CHAPTER XXVII.

SOUTHERN VIEWS OF THE MOVEMENT IN NORTHWESTERN VIRGINIA.

(From Pollard's Southern History.)

With an outrage of the plainest doctrines of the government and a practical denial not only of everything like the rights of the States but even of their territorial integrity, the Northwestern portion of Virginia, which had rebelled against its State government, was taken into the membership of the Federal Union as itself a State, with the absurd and childish addition of giving to the rebellious counties the name of "Virginia." A Convention of the disaffected Northwestern counties of Virginia had been held in Wheeling on the 13th of May and after a session of three days decided to call another Convention to meet on the 11th of June, subsequent to the vote of the State on the ordinance of secession. The Convention reorganized the counties as a member of the Federal Union, and F. W. Pierpont was elected Governor; W. T. Willey and the notorious John S. Carlile, both of whom had already signalized their treason to the State by their course in the Convention at Richmond, were sent as representatives of Virginia to the United States Senate, in which absurd capacity they were readily received.

Jefferson Davis, in his "Rise and Fall of the Confederate Government," refers to the anti-secession movements in Northwestern Virginia from the same point of view as
Pollard. The June Convention was a "so-called convention," the Constitutional Convention was also "so-called," and it framed a "so-called constitution." The Legislature was also "so-called;" and "adopting the new Federal process of assumption, it assumed to be the Legislature of Virginia." We used to speak of Mr. Davis' own government as "so-called;" and we have this advantage of him in the matter of epithets, that while the Confederacy never got beyond the "so-called" stage, the governments framed in Northwestern Virginia endured. The reorganized Virginia government established by the June Convention at Wheeling is the government of Virginia to-day, with its capital at Richmond; and West Virginia promises to be a great Commonwealth ages after the "so-called" President of the "so-called" Confederacy has been forgotten.

After reciting the admission of West Virginia, Mr. Davis "pauses" for a moment "to consider these proceedings in the light of fundamental republican principles"—of which principles Mr. Davis was himself so eminent an exemplar!

The State of Virginia was not a federation but a republic or nation. Its government was instituted with the consent of the governed, and its powers, therefore, were "just powers." When the State Convention at Richmond passed an ordinance of secession, which was subsequently ratified by 60,000 majority, it was as valid an act for the people of Virginia as was ever passed by a representative body. The legally expressed decision of the majority was the true voice of the State. When therefore disorderly persons in the Northwestern counties of the State assembled and declared the ordinance of secession to be "null and void," they rose up against the authority of the State. When they proposed to elect delegates to a convention to resist the act of the State and that Convention assembled and organized
and proceeded to action, an insurrection against the government of Virginia was begun. When the Convention next declared the State offices to be vacant and proceeded to fill them by the choice of Francis H. Peirpoint for Governor and other State officers, assuming itself to be the true State Convention of Virginia, it not only declared what notoriously did not exist but it committed an act of revolution. And when the so-called State officers elected by it entered upon their duties, they inaugurated a revolution. The subsequent organization of West Virginia and its separation from Virginia were acts of secession. Thus we have in these movements insurrection, revolution and secession.

The fatal defect in Mr. Davis' argument is that its first premise is false. The act of secession was not valid. It was an act of revolution pure and simple. If the ordinance had been legal as passed—which under the Constitution of the United States was impossible—it could not be consummated and in force until ratified by the people of Virginia more than a month after its passage. But the Convention and the Confederacy waited for no such ratification. By a coup d'etat as infamous as that of Louis Napoleon, the "so-called" President of the Confederacy took instant military possession of Virginia, under color of a league entered into with his fellow-conspirators at Richmond in violation of every principle of law and government. This league violated, first, the Constitution of the United States; it violated the act of Assembly calling and constituting the Convention, and the schedule accompanying the ordinance of secession; violated the Bill of Rights which forbade the erection of any foreign government in Virginia. It violated all the "fundamental republican principles" about which Mr. Davis became so solicitous after he found he was not to be hanged. This
military seizure of Virginia put Mr. Davis in absolute control of the election on the ratification of the ordinance and made a reign of terror at the polls on that 23d of May all over Virginia except in a few counties in the Northwest. The people of Virginia had voted in February against secession by nearly sixty thousand majority. What the vote really was under the Davis reign of terror in May will never be known; but the history of all civilized countries may be challenged to show a greater outrage on popular rights. This book has been written in vain, and the history it records enacted in vain, if it does not clearly appear that the people of Northwestern Virginia were justified before God and man in the principles to which they appealed for the vindication of their rights and in the measures of self-preservation adopted by them.

Gordon Battelle, in the midst of the Jeff. Davis rebellion said: "It has been the merit of other attempted revolutions that their motive at least was a reaching upward and forward after liberty. It is the infamy of this that it is a reaching downward and backward after despotism."

It does not become the unsuccessful head of a flagrant and inexcusable rebellion, undertaken with no higher object than to perpetuate the enslavement of a subject race, to reproach the people who were driven to defend their liberties and lives against the violence invoked by him.