceptance of the slave-soldier scheme as a product of disillusionment and demoralization. But this was only true to a degree. He was far more demoralized by the protracted nature of the war and the prospect of dwindling Southern resources to stave off military defeat than he was about Southern slavery. Ruffin never re-examined the morality of slavery during the war. Though he did not probe the relationship between the arming and freeing of slaves and the positive-good theory, his skepticism about the martial capacities of the black testifies to his continuing subscription to, at least, certain aspects of the proslavery dogma. Also, Ruffin still believed that the black was essentially content with his condition. He attributed slave disloyalty to outside forces--abolitionist emissaries, Union generals, Republican proclamations, Confederate policies, and Southern indiscretions. Significantly, Ruffin did not depict slavery in its death throes until he was ready to endorse the slave-soldier scheme. Previously, Ruffin had maintained

that slavery would be more profitable and secure after the war ended; he had deemed the wartime disruptions of slavery temporary and surmountable.[27] Ruffin's failure to include race war as one of the grim results of abolition may have stemmed from his realization that the slaves did not thirst for the blood of their masters. The Marlbourne slaves, Ruffin may have remembered, had concealed his whereabouts from inquisitive Yankee soldiers. But, likelier still, Ruffin's dilution of the dreadful consequences of abolition and his depiction of slavery as an expiring institution reflected his psychological need to lessen the severity of the sacrifice he was making--the sacrifice of Southern slavery.[28] It was not that his devotion to slavery had waned but that his devotion to the South had risen. It was not that his fears of abolition had subsided but that his fears of the North had grown.

For Edmund Ruffin, the greatest catastrophe was not the abolition of slavery but Yankee domination. As the military plight of the Confederacy deteriorated in the closing months of the war, Ruffin became increasingly haunted by nightmarish visions of terrible Yankee rule. Sometimes Ruffin feared that the Northern abolitionists would monopolize the federal government, transfer Southern plantations to Yankee emigrants, and elevate Southern blacks to political and social superiority. He envisioned blacks, including former slaves, controlling all Southern state governments and occupying the most distinguished church

pews. At times Ruffin feared that the Union would adopt General Sherman's policy of deporting Southerners. At still other times Ruffin feared that the North would indiscriminately slay all Southerners--men, women, and children--either by the sword or by starvation. Having long perceived the cruelty with which many Northern soldiers treated Southern slaves, their professed objects of philanthropy, Ruffin could not help fearing what victorious Yankees would do to Southern slaveholders, whom they avowedly loathed.[29]

To say that some of Ruffin's visions of Yankee rule seem tame compared to his old visions of abolition--economic ruin and race war--misses the point. It did not seem so to Ruffin. To Ruffin, the mildest result of Union victory, the physical liquidation of the entire Southern population, was worse than the harshest result of Southern emancipation. Yes, Ruffin considered Yankee annihilation of Southerners preferable to Yankee political domination. Ruffin's willingness to subject himself to political dictatorship extended only to the benevolent despotism of congenial Southrons--not to the hated Yankee foe. Political subjugation to the Yankees after their military triumph, in Ruffin's mind, was slavery itself. And for him, "bondage"--particularly to the Yankees--was worse than "extermination." Yankee rule after Confederate defeat was the ultimate humiliation: enslavement was more galling than death.

The very uncertainty of Yankee postwar policy compounded Ruffin's dread of Northern rule. The North could confiscate plantations and deport slaveholders or respect the proprietary and residential rights of the vanquished; the North could overturn racial relations entirely or merely content itself with ending slavery; the North could starve the Southern people or feed them; the North could slay all Southerners or let them live. It would be entirely her choice. The South would be prostrate, absolutely powerless. The North would have the power of life and death over the Southerner. The Southern planters, former slaveholders themselves, would become the slaves of Yankee masters, not just metaphorically but truly--by virtue of their defeat in war. Northern mastery would not imitate the modern benevolent stewardship of Southern slaveholders; it would be an atavistic regression to primitive times as when barabarians had overrun the Roman Empire. This was the deeper meaning of Ruffin's historical parallel. Had not Ruffin propagandized that slavery originated in military conquest? Here was history redounding upon its interpreter with a vengeance! Ethical appeals would be pointless. The brutal reality of conquest made slavery rational. Had not this been the upshot of the proslavery analysis?

Even if the North treated the South with initial leniency, her mastery would be frightening. The prerogative of cruelty belonged to the master. Indeed, for a man of Ruffin's temperament and suspicions, the forbearance of

Yankee rule would not be an extenuation of its cruelty but its supreme psychological expression. The withholding of retribution would only prolong the slave's anticipation, a form of subtle psychological torture for an impatient man like Ruffin. The fire-eating prophet had, in fact, anticipated such a scenario in his 1856 essays: the abolitionists would have the power to destroy slavery but would deliberately withhold the final blow. Thus Ruffin's worst nightmare of personal punishment by the North was not summary execution but languishing in a Yankee prison. The intrinsic humiliation of bondage, along with the anticipated torments, made Ruffin prefer any fate to Yankee rule. If the Confederacy released her slaves, she could at least endeavor to avert her own bondage. Even if the redemption of the Confederacy by black slaves were a monumental disgrace to the white slaveholder, Confederate victory could avert a far greater disgrace--subjugation by the Northern master. Not being oneself a slave was more important than being a master.[30]

The month of February 1865 witnessed a resurgence of Confederate patriotism. With Grant marching towards Richmond and Sherman penetrating South Carolina, the Confederacy sounded out the North for terms of peace. Some Southerners, such as Senator William Graham of North Carolina, believed the North would permit slavery to remain if the Confederacy negotiated a settlement. But the Hampton Roads Conference in early February ended abortively as

Lincoln insisted on reunion and abolition as the price of peace. The Confederacy had reached its last resort, arming the slaves. On February 10, Mississippi Congressman Ethelbert Barksdale introduced the administration measure authorizing the conscription of male slaves between eighteen and forty-five years of age, with the provision that not more than one quarter of such slaves may be taken from any single owner. Though the bill did not officially alter the status of the conscripted bondsman, it was understood that freedom would be conferred upon the slave-soldier. As the Confederate Congress moved towards limited emancipation, an array of Southern public leaders inspired the people to make a total war effort. Politicians made rousing speeches and journalists penned stirring editorials to galvanize Southern sacrifices to achieve independence.[31]

Ruffin tried to participate in this last-ditch campaign to rekindle the patriotic flame. In late February he wrote a series of resolutions for a local county meeting in Virginia. His last public expression of the principles of fire-eater orthodoxy breathed the spirit of intransigent resistance. Ruffin's resolutions justified secession as a legal and moral right, denounced the North for waging a cruel war against the peaceful South, and declared that a Northern military victory would be an unspeakable calamity upon the South--worse than any enormity since the Dark Ages. Contending that voluntary submission to the North would not mitigate Yankee oppressions, Ruffin called upon every

Southerner to donate all his income and chattel, except what was necessary for survival, to the Confederate treasury. Further, Ruffin called for the military service of all men "able to carry a musket" and the continuation of the armed struggle "to desperation" if required. Gone was Ruffin's concern for the long-term productivity of the civilian sector: it was do or die. Every man would be a soldier. Had the South followed Ruffin's advice, it would have become impoverished, desolate, slaveless. But Ruffin felt that such sacrifices were vital "for protection from bondage to our enemy--rather than which, the speedy & bloody extermination of the whole southern people, men women & children, would be preferable." Ruffin's resolutions were not adopted. But their author made sacrifices consonant with his pleas. He donated most of his remaining cash to the Confederacy; he then contributed the family plate and even parted with his gold watch. The desperation of the Confederate military situation and his expectation of an imminent and dramatic showdown had revitalized his spirit of sacrificial patriotism. His identification with the Confederate cause was reaching a crescendo.[32]

But Southern sacrifices came too late. The Confederate Congress enacted the slave-soldier bill in March. A small number of slaves were recruited in Virginia. But a month later, the Confederacy was dead. Ruffin would not accept Confederate defeat. Eight days after Lee surrendered to Grant at Appomattox, Ruffin hoped that the Confederacy would

continue the struggle from the Southwest. He would go Texas himself to fight the Yankees, if only he were a young man. The outcome of the war, Ruffin had long held, would hinge upon the Southern will to resist. The shame of defeat could be avoided by perseverance. He would not submit. Ruffin was incensed by Lincoln's offer to pardon Southerners who pledged loyalty to the Union: "This offered benefit will be more intolerable than all other undisguised measures of oppression & tyranny." Ruffin was loath to abase himself by taking the oath of loyalty to the United States Constitution; he would not be the voluntary instrument of his own degradation--to the Yankees. He hoped to avoid even the appearance of submission. With unconscious irony, Ruffin bitterly complained that the old-time fire-eaters would not only be forced to take the despicable oath of allegiance to the Union and obey all Yankee directives, but they would have to "play their parts of obedient subjects & slaves to Yankee power with cheerfulness & smiling faces." Feign submission and wait for an opportunity to strike once more for Southern independence--this was his advice to Southern patriots. Ruffin welcomed the assassination of Lincoln with unconcealed glee, but deeply resented his martyrization. But Lincoln's successors were less charitable. The Radical Republicans spoke of harshness. Their policies, Ruffin feared, would promote the ascendancy of the black man. The new president, Andrew Johnson, a Southern Unionist and a commoner, threatened to destroy the

power of the planter aristocracy in favor of the white masses. Ruffin's status and honor stood imperilled by the elevation of his social inferiors.[33]

Ruffin's forebodings of Reconstruction compounded his personal despondency. Checked by his piquant interest in the outcome of the war, Ruffin's melancholy reemerged forcefully at the end of the war. The defeat of the Confederacy removed Ruffin's raison d'etre. He now saw himself as a parasite, as "merely a cumberer of the earth, & a useless consumer of its fruits, earned by the exertions of others"--phrases strikingly evocative of his proslavery literature. Having invested his funds in the Southern cause, he had virtually nothing left to sustain himself. It was too embarrassing to "sponge" off the charity of strangers or the generosity of his children. Circumstances had reduced the once independent master, proud patriarch, and diligent agronomist to the very drone whose enslavement he had unabashedly advocated. What could he do? He decided to kill himself. He wrestled with his conscience to overcome his religious and moral scruples. The deity, Ruffin argued, prohibited homocide, not suicide. The destruction of self was only "cowardly & base" if it increased the misery to family and country. But self-inflicted death which averted injuries to others was not merely permissible but "commendable," not cowardly but courageous. Indeed, the termination of his life would remove an incubus from his children: it would lessen their

expenses and danger from Yankee retribution.[34]

Suicide would also avert the humiliating spectacle of Ruffin's craven submission to the Yankees. The supreme act of self-negation would thus be an act of profound affirmation; it would be the fire-eater's ultimate act of defiant resistance. He would perish with his honor intact. Had Ruffin not espoused his preference for the annihilation of all Southerners to their subjugation by the North? He was merely executing his avowed principles and validating the sincerity of his commitment. Indeed, if Ruffin submitted to his military conqueror--if he chose a debased life instead of an honorable death--then he would exhibit the character of the slave. Thus Ruffin could rationalize his suicide on the grounds of both Honor and Utility. Thus Ruffin could portray his quest for martyrdom as sacrificial, his escape from humiliation as honorable, his flight from responsibility as courageous.

But his last diary entry on June 18, 1865--and presumably his last thoughts as well--did not express such elevated sentiments of nobility. The aged fire-eater poured out his venomous spleen into the daily receptacle of his reflections and passions; then he blew his brains out. Here was Ruffin's final bequest to his beloved South:

> I here declare my unmitigated hatred to Yankee rule--to all political, social & business connection with Yankees --& to the Yankee race. Would that I could impress these sentiments, in their full power, on every living southerner, & bequeath them to every one yet to be born! May such sentiments be held universally in the outraged & down-trodden South, though in silence & stillness until the now far-distant day shall arrive for just

retribution for Yankee usurpation, oppression, & atrocious outrages--& for deliverance & vengeance for the now ruined, subjugated, & enslaved Southern States! ...And now, with my latest writing & utterance, & with what will be near to my latest breath, I here repeat & would willingly proclaim my unmitigated hatred to Yankee rule--to all political, social, & business connection with Yankees, & to the perfidious, malignant, & vile Yankee race. 35

Notes

(1) Ruffin, Diary, I, Entry for Dec. 6, 1858, 253; Ruffin's MS Diary, Entry for Jan. 1, 1864, 3,147-3,148, LC.

(2) Ruffin, Diary, II, Entries for June 22, Sept. 1, 1861, Aug. 15, Nov. 22, 1862, Mar. 4, 1863, 50, 117-118, 414, 496, 593.

(3) Ibid., Entry for Sept. 1, 1861, 119-120.

(4) Coulter, Confederate States, 390-396; McPherson, Battle Cry, 434-435. Both of these historians contend that Southerners who criticized the Davis administration for violating civil liberties were overreacting. Coulter argues that the states' rights position was a mere weapon against Northern antislavery, unnecessary in the homogeneous Confederacy. See Coulter, Confederate States, 401-403. But states' rights had a basis in republican ideology independent of the slavery issue.

(5) Coulter, Confederate States, 387-389, 393; DuBose, Yancey, II, 671-673, 677-678, 682-683, 695-697. Yancey also called for greater public proceedings in the Senate on democratic grounds. See DuBose, Yancey, II, 681-682.

(6) "Secret and Open Proceedings in Congress," "Secret Sessions in Congress," "A Despotism over the Confederate States Proposed in Congress," "Suspension of Habeas Corpus," "The Richmond Enquirer and the Habeas Corpus Act," "Unconstitutional Taxation," "The Mission of the Confederate States," "The First Congress and its usurpations," "The Second Congress of the Confederate States--The Writ of Habeas Corpus," Charleston Mercury, Jan. 31, July 25, 26, 1862, Mar. 12, Apr. 7, 18, 21, Dec. 19, 1863, Mar. 29, June 13, 27, 1864.

(7) Ruffin, Diary, II, Entries for Sept. 17, Nov. 19, 1861, 134-135, 169-171. Ruffin not only sought to restrict voting before and during the Civil War, but alluded to the need of circumscribing white suffrage even if the South won the war. See Ruffin's MS Diary, Entry for Jan. 1, 1864, 3,149-3,150, LC.

(8) Ruffin, Diary, II, Entries for Oct. 1, 1862, Feb. 19, 1863, 455, 581; Ruffin's MS Diary, Entries for Feb. 11, 18, 1864, 3,193, 3,202-3,203, LC.

(9) Ruffin, Diary, II, Entries for Mar. 10, Apr. 2, Nov. 15, 1862, 253, 271, 491; Ruffin's MS Diary, Entries for July 16, 1863, Jan. 11, 1864, 2,218, 3,157, LC.

(10) Ruffin's MS Diary, Entry for Jan. 1, 1864,

3,143-3,144, LC.

(11) Edmund Ruffin to Jefferson Davis, June 26, 1861 (First draft), Edmund Ruffin Papers, SHC; Ruffin, Diary, II, Entry for Mar. 3, 1862, 246; Ruffin's MS Diary, Entry for Jan. 26, 1865, 3,804, LC.

(12) "Journal of the Southern Rights Convention Held in the City of Montgomery, Feb. 10, 1851 and the Address of the Committee" (Montgomery, 1851), 12-13; "An Abstract of the Speech of Hon. William L. Yancey, at the Barbecue at Bethel Church, on the 10th July," Montgomery Daily Mail, July 14, 1858; "Washington Serenade Address," Richmond Enquirer, Sept. 25, 1860.

(13) "SPEECH OF THE HON. R.B. RHETT, delivered at the Mass Meeting, at Macon, Ga., on the 22d August, 1850," Macon Georgia Telegraph, Sept. 24, 1850; "A Letter from the Hon. R. Barnwell Rhett to Governor Adams, on the State of Public Affairs," "The Fruits of Constitutional Construction," Charleston Mercury, Nov. 7, 1856, Apr. 22, 1857.

(14) Although Quitman opposed the popular election of judges as injurious to judicial independence and integrity, he accepted universal white manhood suffrage. May, Quitman, 52-53; Yancey not only endorsed white manhood suffrage but in the 1840s championed the causes of the masses against the slaveholding aristocracy in Alabama state politics. Draughon, "Yancey," 108-110. On Ruffin's preference for British constitutional monarchy to American popular sovereignty, see Ruffin's MS Diary, Entry for Nov. 1, 1864, 3,658-3,659, LC.

(15) Durden, Gray and Black, 51-53, 68-73, 101-106, 147-151, 185.

(16) Ibid., 93-94, 110; "Emancipation of Slaves by the Confederate Government," "LETTER ON THE PURCHASE AND EMANCIPATION OF SLAVES BY THE CONFEDERATE GOVERNMENT," Charleston Mercury, Nov. 3, 19, 1864.

(17) Durden, Gray and Black, 91-92, 184; McPherson, Battle Cry, 835; "Emancipation of Slaves by the Confederate Government," Charleston Mercury, Nov. 3, 1864.

(18) "The Employment of Slaves," Charleston Mercury, Nov. 12, 1864; Durden, Gray and Black, 109-110, 122-123, 127-128, 243.

(19) Ruffin's MS Diary, Entries for Oct. 29, 30, 1864, 3,647-3,650, LC; Mitchell, Ruffin, 232.

(20) Ruffin's MS Diary, Entry for Oct. 29, 1864,

3,647-3,648, LC.

(21) McPherson, Battle Cry, 777-780, 811-821; Durden, Gray and Black, 135-137, 205-209; Ruffin's MS Diary, Entry for Dec. 27, 1864, 3,734-3,735, LC.

(22) Ruffin's MS Diary, Entries for Feb. 13, 18, 1865, 3,837, 3,843-3,844, LC.

(23) Ibid., Entries for Dec. 27, 1864, Feb. 13, 1865, 3,734, 3,836-3,837, LC.

(24) Ibid., Entries for Dec. 27, 1864, Feb. 13, 1865, 3,735, 3,836, LC.

(25) "The Governor of Virginia and his Abolitionism," "Lunacy," "Treason in the Tainted Gale!" "'Jeff. Davis at Sea' Again," Charleston Mercury, Dec. 12, 1864, Jan. 13, 31, Feb. 6, 1865.

(26) Ruffin quoted in Mitchell, Ruffin, 248.

(27) Ruffin, Diary, II, Entry for Mar. 27, 1863, 609. Ruffin did believe that stronger police regulations would be required after the war. See his diary entry for Mar. 13, 1863, 599.

(28) After witnessing the defeat of the Confederacy and the start of Reconstruction, Ruffin again predicted eventual race war in the South. Mitchell, Ruffin, 252.

(29) Ruffin, Diary, II, Entry for Oct. 16, 1862, 468; Ruffin's MS Diary, Entries for Sept. 13, 1864, Jan. 17, Mar. 10, 1865, 3,578-3,579, 3,786, 3,909, Ruffin's Resolutions appended to his MS Diary, Feb. 22, 1865, 3,850, LC; On Ruffin's indictment of the brutal treatment of Southern slaves by the Union army--which, however self-serving, was not without foundation--see Ruffin, Diary, II, Entries for Aug. 26, Nov. 21, Dec. 3, 1862, Mar. 13, May 29, 1863, 430, 493, 502-503, 598, 670-672.

(30) Edmund Ruffin, "Consequences of Abolition Agitation," No. II, DBR, XXIII (Sept., 1857), 270; Ruffin, Diary, II, Entry for May 11, 1862, 300-301, on his preference of hanging to imprisonment. Ruffin would have agreed with the following statement by the editor of the Richmond Examiner, who also reluctantly acquiesced in slave-soldiery after Lee's endorsement: "Will there be any comfort going down to perdition carrying our principles with us intact? The principle of slavery is a sound one; but is it so dear to us that rather than give it up we would be slaves ourselves?" Durden, Gray and Black, 227.

(31) Durden, Gray and Black, 172-173, 186, 192-195, 202-203.

(32) Ruffin's Resolutions appended to his MS Diary, Feb. 22, 1865, 3,850, LC; Ruffin's MS Diary, Entries for Feb. 23, Mar. 2, 1865, 3,851, 3,896, LC; Craven, Ruffin, 255.

(33) McPherson, Battle Cry, 837; Ruffin's MS Diary, Entries for Apr. 17, 25, May 1, 6, 13, June 5, 1865, 3,970-3,971, 3,986-3,987, 3,993-3,995, 4,002-4,004, 4,014-4,015, 4,053-4,054, LC; "Extracts from the Diary of Edmund Ruffin," William and Mary Quarterly, XXIII (July, 1914), Entries for Apr. 19, 27, 1865, 39-41; Mitchell, Ruffin, 252.

(34) Ruffin's MS Diary, Entry for June 16-18, 4,089-4,096, LC; Mitchell, Ruffin, 250-251, 254. Ruffin's suicide was not spurred by a sudden impulse; he had contemplated the deed for some time. In his Jan. 5, 1865 diary entry, he viewed himself as useless septuagenarian. "Superfluous lags the veteran on the stage," he lamented rather melodramatically. He hoped the Yankees would shoot him dead while he gave his "feeble aid" to the Confederacy. Fearing that "so honorable a death" would elude him, Ruffin hinted of suicide unless nature obviated such a recourse. See Ruffin's MS Diary, Entry for Jan. 5, 1865, 3,751-3,753, LC; Mitchell, Ruffin, 248.

(35) Ruffin's MS Diary, Entry for June 18, 1865, 4,098, & "Memoranda for the instruction of my son Edmund Ruffin jr." LC.

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