



---

The Ruffner Pamphlet of 1847: An Antislavery Aspect of Virginia Sectionalism

Author(s): William Gleason Bean

Source: *The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography*, Vol. 61, No. 3 (Jul., 1953), pp. 260-282

Published by: Virginia Historical Society

Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/4245944>

Accessed: 06-01-2019 18:46 UTC

---

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact [support@jstor.org](mailto:support@jstor.org).

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <https://about.jstor.org/terms>



JSTOR

*Virginia Historical Society* is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography*

# THE RUFFNER PAMPHLET OF 1847: AN ANTISLAVERY ASPECT OF VIRGINIA SECTIONALISM

by WILLIAM GLEASON BEAN\*

THE institution of slavery lay heavily upon the conscience and to a lesser degree upon the purse of Virginians for many decades after the Revolutionary War. A consciousness of the incompatibility between slaveholding and the idealism engendered by the revolutionary struggle caused them to question the enslavement of human beings. Certain economic factors strengthened their abolition sentiments. The closing of British markets after the war, the agricultural hardships imposed upon Virginia during the Napoleonic period, and the exhaustion of the soil in the Tidewater after 1815 brought material distress to the Old Dominion and lessened the economic value of slaves.

The antislavery views of Jefferson, Washington, Henry, Mason, and other eminent Virginians from 1776 to 1826 are too well-known to dwell upon. The Colonization Society after 1815 was an effort to solve the racial problem, but emancipation without colonization was unthinkable to its members. Throughout his life Jefferson, worried in conscience in regard to the existence of slavery, always opposed its continuation, and made attempts to pave the way for its extermination. Alarmed in his old age by the national controversy over the admission of Missouri into the Union, Jefferson wrote, April 22, 1820, that "there is not a man on earth who would sacrifice more than I would to relieve us from this heavy reproach [of slavery], in any *practicable* way. The cession of that kind of property, for so it is misnamed, is a bagatelle which would not cost me a second thought if, in that way, a general emancipation and *expatriation* could be effected. . . . We have the wolf by the ears, and we can neither hold him, nor safely let him go. Justice in one scale, and self-preservation in the other," was the dilemma which Jefferson clearly saw and which remained to trouble subsequent generations of

---

\*Dr. Bean is head of the history department at Washington and Lee University. A grant-in-aid from the Carnegie Corporation made possible a portion of the research for this article.

Virginians.<sup>1</sup> In one of his last utterances on slavery, Jefferson, referring to emancipation as one of his "greatest anxieties," did not despair of the ultimate extinction of this institution.

However, the rapid development of the lower South after 1830 with her slave-labor system, the increased demand of that region for the surplus slaves from the upper South, the agricultural renaissance of Virginia in the decade of the 1830's, and the attacks of northern abolitionists checked the growth of antislaveryism in Virginia. In the memorable debate over slavery in the Virginia legislature of 1831-32, called by one scholar the "final and most brilliant of southern attempts to abolish slavery," Virginia took the "road from Monticello," and repudiated the Jeffersonian idea of gradual emancipation and colonization. The failure of the endeavors of such young men as Thomas Jefferson Randolph, William H. Roane, James McDowell, Charles J. Faulkner, Thomas Marshall, George W. Summers, Samuel McDowell Moore, and William Ballard Preston to rid Virginia of slavery was accompanied by the waning of Jeffersonianism and the emergence of Calhounism, not only in Virginia but throughout the South. Slavery remained in Virginia after 1832 as a mild patriarchal relationship between the two races and expressions of antislavery sentiments were thereafter "infrequent, cautious, and usually private."<sup>2</sup>

The persistence of the belief in eastern Virginia, a decade after 1832, of the unprofitableness of slavery is to be found in a private conversation between a Gloucester County planter, a Mr. Clark, and the young tutor of his children, James Baldwin Dorman of Rockbridge County, Virginia. Dorman wrote in his diary, November 9, 1843, that, in a long discussion with the planter, Clark declared that the "evils consequent upon this institution are numerous & deeply to be deplored in both a moral & social point of view & can only be corrected by striking at the root." After relating to Dorman recent instances of gross thieving by his slaves, this owner of fifty slaves asserted that they were "a burden, not a benefit to their masters." Clark also pointed out that his neighbor, John Tabb of "White Marsh," had found the use of slave labor too costly in the raising and spinning of his own cotton. The

<sup>1</sup>Jefferson Himself: *The Personal Narrative of a Many-Sided American*, ed. Bernard Mayo (Boston, 1942), p. 332. On one occasion Jefferson wrote that he trembled for his country when he reflected that "God is just; that his justice cannot sleep forever: that . . . The Almighty has no attribute which can take side with us in such a contest" between freedom and slavery. Thomas Jefferson, *Notes on the State of Virginia with an Appendix*, 3rd American ed. (New York, 1801), Query XVIII, pp. 241-242.

<sup>2</sup>Joseph Clarke Robert, *The Road from Monticello: A Study of the Virginia Slavery Debate of 1832* (Durham, N. C., 1941), pp. v, 53. Randolph and Roane were the grandsons respectively of Jefferson and Patrick Henry; Thomas Marshall was the son of John Marshall.

annual productivity of each slave woman engaged in this task amounted to five and one-half dollars; whereas the annual cost of maintenance of each was twenty dollars, "besides the trouble & vexation of their maintenance & the odium which he [Tabb] incurred with them from the belief that they were tasked hard to make money for him."

After hearing this slave master recite the tribulations attendant upon slaveholding, Dorman jotted down his reflections on such a system:

And yet these men will not liberate their slaves. That lingering feeling in the heart of man which prevents him from relinquishing a right that once abandoned can never be regained; the puerile dread of regretting the step after it has been irrevocably taken restrains them from obeying the dictates of their reason and feeling of natural justice and right. They feel that their slaves are a burden & a nuisance, that they eat up their substance & wear out their farms & yet a childish timidity or a miserable pride forbids them from providing the mandates of liberation. Miserable pride indeed! to be owner of 50 miserable abject beings but one degree above the brute!<sup>3</sup>

These observations of Dorman reflected the views of his native community. It was in western Virginia (west of the Blue Ridge) that an atmosphere favorable to emancipation and colonization lingered on after the echoes of the debates of 1832 had faded away in the eastern part of the state; and this dormant antislaveryism in the West, aggravated by the recurrent sectionalism in the state, erupted in 1847 in Rockbridge County.

The Ruffner Pamphlet of 1847 was a socio-economic denunciation of slavery, penned by the Rev. Dr. Henry Ruffner, President of Washington College, Lexington, Virginia, and signed by a group of distinguished Lexingtonians.<sup>4</sup>

The appearance of this pamphlet at the time when the South was almost unanimous in her opposition to the Wilmot Proviso was a mere accident. This antislavery document had no connection with the national controversy then raging over the exclusion of slavery from the new territories to be acquired from Mexico at the successful conclusion of the Mexican War. But it is an interesting coincidence that while the Virginia legislature in March, 1847, was affirming its opposition to the Wilmot Proviso, which prohibited the extension of slavery into the territories wrested from Mexico,<sup>5</sup> a group of

<sup>3</sup>The Diary of James Baldwin Dorman (Microfilm copy in the McCormick Library, Washington and Lee University). The original is in the Yale University Library, which graciously granted permission to quote from the diary.

<sup>4</sup>*Address to the People of West Virginia; Shewing that Slavery is Injurious to the Public Welfare, and That It May Be Gradually Abolished, without Detriment to the Rights and Interests of Slaveholders.* By a Slaveholder of West Virginia. (Lexington, 1847). This Address is commonly referred to as the Ruffner Pamphlet.

<sup>5</sup>*Journal of the House of Delegates of Virginia. Session 1846-1847.* (Richmond, 1846), pp. 145, 163, 175, 178.

citizens of Rockbridge County, Virginia, was advocating the gradual abolition of slavery in the western portion of the Commonwealth.

The genesis of the Ruffner Pamphlet is to be found in the general discontent current in western Virginia after 1830 and particularly in Rockbridge County in the decade of the 1840's. This brew of sectional discontent was brought to a boil by the refusal of eastern Virginians to harmonize the Constitution of 1830 with the tenets of Jacksonian democracy and also by their unwillingness to provide for an adequate system of internal improvements to meet the growing needs of the people of the western area.<sup>6</sup>

The political demands of the West included recognition of the principle of majority rule, universal manhood suffrage, representation in the legislative bodies based upon white population, and the election of state and local officials by popular vote. The political discrimination against the West, inherent in the existing constitution, had been a long-borne grievance of the small farmers of the Valley of Virginia and the mountainous regions of Trans-Allegheny. Western Virginia contended that the majority should rule, and it rejected the eastern contention that slaves, who constituted no part of the body politic, should add political weight to their masters. To western reformers the revolution of 1776 was not finished but only temporarily interrupted; with western Virginia reduced to political impotence, they had developed a deep antagonism to the ruling class of slave masters of the Tidewater.<sup>7</sup>

In the Constitutional Convention of 1829-30 the eastern slaveholders had refused to relinquish their control over the state; and in the late 1840's there was a persistent demand in the West for another constitutional convention in order to eliminate the political inequalities of the existing constitution. Youthful John Letcher, lawyer and occasional editor of the Democratic *Lexington Valley Star*, was a most vigorous advocate of reform. An ardent proponent of Jacksonianism, Letcher was constantly denouncing the illiberal features of the constitution and demanding its complete democratization. In his paper, June 19, 1845, he wrote that it was "a disgrace to the State that property is made the test of merit. We all feel and know that the West is oppressed . . . that under the present constitution a *minority* actually rules

<sup>6</sup>See the *Valley Star* (Lexington, Va.), August 19, 1858, for an account of the genesis of the Ruffner Pamphlet.

<sup>7</sup>For a general discussion of these sectional grievances, see Charles Henry Ambler, *Sectionalism in Virginia from 1776 to 1861* (Chicago, 1910), ch. VIII; Francis Pendleton Gaines, Jr., "The Virginia Constitutional Convention of 1850-1851: A Study in Sectionalism" (Doctoral dissertation, University of Virginia, 1950); and Charles S. Sydnor, *The Development of Southern Nationalism, 1819-1848 in A History of the South*, V (Baton Rouge, 1948), ch. XIII.

the *majority*." Reflecting the strong, non-partisan feeling of his section that either the constitution be revised or else the state be divided, Letcher pulled no punches: "No man deprecates a division of the State more than we do, but there are other evils which we consider of greater magnitude than a division. If the East are determined to refuse us justice, if they will continue to oppose the call of a convention, then we say let us separate. We have no objection to have the issue made up at once — either a convention or a division of the State with the Blue Ridge as the dividing line."<sup>8</sup>

The *Lexington Gazette* likewise demanded that the East recognize western rights. The editor of this Whig journal, commenting upon the need for political reform in Virginia, declared that western Virginia was "an obscure province" of the state. With an area larger in extent than that of eastern Virginia and with a white population greater than that of the East by 40,000, the West was "permitted," the *Gazette* caustically observed, to have sixty-nine members in the House of Delegates while the East had ninety-seven.<sup>9</sup> While this paper affirmed its belief in Negro slavery and pronounced as unfounded the fears of the East that the West, if granted political equality, would jeopardize the security of slave property, it avowed its opposition to another kind of slavery, "a slavery the most revolting of which the human mind can conceive and against which the people of the West have sworn eternal war. It is the slavery of the white race west of the Blue Ridge to the black bondsmen and free negroes East of the mountains."<sup>10</sup> In an editorial, "Wealth against Men," the *Gazette* inveighed against the political philosophy of the East that "the protection of property is the absorbing object of all government! [that] men are nothing in comparison . . . [and that] the rights of personal liberty and security have inferior claims upon government to property."<sup>11</sup>

This organ of Rockbridge Whiggery asserted its preference for a division of the Old Dominion to the "perpetual deprivation of political rights. Are not our rights as freemen as dear to us, as the property of our eastern brethren is to them? Is not liberty as sweet to the ear as gold?"<sup>12</sup> In early 1846 a committee of the Virginia House of Delegates proposed a bill calling for a convention in which representation would be based on white population and slaves — the mixed basis — the system then in effect in Virginia and to

---

<sup>8</sup>*Valley Star*, July 17, 1845.

<sup>9</sup>*Lexington Gazette*, June 26, 1845.

<sup>10</sup>*Lexington Gazette*, June 26, 1845.

<sup>11</sup>*Lexington Gazette*, September 4, 1845.

<sup>12</sup>*Lexington Gazette*, November 20, 1845.

which the westerners had vowed hostility. Editorializing unfavorably on this proposed bill, the *Gazette* said, February 12, 1846: "We ask for a convention and we are mocked at and insulted by the grant of holding a convention [which] we are assured will never yield one right or one demand of the West. We literally ask for bread and they give us a stone. . . . We call upon the East to consider that they cannot and will not be allowed to retain in their hands the entire mastery of those who constitute so great a majority of the citizens of the Commonwealth; that they cannot expect always a submission to the present state of things."

In 1845 Samuel McDowell Moore, veteran Rockbridge Whig, a member of the Constitutional Convention of 1829-30, and an emancipationist and antinullifier in 1832, wrote a series of articles in the *Lexington Gazette* under the caption, "An Address to the People of West Virginia." He deplored the fact that eastern slave masters sacrificed every interest in the state to the perpetuation and security of slavery, and he declared that the West, with a majority of the white population, possessed the right to a majority in the General Assembly and would take "nothing less. Are we like tame slaves to surrender our rights and to leave our posterity to feel the degraded and infamous station of mere vassals to their eastern lords?"<sup>13</sup> While Moore advocated the division of the state only as a last resort, he admonished eastern Virginians that "coldness, neglect, and barbarous treatment" would alienate the filial affections of the West from the East, and warned them that the wrongs inflicted upon western Virginia were almost unbearable. If the East persisted in its refusal to call a convention and to grant fair representation to the West, Moore avowed, Virginians were faced either with a civil war or with a peaceful partition of the state.<sup>14</sup>

The economic cause of this sectional resentment centered largely around the question of transportation. It should not be forgotten that, as late as the 1840's, the problem of marketing their agricultural products was a serious one to the inhabitants of Rockbridge County and the other landlocked counties of the Valley of Virginia. Two projects had aroused their hopes in this respect: the James River and Kanawha Company and the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad. The first of these, designed to connect by canal the James and Kanawha Rivers, reached Lynchburg in 1840, but work on the extension of the canal from Lynchburg to Buchanan had been suspended. To justify their action, the opponents of its completion alleged that the com-

---

<sup>13</sup>*Lexington Gazette*, August 14, 1845.

<sup>14</sup>*Lexington Gazette*, November 13, 1845.

pany had been badly managed and that the appropriations previously made by the state had been injudiciously expended, but the citizens of the Valley blamed the antagonism of Richmond and Lynchburg for the suspension of the construction of this canal. A committee, composed of representative men of Rockbridge County, petitioned the General Assembly to extend the canal westward. If this request was denied, the petitioners declared "we must seek the aid of foreign capital and a market in a city of a sister State. . . . This is not the language of intimidation or threat, but of sorrow and despair."<sup>15</sup>

Furthermore, Virginians of the Valley had been thwarted in 1842 in their endeavors to secure an extension of the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad southward from Harper's Ferry through the Shenandoah Valley to the Ohio by the Great Kanawha Valley, a proposal favored by the railroad but blocked by Richmond and Norfolk because it would divert trade, its advocates maintained, from these cities to Baltimore. The dog-in-the-manger attitude of east Virginia in regard to internal improvements incensed the people of Rockbridge County, and numerous protests were registered against this attitude.

In a long editorial, entitled, "Western Interests," the *Lexington Gazette* commented upon the myopia evinced by eastern Virginia in its opposition to a system of transportation for the western regions:

The West is not disposed to submit any longer to the complete neglect which condemns the richest and fairest portion of Virginia to the condition of a province, and locks up in her mountains and valleys a vast and inexhaustible store of agricultural and mineral wealth. A continuation of the illiberal policy of the East will force the West to seek markets in other states. Is it not evident that a complete alienation of feeling between the East and the West must ultimately ensue? Those who desire to preserve the integrity of Virginia can afford no more effectual means than good roads, canals or steam, uniting the most distant sections, and bringing the inhabitants into constant and familiar communications. [Rockbridge County], rich in all the elements of wealth and greatness, [is] consigned to cheerless poverty, by the short-sighted, sordid policy which has too long prevailed in the councils of this Commonwealth.<sup>16</sup>

Internal improvement conventions were held in the Valley from 1842 to 1847. In the *Lexington Valley Star*, April 23, 1846, there appeared a non-partisan address "To the People of Eastern Virginia," stating that the con-

<sup>15</sup>*Valley Star*, February 5, 1846. This Democratic journal declared on March 5, 1846, that "the time has arrived for decisive and energetic action on the part of western Virginia to rescue her from degradation and ruin." A correspondent of the Abingdon *Southwestern Virginian* had proposed that western Virginia and eastern Tennessee be formed into a new state to be called the "State of Lafayette." Quoted in *Valley Star*, March 5, 1846.

<sup>16</sup>*Lexington Gazette*, June 19, 1845.

ditions resulting from the lack of a safe and convenient means of marketing the products of Rockbridge County had become intolerable and pleading with the East for cooperation in this matter. "We trust," the final paragraph of the address ran, "that you will decide whether we shall be permitted to seek a market amongst yourselves for the surplus products of our soil, or shall be driven to find one in another State," an intimation perhaps of separate statehood. "Western Virginia" noted that the "Commonwealth has forgotten the acknowledged duty of a parental government to furnish means for the development of the resources of its people. . . . The government of Virginia has suffered the richest portion of its territory to remain hemmed in by mountain barriers, despite the wants and petitions of the people"; and the *Gazette* bemoaned the fact that the dwellers in the most fertile portions of the state were deprived of almost every incentive for "effort by the contracted policy which has characterized the legislation of Virginia."<sup>17</sup>

The most controversial bill before the General Assembly of Virginia in its session of 1846-47 provided for the completion of the canal from Lynchburg to Buchanan. Despite the exertions of the delegates from the Valley, the first vote in the House of Delegates was unfavorable to this proposal, and the *Gazette* gloomily recorded that this reversal had completely stunned its friends, and labelled this defeat as most unfortunate. "Many in our midst," the editorial continued, "are becoming favorable to a division of this good old Commonwealth and we fear our accumulated wrongs will run over and carry the spirit of division into every hut of Western Virginia."<sup>18</sup> At an internal improvement meeting in Augusta County, a resolution was adopted deploring the conduct of "our eastern brethren" in defeating this canal bill and declaring that this action would weaken and destroy the bonds which had bound Virginians together in a "common brotherhood."<sup>19</sup>

Aided, however, by the officials and the stockholders of the James River and Kanawha Company, the advocates of the canal bill rallied after its initial defeat and finally secured its passage, March 1, 1847, with the condition that the extension should be self-liquidating. This victory was celebrated in Lexington by the firing of a grand salute at the Virginia Military Institute and by "three hearty cheers" by her citizens on the public square, "with three groans for Lynchburg."<sup>20</sup>

---

<sup>17</sup>*Lexington Gazette*, April 15, 1845.

<sup>18</sup>*Lexington Gazette*, February 15, 1847.

<sup>19</sup>*Lexington Gazette*, February 25, 1847.

<sup>20</sup>*Lexington Gazette*, March 11, 1847.

Before the passage of this bill, the crescendo of clamor and agitation in Rockbridge County for justice to her interests had reached a climax. In this milieu of resentment and despair the Franklin Society and Library Company of Lexington met, February 6, 1847, to debate the question of the division of Virginia into two separate states with the Blue Ridge as the dividing line. This society, in existence since 1800, constituted a semipublic forum for the discussion mainly of current public issues. Its membership was composed of the leading citizens of the county, including many professors from Washington College and the Virginia Military Institute; it met weekly in its own hall which was equipped with a library.

The subject now posed for debate was: "Should the people of Western Virginia delay any longer in taking steps to bring about a division of the State?" and out of the weekly discussions from February 6 to April 24, 1847 — the most prolonged debate of any topic hitherto engaged in by the Society — came the Ruffner Pamphlet.<sup>21</sup> The principal participants in this discussion were Judge John W. Brockenbrough, Colonel Francis H. Smith, Dr. Henry Ruffner, John Letcher, and Samuel McDowell Moore.<sup>22</sup> Smith, Ruffner, and Moore were Whigs; Brockenbrough and Letcher were Democrats; and all were slaveholders. The proponents of the disruption of Virginia were Ruffner, Letcher, and Moore, all native western Virginians; its opponents were Brockenbrough and Smith, born and reared in the Tidewater.

In the first debate on February 6 the slavery question was injected into this discussion, by whom it is not known, but its injection was inevitable because western Virginians had always claimed that they suffered politically from the selfishness of the predominantly slave interest of the East. Furthermore, some of the disruptionists had antislavery predilections, and all demanded representation in the General Assembly based upon white population, the principal political gravamen of the reformers and one of the western grievances which had provoked this controversy over the severance of the

---

<sup>21</sup>Minutes of the Franklin Society and Library Company (McCormick Library, Washington and Lee University).

<sup>22</sup>Brockenbrough, 1806-1877, scion of a distinguished family of eastern Virginia, was born in Hanover County and educated at William and Mary and the University of Virginia. He then studied law in the school conducted by Judge Henry St. George Tucker at Winchester, Virginia. Brockenbrough moved to Lexington in 1834 and practiced law there until his appointment by President Polk as judge of the United States District Court of western Virginia in 1845. In addition to his judicial duties, he conducted a private law school eventually merged in 1866 with Washington College. A member of the Virginia delegation to the Washington Peace Conference, Brockenbrough was judge of the Confederate District Court of western Virginia during the Civil War. After the war he was instrumental in inducing General Lee to accept the presidency of Washington College. *Rockbridge County News* (Lexington, Va.), November 12, 1936. For sketches of Smith, Ruffner, and Letcher, see the *Dictionary of American Biography*.

state. White representation had always been to the upholders of the mixed basis an ominous word with abolition undertones; they feared that white democracy would endanger their slave-property rights. Apparently the controversial topic of representation receded into the background after the first meeting, and the expediency of abolishing slavery in western Virginia and to a lesser extent the division of the state became the absorbing subjects for consideration.

Dr. Ruffner, known as "long opposed in feeling to the perpetuation of slavery,"<sup>23</sup> was not present at the initial discussion, but upon request he attended the remaining sessions and spoke on two occasions. His important discourse of February 27 became the basis of the Ruffner Pamphlet. While there are no full reports of the speeches delivered in the course of the debates, there are a few subsequent accounts by some of the participants. Judge Brockenbrough later recalled that he regarded the antislavery position taken by Ruffner so extreme that "I instantly & with much warmth replied to it. Its spirit and tone I strongly condemned." Brockenbrough distinctly remembered that Ruffner argued that the partition of Virginia "furnished the only practicable means by which West Virginia could ever be relieved of the plague or incubus of slavery. This institution was represented as the Pandora's box whence all the woes that afflicted the State had issued. It was denounced as a 'social, political, and moral evil' of enormous magnitude, the sufficient cause of the sad decline (as he represented it) of Virginia in all the elements that constitute the strength & glory of a State. In short, I deemed it a most rabid abolition speech & so characterized it; at the same time, of course, using no offensive terms toward one for whose character I entertained the most profound respect."<sup>24</sup>

The Rev. Mr. George E. Dabney, professor at Washington College and a minor participant in this controversy, recounted that Ruffner advocated the division of Virginia entirely on the ground that "Western Va. might be free, Eastern Va. never could. In his [Ruffner's] speech, he waived all complaints against E. Va. for refusing internal improvements. I did not understand him to mention either in speech or pamphlet that it was wrong to hold slavery, which would have been grossly inconsistent with his own practice. Various others & among them Letcher, argued that slavery was a

---

<sup>23</sup>Henry Ruffner to Messrs. Moore, Letcher, &c., Lexington, Va., September 4, 1847, in *Address to the People of West Virginia*, pp. 3-4.

<sup>24</sup>John W. Brockenbrough to William Henry Ruffner, "Thornhill," near Lexington, Va., July 21, 1858, in the Ruffner Collection (Presbyterian and Reformed Churches Historical Foundation Library, Montreat, N. C.). My colleague, Professor Ollinger Crenshaw, called my attention to the collection of Ruffner papers.

great social and political evil, agreeing with your father in that, but dwelling on the subject of legislative neglect which he [Ruffner] ignored for the occasion.”<sup>25</sup> James D. Dorman, who heard Ruffner’s address of February 27, wrote in his diary that Ruffner spoke with an “array of facts & power of reasoning which are indeed irresistible. His speech settled many doubters.” Again on April 10, Dorman noted that the question under consideration was “of deep interest and importance, particularly to Western men. The arguments are based upon the advantages to be derived from an abolition of slavery & from a judicious plan of internal improvements drawing travel & patronage from Western States through Virginia to Baltimore & upon the inequalities of representation in our State Legislation.”

Two members of the Society recorded their observations of a speech by Judge Brockenbrough, the ablest upholder of the status quo. The secretary of the Society scrawled in his minutes, March 6: “Judge Brockenbrough’s speech this night 2½ hours in length and I suppose was as able as could be made on that side”; and equally unsympathetic was Dorman’s notation in his diary of the same date: “Franklin Society. Heard Judge Brockenbrough’s speech of 2 hours. Not much soundness and force.”

Encouraged by the warm reception accorded his discourse by the majority of the members of the Franklin Society, Dr. Ruffner determined to write a brochure urging the removal of slavery from western Virginia. He was thus in a receptive mood when on September 1, 1847, several members of the Society, among them John Letcher and Samuel McDowell Moore, requested him to publish the arguments favorable to this proposition. Ruffner cheerfully agreed to prepare an address to the people of western Virginia, “comprising the substance of the argument as delivered by me, enriched and strengthened by some of the impressive views exhibited by several of yourselves”; and presently the Ruffner Pamphlet made its appearance.

Ruffner, a slaveholder, disavowed at the outset of this document any sympathy for northern abolitionists. “We repudiate,” he stated, “all connection with themselves, their principles and their measures. All that we ask of them, is that they stand aloof, and let us and our slaves alone. One thing we feel certain of, that we can and do provide better for the welfare of our slaves, than they did or ever will.”<sup>26</sup> The only net result of the agitation of northern fanatics, Ruffner asserted, had been the rise of southern extremists, “ultra-proslavery men — called chivalry and nullifiers — who so often

---

<sup>25</sup>George E. Dabney to William Henry Ruffner, Richmond, July 7, 1858, Ruffner Collection.

<sup>26</sup>The quotations and statements of Ruffner, unless otherwise indicated, are to be found in the Ruffner Pamphlet.

predict and threaten a dissolution of the Union. Thus it is that extremes often meet." He was confident that the inhabitants of western Virginia had the moral courage to remove the "plague of slavery" from their area without incurring the stigma of abolitionism. Against northern abolitionists, Ruffner affirmed the right of slaveholding; against ultra-southerners, he averred the expediency of removing slavery from the western portion of Virginia or from any state or section of a state in which the slave population was negligible.

Ruffner disclaimed any intention of interfering with the institution of slavery in eastern Virginia; yet at the same time he demanded that the East acquiesce in the decision of the West to remove gradually her black people. While no slave state so far had abolished slavery in one portion and retained it in another, he saw no insuperable obstacle to such action: free and slave states had existed contiguously and peacefully without evil consequences to either. In actuality, Ruffner claimed that Virginia was half-slave and half-free. To quiet the fears of eastern slaveholders, if his emancipation scheme should be consummated, Ruffner suggested an amendment to the Virginia Constitution to provide for the safety of their slave property against "all unjust legislation, arising from the power or the anti-slavery principles of the West."

Ruffner's antislaveryism was pragmatic, with slight concern over the philosophical rights of the blacks. The language of this emancipation tract was generally moderate and chaste without much bitterness or vituperation toward slave masters, and only a minor reference was made to the moral influence of the slave system. The arguments for emancipation and colonization were based upon statistics compiled from the United States Census of 1840, and Ruffner's major thesis was the deleterious effects, social and economic, of slavery upon Virginia and especially upon western Virginia as compared to the progress manifested in the free states in regard to population, agriculture, manufacturing and trade, and public education.

Ruffner stated that Virginia from 1790 to 1840 had lost more people by emigration than all the original free states together. The natural increase of population each decade had been about  $33 \frac{1}{3}$  percent; yet from 1830 to 1840, 375,000 of her people (304,000 from eastern Virginia, 71,000 from western Virginia) had moved to other states, a number equal to the population of the State of Mississippi in 1840. "It is a truth, a certain truth," he proclaimed, "that *slavery drives free laborers — farmers, mechanics, and all, and some of the best of them too — out of the country, and fills their places with negroes.*" Ruffner recalled that Virginia was proudly referred to as the

mother of states, but he was grieved and mortified at the "lean and haggard condition of our venerable mother. Her black children have sucked her so dry, that . . . she has not milk enough for her offspring, either black or white." Even the Valley of Virginia had already become "slave-sick," and she was spewing out its white population. "What a pity that so rich and so lovely a land, should be afflicted with this *yellow* fever and this *black* vomit."

Agriculture was characterized by Ruffner as extensive and exhaustive with resultant impoverishment and depopulation. The lack of manufacturing was attributed by him to the slave system which kept Virginia "few and poor" in spite of the natural resources with which a "bountiful Providence" had endowed her. The commerce of "our slave-eaten" Commonwealth had decayed and dwindled to a pittance, and slavery had exerted a retarding influence upon the progress of education in Virginia by dispersing the white people and making the indigent indifferent to the education of their children.

The agricultural poverty of eastern Virginia and its consequent depopulation; the dearth of industry in Trans-Allegheny, rich in mines and forests; the lack of canals and railroads; the widespread prevalence of illiteracy — all these woes, Ruffner lamented, were the results of a slave economy.

This Presbyterian divine included, in this otherwise socio-economic criticism of slavery, a moral condemnation of this institution. Although western Virginia had comparatively few slaves, the moral influence of their presence upon the whites of this area was already discernible. Ruffner deplored the fact that the old Calvinistic virtues of thrift and hard work were being replaced by both "unthrifty sentiments" and a distaste for manual labor; industrious habits were giving way to "indolent relaxation, false motives of dignity, and refinement, and a taste for fashionable luxuries."

After the indictment of slave labor as unprofitable and unproductive, Ruffner unfolded his plan for gradually ridding western Virginia of her Negroes before she was overrun by slaves from eastern Virginia. He asserted that with the inescapable decline of the price of cotton, due to overproduction, the southern demand for slaves would cease; and, with the southern slave market closed, he predicted that the stream of slaves from Tidewater Virginia, heretofore pouring into the Gulf States, would be thrown back upon the entire State and would overflow into the slaveless lands of western Virginia. The desolate future of this area, unless an insurmountable barrier were erected against this "stygian inundation," was pictured by Ruffner:

And then, fellow-citizens [of western Virginia], when you have suffered *your* country to be filled with negro-slaves instead of white freemen; when its population

shall be as motley at Joseph's coat of many colors, — as ring-streaked and speckled as father Jacob's flock was in Padan Aram; — what will the white basis of representation avail you, if you obtain it? Whether you obtain it or not, East Virginia will have triumphed; . . . and all Virginia will have become a land of darkness and of the shadow of death.

Then by a forbearance which has no merit, and supineness which has no excuse, you will have given to your children for their inheritance, this lovely land blackened with a negro population — the offscourings of Eastern Virginia, — the fag-end of slavery — the loathsome dregs of that cup of abomination, which has already sickened the Eastern half of our commonwealth.

Ruffner outlined his plan of removing slaves from western Virginia “without detriment to the rights and interests of slaveholders” as follows:

1. *Let the farther importation of slaves into West Virginia be prohibited by law.*
2. *Let the exportation of slaves be freely permitted, as heretofore; but with this restriction, that children of slaves, born after a certain day, shall not be exported at all after they are five years old, nor those under that age, unless the slaves of the same negro family be exported with them.*
3. *Let the existing generation of slaves remain in their present condition, but let their offspring, born after a certain day, be emancipated at an age not exceeding 25 years.*
4. *Let masters be required to have the heirs of emancipation taught reading, writing and arithmetic: and let churches and benevolent people attend to their religious instruction.*
5. *Let the emancipated be colonized.*

This scheme was similar in purpose to the Jeffersonian plan presented in the Virginia Legislature of 1832 by the emancipationists of that period. The ultimate objective of both emancipation proposals was to free Virginia of her black population, and both contained postnati provisions of emancipation and colonization beyond the confines of Virginia; they differed in minor provisions.

Under the proposed emancipation program of 1832, slaves in Virginia born “on or after July 4, 1840,” upon attaining the ages of twenty-five years for males and eighteen for females, would become the property of the State of Virginia. Then as bondsmen of the state, they would be hired out until they had earned a sum sufficient to defray the expenses of their removal outside the limits of the United States. Thus those emancipated could never remain as free blacks; and presumably those destined to freedom could be sold before reaching the ages of twenty-five for males and eighteen for females by their masters, either with or without their parents.<sup>27</sup>

---

<sup>27</sup>Robert, *The Road from Monticello*, p. 19.

The Ruffner proposal showed more consideration for the postnati slave children. They could not be "exported" after the age of five; nor could those under this age, unless with the members of their families. Ruffner declared that the purpose of this restriction was to prevent slaveholders from nullifying the benevolent intentions of the law by selling into slavery those entitled to freedom and old enough to appreciate the privilege designed for them. Slaves under five years of age could be disposed of with their families, but not separately. The emancipated would furnish "their own outfit" by laboring as "hirelings," but the cost of transportation to Liberia would be borne by the people of western Virginia.

A novel feature of the emancipation proposition of Ruffner was the suggestion of rudimentary and religious instruction for the heirs of emancipation. "Thus an improved class of free negroes would be raised up [before their colonization, and] no objection could be made to their literary education, after emancipation had been decreed." Ruffner had earlier expressed a concern in the religious training of "that injured race." Replying to an inquiry of the Rev. Mr. William S. Plumer in regard to the religious education of slaves, Ruffner had written on June 17, 1834, that "here are the people over whom American humanity and religion ought to have shed their tears of sympathy — yes, of penitence too. But we have been so indignant at the fanatical ravings of Garrison and crew, that we have forgotten to wrest from their frantic hands the most dangerous weapon that they can wield against us, either before the American public or before the court of heaven." In this communication, Ruffner suggested that, with the master's consent, oral instructions should be given to the slaves, and he believed that simple doctrines, clearly expressed, would gain their confidence and love. While the religious information imparted to them should be confided largely to the Pauline injunction to slaves to obey their masters, this precept should not be pressed too far, lest the slaves suspect that "you are but executing a selfish scheme of white men to make better slaves, rather than to make them Christ's freemen. If they suspect this, you labor in vain."<sup>28</sup>

To the charge that his plan would expropriate the slaveholder's right of property, Ruffner countered with the axiom that this right, founded on human law, could be abrogated, if the public welfare demanded its abrogation. He asserted that the law recognizing black people as property was a suspension of the natural law of freedom and equality of all men, and that this legal right could be justified only as long as "more evil than good" would

---

<sup>28</sup>Henry Ruffner to W. S. Plumer, Lexington, July 17, 1834, Ruffner Collection.

result from emancipation; but since public injury rather than benefit had resulted from the establishment of slavery in western Virginia, this human law should be changed. Slave masters could still dispose of their slaves under certain restrictions; and in any event Ruffner assured the western slave masters that the removal of slaves from western Virginia would in its general beneficial consequences compensate them for the momentary losses incurred in the effectuation of this emancipation experiment.

In conclusion, Ruffner maintained that eastern Virginia, by accepting his postnati program of emancipation and colonization and also by granting western Virginia a just share of representation in the General Assembly, would eliminate by her action all hostile feeling of the West to the East. Western Virginia would cease to be the perpetual waif of Virginia, and neither would she any longer desire separation nor be disposed to disturb the harmony of the Commonwealth. Instead of aiding the designs of the northern abolitionists, the inhabitants of western Virginia, both from interest and tradition, would oppose the activities of this "morally insane, meddling and mischievous sect."

The abolition plan of 1847 was an old story to Virginians, many of whom had advocated emancipation and expatriation of the blacks since 1815. The failure of the Virginia legislature, as mentioned previously, to adopt a plan of gradualism had slammed the door upon emancipation; and the Colonization Society in Virginia in the late 1840's was in a moribund condition. The Ruffner Pamphlet was the last public effort in the Old Dominion to rekindle interest in this old Jeffersonian dream.

At the time of the publication of the pamphlet Ruffner hoped that its circulation would strengthen the antislavery sentiment in the Valley and in Trans-Allegheny, and he envisaged the formation of an antislavery party in the West to achieve his goal of emancipation. "We soon perceived," he said later, "that most of editors and politicians of the Valley would not embark with us in an enterprise of doubtful success. They objected to our movement as ill-timed, while northern abolitionism was raging and without their concurrence we must fail. West of the Allegheny the pamphlet was better received; but in East Virginia some papers denounced it as abolitionist."<sup>29</sup> When William Henry Ruffner, son of Dr. Henry Ruffner, returned to Lexington in February, 1848, he found ill-feeling displayed toward his father, whose supporters were disheartened and regretted having made the

---

<sup>29</sup>Henry Ruffner to the *Kanawha Republican*, July 15, 1858, quoted in *Valley Star*, August 12, 1858.

"demonstration." Young Ruffner added that his father "was made to feel in many ways that he had bitter & unscrupulous enemies & that there was no peace whilst he remained College Presdt."<sup>30</sup>

Of the two local papers the *Lexington Gazette* alone endorsed the Ruffner Pamphlet, published it serially, and expressed its intention to aid in the "speedy completion of the scheme." It stated, October 21, 1847, that the Ruffner proposal was purely a policy, "a dollar and cent calculation," as well as a means of infusing "life, energy, and prosperity" into the sluggish and almost stagnant business of Virginia. Slavery, still in its infancy in western Virginia, should be checked before it became fastened upon this region by rapid augmentation. To those opposed to its removal, eastern Virginia should be an object lesson of the blight of this institution. "Instead of seeing her once rich and fertile soil, blooming and blossoming as some garden spot," the editor wrote, "they behold waste and deserted fields. Where are the beautiful towns and villages which should dot every few miles of any country? You look in vain for them. A few miserable huts thrown together constitute the greater part of the settlements which meet the eyes of the traveller." The slave owners of these lands, made unproductive by improvident cultivation, relied wholly upon the sale of surplus slaves for their livelihood; and they were the opponents of transportation projects, political reform, and increased taxation, the *Gazette* averred.<sup>31</sup>

The Fincastle *Valley Whig* questioned the timeliness of the publication and dissemination of the Ruffner Pamphlet; to this criticism the *Gazette* replied that "now is the time to act."<sup>32</sup> In its judgment the contemporaneous national excitement over slavery would soon subside as the fanatics, both North and South, did not reflect public opinion of these two sections. A local correspondent of the *Gazette* was enthusiastic about the effects of the ridance of the black population from western Virginia: "[This region] will speedily be filled up with a free, hardy and industrious white population. Multitudes of wealthy farmers will move in from the North, our lands will be greatly enhanced in value, and this will become one of the most prosperous sections of this great nation."<sup>33</sup>

On the other hand, the *Lexington Valley Star*, the mouthpiece of John Letcher, maintained a stony silence in regard to this pamphlet. Letcher refused to contribute to its printing cost, alleging a decade later as justification

---

<sup>30</sup>Diary of William Henry Ruffner, Ruffner Collection.

<sup>31</sup>*Lexington Gazette*, October 24, 1847.

<sup>32</sup>*Lexington Gazette*, November 18, 1847.

<sup>33</sup>*Lexington Gazette*, October 21, 1847.

for his action that the pamphlet contained statements at variance with the speeches delivered in the Franklin Society.<sup>34</sup> The editor of the Whiggish *Staunton Spectator* abstained from commenting on the Ruffner Pamphlet as he, a non-slaveholder, thought the future status of slavery should be decided by the owners of that "species of property and by them it must be settled."<sup>35</sup>

Ruffner had incurred the enmity of others outside of Lexington, although the appearance of this antislavery tract passed unnoticed in the Richmond press. In the last years of his presidency of Washington College, Ruffner was preparing a manuscript on the history of Washington College; and John R. Thompson, editor of the *Southern Literary Messenger*, had promptly and cordially consented in 1849 to publish it in this periodical. In 1852 Thompson changed his mind in regard to this matter and explained to Ruffner the reason therefor: "You have correctly apprehended the cause of the non-appearance of the History of Washington College. . . . The erasure of your name from the List of Contributors to the Messenger was intentional, and resulted from a most unjustifiable attack made upon you by a Virginia Newspaper. I did not think it worth while to inform you at the time. . . . The ground of attack upon you was your opinion of slavery."<sup>36</sup> Although the paper mentioned by Thompson is not revealed, it could have been the *Fredericksburg News* which had doubtless attacked Ruffner for his anti-slavery views. Writing to his son, March 29, 1851, Dr. Ruffner observed: "As to the Fredericksburg News man, let the puppy bark at me. I care not a straw about him."<sup>37</sup> One Democratic politico, Cook of Wythe County, stated in 1858 that when he received in 1847 a copy of the pamphlet, he returned it to the author with the comment of "fool-liar-falsehood-treason."<sup>38</sup>

Attacked by his local enemies, Dr. Ruffner resigned the presidency of Washington College, June 21, 1848.<sup>39</sup> But Ruffner had evidently not abandoned hopes of the formation of an antislavery party in the upper South, for in the summer of 1849 he journeyed to Louisville to participate in the unsuccessful emancipation movement in Kentucky. His activity in this effort

<sup>34</sup>John Letcher to the *South* (Richmond, Va.) June 22, 1858, quoted in *Lexington Gazette*, July 8, 1858.

<sup>35</sup>*Staunton Spectator*, November 3, 1847.

<sup>36</sup>George E. Dabney to Henry Ruffner, Washington College, October 6, 1849; John R. Thompson to Henry Ruffner, Richmond, May 13, 1852. Ruffner Collection.

<sup>37</sup>Henry Ruffner to William Henry Ruffner, Kanawha Salines, March 29, 1851, Ruffner Collection.

<sup>38</sup>*Richmond Enquirer*, December 10, 1858.

<sup>39</sup>The Ruffner Pamphlet was a contributing factor in Ruffner's resignation. Factional animosities within Washington College and the Skinner affair, a bitter squabble in the local Presbyterian Church in which Ruffner played a major role, were other causes of his resignation.

was confined to a written refutation of the proslavery arguments of one Ellwood Fisher of Cincinnati, whose "Lecture on the North and the South" was undoubtedly being circulated in Kentucky by the opponents of abolition. Ruffner's second antislavery broadside was printed in Louisville in the fall of 1849 under the pseudonym of "Justice."<sup>40</sup> In this pamphlet Ruffner revealed himself to be an antislavery polemicist of the first order.

After this foray into Kentucky politics, Ruffner returned to Kanawha Salines, Kanawha County, Virginia, to which he had retired after his departure from Lexington, and remained there until his death, December, 1861.

The motivation of Dr. Ruffner in publishing his antislavery pamphlets was to further the cause of emancipation; his antislaveryism was fundamental and pronounced, and he never publicly renounced it.<sup>41</sup> Not all those associated with the Ruffner Pamphlet, however, were in agreement as to the objective to be achieved by its publication. John Letcher was influenced more by expediency than by deep conviction and impelling enthusiasm for emancipation; his momentary espousal of antislaveryism in 1847 was never to him a passion, but a policy. For traces of any abolition utterances prior to 1847, his editorials in the *Valley Star* will be searched in vain. While Letcher admitted in a few discourses in the Franklin Society that slavery was a "social and political evil," he stressed the "legislative neglect" of the West. Letcher, politically ambitious, recanted in 1850 his previous antislavery sentiments. This recantation was the reflection both of his political aspirations and of the changing attitude of the people of the Valley of Virginia toward slavery in the turbulent 1850's, a reaction against the rising tide of political abolitionism of Charles Sumner, Benjamin F. Wade, Joshua Giddings, and other determined men of this stripe.

In a public debate in the gubernatorial campaign of 1859 with his Whig adversary in Fincastle, Letcher is reported to have said that he endorsed the Ruffner Pamphlet "not through any abolition feeling, but to compel the

<sup>40</sup>*Review of Ellwood Fisher's Lecture on the North and the South*, by "Justice" (Louisville, 1849). A copy of this pamphlet is in the library of the Filson Club, Louisville, Kentucky.

<sup>41</sup>There is no evidence that Dr. Henry Ruffner, unlike John Letcher and Samuel McDowell Moore, ever abandoned his antislavery opinions. During the gubernatorial campaign in Virginia in 1859 when the Ruffner Pamphlet was the burning issue and when Ruffner was regarded by the extreme proslavery men in both parties as a social incendiary, Ruffner never retreated from his antislavery position. Hinton Rowan Helper, author of *The Impending Crisis of the South: How to Meet It*, sent Ruffner a copy of his *Compendium of the Impending Crisis* on July 7, 1859, and asked him for his critical opinion of this inflammatory antislavery document. It would be interesting to know Ruffner's reply. H. R. Helper to Henry Ruffner, New York, July 7, 1859, Ruffner Collection. Observing the developing secession crisis in Virginia in early 1861, Henry Ruffner wrote W. H. Ruffner that "West Virginia will not secede from the Union — though she may from East Virginia." Henry Ruffner to W. H. Ruffner, Kanawha Salines, Va., January 9, 1858, Ruffner Collection.

Eastern portion to do justice to the Western portion."<sup>42</sup> A Democrat, Letcher served in Congress, 1851-1859, and his congressional record as a defender of southern institutions was satisfactory to his Valley constituents, although he was never identified with ultra-southernism. As a candidate for the Democratic nomination for governor of Virginia in 1858, Letcher was flayed by his Democratic foes in the intraparty struggle and also, after his nomination by the Democrats, by the Whigs in the general election of 1859, for his past association with the Ruffner Pamphlet. To the accusation of being unsafe on the slavery issue, Letcher declared in 1858:

[In 1847] I did regard slavery as a social and political evil. I did not regard it then, or since, as a moral evil, for I was at that time, and have been ever since, and am now the owner of slave property by purchase and not by inheritance. At that day, such an opinion was held by a large number of citizens of Virginia on both sides of the Blue Ridge. Since [1847] much more attention has been given to the question; it has been more thoroughly examined in all its bearings, and is much better understood, not only in Virginia, but throughout the South . . . and an impression thus made upon the public mind has resulted in an almost entire revolution of public sentiment. Previous to [1847], I had given very little consideration to it, but after much [study and reflection], I became entirely satisfied, not only that my opinion as to the social and political influence of the institution was erroneous, and I acknowledged my error [in 1850].<sup>43</sup>

As late as June, 1860, after his election to the governorship and after his inauguration, the influential *Richmond Whig* continued to refer to Letcher as "a Southern man with Northern principles."<sup>44</sup> His gubernatorial career, 1860-1864, was a refutation of this imputation.

Another Lexingtonian of distinguished Covenanter ancestry, Samuel McDowell Moore, was likewise subsequently plagued by his identification with the Ruffner Pamphlet. A signer of this brochure and a member of the General Assembly of 1832, Moore was one of the radical emancipationists of this legislative body, and his passionate speeches there savored of the ethical indignation of the rabid abolitionists. He pronounced the right to enslave any man without his consent as an act of "injustice, tyranny, and oppression," and denounced slaveholding as a denial of "those perfect, inherent, and inalienable rights . . . of the human race," Negroes included. Conceding that the slaves were generally well treated and better off than the laboring masses of Europe, Moore still characterized this institution of

<sup>42</sup>*Lynchburg Virginian*, March 17, 1859.

<sup>43</sup>*Lexington Gazette*, July 8, 1858.

<sup>44</sup>*Richmond Whig* quoted in *Valley Star*, June 14, 1860.

bondage as an "intolerable evil." To him, slavery was an abnegation of the spirit of Christianity which taught the "humblest individual to look upon all men as equal" in the eyes of the Creator, and Moore announced that he was prepared to reject any religion which justified slavery.

The deplorably moral effects of this institution upon both whites and blacks were expatiated upon by this ardent emancipationist. Slaves, kept in a state of ignorance, were unable to experience any morally exalted feelings, and they were incapable of discriminating between virtue and vice and of appreciating the high satisfaction afforded to free men in performance of honorable acts. Slavery, which could never actuate its victims with inspiring motives, implanted in their nature the most vicious tendencies of immorality, untruthfulness, deceit, and thieving, and it spread these dissolute habits among the masses of the white population. Moore asserted that, with the impossibility of slaves being virtuous and moral, their vices had "an injudicious influence upon the morals of the free." One social sequel of the existence of slavery, he observed, was the universal indisposition of the white people to engage in the actual cultivation of the soil because they considered manual labor degrading.<sup>45</sup> These antislavery utterances of Moore in the legislative debates of 1832 were far more extreme than the abolition views enunciated in the Ruffner Pamphlet of 1847. In 1846, Moore was accused of desiring a division of Virginia in order to abolish slavery in her western section.<sup>46</sup>

Moore's brood of abolitionism came home to roost in 1860. In the Whig State Convention at Richmond, February, 1860, delegate Woodfin of Buckingham County objected to Moore's name being placed on the Whig electoral ticket in the ensuing presidential election. Woodfin questioned the advisability of choosing as an elector one who had endorsed the Ruffner Pamphlet, since the Whigs in the gubernatorial campaign of 1859 had opposed Letcher on this ground. In reply Moore stated that he had no apology to offer for having signed the Ruffner Pamphlet of 1847, and he boldly asserted that "old man Ruffner is as true a patriot as ever breathed the breath of life. I did sign a call upon him to publish an address he delivered, but by doing so I am not to be considered as favoring the education of negroes (applause). I was in favor of getting rid of negroes in our section, but I did not design to set them free. I wished to remove them by

---

<sup>45</sup>See Robert, *The Road from Monticello*, pp. 20-21, 62-64, 108, for Moore's speeches in the Virginia House of Delegates in 1832 in favor of the emancipation resolution.

<sup>46</sup>"To the Public," letter from Jacob Baylor to the *Augusta Democrat* (Staunton), quoted in *Valley Star*, February 12, 1846.

sale (applause).” Moore assured the members of this Whig assemblage that his section was unflinchingly true to the institutions of Virginia, and he reiterated his previous conviction that southern slaves were “the best fed, best cared for, and the happiest class of laborers in the world.”

Denouncing the northern abolitionists and upholding the southern opposition to any interference with the property rights in slaves either in the states or territories, Moore inquired of this body, “when [will] the act of limitation for signing the Ruffner Pamphlet commence?” The Convention, satisfied with the explanation of his conduct in 1847, selected him as an elector, but Moore withdrew his name as an elector fearful that his past association with Ruffnerism would be a liability to party success, a tacit acknowledgment on Moore’s part of the validity of the contention of Woodfin.<sup>47</sup>

At a Whig meeting in Lexington, March, 1860, Moore further clarified his position on slavery by declaring that his views had been modified since 1847. This erstwhile emancipationist, realizing that earlier conditions which had made emancipation a realistic dream no longer existed, confessed the impossibility of devising a practical plan of emancipation and deportation, which he had championed in 1832 and 1847, and affirmed the belief that slaves could never be freed and remain as such in the slave states. Rejecting the idea of amalgamation as abhorrent to all southerners and convinced that the two races could not dwell together on terms of equality, Moore averred that the system of slavery was a necessary evil by stern necessity.<sup>48</sup>

The changing attitude of Samuel McDowell Moore on the issue of slavery from 1832 to 1860 illustrates the dilemma of many Virginians of this period. In his youthful years, Moore, inspired by Jeffersonian idealism, hoped for a solution of this racial problem by emancipation and colonization; he persisted in this hope in 1847; and only on the eve of the Civil War did he acknowledge the impracticability of this scheme and bow to the inevitability of the slave system. But he never embraced the extreme dogma of many southerners that slavery was a positive boon to both races and that secession was the only course to follow in order to protect this institution.<sup>49</sup>

Ruffnerism was a transient episode in the history of the Valley of Virginia. By 1860 the emancipationists of 1847, with the exception of Dr. Ruffner, had repudiated their antislavery antecedents, and this repudiation was made easier by the abatement of sectionalism in this area in the decade preceding

<sup>47</sup>*Lexington Gazette*, March 1, 1860.

<sup>48</sup>*Lexington Gazette*, April 15, 1860.

<sup>49</sup>Moore, a member of the Virginia Constitutional Convention of 1861, was a staunch unionist.

the Civil War. The Valley, with the political concessions granted in the Reform Convention of 1850-51, with improved transportation facilities, and with an increase in its slave population since 1850, found its interests not so dissimilar to those of the East. In the crisis of 1861, the people of the Valley remained loyal to Virginia, and her contributions of manpower and resources to the southern Confederacy were incalculable.

In Trans-Allegheny, Ruffnerism continued to be a potent force after 1850, and sectionalism remained more pronounced there than in the Valley. The inhabitants of this region, still restive under the continued political dominance of the East and scorning the eastern assumption that slavery was the basic concern of the state, clamored for a program which would recognize the system of free labor and would develop their resources. Two prominent spokesmen and future Republicans of this area, Alfred Caldwell, Mayor of Wheeling, and F. H. Pierpont, of Fairmont, cried out in the gubernatorial struggle of 1859 against the contention that the perpetuation of slavery was of primary importance to Virginia. "It is niggers, niggers, niggers, first and last," Caldwell proclaimed, "and tariffs and everything else must be made to suit the niggers";<sup>50</sup> and Pierpont stated that there were other interests in Virginia than the Negro question.<sup>51</sup>

In 1861 antislaveryism was still an aspect of the sectionalism of the region which was soon to be West Virginia.

---

<sup>50</sup>*Wheeling Intelligencer*, January 5, 1859.

<sup>51</sup>Francis H. Pierpont to the editors of the *Wheeling Intelligencer*, Fairmont, March 16, 1859, Pierpont Papers (University of West Virginia Library).