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The Friendship of L.Q.C. Lamar and Jefferson Davis

by Willie D. Halsell

Lucius Q. C. Lamar was Jefferson Davis's "most intimate friend and confidant," stated the Washington correspondent of a Memphis newspaper in summarizing the chief events of Lamar's life.¹ Lamar, however, had at no time claimed that he had been so close to Davis. He had said that he was "not more intimate than other gentlemen but still a friend of Mr. Davis and often in consultation with him, . . ."²

The newspaper [writer] probably exaggerated, and Lamar understated, the nearness of the relationship, especially in regard to the time during and after the Civil War. Their devotion was such that Lamar in 1861 confided to his wife: "The President seems more attached to me than ever. Everybody says that it is well known that he loves me."³ Lamar more than returned that love. Soon after Davis was released from Fort Monroe, Lamar asked a mutual friend "to represent my feelings to our Chief and Mrs. Davis . . . I never could express them to him or her . . . But I honor & love our Chief above all men . . . You can never do me as great a favor as you will now do by making known to these precious & priceless ones, how *entirely* I am devoted to them & with what depth &

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¹ Memphis (Tennessee) *Daily Commercial*, January 25, 1893.

² *Congressional Record*, 48 Cong., 2nd sess., 627 (January 12, 1885).

³ Lamar to wife, November 22, 1861, quoted in Edward Mayes, *Lucius Q. C. Lamar: His Life, Times and Speeches, 1825-1893* (Nashville: Publishing House of the Methodist Episcopal Church South, 1895), 97 (cited henceforth as Mayes, *Lamar*).

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tenderness I love him . . .”⁴

Despite the difference of seventeen years in their ages, Davis and Lamar had many similarities of character. When in school, both read widely and in varied fields, with the result that each became a man of several interests, and each was considered to be among the best educated men of his day. They agreed on most of the major issues and public questions in the decade before the war. They both admired Calhoun and faithfully studied his doctrines. Calhoun’s mantle fell to Davis, generally considered Calhoun’s successor as [the] southern leader in the Senate. Lamar was said to be “perfectly familiar” with almost every sentence of the Carolinian’s,⁵ and he was chosen to deliver the address at the unveiling of the Calhoun monument in Charleston.

Neither Davis nor Lamar recanted [their] secession beliefs. They never admitted that secession was anything but a legitimate constitutional right, and never said they would pursue a different course, if 1861 should be enacted again. Both were Democratic senators from Mississippi, party leaders in the state and South, and [presidential] cabinet members. A final likeness was the fact that neither was very successful in business affairs.

They had not as many dissimilar as similar characteristics. Their rearing and education differed, for Davis’s father, a stern parent, sent him away to school when he was still a little boy, but Lamar was constantly surrounded in childhood with a loving and sympathetic family. His education, even through college, was obtained while he lived at home, and he read law in the office of a relative. In dispositions also they were unlike, Lamar being affectionate, easygoing, even-tempered, Davis less friendly and of more uncertain temper.

Their friendship began in the early 1850s when Lamar, a young and aspiring politician, emulated with unbounded admiration the older man’s successful career. From their first meeting, probably at a States Rights Convention in 1851, through the two stormy decades that followed, they were usually in political accord.⁶ Indeed, as Lamar later said, he “grew up” as a young man under Davis.⁷

⁴ Lamar to Burton Harrison, August 13, 1867, *Burton Harrison MSS.*, Library of Congress, Division of Manuscripts.

⁵ Atlanta (Georgia) *Constitution*, June 11, 1874.

⁶ Oxford (Mississippi) *Constitution*, May 17, 1851; Yazoo (Mississippi) *Democrat*, June 25, 1851; Memphis *Daily Appeal*, June 25, 1851; Jefferson Davis to James A. Pearce, August 22, 1851, in Mrs. Jefferson Davis, *Jefferson Davis: ex-president of the Confederate States of America/A Memoir by His Wife*, 2 vols. (New York: Bedford Co., 1890), I: 471-2.

⁷ Lamar to wife (1879), in Mayes, *Lamar*, 364.

A political emergency cemented their developing friendship when Lamar performed a service for Davis in the gubernatorial race between Davis and Henry S. Foote in the autumn of 1851. Davis had resigned from the [United States] Senate for the purpose of carrying on the canvass for the States Rights Democrats against the Unionists. When, in the course of the campaign, the Unionist candidate, Foote, arrived at Oxford to speak, Lamar, then a professor at the state university, was pressed into the debate against him. The young professor was untried as a political orator, while Foote was one of the most skillful of speakers. Lamar, however, emerged from the joint debate far from defeated and was carried off triumphantly on the shoulders of excited university students.⁸

When Davis delivered the commencement address at the University in July 1852, Lamar, eager and devoted, doubtless met and conversed with him. Lamar was probably among the company which afterwards made a journey from Oxford to Holly Springs with Davis, Professor Albert T. Bledsoe,⁹ “and others.”¹⁰

In 1857 Lamar and Davis were both elected to Congress, Lamar to the House, Davis again to the Senate. They served in those offices over three years, Lamar resigning to canvass the state for the approaching secession convention, and Davis withdrawing after Mississippi’s secession from the Union. Both worked hard during those years, and they reached the top rank in Mississippi politics, Lamar being “confessedly Mississippi’s greatest statesman, after Davis and [A.G.] Brown, . . .”¹¹ and that at a time when unusual talent in the state competed.

Neither Davis nor Lamar was a delegate to the Democratic party convention which met at Charleston in April 1860. Both, however, were constantly informed by wire of developments. Some weeks before the Charleston Convention, Davis had prepared resolutions voicing the position of the wing of southern Democrats of which he was a member. It was generally expected that if these resolutions were adhered to,

⁸ Mayes, *Lamar*, 51-5.

⁹ [Bledsoe] was the learned and versatile professor who wrote the defense of Davis entitled *Is Davis a Traitor: or Was Secession a Constitutional Right Previous to the War of 1861?*

¹⁰ *Oxford Democrat Flag*, July 2, 1852; *Holly Springs Palladium*, June 10, 1852; *Memphis Daily Eagle & Enquirer*, May 23, 1852.

¹¹ Wiley P. Harris in *Memphis Daily Appeal*, December 8, 1875; quoted in Mayes, *Lamar*, 270.

the convention would split.¹² Davis was bitterly opposed to Stephen A. Douglas's candidacy, since he disliked and distrusted Douglas, and furthermore, said a few, because Davis wanted the nomination for himself, a charge which he denied.¹³ Davis thought that one could be chosen "who will be accepted by both sections without a platform."¹⁴ When, after convening in Charleston, the southern delegates in a night caucus resolved to stand by the Davis resolutions, at least one witness predicted "war and tumult."¹⁵

The convention had been in session only a few days when Davis, disturbed at the turn of affairs, sent Lamar to Charleston as his messenger. Lamar was charged with the task of informing the southern delegates that Davis did not want them to secede on the platform, but to remain in the convention and "achieve a more solid and enduring triumph by . . . defeating Douglas."¹⁶ Lamar urged these views on the delegates, but all in vain. The extremists of the Mississippi delegation would not be held back. They forced the Alabama delegation to obey their instructions to withdraw, reported Lamar, and then followed Alabama out of the convention.¹⁷

On the night of Mississippi's withdrawal from the party convention, Lamar, who had been dispatched for the purpose of restraining [the southern delegates], was so carried away by the intense excitement that he took a leading part in a mass meeting of southerners. Near midnight in front of the courthouse where a crowd jammed the moonlit street, Lamar spoke an hour and a half to an enthusiastic audience. He declared that the Democratic party had been split and that "Broken faith, like broken heads, can not be mended." He was followed by William L. Yancey [of Alabama] and other orators. Lamar thus cast his lot with the seceders, while agonizing over the lack of unity and cooperation among the seceding

¹² Jackson (Mississippi) *Daily Mississippian*, February 9, 1860; Memphis *Weekly Appeal*, March 14, 1860; Ethelbert Barksdale to Davis, February 20, 1860, in Dunbar Rowland, ed., *Jefferson Davis constitutionalist: his letters, papers, and speeches*, 10 vols. (Jackson, MS: Mississippi Department of Archives and History, 1923), IV, 196, 203-4.

¹³ Jefferson Davis, *The Rise and Fall of the Confederate Government*, 2 vols. (New York: D. Appleton, 1881), I, 206-7.

¹⁴ Jefferson Davis to Franklin Pierce, January 30, 1860, in Rowland, *Jefferson Davis, Constitutional*, IV, 185.

¹⁵ Murat Halstead, *Caucuses of 1860. A History of the National Political Conventions of the Current Presidential Campaign . . .* (Columbus, 1860), 23.

¹⁶ Lamar to C. H. Mott, May 29, 1860, in Mayes, *Lamar*, 83.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

delegates.¹⁸

During the month after the Charleston Convention, Davis and other congressmen prepared an address to southern Democrats, in which the Democrats were urged to defer the Richmond Convention of seceding delegates and to send representatives to the Baltimore Convention, in the hope of gaining unanimity and a winning candidate. The platform which the southerners had maintained at Charleston should also be demanded at Baltimore. There were nineteen signatures to this address: Davis's name was fourth, Lamar's fifth.¹⁹ No other Mississippi congressman's name was signed. Said Lamar in explanation to a confidant, "Davis had signed it, and I was determined that his name should not go unsupported by any of the [Mississippi] delegation."²⁰

Lamar, Davis, and other prominent Mississippi Democrats, anxious to carry the election, took part in the exciting fall campaign, Davis and Lamar speaking together at one place, Columbus.²¹ The States Rights Democrats hoped not only to win the state for their candidates, but also to obtain a degree of unity that would make small the opposition to secession, if Lincoln should be elected.²²

When it was evident that the Democrats had lost the 1860 election, the Mississippi congressmen were summoned by the governor of the state to a conference in Jackson. Before their arrival, the governor had issued a proclamation convening the legislature in special session to consider the calling of a secession convention. The chief question put before the congressmen was whether the governor should recommend to the legislature separate action or cooperative secession with the other southern states. Prolonged debate took place between the congressmen. Jefferson Davis, A. G. Brown, and Lamar opposed separate action. These three were overruled, however, and they thereupon agreed that the action

¹⁸ Ibid.; Halstead, *Caucuses of 1860*, 75; Joseph Hodgson, *The Cradle of the Confederacy; or, The Times of Troup, Quitman, and Yancey: a sketch of Southwestern political history from the formation of the Federal Government to A. D. 1861* (Mobile: Register Publishing Office, 1876), 416-7; New Orleans (Louisiana) *Delta*, quoted in Natchez (Mississippi) *Daily Courier*, May 4, 1860.

¹⁹ Jackson *Semi-Weekly Mississippian*, May 22, 1860; Yazoo *Democrat*, May 26, 1860; Memphis *Weekly Appeal*, May 30, 1860; Lynchburg (Virginia) *Reporter*, quoted in Memphis *Weekly Appeal*, September 12, 1860; George F. Milton, *The Eve of Conflict. Stephen A. Douglas and the Needless War* (New York, 1934), 454; Pierce Butler, *Judah P. Benjamin*, in the American Crises Biographies (Philadelphia: G. W. Jacobs & Company, 1906), 193.

²⁰ Lamar to C. H. Mott, May 29, 1860, in Mayes, *Lamar*, 83.

²¹ Colonel George H. Young to A. B. Longstreet, October 26, 1860, in Mayes, *Lamar*, 85.

²² Percy Lee Rainwater, *Mississippi – Storm Center of Secession 1856-1861* (Baton Rouge, 1938), 136.

of the conference be made unanimous, recommending to the governor that he advise separate and immediate secession.²³

Lamar and Davis both were moderate secessionists, as also the majority of the Secession Convention, meeting [at the state capitol] in January 1861, proved to be. Lamar was reported by a “fire-eater” to be “very reasonable on the secession question.”²⁴ He feared the disunity, jealousy, and discord which he saw “between the most patriotic of our men,” and he foresaw that fearful results would follow secession.²⁵ Davis, who was more moderate than Lamar, held back, he later said, because he realized the military handicaps of the South.²⁶

Six months after the secession of Mississippi, Lieutenant Colonel Lamar stood with President Davis on the balcony of the Spotswood Hotel in Richmond, Virginia. Davis, after being serenaded by the citizens, made an address. He was followed by Governor Henry A. Wise of Virginia, and then by Lamar, who confidently declared that “history will acquit these Confederate States of all responsibility for its [war’s] calamities.”²⁷

Since Lamar’s company was located near Richmond for about a year, it was convenient for Lamar to drop in frequently to visit the president and other friends. When he was invalided by sickness, President Davis was one of the first to call on him.²⁸ Davis “often” consulted with Lamar,²⁹ and he sent him on at least one peace-making mission. “Ill feeling between the Potomac generals and the President” with Lamar’s cousin, James Longstreet, taking the side against the president, was the cause of Lamar’s journey to Joseph E. Johnston’s headquarters in November 1861. Lamar hoped to “disabuse” Longstreet’s and Johnston’s minds “of

²³ Vicksburg (Mississippi) *Whig*, December 4, 1860, quoted in *Natchez Courier*, December 7, 1860; Otho Singleton to Davis, July 14, 1877, in Davis, *Rise and Fall of the Confederate Government*, I: 57-9, footnote; Reuben Davis, *Recollections of Mississippi and Mississippians* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1889), 391; Mayes, *Lamar*, 86-7. For a different account, see Rainwater, *op. cit.*, 168-9.

²⁴ Mrs. Jacob Thompson to Mrs. Howell Cobb, December 15, 1860, in Ulrich B. Phillips, ed., *The Correspondence of Robert Toombs, Alexander H. Stephens, and Howell Cobb*, in *American Historical Association Annual Report*, 2 vols. (1911), II, 523; Rainwater, *op. cit.*, 208.

²⁵ Lamar to A. B. Longstreet, December 11, 1860, in Mayes, *Lamar*, 89; Lamar to C. H. Mott, May 29, 1860, *op. cit.*, 83.

²⁶ Davis, *Rise and Fall of the Confederate Government*, I: 57; also see Rainwater, *op. cit.*, 152-7.

²⁷ Mayes, *Lamar*, 94-6; Mary Boykin Chesnut, *A Diary from Dixie* (New York, 1905), 70.

²⁸ Chesnut, *A Diary from Dixie*, 70, 72-3.

²⁹ *Congressional Record*, 48 Cong., 2nd sess., 627 (January 12, 1885).

some wrong impressions.”³⁰ At this time Lamar reported to his wife that Davis was more attached to him than ever, and that if the Confederacy should have peace, he expected Davis would appoint him minister to a foreign country.³¹

On the day of Davis’s inauguration, February 26, 1862, Lamar was again in Richmond. He talked with Davis, and in the course of the conversation suggested the name of a young man for the office of private secretary to Davis. This young man was Burton Harrison, whom Lamar had known at the University of Mississippi and who was still maintaining a “Classical School” there. Harrison, though he had a dependent mother and sister, intended to join Lamar in the Virginia army, and was awaiting word from him. The word proved to be a telegram stating that “You are Private Secretary to the President.”³²

Lamar and Harrison planned to meet in Chattanooga, but they missed each other. Lamar continued to Oxford, Mississippi, from which place he wired Harrison to go on to Richmond and get an introduction to the president through a mutual friend.³³ Harrison was employed by Davis and faithfully remained with him or his family until the fall of the Confederacy and imprisonment.

Lamar spent several months on sick leave in Mississippi and Georgia until November [1862] when the president appointed him Minister Plenipotentiary to Russia. Davis wanted Harrison to go with Lamar as his secretary, but for some reason Harrison remained with the president.³⁴ In late 1863 Lamar returned to the Confederacy and during January 1864, he reported to Davis and Secretary of State Judah P. Benjamin, and also

³⁰ Lamar to wife, November 22, 1861, in Mayes, *Lamar*, 97; on Johnston, Lamar, and Davis [during the] latter part of the war, see Davis to L. B. Northrop, April 17, 1885, in Rowland, *Jefferson Davis, Constitutionalist*, IX, 366.

³¹ Lamar to wife, November 22, 1861, in Mayes, *Lamar*, 97.

³² Mrs. Burton Harrison’s Scrap Book, 1858-1909, in *Burton Harrison MSS.*; Mrs. Burton Harrison, *Recollections Grave and Gay* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1911), 69; Fairfax Harrison, ed., *Aris Sonis Focisque: Being a Memoir of an American Family, the Harrisons of Skimino and Particularly of Jesse Burton Harrison and Burton Norvell Harrison* (New York: The De Vinne Press, 1910), 149-50.

³³ Lamar to Harrison, [March] 1, 1862, in Mrs. Burton Harrison’s Scrap Book, 1858-1909, in *Burton Harrison MSS.*

³⁴ *Original Documents Relating to the Mission of L. Q. C. Lamar as Commissioner of the Confederate States of America to Russia*, in Mississippi Department of Archives and History; Thomas Walton to Burton Harrison, December 8, 1862, in Mrs. Burton Harrison’s Scrap Book, 1858-1909, in *Burton Harrison MSS.*

had his accounts audited in Richmond.³⁵

Lamar next served the Confederacy and Davis by making a series of speeches in Georgia towns, defending Davis and his presidential course, chiefly the suspension of the use of the writ of habeas corpus. The attacks of Governor Joseph Brown and Vice-President Alexander H. Stephens had to be answered by the president's friends, and Lamar was one of those chosen for the task. During March and April he spoke to the Georgia legislature in Milledgeville, and to citizens at Columbus and Atlanta.³⁶ He stoutly declared his confidence in the president, saying that "For one, I believe that the highest earthly ambition of Jefferson Davis is to be instrumental in securing the independence of these Southern States, with all the civil liberties of the people unimpaired and inviolate."³⁷

Some act or event in the autumn of 1864 estranged Lamar and Davis. Lamar wrote to Burton Harrison to intercede with the president for him. Lamar said to Harrison's sister, "If Burton doesn't stand up for me, I'm undone – The President is against me."³⁸ Lamar went to Richmond in December, where he was appointed judge advocate of a military court.³⁹ If he saw Davis again before the fall of the Confederacy, no record of the meeting has been found.

The imprisonment of Davis and Burton Harrison worried and grieved Lamar, not only because he loved them, but also because he saw a sinister meaning in this action of the federal government. He brought his personal influence to bear on the people he knew who might aid in the release of the prisoners.⁴⁰

After they had been freed in 1867, Lamar, who was at the time a professor at the University of Mississippi, suggested to the students that they make up a gift of money for Davis. He planned to take the gift in person to Davis in Canada, but, the failure of a bank took away his savings

³⁵ Mayes, *Lamar*, 113; Judah P. Benjamin to Henry Hotze, January 9, 1864, *Official Records of the Union and Confederate Navies in the War of the Rebellion* (Washington, 1895-1912), Series II, vol. 3, 995. Lamar also attended the wedding of Hetty Cary (sister of Constance who married Burton Harrison) on January 19 (Mrs. Burton Harrison, *Recollections Grave and Gay*, 202) and was in Petersburg, [Virginia], January 20. Mayes, *Lamar*, 115. *Atlanta Journal*, January 25, 1893.

³⁶ Mayes, *Lamar*, 114-5, Appendix No. 7, 639-56; John C. Butler, *Historical Record of Macon and Central Georgia* (Macon, 1879), 280.

³⁷ From the speech at Atlanta, April 14, 1864, in Mayes, *Lamar*, Appendix No. 7, 653.

³⁸ "Sister," Oxford, Mississippi, to "Brother," October 18, 1864, in *Burton Harrison MSS*.

³⁹ Mayes, *Lamar*, 115.

⁴⁰ Harrison, *Aris Sonis Focisque . . . Harrison's of Skimino*, 179; Lamar to John N. Waddell, November 21, 1865, in Mayes, *Lamar*, 121; John N. Waddell to Rev. W. T. Brant, January 10, 1866, in Mrs. Burton Harrison's Scrap Book, 1858-1909, in *Burton Harrison MSS*.

so that he was unable to make the trip. He sent to Burton Harrison the \$500 and a letter to be delivered by Harrison to “our chief.”⁴¹

Lamar discussed his position in regard to Mississippi politics, saying to Harrison that many “of the old knights” were “disposed to enter” the political lists again, but he himself was unwilling “although often thereunto requested.” He added, “Nor do I intend to, until – our Chief comes home and is allowed his place of leader.”⁴² Lamar consulted Davis regarding the political situation in Mississippi during Reconstruction, and Davis approved his decision to take his “property and family from the State.” Davis said in effect that he saw “nothing but sorrow and wrongs for Mississippians in the future.”⁴³ Notwithstanding these plans, Lamar finally decided to remain in Mississippi.

Davis was concerned over the effect of the war on Lamar’s prospects in politics. The “brilliant future” promised by his talents and abilities had been altered, possibly ruined. The years spent in the conflict had created a “hiatus” in Lamar’s career, which Davis feared might become “a great misfortune” to him.⁴⁴

Despite his intention not to re-enter politics until Davis was pardoned and restored to political life, Lamar was nominated for Congress and elected in 1872. He returned to the House of Representatives after twelve years absence with a message of peace on his lips. His opportunity to deliver it effectively came in the eulogy he made [for] Charles Sumner, in which he asked for sectional peace and understanding. Because of the magnanimity of this speech, he was able from that time forward to discuss controversial subjects without invoking a storm of Republican invective. And a topic prominent among those of a controversial nature was Jefferson Davis.

The most positive and convincing proof of Lamar’s devotion and loyalty to Davis was to be found in his frequent vindications of Davis in Congress. Lamar first spoke in behalf of the former Confederate President in January 1878, when describing the prominent figures in the Senate of 1861. He named Jefferson Davis and then paused to ask: “Mr. President, shall I not be permitted to mention his name in this free American Senate which has been so free to discuss and condemn what it has adjudged to

⁴¹ Lamar to Burton Harrison, August 13, 1867, in *Burton Harrison MSS*.

⁴² *Ibid*.

⁴³ Lamar to Judge James Jackson, Macon, Georgia, May 30, 1870, in Mayes, *Lamar*, 128.

⁴⁴ Letter from “Y.M.C.,” Memphis, reporting an interview of Davis to the editor, Macon (Georgia) *Telegraph and Messenger*, quoted in *Atlanta Constitution*, June 1, 1873.

be his errors? – one who has been the vicarious sufferer for his people, the solitude of whose punishment should lift him above the gibe and the jeer of popular passion, . . .”⁴⁵ Again in May of the same year, Lamar mentioned Davis’s “commanding” character, notable “not only for great and shining talents and abilities, but also for his spotless morality and the unflecked purity of his public conduct.”⁴⁶

During the years 1878 and 1879 two incidents occurred which estranged Davis and Lamar. A misunderstanding between the two friends developed from a newspaper correspondent’s article, in which it was said that Lamar had been suggested as representative of the South at the Paris Exposition; but he in a note urged Senator John B. Gordon to go in his place, since, according to the article, Lamar recalled his days as Confederate diplomat when “The greatest obstacle in the way of financial recognition of our Confederacy was that our president was from Mississippi, to which the odium of repudiation was attached.” Because Lamar also was from Mississippi, and Gordon from a state with no repudiation in its past, Gordon could accomplish more for the South than Lamar. This account was published in Mississippi newspapers in January 1878, the *Clarion* giving it three and a half columns on its editorial page.⁴⁷

Lamar explained to Davis that the article had little basis in fact. He had written a note to Gordon, suggesting that Gordon take his place on the trip to Europe, and urging as one inducement the high character of Georgia’s credit. No language in the note connected Davis with any act of repudiation. This note, left by Lamar on Gordon’s desk, was read by a newspaper correspondent without Gordon’s knowledge, and was used as the heart of the erroneous article. When it was published, Gordon wanted to answer in the papers, but Lamar “felt so disgusted” that the matter was dropped.⁴⁸

By August 1878, the misunderstanding had been set aright, and Davis denied that he “had ever believed him [Lamar] unfriendly.” To the contrary, Lamar “had in adversity remained my firm friend.”⁴⁹

⁴⁵ *Congressional Record*, 45 Cong., 2nd sess., 525 (January 24, 1878).

⁴⁶ *Congressional Record*, 45 Cong., 2nd sess., 3655 (May 22, 1878).

⁴⁷ Jackson *Daily Clarion*, January 8, 1878; Raymond (Mississippi) *Hinds County Gazette*, January 2, 1878; J. S. McNeilly, “War and Reconstruction in Mississippi, 1863-1890,” in Mississippi Historical Society *Publications*, Centenary [Series], II, 451.

⁴⁸ Lamar to Davis, June 29, 1878, in Rowland, *Jefferson Davis Constitutionalist*, VIII, 222; John B. Gordon to W. T. Walthall, August 21, 1878, in *op. cit.*, VIII, 258.

⁴⁹ Davis to John B. Gordon, August 28, 1878, in Rowland, *Jefferson Davis Constitutionalist*, VIII, 267-8; Mayes, *Lamar*, 363.

Then before the year was over, another difficulty arose between them. The source went as far back as January 1878, when Lamar had been instructed by the Mississippi legislature on his vote for the silver bill then before Congress. But he had his own convictions on the monetary policy of the government, and he declined to obey the instructions. Opposition to him appeared all over the state. One of his strongest opponents was Ethelbert Barksdale, editor of the state Democratic newspaper, the *Clarion*. Unknown to Lamar, Barksdale wrote to Davis, asking for an expression of his views on the instruction question. He promised not to publish Davis's answer without his permission.⁵⁰

Davis answered promptly that a senator should obey instructions or resign his office. His long letter was published in the *Clarion* a month later, and papers over the state copied it.⁵¹ Lamar was thunderstruck, hurt, and disappointed. He did not object to Davis's having views different from his, but what disturbed him was that "my enemies have inveigled Mr. Davis into writing an article against my position" and this article had been put in the hands of his ablest and most merciless opponent. Lamar considered that true friendship would have caused Davis to inform Lamar privately of his views, particularly since Lamar had for so many years been Davis's pupil, "friend, admirer, and unwavering supporter."⁵²

Because of Davis's tremendous prestige in Mississippi and the South, his letter was a blow to Lamar. It can hardly be doubted, in view of their long friendship, that Davis was innocent of intent to harm Lamar. He simply stated his opinion on the question, not realizing the possible effect on Lamar's political prospects. Barksdale was triumphant, for he had maneuvered Davis into taking a position against Lamar. It was to Lamar's credit that he did not attribute malice to Davis.

Two months later Lamar defended Davis with such boldness and adroitness that the South was thrilled; and again Lamar's previous plea for sectional peace in the Sumner eulogy caused his championship of Davis to be received more calmly by the senators than would have happened otherwise. On the first day of March 1879, the subject of pensions for Mexican War veterans was under discussion. Senator George F. Hoar of Massachusetts moved to strike the name of Jefferson Davis from the

⁵⁰ Ethelbert Barksdale to Davis, December 12, 1878, in Rowland, *Jefferson Davis, Constitutionalist*, VIII, 297.

⁵¹ Davis to Barksdale, December 14, 1878, in *ibid.*, 298; Jackson *Weekly Clarion*, January 15, 1879; Memphis *Daily Appeal*, January 25, 1879; Mayes, *Lamar*, 363-4.

⁵² Lamar to wife [1879], in Mayes, *Lamar*, 364.

pension rolls. Several southern senators defended Davis, recalling his courage on the battlefields of Mexico. Hoar answered that two of our bravest officers in the Revolutionary army were Aaron Burr and Benedict Arnold. Lamar stood at this point and indignantly characterized Hoar's insult as wanton and unprovoked. The Chair called Lamar to order against which he appealed, saying that it seemed to be in order to fling insults but out of order to characterize the blow. His appeal was sustained, and Lamar declared that he and numerous southern men who believed in secession occupied the same position as Davis. He defended Davis against the charge of treason, and declared that Hoar might have learned a lesson from the pages of mythology. He compared Davis to Prometheus bound to the rock, and likened the manner of Hoar's attacks with those of the vulture which buried its beak in the vitals of its victim. The effect of Lamar's dramatic figure of speech and delivery was stunning to the Republicans.⁵³ After about two weeks had elapsed, Davis wrote Lamar a formal letter of thanks for his defense "against the petty malignity of Hoar, Blaine, and others."⁵⁴

Another notable occasion on which Lamar spoke in behalf of Davis was in January 1885. Lamar was being mentioned for a place in President-elect Grover Cleveland's cabinet, but, no matter what the results might be for his political future, he again emphatically repelled charges against Davis. The debate arose out of the questions of what had been done with the Confederate state papers since they had been deposited in the War Department by General W. T. Sherman, and whether or not Sherman had seen among those papers a letter from Davis stating that he would coerce a seceding southern state. The issue was largely personal, and northern and southern senators immediately took sides in the angry debate. Lamar was not on the floor of the Senate, and entered just in time to hear Senator John Sherman say: ". . . great God! will it ever be disputed in this country of ours at any time, even a thousand years hence, that Jefferson Davis . . . was a conspirator and traitor to his country? . . . it was a causeless rebellion, . . . and . . . all the men who led in that movement were traitors

⁵³ *Congressional Record*, 43 Cong., 3rd sess., 2228-9 (March 1, 1879); Macon (Mississippi) *Sun*, September 18, 1885; *Memphis Daily Appeal*, March 5, 1879; *Memphis Daily Commercial*, January 25, 1893; John J. Ingalls, *A Collection of the Writings of John James Ingalls* (Kansas City, 1902), 363; George F. Hoar, *Autobiography of Seventy Years*, 2 vols. (New York, 1903), II: 177. For interesting northern reaction to the bitter speeches made at this time, see *Zach Chandler MSS* and *John Sherman MSS*, Library of Congress, Division of Manuscripts.

⁵⁴ Davis to Lamar, March 15, 1879, in Rowland, *Jefferson Davis Constitutionalist*, VIII, 366-7.

to their country.”⁵⁵

Lamar, refusing to be infuriated by the “bloody shirt” nature of the charges, replied that “no such letter is in existence and, in my opinion, no such letter was ever written General Sherman . . . has been misled and misinformed” Then Lamar summarized the political losses of the South and his position:⁵⁶

We of the South have surrendered upon all the questions which divided the two sides in that controversy. We have given up the right of the people to secede from this Union; we have given up the right of each State to judge for itself of the infractions of the Constitution and the mode of redress; we have given up the right to control our own domestic institutions. We fought for all these, and we lost in that controversy; but no man shall in my presence call Jefferson Davis a traitor without my responding with a stern and emphatic denial.⁵⁷

Davis and Lamar met for probably the last time in January 1882. Lamar was in Jackson as a candidate for reelection by the Democratic caucus. The last four years had been trying for him, marked as they were with alienation from his constituency caused by the instruction question, the yellow fever epidemic, and jealousies and revolts within the Mississippi Democracy. His reelection to the Senate had been doubtful for a time, but county conventions over the state instructed for him with the result that on the night of January 4, 1882, he was unanimously renominated by the caucus.⁵⁸ After the speeches at the [State] Capitol were concluded, many of the members adjourned to the Edwards House, a famous political rendezvous. It happened that Jefferson Davis also came to the hotel at this time; he was en route from his home on the coast to his Brierfield Plantation in Warren County. He joined in the congratulations, and, the crowd insisting on a speech, he addressed them for half an hour. Lamar also made a few remarks.⁵⁹

The two men provided a sharp contrast as they stood near each other.

⁵⁵ Congressional Record, 48 Cong., 2nd sess., 627 (January 12, 1885).

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, *Atlanta Constitution*, January 13, 1885; *Washington Post*, January 13, 1885.

⁵⁷ For northern response to this scene, see *John Sherman MSS*, [Library of Congress].

⁵⁸ *Vicksburg Daily Commercial*, January 4, January 9, 1882; *Memphis Daily Appeal*, January 5, January 6, 1882; *Memphis Commercial Appeal*, September 30, 1923.

⁵⁹ *Memphis Daily Appeal*, January 6, 1882, *Memphis Commercial Appeal*, September 30, 1923.

Davis, at seventy three, was stooped, broken, and aging. As the “vicarious sufferer” for the southern rebellion, his participation in politics had ended seventeen years before. Lamar was at the high point of his career to that date, riding the topmost wave. He was fifty-six years old, vigorous, and resourceful. Davis’s political service to the South was ended, Lamar’s was approaching a climax of usefulness.

The last communication between them took place in 1885 and 1886. Lamar wrote to Davis to tell him that he had accepted a place in Cleveland’s cabinet, his chief motive being that if “I may impress the country with a desire of the South faithfully to serve the interests of a common country, I may do more good than I have ever yet been able to accomplish.”⁶⁰ He hoped for Davis’s approval of the step.⁶¹ Davis advised that he thought Lamar’s service in the cabinet “will be better for the public than yourself.” The Interior Department with its many divisions held little appeal for Davis, and he thought it would have been better for Lamar to accept “some other Department where unity in its duties would have afforded a better opportunity for the exercise of your genius. . . .”⁶²

Lamar’s last letter to Davis concluded with a statement which described his course in regard to Davis during twenty years: “No man has either in public or private assailed your name or made a slighting allusion to your fame and character in my presence without receiving a prompt and indignant rebuke from me.”⁶³

In their declining years Lamar and Davis were in similar situations. Lamar, when asked by a younger relative and friend if he should become a senatorial candidate, answered no. He, then more than sixty years old, described his situation by reviewing his own political career, as antebellum congressman, Confederate soldier and diplomat, harbinger of peace for the nation in House and Senate, cabinet member, Supreme Court justice, in all of which offices he had won honor; and yet he would advise no man to enter politics. For, said Lamar, now in his old age he had no money, no home, poor health, few real friends, his family was widely scattered, and he was forgotten by his people. He paraphrased Cardinal Wolsey’s words, saying in effect that had he but served his own interests as diligently as he had served his country, he would not now be given over to sadness in

⁶⁰ Lamar to Davis, February 28, 1885, in Mayes, *Lamar*, 471.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁶² Davis to Lamar, March 28, 1885, in Rowland, *Jefferson Davis Constitutionalist*, IX, 357-8.

⁶³ Lamar to Davis, July 3, 1886, in *Ibid.*, IX, 463.

his grey hairs.⁶⁴ Davis could truthfully say the same words in his old age, the country he served at such a cost being the Confederacy.

⁶⁴ Audley W. Shands, then a boy about twelve years old, heard Lamar giving this advice to his father. The boy was tremendously impressed. He said that these words of Lamar affected the course of his (A. W. Shands') life. Interview of Audley W. Shands, Cleveland, Mississippi, December 15, 1933.

