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CHARLES S.
SYDNOR

**THE
DEVELOPMENT
OF SOUTHERN
SECTIONALISM
1819-1848**



The Development of Southern Sectionalism 1819-1848

BY CHARLES S. SYDNOR



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Volume V

THE DEVELOPMENT OF
SOUTHERN SECTIONALISM
1819-1848

A HISTORY
OF
THE SOUTH

Volume V

EDITORS

WENDELL HOLMES STEPHENSON

E. MERTON COULTER

PUBLISHERS' PREFACE

A HISTORY OF THE SOUTH is sponsored by Louisiana State University and the Trustees of the Littlefield Fund for Southern History at The University of Texas. More remotely, it is the outgrowth of the vision of Major George W. Littlefield, C.S.A., who established a fund at The University of Texas in 1914 for the collection of materials on Southern history and the publication of a "full and impartial study of the South and its part in American history." Trustees of the Littlefield Fund began preparations in 1937 for the writing of the history that Major Littlefield contemplated. Meanwhile, a plan had been conceived at Louisiana State University for a history of the South as a part of that institution's comprehensive program to promote interest, research, and writing in the field of Southern history.

As the two undertakings harmonized in essentials, the planning groups united to become joint sponsors of *A History of the South*. Wendell Holmes Stephenson, then professor of American history at Louisiana State University, and the late Charles W. Ramsdell, professor of American history at The University of Texas, were chosen to edit the series. They had been primarily interested in initiating the plans, and it was appropriate that they should be selected to edit the work. Upon the death of Professor Ramsdell in 1942, E. Merton Coulter, professor of history at the University of Georgia, was named his successor.

Volumes of the series are being published as the manuscripts are received. This is the second published volume; it follows Volume VIII. When completed, the ten-volume set will represent about twelve years of historical planning and research.

AUTHOR'S PREFACE

THE treatment of the history of the South from 1819 to 1848 offered in this book falls into two broad divisions. One of them embraces developments of an internal nature; the other is concerned with the Federal relations of the South—the course of events through which this region was transformed from a position of great power in national affairs to the position of a conscious minority. The first division, the internal history, includes such physical and economic factors as Indian removal and the subsequent migration of white men and slaves from the Atlantic states into the Gulf states, the spread of the cotton kingdom into this same area, the growth of the slave trade into a business of enormous proportions, and the revolution in transportation worked by the steamboat and the railroad; changes in the mind and spirit of Southerners, signalized by the growth of the evangelical churches, the establishment of numerous colleges, new trends in literature, and a manifold humanitarian reform movement; and a democratic revolution of considerable magnitude that can be traced both in constitutional revisions in most of the Southern states and in political life generally, especially in radical innovations in the arts of securing office and of influencing public opinion.

The second broad division of this book traces a change of the first magnitude in the relationship of the South to the nation. At the beginning of the period under review Southern politicians and statesmen well-nigh dominated the Federal government; before it was ended they had seen their region decline to a subordinate political position. As their influence over national affairs waned, Southerners attempted to invent defenses against what they regarded as Northern political ruthlessness. Feelings of fear, desperation, and bitterness possessed them. Their patriotism toward the nation diminished. Their allegiance to their section increased.

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The necessity for treating both the domestic history and the Federal relations of the South within a single volume has posed a difficult problem in respect to organization. Wisely or not, it was met by adopting the following general plan. The first group of chapters describes and analyzes economic, cultural, and political movements within the South during the 1820's and early 1830's. The middle chapters, retracing nearly the same years, deal with the relationship of the South to the nation. Here it was necessary to write of some subjects that are the common property of general works in American history, but at certain points in this familiar story, such as in the discussion of the Missouri controversy, in exploring the origin and significance of nullification, and in emphasizing the importance of the 1820's in the development of Southern sectionalism, the author has ventured to depart from some of the customary interpretations.

The final chapters, which cover the last years of this study, treat both the internal and external aspects of Southern history, seeking to show the effect of each upon the other, and to describe the opinions, ideas, and attitudes that emerged in the South about its own way of life and about its relationship to the nation. Thus, as the story moves on through nearly a third of a century, emphasis shifts from social and economic subjects to political events and, finally, to regional attitudes and opinions.

Limitations of space have compelled a close adherence to the main goals. The domestic history of the several states could not be recounted except at moments when some one of them was exercising extraordinary influence in the region. An extended narrative of political events during the last fifteen years of our period was shortened to an essay upon the significance of those events. By these and other curtailments space was found for dealing with topics already mentioned, for assessing the activities of county and state government, for investigating the location of political power, and, especially, for attempting to discover how men secured places of power in local, state, and national government.

The selection of topics and the apportionment of space were doubtless influenced by the author's conviction that the problem of sectionalism deserves close attention. It has a central position

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in the history of the South, but it is not confined to the South or even to the United States. Sectionalism is a reversal of that process briefly summarized in the familiar phrase *e pluribus unum* and illustrated by unifying movements at many times and places in history. It is an opposite flow of events from unity toward disunity. Various names have been applied to it—separatism, particularism, disunity, secession, and nationalism as well as sectionalism—but whatever the name, the movement itself is disquieting in its course and sometimes disastrous in its consequences. This movement, at least in its embryonic form, has appeared more than once in American history; but its most extreme and well-developed occurrence was in the ante-bellum South. The author has attempted to make this book something of a case study of sectionalism. It has not been his intention to defend or to condemn its emergence in the South, but rather to search for the causes and to trace the development of this remarkable instance of a movement from unity toward disunity.

This work is concluded with humility. The author wishes that he were more learned in the various fields of history—literary, constitutional, political, religious, agricultural, social, economic, and others—that he entered. He is aware that a more restricted approach would have been safer, but the subject required him to range widely. Having done so, he hopes that a benevolent law operates in behalf of those who explore more fields than they can master. To compensate for the larger risk of error there perhaps may be a greater opportunity to see new meanings and wider relationships when familiar subjects, such as *McCulloch v. Maryland*, nullification, Indian removal from Georgia, or the Southerners' legal defenses of slavery, are examined in the light of economic and political as well as of constitutional history.

This work is also ended with gratitude to many persons. To scholars whose writings have opened paths and sometimes broad highways the author is more deeply indebted than the footnotes and the critical essay on authorities may perhaps indicate. He has been met with unfailing helpfulness by the staff members of the archival collections and libraries in which he has worked. To Professors Jay B. Hubbell, B. U. Ratchford, and William B.

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Hamilton, and to Mrs. Charles S. Sydnor, Mr. James S. Purcell, Jr., and the editors of the series in which this work appears he is indebted for helpful suggestions and criticisms.

C. S. S.

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"Melrose," Natchez, Mississippi

"Riverwood," near Nashville, Tennessee

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Classical-Revival Interior

Andrew Jackson, Daniel Webster, and Henry Clay

"Nullification or a Peep at South Carolina in 1832-3"

Advertisement of a Slave Sale

Rates, Regulations, and Schedule of an Early Southern Railroad

Railroad and Stage-Route Advertisements

Georgia Scenes in 1838

Meeting Street, Charleston, South Carolina, in 1844

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CHAPTER I

THE UNAWAKENED SOUTH

TO discover the boundaries of the South in the year 1819, or even to learn whether there was such a thing as the South, one must examine economic and cultural, rather than political, conditions. At the beginning of that year there was no Southern political party, no slave-state bloc in Congress, and no sentiment of Southern nationalism. Only one political party, the Republican, was active in national affairs, and Southerners had much influence within this powerful organization. James Monroe of Virginia was President of the United States, and among his six cabinet members were William H. Crawford of Georgia, John C. Calhoun of South Carolina, and William Wirt of Virginia. Henry Clay of Kentucky was Speaker of the House of Representatives.

Southerners, having so large a share in the direction of national affairs, were, in general, satisfied with the way the government was being managed, and most of them were too busy with their private affairs to spend much time waving the flag and listening to speeches. At Nashville, Tennessee, for example, the Fourth of July, 1819, slipped by uncelebrated except for a patriotic sermon delivered in the Methodist Church by the Reverend John Johnson.¹ But when Southerners happened to think of it, they liked to recall the Battle of New Orleans and the events of the American Revolution; and some men could remember these things from their own experiences, for the history of the United States was then a matter of personal recollection rather than of textbooks. Five of the signers of the Declaration of Independence were "yet living to behold the fruits of their mighty effort,"² and to be revered by the younger

¹ Nashville *Whig*, July 3, 1819.

² *Niles' Weekly Register* (Baltimore), XVI (1819), 400.

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generation as living symbols of American patriotism. The General Assembly of the State of Maryland, in anticipation of the fiftieth anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence, resolved that whereas "in the course of nature the surviving heroes and patriots of the revolution, will all, soon, bid the world farewell, and can never see another year of jubilee, . . . the fourth day of July next be set apart, and recommended to the people of this state, to be kept and observed as a day of thanksgiving and rejoicing, and of sending portions, one to another, and gifts to the poor, of relieving debtors from prison, and making the fiftieth Anniversary of American Independence a glad and joyful day." ³

Though the South was at peace with the nation on political issues, it was unlike it in many phases of its economic and social life. It is therefore needful to turn to this realm to discover the dominant characteristics of the South around the year 1820 and to lay a foundation for understanding the momentous events that were soon to occur.

South of Mason and Dixon's line and the Ohio River there were ten states, exactly half the number of states in the Union. Five of them—Maryland, Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Georgia—lay along the Atlantic coast, with their histories reaching back into the colonial period; and five were the younger inland and Gulf states of Kentucky, Tennessee, Louisiana, Mississippi, and Alabama. The last two had only recently emerged from territorial status, Mississippi having been admitted to statehood in 1817 and Alabama in 1819. For the sake of having a recognized and exact area for discussion, these ten states will be regarded as the South, because, as will presently appear, they possessed certain common traits. Along the edges of this group of states there were several border areas, but, to avoid complicating an involved story, they will be disregarded for the present. Above the Ohio River, for example, there were many people who had recently migrated from Virginia, North Carolina, and other Southern states,⁴ and some

³ Maryland *House Journal*, 1825-1826, pp. 398-99.

⁴ John D. Barnhart, "Sources of Southern Migration into the Old Northwest," in *Mississippi Valley Historical Review* (Cedar Rapids), XXII (1935-1936), 49-62; "The Southern Element in the Leadership of the Old Northwest," in *Journal of Southern History* (Baton Rouge), I (1935), 186-97; and "The Southern Influence in the Formation of Ohio," *ibid.*, III (1937), 28-42.

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14,000 persons had already settled in the Territory of Arkansas.⁵ Florida and Texas lay outside the boundaries of the United States, but Florida was well within the limits of Southern consciousness because it was in process of being acquired and because Andrew Jackson's recent foray against the Seminole Indians had aroused a storm of newspaper controversy.

The census of 1820 revealed that the South contained a smaller part of the nation's population than formerly; 4,298,199 persons were counted in the ten Southern states, which was half a million short of being half of the population of the United States. Furthermore, there were critical differences in the character of the two peoples. A third of the Southern population, against only 2 per cent of the Northern, was black. To put the matter in more detail, there were 1,496,189 slaves in the South and practically none in the North, and there were 116,915 free Negroes in the South and approximately the same number in the North.

The white population of the Southern states was 2,685,095 persons. That of the North was nearly twice as large. There was much homogeneity within the white population of the South, where only 12,320 unnaturalized foreigners were counted in contrast to 41,335 in the rest of the nation. Furthermore, the English, Scotch, Scotch-Irish, German, French, and other colonial stocks of the seaboard South had lived together long enough to lose many of their diversities. Here and there some evidence of cultural differences remained as among the Pennsylvania Dutch of the Shenandoah Valley and in the Scotch and German settlements in North Carolina. The St. Andrew's, the Hibernian, the French Benevolent, and the German Friendly societies kept alive the traditions of some of the racial groups in Charleston.⁶ Generally speaking, the melting pot had done a pretty thorough job on the colonial stocks of the South.

But, though the South differed from the North in its smaller and

⁵ Throughout this chapter population figures have been taken from the United States *Census of 1820* (Washington, 1821), or *The Compendium of the Ninth Census*, 1870 (Washington, 1872). The latter has been preferred because it corrects some errors in the earlier publication. However, the *Census of 1820* contains some facts that are not available elsewhere.

⁶ Robert Mills, *Statistics of South Carolina, Including a View of Its Natural, Civil, and Military History, General and Particular* (Charleston, 1826), 429-30.