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## Mississippi Unionism: The Case of the Reverend James A. Lyon

*Edited by John K. Bettersworth*

The record of unionism in Mississippi during the Civil War is exceedingly fragmentary, for those classes who differed with the prevailing sentiment of the day were in most cases either the poor, who rarely committed their grievances to writing, or the wealthy, who shrewdly concealed if they did not destroy all written evidence of their dissent. The case of the Reverend James A. Lyon of Columbus is a fortunate exception.<sup>1</sup> A steadfast opponent of secession, this Presbyterian clergyman remained a unionist to the end, despite all efforts to silence him. It is indeed remarkable that Lyon survived the hysteria of wartime. He doubtless enjoyed, of course, a great deal of immunity by virtue of his cloth; yet other ministers who were of his mind were harried out of the land. The explanation lies, perhaps, in the fact that his years of service and leadership in the community had given Lyon a prestige that could transcend political differences. At any rate, with the exception of a seven-year interruption because of ill-health, Lyon had been building up the church and his reputation in Columbus ever since he came there in 1841 from the hills of East Tennessee.<sup>2</sup> Lyon's reputation was by no means limited to Columbus. In 1861 he went as the delegate from the Presbytery of Tombeckbee to the first General Assembly of the Confederate Presbyterian church, where he "was drawn into a leading

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This article was originally published in the January 1939 edition of *The Journal of Mississippi History*. Some of the language may be offensive because the article is a product of its time and place. The article is reprinted verbatim to reflect the scholarship as it was presented at the time.

<sup>1</sup> [In 1939] the original manuscript of the journal of the Reverend James A. Lyon, from which the [published] selections [were] taken, [was] owned by Dr. Robert H. White, Nashville, Tennessee. Excellent typewritten copies of the journal are available at the Department of Archives and History, Jackson, Mississippi [Z/0176.000/S].

<sup>2</sup> W. W. Lipscomb, *A History of Columbus, Mississippi* (Birmingham, 1909), 105-106.

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part” and by crusading in behalf of slavery reform got himself appointed chairman of a committee to “prepare a manifesto on slavery and the religious instruction of negroes” to be laid before the next assembly.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, the 1863 meeting elected Lyon as moderator.<sup>4</sup>

Lyon’s manifestations of unionism consisted mainly in remarks on “The War” in his journal, where he denounced the “demagogues” who had engineered disunion and set up the Confederate government; in sermons, where he called upon the people to repent their secessionist sins; in a spirited public defense of his son Theodoric against charges of disloyalty; and finally, in encouraging the peace movement at the end of the war. Theodoric, a second lieutenant in the army, had incurred the hatred of the fire-eaters by writing a letter defending the sentiments of his father. The letter became public property, whereupon Theodoric was court-martialed, removed from his command, and transferred to Virginia. His only consolation was that in standing for the legislature during the progress of the court-martial he received one-fourth of the votes cast in Lowndes County, and a conservative, James M. Arnold, was actually elected.

While it is dangerous to generalize on the basis of the still incomplete evidence of Mississippi unionism, one is tempted by a reading of Lyon’s journal to make several observations, for whatever they may be worth. First of all, the diary sheds light on the peace or reconstruction party that was beginning to take shape in the 1863 elections. That the legislature of 1863 was strongly Whiggish has been evident enough from the policies it followed,<sup>5</sup> but it is upon such revelations as those of Lyon that we have to depend to learn the details of the canvass that brought victory to the conservatives.

In the second place, one asks whether there is any significance in the fact that practically all of the Mississippi clerical dissent that has been recorded was among Presbyterians. It was a Presbyterian, John Aughey, whose unionism sent him in flight from his churches in Attala and Choctaw counties to Tishomingo County, only to be captured and held

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<sup>3</sup> Lyon’s Journal, 23-24. The report, prepared by Lyon for the 1863 meeting, called for a thorough-going revision of the slave codes, particularly insofar as Negro education and family relationships were concerned. Although the report was read in the assembly and was published in the *Southern Presbyterian Review*, XVI (1863), 1-37, its sentiments were too radical for the times, and the assembly never got around to adopting it. Lyon’s Journal, 56-59, 96-98.

<sup>4</sup> Lyon’s Journal, 24.

<sup>5</sup> A conservative became speaker of the House of Representatives and the legislature chose J. W. C. Watson, an old-line Whig, as Confederate senator. *Mississippi House Journal*, 1863, pp. 85, 167-171.

prisoner by the Confederates until he could escape to the Federal lines.<sup>6</sup> It was also a Presbyterian, James Phelan of Macon, who for his opposition to the Confederacy was forced to resign and retire to the country, where the second attempt on his life proved fatal.<sup>7</sup> Another, the Reverend Gallaudet of Aberdeen, escaped to the North.<sup>8</sup> If there was any connection between unionism and Presbyterianism it might at least partly be explained by the fact that of the three largest denominations in Mississippi, the Presbyterians were the only one that had not suffered a sectional cleavage before the Civil War began. Many a Presbyterian clergyman in the South was Northern by education if not by birth, and there had been a constant interchange of both ministers and ideas between the two sections. Lyon himself had lived for a time in Saint Louis.<sup>9</sup> Here, then, was a church that had preserved much of its national character to the end. If we seek further explanation, we may find it in an open-mindedness on the whole question of slavery and secession that would naturally obtain in a church that was essentially the church of the educated, liberally inclined urban communities. Finally, as an aristocratic church, it is reasonable to assume that the Presbyterian church would be very likely to reflect the attitude of those wealthy classes in Mississippi who had opposed secession from the beginning.

The Lyon journal covers the years from 1861 through 1870. The entries were not made regularly, except upon Lyon's birthday and at the end of the year. In nearly every other case the excuse for writing was an occurrence of more than everyday importance, and in the narration the trivia with which a daily record becomes cluttered are missing. The method used is almost entirely retrospective, and even though Lyon may have at times been guilty of wishful remembering, the result is at least concise and coherent.

1861

[SERMON ON THE CONDITION OF THE COUNTRY,  
January 4, 1861]

. . . Tho my audience was very large the church being crowded, yet

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<sup>6</sup> John H. Aughey, *The Iron Furnace; or, Slavery and Secession* (Philadelphia, 1863). A revised and enlarged edition of this book was published under the title of *Tupelo* in 1888 at Lincoln, Nebraska, and in Chicago in 1905.

<sup>7</sup> Aughey, *Tupelo*, 69-70.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 72.

<sup>9</sup> Lipscomb, *A History of Columbus, Mississippi*, 106.

those whom I hoped most to influence by it staid away. I however had the sermon published in “The True Witness & Sentinel” of New Orleans (Jany 26<sup>th</sup>) and distributed a large number of extra copies among the people—The sermon or rather I was spoiled by an anonymous writer in the Mississippi Democrat of this place—wh[ich] enabled me to demand of the editor that the Sermon should be published in the same paper. This was done, but very reluctantly—and with a long pretended Editorial, doubtless by the same unknown author, criticizing & spoiling the Sermon & me—I have reason to believe that the sermon has done and is doing great good—in preparing the minds of the people for another question that is not very far ahead I hope—that of *Re-Union*.

### MY CONFEDERATE FAST-DAY SERMON

Thursday the 13<sup>th</sup> of June was appointed by the provisional president of the “Confederate States” in obedience to the unanimous request of the “provisional Congress” of the same as a day of “humiliation fasting & prayer” before Almighty God in the view of the Calamitous Condition of the Country—In obedience to this request I prepared & delivered a Sermon on the Subject—“The Crisis in the Light of providence.” I devoted a long preliminary to this Sermon in enveighing against letting down and prostituting the pulpit, to a level with a low and corrupt hustings which has been done to a most lamentable extent by nearly all the pulpits in the land not excepting some of the first presbyterian pulpits!—This Sermon was published entire in “The True Witness and Sentinel” published in New Orleans July the 6<sup>th</sup> 1861—I have received many thanks from some of the most inteligent [*sic*] men in the country for this Sermon—In it I maintained the same position that I took in my fast day sermon of Jany the 4<sup>th</sup> 1861—

1862

### MY FAST DAY SERMON FOR FEB: 28, '62

. . . . I had no comfort to give the people—no flattery for them or their rulers—Their *Sins*, their violations of God’s law but nothing else had brought the sword upon the land—and the only hope was in repentance—In depicting the evils of the war—three gentlemen, viz E. P. Odeneal, Abm. Humphries, and James Turner left the house, in a way that showed that they were offended—but I could not change my tone—My text was the 1<sup>st</sup> verse of the 58 chapter of Isaiah—“Cry aloud, Spare not &c”—and

I endeavoured to act up to the spirit of my text—I did not know what effect the Sermon might have but I now have reason to believe that it did good—It certainly convinced the people that I will not be compelled to preach “Smoothe things”—

### THE CIVIL WAR

Hitherto I have not made any entry in this journal relative to the dreadful Civil War that has been raging between the two sections now for nearly two years. The fact is it was appalling, so dreadful, so heart-sickening and so astounding in its developments that I had not the heart to write about it in the first place—and felt conscious that I had not the ability to transfer my views of it in anything short of a volume. I have felt astounded ever since it commenced, and before the actual beginning of hostilities—at the amazing developments made by it—which to portray would require me to speak of its *remote* causes, which I trace not so much to *slavery* as to the haughty *spirit* generated by slavery—of its immediate causes to be found in the passing of political power out of the hands of our party into those of another of the delusions palmed off upon the people in both sections—of the fallacies studiously inculcated as truths—of the efforts made to convince the people that there would be no war and *driving* and hissing them into submission to Secession—and after the war commenced the thousand efforts & appeals and devices resorted to, to deepen hatred and create the war spirit and keep it up—and then after a certain degree of progress had been made—to speak of the enormous lengths and strides in tyranny and absolute despotism on the part of demagogues now become bold—in dividing the country, in appointing themselves law-makers, generals, Rulers, Judges &c—in taxing the people—making war—siezing [sic] property drafting, conscripting, shooting, hanging burning, destroying &c &c! The tameness with which the masses submit to it—The assiduity with which the spirit of hatred is cultivated by the demagogues, and the efforts to instill it into the minds and hearts of the people—the extreme reluctance that the people have [been] manifesting from the beginning to go into this war—nothing but . . . the deep laid schemes, the violence and the deception of the demagogues could ever have precipitated them into a war, so distasteful, and so ruinous. And nothing but the iron manacles that now bind them could keep them in what their souls hate—

But after all there is another view of the subject—This war however dreadful, and criminal on the part of those who have been instrumental

in bringing it about, was necessary, to the body politic as medicine is sometimes necessary to the body physical. The disease of pride, vanity, ingratitude, selfishness, infidelity, atheism, *cruelty, unfaithfulness*, and all the other national diseases consequent upon unchecked prosperity, needed to be purged out by the chastisement of war!—

How the war will end I cannot foresee—We have to suffer yet more however before the clouds of God's just wrath are rolled back—and the sword of his Justice is sheathed—It may end by compromises [*sic*] and final reconstruction—but all is dark at present—equally dark I imagine on both sides. (Decr. 31, 1862)

1863

**MY 49<sup>TH</sup> BIRTH DAY, APRIL 19<sup>TH</sup>**

My custom is to make an entry in this my journal on each successive birth day. Since the last it has seemed like one long & most oppressive night-mare, on account of the horrid civil war still in progress—How we are able to attain peace is to me inexplicable [*sic*]. I do not see how our rulers, and demagogues can make peace—I have no hope from foreign intervention—I see no end to the war except in absolute subjugation on the part of the South, unless the people rise in their majesty and take the matter into their own hands, and compromise by an honorable and just reconstruction.

**THE COURT MARSHALL [*sic*]**

I was earnestly opposed to Secession not only as a great political heresy, but as an egregious blunder that would bring war and ruin upon the land. In my warnings and expostulations, I faithfully predicted all the calamities and ruin that have followed in the trail of that rash, wicked and precipitate measure. Just in proportion as my predictions come true, and the sad facts verify all that I foretold, in that degree I am denounced by those who were chiefly instrumental in bringing on the ruin. Hence these miserable men, have been accustomed to defame me as an “Abolitionist,” “Black-republican,” “Lincolnite,” “Unsound,” “Traitor” &c &c—for as the ruin and distress accumulate, the people remind them that I had warned them against their reckless madness in bringing on the war.

It has been my opinion from the beginning, and is so still, that unless God interposes by his providence, in some way, which human logic cannot deduce, and human sagacity cannot scrutinize, there can be but one result

to the contest—and that is, that the *stronger*, must eventually overcome the *weaker* power. All the signs of the times point to this result. The only escape from it that I can perceive is to encourage the Conservative peace party North to hope that when Lincoln's Abolition policy is overthrown, that we the South will go up to a Convention of all the states there to discuss the causes of our troubles, and to agree upon a just and honorable settlement:—which doubtless would result in the re-establishment of a united government under our Constitution. Infinitely better [to] pursue this policy, [than] to continue a hopeless resistance by the sword only, until we are subjugated, and are compelled to submit to the ignominious terms that may be dictated by the Abolitionists.

An opportunity for the publication of the aforesaid views was providently offered, by the Hon. Scott Thompson who addressed to me a letter from Crawfordsville Miss. dated August 12<sup>th</sup>, 63, stating that there was a report extensively circulated that there was [a] "Reconstruction party" in Columbus numbering several hundred of which I was "the *head* and *front*"—He requested that I should reply "*in extenso*" for publication. This letter gave me some uneasiness from the fact that I was represented as being at the head of a *Political Party*, whereas I never took any active part in politics in my life, and never expect to, so long as I entertain my present views on the subject of ministers of the Gospel adhering rigidly to their holy vocation, and leaving all secular matters whatever to secular men. And moreover the rabid war men have attached to the meaning of the word "Reconstruction" however unjustly, that of "submission" to Lincoln and to Abolitionism which I exceedingly deprecate [*sic*]—Not desiring to have my name attached to a political paper as its author to be circulated through the public prints, I handed the Scott Thompson letter over to my son Theodoric C Lyon, whose political views correspond with my own; and who was better able to answer the letter, than I was myself.<sup>10</sup>

Accordingly he answered the letter on August 17<sup>th</sup> setting forth his views as to the best policy to be adopted in the present conjuncture of affairs. This letter was read, by Mr. Thompson, to divers persons in his neighborhood—When some one we know not precisely who, but suppose it was Majr. Ed. Gregory, reported the letter to the provost Marshall [*sic*] in this place (Columbus Miss) as a disloyal treasonable document,

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<sup>10</sup> That Theodoric had been a unionist from the beginning of the war is evident from the fact that his father mentioned early in 1861 the publication of an union address by Theodoric in the *Nashville Republican Banner*. Theodoric did not, however, evade military service. He joined the Lowndes Riflemen and soon became a second lieutenant. *Lyon's Journal*, 5, 36-37.



whereupon the provost Marshall [sic] sent for the letter, which was given up to him. Altho we intended to have the letter published, yet this fact, and the rumors relative to its character, made us the more anxious for its publication in order that it might speak for itself. Accordingly, with some difficulty, my son, procured the publication of the correspondence under the head of “*political correspondence*” in “*The Southern Republic*” Sept. 1<sup>st</sup>. 63. A little weekly sheet published in Columbus Miss by J. D. Williams.

The rumors that had been afloat relative to the character of the letter whetted the public curiosity exceedingly to see the letter. The letter not only sets forth what we deemed the wisest and safest policy to pursue in the present crisis—but it lays at the door of the reckless politicians and demagogues the responsibility for all our troubles, and holds them strictly accountable for the ruin into which the country is plunged. This of course excited their wrath. And there happened to be an unusual number of such demagogues and their minions in Columbus when the letter came out. Amongst this class may be mentioned W. S. Barry, Isham Harrison, Beverly Mathews, Jim Blair, Ed Gregory &c. They first tried to prevent the letter from being published—next they endeavored to turn it into ridicule—[lest] they began to smell *treason* in it—and after they had got up as much excitement as possible, they called a public meeting at the Court House, which was largely attended, both by men and women, where speeches were made by the Hon. W. S. Barry, Genl. Gideon J. Pillow, Majr. Ed. Gregory, Jim Blair—all of these were intoxicated) Anthony Whitefield (a lad) Old Majr. Blewitt (a silly old dotard, and a baptist, who has entertained a grudge against me for the last twenty years for a sermon I once preached showing that “Baptist Immersions were invalid”)—and Wm Witherspoon who spoke a few words in favor of Theodoric.<sup>11</sup> This meeting was a “ridiculous farce,” as afterwards pronounced by some that

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<sup>11</sup> William S. Barry, who appears to have been the leading spirit in the movement against Lyons, was one of the outstanding Democratic politicians of the secession era. A lawyer and planter, he entered politics early in his career. In 1849 he was elected to the Mississippi House of Representatives, and in 1853 he entered the House of Representatives of the United States. As president of the Secession Convention of January 1861, Barry had taken an aggressive stand in favor of disunion, and in a speech to the convention he had expressed his attitude toward dissenters by recommending that they be subjected to “the stiff limb and the strong rope.” H. S. Fulkerson, “A Civilian’s Recollections of the War Between the States,” MS., ch. I, p. 11. After the adjournment of the convention, Barry served as delegate to the convention at Montgomery and member of the Provisional Congress, resigning his seat in 1862 to enter the army. Goodspeed, *Biographical and Historical Memoirs of Mississippi* (Chicago, 1891), I, 353. Major Thomas Blewett, however “silly” he was, was a pillar of the Baptist Church and a leader in civic affairs. The Blewett House, a hotel built by him, became a famous rendezvous of state political leaders. Lipscomb, *A History of Columbus, Mississippi*, 118-119.

took a leading part in it. It hurt no body except those who got it up and took part in it.

But the assailants were not satisfied with the volley of abusive and scurrilous words heaped upon us. There happened to be here as the commander of this District a weak, old, yankee granny of a Brig'r Genl. Dan'l Ruggles, who on account of his being a blue nosed Yankee, thought that he must be extra loyal to the South—and consequently has made himself exceedingly odious & detested, by his arbitrary and tyrannical acts of military power, in arresting not only soldiers & officers, but ladies and gentlemen, and even ministers of the Gospel. This persecuting clique of Demagogues went to this convenient tool, and by pressure, prevailed upon him to arrest my son, which he did after considerable hesitation on the 4<sup>th</sup> of Sepr.

This however did not impose any obstacle in the way of my son's answering in public meeting, the misrepresentations & caricature of his letter, and the charges false and damaging made against him by the drunken speakers at the farcical meeting. This he intended to do. And as there was a public meeting in the court house on Saturday the 5<sup>th</sup>—his purpose was to give notice at that meeting that he would in due time pay his respects to his assailants, and defamers. But just before the hour for the meeting, Genl Ruggles issued an order that he should not attend *public meetings* of any kind! Accordingly he was prevented from attending the meeting—But I myself attended the meeting, and at the close gave the notice which he himself would have given had he been there. Just as I had finished giving the notice, Majr Ed. Gregory, sprang up and began to cry, "*Treason, treason, treason!!*"—Green T. Hill, a stage driver chimed in—and Wm. S. Barry hissed them on! I stood calm, cool, and collected, my hat in one hand my cane in the other—vituperative abuse was heaped upon me by Gregory and Hill—I replied calmly & firmly in a conventional tone—When after-a-while they became exhausted [*sic*] and I think, ashamed, or at all events confounded!—And thus this disgraceful scene ended.

That evening old Ruggles confined Theodoric to his premises—and next day sabbath, he put under "close arrest" and so remained for two weeks, until Majr Genl Hardie [*sic*] arrived here & released him from "close arrest."

On the following Tuesday Sepr 8<sup>th</sup> I started to Moreton [Morton] Miss. the Head Quarters of the Department to see Genl Hardie [*sic*], and to procure a speedy and an open trial in Columbus. This the Genl

promised—I there made the acquaintance of several of the Staff—Officers of Genl J. E. Johnston, viz Col. Ewett, Col Lamar, Major Eustace, and then I joined Dr. David M. Yandell.

Genl Hardie [sic] appointed Brig'r Genl Buford, Col. Lowry, Col. Ferril, Col. Holt, Col. Scott, Col. Crossland, and Col. Goodwin, as the Court Marshall [sic] to try the case: and set Monday the 21<sup>st</sup> of Septr as the time to commence. Poor Col. Goodwin however was in the court but one day—He came here sick—was taken to his bed on Tuesday and died on Friday, leaving a wife and some six little children in North Alabama.

On Monday evening, the day that the trial commenced, George Miller, whom Theodoric defeated for the Lieutenancy last winter—and who during the contest for that office, preferred [*sic*] a batch of charges against him—but which batch of charges were sent back to him from “Head Quarters” as impertinent—this aforesaid Geo. Miller, aided by the aforesaid Hon. W. S. Barry, took up his batch of charges to the aforesaid Brig'r Genl Ruggles, who appended them to the charges growing out of the Thompson Letter! This of course complicated his trial considerably, and protracted it for nearly two weeks in length. The charges in the Miller batch were vile and low. But they broke down on every one. The clique did their very best, by every means fair and foul—by false-swearing & by outside pressure to procure a conviction. But my impression is that they have failed.

Saturday the 3d of October was set for the final hearing of the case. But little time was allowed to prepare, after the evidence was closed. Theodoric sat up nearly all of Friday night in order to be ready to make his defence on Saturday morning—The Hon George R. Clayton, was his legal adviser & assistant in the case. At 9 o'clock in the morning the court was in session. Mr. Clayton read his defence, summing up & commenting upon the evidence mainly. His argument on the law and the evidence seemed to be absolutely conclusive. After hearing it I did not see how it was possible for this court not to render an honorable acquittal from all the charges. Next day Theodoric read his part of this defence, dwelling mainly upon first principles, and applying them to Mr. Thompson's letter—He did not touch the vile Miller batch. His argument was abler, so far as the foundation principles were concerned than Mr. Clayton's.

The Judge Advocate, Capt Pool, then followed him with a vile and silly rigmarole, which he says was prepared for him by council! Judge Clayton consumed three quarters of an hour in reading his part—Theodoric one hour, and the Judge Advocate about a half an hour. The court was then

cleared, and the judges made their decision. But what that is, we do not yet know, as it has to be sealed and sent up to Head Quarters for approval or disapproval, before it is made known. What may have been the effect of the pressure brought to bear upon the court, by the mad clique, I can not tell: but I feel sure that if an unbiased judgement is exercised, that nothing more serious than a reprimand will be the verdict. We are waiting with some degree of anxiety for the publication of the decision. Let it be however what it may, I feel sure that a just and wise providence will order it for the best—for the good of them that love God, and for the eventual prosperity of Zion.

### MY SON A CANDIDATE FOR THE LEGISLATURE

In proportion as the fires of persecution raged fiercely against my son, in that degree did the purpose of his friends grow strong to run him as a Candidate for the Legislature. Accordingly he received letters and requests from different places and parties, to allow his name to be announced as a Candidate to represent the County in the next Legislature. But in proportion as this feeling manifested itself the rage of the persecutors increased. And they swore that no Candidate should run on the principles advocated in the Thompson Letter—that he should be arrested—that a party formed on those principles should be put down with bayonets—that the polls should be guarded, and that the people should not vote for such a Candidate!!

Accordingly when the name of Theodoric was about to be announced, certain men went to the printer, and warned him that if he did announce his name, his press would be destroyed by mob violence!—and succeeded in so alarming the printer, that, altho his sympathies were decidedly with Theodoric, yet he was afraid, and declined to announce his name! This despotism of Mob violence made my son and his friends the more determined that he should be a Candidate. But the difficulty was to get his name before the people. The printer was afraid to publish either *circular* or *tickets*! But his friends managed to get circulars and tickets, but only three days before the election, whilst at the same time my son was undergoing his trial. These circulars were pulled down as fast as they were put up—and so successfully did his persecutors proceed in the work of pulling down & brow-beating that not half the people in the county knew on the day of the election that he was a Candidate. Terrorism was brought to bear at some of the boxes, and especially in Columbus, where bullies stood around the box, and “spotted the tickets”—that is

marked on the ticket the number of the voter, so that his ticket could be identified. This deterred a large number from voting for Theodoric that would otherwise have done it!—But no blood was actually shed. The vote cast in the town & county notwithstanding these adverse circumstances was respectable—he getting in town 74 votes, and altogether 156, in the county, which was one fourth of the entire vote cast. Mr. James M. Arnold who was known to hold to Conservative principles was elected by a decided majority, which showed the triumph of his principles advocated by Theodoric and proved that he too would have been elected if he had had a fair chance. But as it was there was a decided victory gained—He was a candidate—he ran—he was voted for—a party was formed—and his principles triumphed in the election of J. M. Arnold.

### THE DECISION OF THE COURT MARSHALL [sic]

The decision of the Court Marshall [sic] has come to hand. We are amazed at the result. Instead of an honorable acquittal, as we felt certain justice required—or a simple reprimand as the utmost limit to which they could go, influenced even by the pressure of the demagogues, it is one of the greatest severity and out-rage—It is undoubtedly a *sacrifice to policy*. He is cashiered—conscripted and reduced to the ranks—separated from his regiment and sent to some Regiment in Virginia under guard—and deprived of all his back pay—amounting to about \$700. And all this severity is on account of the “Thompson letter,” as the court acquitted him on the “George Miller batch of charges”!—This is astonishing and unaccountable in any other view of the case than that the decision was made for the sake of *policy*, and not in accordance with the law, testimony or conscience. An acquittal would have been regarded by the public, as they doubtless supposed, as decision in favor of so-called “*Reconstruction*.” Hence the Condemnation. But the Lord reigns and it will yet all come out right,—Truth will eventually triumph.<sup>12</sup>

### TROUBLE IN THE CHURCH

Two or three rabid men in the chh. and two or three violent men out

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<sup>12</sup> Theodoric, immediately upon arriving in Virginia, took his case before the War Department, which, according to the journal, recommended to Davis that the whole proceedings be set aside; but the president “had been tampered with by letters, especially from Mississippi,” and would not act. The War Department did, nevertheless, permit Theodoric to return to his own company in Mississippi where he continued to seek “relief,” this time through Senator J. W. C. Watson. The war had ended before anything further could be done. Lyon’s Journal, 86-88.

of the church, but directly or indirectly connected with the congregation, have been exceedingly outraged because I did not agree with them in their “blood and thunder” politics, and preach and pray (on fast day occasions) to suit them.<sup>13</sup> These men, in the church, were Bartley Barry, (an Elder) Abram Humphries,<sup>14</sup> and E. P. Odeneal; and out of the church, but indirectly connected with the congregation, Col. W. S. Barry and Jim Blair, two very notorious and very bad men. W. S. Barry is a man of gifts and cunning, and is an accomplished, and perfectly unscrupulous demagogue, besides being a drunken scoffer and debauchee. He has been a great favorite with the democratic party in the state, and is very ambitious to be at the head of political affairs. Besides these there is another member of my church, by the name of Frank G. Baldwin, who, aside from the violence of his political feelings, has failed in all the ends of life. He is the grand son of a distinguished presbyterian minister of Georgia, who in the past age stood high. He himself was educated with the view to the ministry—but back-slid—became addicted to card-playing and idleness—married; lived on his wife’s property . . . and all his affairs are at “loose ends.” He reconnected himself with the chh some years ago—and thought again of preaching but received no encouragement from me. It has so happened however that with him I have never been a favorite. These men have been muttering ever since the war commenced because I was not with them in their violent views and measures; and especially on fast day occasions I would persist in preaching what I believed to be the *truth*, which to them was not “Smoothe things.” When the “Scott Thompson Letter,” (the history of which is given in a preceding entry) was published, the rage of these men know [sic] no bounds. The arch demagogue, W. S. Barry, felt that the scepter of his reign was passing away. The fact is he was one of the sitters for the picture of the demagogues who brought on the war, so graphically drawn, and so scathingly lampooned in the aforesaid Thompson letter. He therefore felt that he must bestir himself, as his days were numbered. Hence the *arrest, trial &c* narrated above in a separate notice, but as long as I was here, and continued to exert the great moral influence that I did, which was in all things antagonistic

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<sup>13</sup> An apocryphal but amusing anecdote that has come to the editor’s attention recounts that Lyon ambiguously prayed for “the success of the armies” without specifying which he meant.

<sup>14</sup> Abram Humphries, a financier whom the war found with large investments in prairie lands and negroes, had achieved wealth and influence as partner in mercantile firms in Columbus and Mobile, as charter member of the Columbus Insurance and Banking Company, and as director of the Mobile and Ohio Railroad. Lipscomb, *A History of Columbus, Mississippi*, 47.

to him, he laid his plans, and went to work to have me removed—or at all events to make the impression if possible, that my views and course were very much disapproved of by the church. He began to operate first (as it is presumed) upon the disaffected member already described, F. G. Baldwin, who became violent—and drew up a paper addressed to me, (of the purport of which I know nothing) and tried to get signers to it—but failed. W. S. Barry next put his cousin Bertley [sic] to work—who together with Baldwin, drew up another paper, addressed to the presbytery, which happened to be in session here at that time, and went to Abram S. Humphries, who, they felt sure would sign it, but he refused, very much to their disgust, and thus the thing failed the second time. But the Rev. M. Peden<sup>15</sup> one of the members of the presbytery, who for some cause I know not what, has conceived a great jealousy and dislike to me, encouraged the mal-contents to get up another paper, and send it to the Moderator of presbytery at Synod; and that the Synod could order a pro-re-nota meeting of presbytery, to take the matter into consideration—and that he himself would attend to it. Accordingly, after I had left for Synod, not dreaming of the ferment that these men were trying to make, they again bestir themselves, still urged as is believed, by W. S. Barry, and got up another paper, signed by nine persons, which was their whole strength, and at least four or five of these were over-persuaded to sign it, on the pretext that my usefulness was at an end here. The parties signing the paper were R. Barry (Elder) B. Barry (Elder) James Hamilton, Geo. Frazer, James Miller, F. G. Baldwin, E. P. Odeneal, John Abert & Ch. H. Abert . . . . These are the signers of the paper addressed to the moderator of presbytery, requesting the dissolution of the pastoral relation between me and the church numbering 180 members!—The letter did not reach the Synod in time—but was forwarded to the Moderator of presbytery whose home is at Louisville, Winston Co. Miss. The letter however was informal, and wrong in every way, and the Moderator, of course, could pay no attention to it, and so wrote them.

Some time after my return from Synod, I heard a rumor of what had been done—and on making inquiry found out all about it. My first impulse was immediately to bring the matter before the congregation, and sought for a copy of the letter with that end in view—But they, or Bartley, for

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<sup>15</sup> Peden had in 1863 made an unsuccessful attempt to prevent Lyon's choice by the Presbytery as delegate to the General Assembly. Lyon's Journal, 50-51. From the fact that one of the men whom Peden favored against Lyon, the Reverend R. S. Gladney, was a "violent secessionist," one would gather that the real issue at the Presbytery meeting was Lyon's unionism. Aughey, *Tupelo*, 71.

he was the animating spirit, and the chief tool of W. S. B.[arry]—refused to let me have a copy—on reconsideration however—knowing that most of those who signed the paper, were over-persuaded to do it—and had no ill-will towards me, I determined to pursue a conciliatory policy and win them back if possible, so that, now, they all seem reconciled except Frank G. Baldwin, and Mrs. Sallie Barry, the wife of the said W. S. B.—But I have prepared an annual sermon at considerable length in which I have discussed certain topics that have been used as fuel to try to get up a disturbance. This sermon I expect to deliver on next sabbath, and trust good results will flow from it. And I have no doubt but that good will come of this abortive effort.

## 1864 THE WAR

I have long purposed to make an entry in this journal on the subject of this present *war*. But as it drags its slow and dreadful length along—its awful proportions, and hideous features developing . . . as it goes, I have felt appalled at the attempt—I feel utterly incompetent to gestate and bring to birth, this monstrous conception as it lies heavy & uneasy in my mind. I feel that any attempt to bring it forth would be an abortion. Therefore I cannot attempt it. I doubt whether any historian of the present generation will be competent to the great undertaking. It is like every other huge object, it must be viewed at a distance, in order to see it in all its proportions and relations. The fact is my mind seems stunned and paralyzed, by the rapid, gigantic, and frightful development of its monstrous and amazing features. The various and multitudinous phases of this morbid development of what was supposed to be civilized and christianized humanity, loom up so rapidly and so fearfully to a frightened [sic] view that my astonishment is chronic and my vision blurred by the one great and all absorbing object. It is with difficulty I read any book that requires thought and attention—with great difficulty that I prepare my sermon and make my sabbath and pulpit preparations from week to week—It so completely fills the sensorium of my mind, if I may so express it—that there seems to be no room for any other subject of thought—And even my thoughts on this subject are often confused and ill digested. It is in my mind “*rudis indigestaque moles.*” The eye of the mind seems blurred by it as does the eye of the body, when one gazed too long upon the disk of the sun—it can see nothing else—and not it clearly. The immediate causes of the war—the remote causes of the war, as seen both from a human



and a providential point of view—how the people were led into it by the devices of wicked demagogues, who themselves were blind—the means used to bring about blood-shed—the multifarious devices, and deception to mislead and then to subjugate the people—the rapidity with which a galling and iron despotism was riveted upon the necks of the people—the terrorism, the boldness, and daring with which the liberties of the people were *snatched* from them—their humiliating abjectness—their fear to speak their opinions—their actually giving utterance to opinions and feelings, the exact contrary of what they entertain and feel! Actuated by the fear of the demagogues and tyrants—all which to behold confounds and stupifies the mind. Next the furious rage of the demagogues—their reckless despair—their determination to bring about a general and a common ruin—their determination to destroy with themselves the whole fabric of liberty—their mad alarm at any and every thing that looks like a peace, every movement to stop the horrid effusion of blood, short of their purpose, which is success in their nefarious design, a ruin to the *whole country*, is frightful to contemplate—Then again the strange vengeance of some of the *Conservative* portion of the people, who were opposed to this war in the outset, but who now seem willing to be ruined themselves, for the gratification of seeing the demagogues and the terrorists punished—is a singular, but perhaps a natural phase of depraved humanity.

There never was on the face of the earth a more absolute despotism, than that which now prevails in the land. It extends not only to the persons and property of the people, but to their words, their speech, their very thoughts & emotions! Although the people both in and out of the army have it wholly in their power to stop this war, if they would but give expression to their ardent wishes, and heartfelt desires—yet they are so completely cowed, subjugated, awed, crushed, that, like victims for the slaughter, they allow themselves to be dragged to clear, manifest, open, inevitable destruction.

But their [sic] is a *providence* in all this. And as I read its designs, *three* things are to be accomplished by it—*First* the wickedness of the people is to be condignly punished—They have misused the great trust of free government—they have from carelessness, indifference, and selfishness allowed it to pass out of their hands into the hands of wicked Godless demagogues—The war therefore is the natural, and necessary fruit of their wickedness. Second, *Slavery* a great and peculiar trust committed to their hands for the civilization and christianization [sic] of the African, but which they have vilely abused, and used only for selfish and sordid

purposes, regardless of the natural rights of the slave, will be modified and reformed, if indeed it is not abolished altogether. And *third*, the *Government*, which has been kept grating, and jarring, ever since the Constitution was adopted, by the existence of certain discordant and antagonistic elements in it, will be strengthened, and *consolidated*, (not centralized) and made what the framers of the constitution intended it to be. The so called “states rights” doctrine, which was so fiercely advocated, at the time the Constitution was adopted, has, ever since, been the *sand* in the machinery, the *friction* in the cogs, and the wheels of government, will be effectually worked out. It is this that has been grinding, and grating, and wearing the operations [of] government, and has hindered the perfect operations of the Constitution. When this *Consolidation* of Government, this clearing, as it were, of the machinery of state, is accomplished, which it is probably, one of the providential designs of this war to do, then the government will be what the framers of the Constitution intended it should be, the wisest, the greatest, and the best, that ever God vouchsafed to a people.

What my exact *duty* is in this great emergency has been and is a source of great perplexity. As a minister of the Gospel, and as an Ambassador of the Lord Jesus Christ, I am in doubt, often painful doubt as to what my precise duty is—as to what I should do, and how far I should go in guiding the people, as to their civil & political duties. I have a vast interest at stake in the country, no less than the entire future of my whole family—besides my two sons exposed to all the horrors of this dreadful war—My youngest brother has already been sacrificed. My constant prayer is that God may direct me—If I know my heart I am anxious to do my *duty*, nothing *less*, and nothing *more*.

As to how this war is finally to end, I am utterly uncertain. Had we encouraged the Conservative peace party north, I have no doubt but that they would have elected Gen'l McClellan president, at the late election, on the Chicago platform, and peace and Re-Construction would have been the result—But this encouragement, Jeff Davis and his supple minions would not allow the people and papers to give. The Consequence is that Mr. Lincoln has been re-elected—and the North again united in their purpose to prosecute the war to final subjugation, which will be the result sooner or later. But at present I see no prospect of the cessation of hostilities. Davis and his oligarchy at Richmond, will hear to no terms—will make no compromise—The result will, in all probability, be that our armies will gradually with an increased ratio of speed, go to pieces, and melt away. This process has already commenced, and I do not think that the war can

last more than another year—unless it is the will of providence that the slave population shall be armed and put into the army. This providence may persist as a kind of discipline and civilizing process, as preparatory to the final freedom of the slaves—If this be the purpose of providence the war may last two years longer. Then the demagogues will fly to foreign lands, and the war will cease—N. B.—I find by look'g back through this journal, that I made an entry on the subject of the war just two years ago on page 36.<sup>16</sup>

1865

### THE END OF THE WAR

This cruel war has at last ended by the complete subjugation of the South—or rather the *leaders* of the rebellion—for strictly speaking it was not a war of the *people* but a war of the demagogues who had subjugated and enslaved the people—This result took place a little sooner—and a little more suddenly than I was expecting when I last made an entry in this journal on the subject. It is true that I confidently expected the war to end this year—and towards the last of Summer—and also by subjugation—as I had lost all hope that our despotic rulers, who seemed to be struck with judicial madness as was Pharaoh of Egypt, would hear to any kind of Compromise, or settlement, that it was possible to obtain—but the end came a little more suddenly than I was expecting. The fact is the Confederacy had been in a dying condition for almost two years—ever since the fall of Vicksburgh [*sic*]—and in actual, “*Articulo Mortis*” since the fall of Atlanta—but its final demise was almost like a convulsion—it took the people by surprise—This was caused by the overthrow and surrender of Lee’s army in Va—which was the *heart* the very centre of life—of course when death commenced there the extremities were soon deprived of their vitality—and complete death rapidly followed . . . .

Generations will come and go, before the history of this gigantic war can be truthfully and fully written . . . . It originated in lies of the basest kind—it was kept up by lies its whole life consisted of lies promulgated systematically, and with malice-propense. In it was verified over again the

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<sup>16</sup> During the year 1864 Lyon began to work vigorously for peace, as a state-wide reconstruction movement got under way. Lyon himself admits authorship of a “Memorial” and “Preamble and Resolutions” on the subject of peace submitted in the legislature of August 1864. Lyon’s Journal, 109-110. In the autumn the *Mississippian*, which had capitulated to the peace party, published a number of communications from Lyon. Incidentally, James M. Arnold, the conservative who had won a legislative seat in the elections of 1863 when Theodoric was also a candidate, introduced the “Preamble and Resolutions” written by Lyon. Lyon’s Journal, 110.

history contained in the XXII chap. of I Kings—where we have an account of “the Lying spirit” in the mouth of the prophets of Ahab, who prevailed upon him to make war against Syria, which resulted in his defeat and death—To my mind the providence of God is clear and out-standing in a most remarkable manner, in that the results were brought about contrary to all human calculation—and, what is very remarkable, causing the people to use the very means to bring about results which they were most anxious to avoid!—One of the strongest of all the psychological phenomena that ever came under my observation, was evidenced in the fact, the demagogues, preachers, i.e. false prophets—news papers and people—all who were actuated by the “Lying Spirit” were made to utter, to advocate and to maintain with fierce vengeance sentiments and policy, which in their secret hearts they believed to be false and ruinous both to themselves and others!

Amongst the multitudinous fallacies—(Lord Bacon’s “Idols”) that were at different stages of the war harped upon by those possessed of the “lying spirit” were the following, viz:

1. “Cotton is King, &c &c”
2. “There will be no war &c”
3. “Yankees can’t fight &c”
4. “Foreign intervention &c”
5. “Federal finances will break down”
6. “North-West dissatisfaction &c.”
7. “Divisions amongst the Yankees &c”
8. “Our Revolutionary fathers succeeded. *Ergo* we are certain in like manner to succeed &c”
9. “Nine millions can never be conquered”
10. “The Sectional hatred is such that the two sections cannot come together again.”
11. “We can’t be subjugated &c.”
12. “The jealousy of European governments will not allow the Union to be restored”—
13. “Slavery is *right*—our cause is righteous and a righteous God is bound to guarantee our ultimate success &c &c”

With such and like fallacies, incessantly harped upon by politicians, demagogues, leaders—news-paper[s], and preachers in whom was the “lying spirit” together with a system of fierce terrorism that stifled all liberty of speech—and liberty of thought, the war was inaugurated and continued, until the last widow’s son, was, *not dragged*—but *pushed* to the slaughter!—But the war is over—the South is subjugated and Slavery is virtually abolished.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> After the war Lyon continued until 1870 to fill the Columbus pastorate, despite some difficulties with his congregation over reconstruction and a constant haggling over salary. When he finally resigned, it was to become professor of “Metaphysics, Logic and Political Science” at the University of Mississippi. Lyon’s Journal, 243. Although not actively engaged in politics, Lyon had no more sympathy with the Northern radicals than he had with the Southern fire-eaters, and he appears to have eschewed politics after the war. He did, however, exhibit an uncompromising negrophilism. Also, in the General Assembly of 1870, he worked diligently to restore the Southern Presbyterians to communion with the Northern branch of the church. Lyon’s Journal, 210-211, 238-239.