CHAPTER V

BLACK SLAVES AND MOUNTAIN WHITES

The first Southern Highlanders came into being through a sifting process which produced both the strong and the weak, and in the struggle for existence a person might pass from one class to the other, but the two classes continued, even as it must always be in a normal society. There was no reason calling for the weaklings to increase their proportion over their more fortunate neighbors to any greater extent in the Southern Highlands than in the Southern Lowlands and Piedmont regions. Southern Appalachia was never so densely populated that many of its inhabitants were forced through the scarcity of land to live on the steep slopes of its rugged mountains. Those who chose to live in the out-of-way places made their decision because they were natural lovers of solitudes, or else because they were so shiftless that hard circumstances washed them there with little resistance on their part. The isolated Elizabethan mountaineers developed in no greater proportions than did the "poor white trash" in the piney woods and wire grass country. There was no part of the South that did not have its unfortunates, and at no period and in no region was it all the one or the other. To denominate all mountaineers as illiterate ne'er-do-wells would be as absurd as to claim that all lowlanders were cultured aristocrats.

Making a living is ever a conscious thought with all normal people, but how much it shall take and the manner in which it shall be done vary widely. Southern Highlanders differed not with this philosophy of life. For some a small field and a rude cabin were sufficient, and the number of hogs kept could be made to vary inversely with the number of bear hunts the fall might

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1 Even in the year 1936 there are great stretches of the Southern Highlands which have never known the mountaineer's cabin.
produce. This class of people lived rudely but well. They were not in the business of producing anything for sale, although they were never without something to sell. They never knew the meaning of financial depressions and of the hunger and poverty that the industrial revolution brought to their twentieth century descendants in Elizabethton, in Kingsport, in Bristol. But highlanders were just as ambitious as lowlanders; they were just as desirous of becoming great as were the people in any other part of the country. They would turn their hand to whatever business their region best promoted. The river valleys of the Tennessee, the French Broad, the Powell, and the Clinch and many less spacious levels, called coves, which the mountains so obligingly provided, afforded agricultural land of the greatest fertility. Here farms sprang up and some of them grew to such sizes that they came to be none other than Southern plantations.

Agriculture came in with such vigor that it was forced to do homage to that handmaid of ante-bellum Southern agrarianism, slavery. In 1860 there were thirty counties which made up what was called East Tennessee, and in every one of them slavery gained a lodgment. With the exception of Scott County where the proportion of slaveholding families to non-slaveholding was one to fifty-seven, the East Tennessee counties ranged in the proportion of slaveholders to nonslaveholders from one to twenty-one, to one to five. Two-thirds of these counties had a tenth or more of their population holding slaves. For the whole South the average was about a third. The number of slaves per county ranged from 59 in Scott County to 2,370 in Knox County. Exactly two-thirds of these counties had more than 500 slaves each, and an even dozen had more than a thousand. While most of the slaveholders owned less than fifteen slaves, about 170 owned twenty slaves or more, and one planter in Jefferson County owned more than 200. These East Tennessee farmers and planters raised corn, wheat, rye, oats and other grains. They also raised hay, cattle, and swine, and horses and mules.

There was also a sort of industrialism growing up, which was not allied to planters nor necessarily friendly to agricultural
philosophy. A great deal of flour and meal was manufactured, amounting in each of seven counties to more than $100,000 annually. In 1860 the value of this product in Knox County was $263,000. Lumber, leather, liquor, and cotton goods were also produced in varying quantities, and in 1860 Hamilton County packed $180,000 worth of pork and beef. Mining interests were beginning to be developed, with Marion County taking out of the ground in 1860 coal to the value of $408,000, and Polk County producing copper worth $404,000. Little cities like Knoxville were growing into industrial centers of some importance.²

In the earlier days East Tennessee had been self-sufficient, shut-off, and contented, but as this region began to produce something to sell, it became more interested in the way out. Nature had provided two main roads—up the valleys toward Roanoke, Lynchburg, and Richmond, and down the valley toward Chattanooga, Atlanta, Birmingham, and Nashville. Minor ways lay northwestward through Cumberland Gap and eastward up the French Broad to Asheville. However, in the case of the latter two ways, it was necessary to cross the two great mountain systems which flanked the Tennessee valleys. But the people beyond the Gap were the competitors of the East Tennesseans in selling their products to the planters, so the Cumberland Gap became a pass into and through East Tennessee to the southward. The road up the French Broad led to Asheville without great difficulty, but the markets that would buy what East Tennesseans wanted to sell lay far on beyond to the southward, and between was a mountainous country yet to be crossed. So strongly did the magnet of trade draw to Columbia, Charleston, and Augusta, that the great six-horse wagons dragged themselves through this mountain highway, sliding down through Saluda Gap into Greenville District, South Carolina. The first easy way to market was down the Holston and into the Tennessee River to Chattanooga, but soon the Tennessee unobligingly broke navigation at the Muscle Shoals,

and then later illogically wandered northward, finally emptying into the Ohio River, five hundred miles away from East Tennessee’s markets. A canal around the shoals would allow unimpeded navigation across the whole stretch of Alabama, but the project never produced anything more valuable than the plans.

The markets that stood gaping for East Tennessee flour, meal, salt, iron, pork, horses, mules, sheep, and hay lay to the south and southeast, in Georgia and South Carolina. These great plantation markets by right belonged to East Tennessee, for they were close by. Yet they lay beyond a great wall of mountains which was not so accommodating as even to allow a water course to trickle through. But in the early 1820’s, a resolute East Tennessean determined to take a cargo to the lowland markets of Alabama, mountain walls and Muscle Shoals notwithstanding. He built himself a keel boat on the Holston, loaded it down with flour and whiskey, and embarked on a remarkable Odyssey. He floated down the Holston, past the mouth of the French Broad and on into the Tennessee until he reached the Hiwassee. Here he turned his boat southeastward up this stream and poled it until he reached the Ocoee. He belabored his boat up this stream almost to the Georgia boundary, when being unable to proceed further he dragged both boat and cargo across the height of land to the headwaters of the Conasauga. Down this river he floated into the Oostanoula, Coosa, and Alabama, and finally deposited his cargo in Montgomery.³

It was easy enough to see that East Tennessee would have great difficulty in reaching her markets as long as navigating rivers and canals was the national mode of travel. And so it was that new hope sprang up in East Tennessee when news reached there that a railroad was a practical invention and that it could be built where people would never dream of trying to put canals. Knoxville, which had long been the wagon center of East Tennessee,⁴ now aspired to be the railroad center. An enthusiastic meeting held here in 1831 humbled the mountains and determined that a railroad should be built across them to

³ *Niles’ Register*, XX, 63, 64 (March 24, 1821).

⁴ In 1825 it was estimated that the number of wagons entering Knoxville averaged 975 annually. *Niles’ Register*, XXIX, 263 (December 24, 1825).
Charleston, South Carolina. The next year, Asheville, North Carolina, which expected to be on this new railroad, was the scene of another enthusiastic meeting. This idea of a railroad through the heart of the Southern Highlands soon came to be developed into a grand conception which fired the imagination of Calhoun, Hayne, and many other Southerners. This road would not stop at Knoxville, but should speed its conquering way into the heart of the Ohio Valley—to Cincinnati. Not only would the Southern Highlands be annexed to the South Atlantic, but the wealth of the Middle West would flow southward, and with it would come an alliance so powerful that the South could defy all New England and the East, commercially as well as politically.

The whole country had now become excited over railroads, and nowhere was there greater enthusiasm than in the Southern Highlands and in the Southeast. On July 4, 1836, more than 400 delegates from nine states met in the Methodist Church in Knoxville to promote the Charleston and Cincinnati project. Without waiting for the slower parts of the country to awaken, the East Tennesseans organized during this year the Hiwassee Railroad Company, and in the course of the next few years, before being overtaken by bankruptcy, they spent more than a million dollars in their fruitless efforts to pierce the mountains. The twentieth century reminder of this former ambition to go through the mountains rather than around them is a short line of track from Knoxville to Maryville, which still bears the ambitious title, Knoxville and Augusta Railroad. The attempt to join by a railroad the Lowlands and the Highlands was revived in 1848. This time a flank attack would be made on the mountains. Under the name of the East Tennessee and Georgia Railroad, this project was begun at Dalton, Georgia, in 1850.

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6 Ibid., XL, 307 (July 2, 1831).
8 This was the famous Charleston and Cincinnati Railroad, which as such was never built. See *ibid.*, pp. 168-220. For a discussion of this project which grew up after the Civil War and which resulted in the Cincinnati Southern Railway from Cincinnati to Chattanooga, see E. M. Coulter, *The Cincinnati Southern Railroad and the Struggle for Southern Commerce*. 
and by the end of the following year it had been pushed northward to Athens, Tennessee. It continued northeastward, crossing the Tennessee River in 1852 and reaching Knoxville in 1855. In 1859 a branch was built from Cleveland, Tennessee to Chattanooga, to connect with roads to Nashville and Louisville and with the Western and Atlantic, which had been built by the state of Georgia from Atlanta to the latter city, and had been completed in 1851. By 1860 the Virginia and East Tennessee Railroad had been pushed through Lynchburg and on to Richmond. At this time East Tennessee found herself well connected with all the principal cities of the United States through this strategic line which passed from Chattanooga to Bristol.  

East Tennessee was never plantation country and never would have become so, but by 1860 it was fast making preparations to tie itself to the planter class by the tough thongs of a lucrative trade. Though entirely different from the Lower South in topography and largely in occupation, it was not an enemy territory alien in sympathy. On the all-absorbing Southern institution, it was harmonious with the rest of the South. It had been exposed very early to influences hostile to slavery, but it had listened no more attentively and had reacted no more favorably than many other regions of the South not in the mountains.

It was characteristic of the pioneer preachers, irrespective of denomination, to oppose slavery, coupling with it the other great sin, whiskey-drinking. These impecunious wanderers, having no worldly possessions, saw few slaves in their earthly kingdom, but those few they did see likely belonged to people who considered themselves too high in the scale of life to notice, except to spurn, the frontier preacher. Coupled with this wholly human personal feeling against slaveholders and therefore against slavery, were specific teachings of some of the denominations. The Quakers were as well-known for their anti-slavery sentiment as for any other doctrine. Methodists, Presbyterians, and Baptists were likewise in varying degrees opposed to slavery. As the Presbyterians became more wealthy and educated they soon forgot their hostility, and left the Methodists to get

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away as best they could from the teachings of John Wesley and the pronouncements his Church had made.

Wesley had declared that slavery was a "complicated villainy," and that man-buying was no more respectable than man-stealing. The earliest Methodist saints, such as Thomas Coke and Francis Asbury, imbibed their anti-slavery feelings from Wesley, and when in 1784 in Baltimore they set up the Methodist Church in America, they forbade all members of the Church to own slaves, except in states where manumission was prohibited by law. But they had climbed onto too high a plane; within less than six months the rule was indefinitely suspended. As far as slavery was concerned the Methodists were now in a state of nature until 1796, when they marched toward high ground again by forbidding all Church officials to own slaves or any Methodist to buy or sell slaves "Unjustly, inhumanly, or covetously." They soon suffered a relapse and in 1808 they repealed all rules which attempted to regulate a private member's dealings with slavery. The Methodist Church was now becoming wealthy enough in the South and respectable enough, to feel an interest in the destiny of its surroundings, and so Bishop Asbury came to the conclusion that it were much better to work for the salvation of the slave's soul and the alleviation of the harshness of his position rather than to attempt further to have him set free. In 1840 the Church abandoned the subject of slavery entirely, by repealing the rule against officials owning slaves. But at the next conference in 1844 the storm broke, and the Church split into two permanent bodies on the subject of slavery. Southern Methodists now like other denominations in the South became a church for the land of slavery, a land that was consciously developing a nationality.⁹

East Tennessee very early became the scene of vigorous attempts to organize manumission societies, and some of the earliest anti-slavery leaders who came to be best known made their start here. Samuel Doak came into the Holston River Valley before the end of the Revolution and for the next generation

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Educated the people against slavery both from the pulpit and in Washington Academy and Tusculum Academy, which he founded. A pupil who showed the results of this teaching, fifty years later in far-away Texas, was Sam Houston. By 1814 the Quakers had organized the Manumission Society of Tennessee and had begun their appeal to all, but especially to the religious denominations, to help spread the movement. In 1816 this society held a meeting in Greene County, and over the names of Thomas Doak, Elihu Embree, and others, it sent out an appeal for the gradual emancipation of the slaves.¹⁰

East Tennessee became the cradle of the emancipation press. In Jonesboro in 1816 the Manumission Intelligencer sprang up, soon to be followed by the Emancipator, edited by Elihu Embree. When Embree died his place was taken by Benjamin Lundy, who set up his Genius of Universal Emancipation, first begun in Ohio and later moved to Greeneville. But with all the writing by newspaper editors and all the preaching by Quakers, Methodists, Baptists, and Presbyterians, the manumission movement made little progress in Southern Appalachia. Before slaves were brought in, the Highlanders could not become greatly excited over something about which they had no first-hand information, and when the valley farms began to be developed sufficiently to make slaves desirable, the manumission movement became correspondingly undesirable. Abstractions never took up a great amount of the time Southern Highlanders had at their disposal. Although Lundy’s program was innocuous as compared with the later abolition movement conducted by William Lloyd Garrison, yet it appeared vicious enough to lead East Tennesseans to threaten Lundy in various ways. “Often the bullies,” declared Lundy, “vapoured around me with bludgeons, in such a manner, that the sparing of my life might seem to have been providential.” In 1824 Lundy moved out with his Genius of Universal Emancipation and continued it in Baltimore.¹¹

¹⁰ Niles’ Register, XIV, 321 (July 4, 1818).
¹¹ The Life, Travels and Opinions of Benjamin Lundy, Including his Journey to Texas and Mexico; with a Sketch of Contemporary Events and a Notice of
It has heretofore been amply demonstrated that Parson Brownlow was interested in all the religious and journalistic activities in the Highlands, and it might well be inferred that he would spring into the midst of any movement which he might succor or belabor and in which he might whip up excitement. The Parson did not necessarily predicate his position on conformity with the prevailing sentiment; he was entirely too eccentric, independent, and honest for such slavishness. So it does not logically follow that to explain East Tennessee is to explain the Parson. Yet in the matter of internal improvements and of slavery, it is true that Brownlow coincided with his surroundings and that he had no little part in directing and supporting sentiment in East Tennessee on these two subjects. In his newspaper he gave a great deal of space to railroads, and he applied to the abolitionists some of his most devastating invective.

The question might well be asked, How did Brownlow look upon aristocrats, both in his midst and on the slave plantations? It expresses much to say that he did not hate them and never hurled his terrible bolts at them. Through grim circumstances he had been forced to believe in hard labor; the aristocrats frowned upon manual labor as something for the slave to do. The Parson with good feeling told them how mistaken they were in upholding such a system of philosophy. Andrew Johnson had a personal feeling against aristocrats because he had begun life among them as a poor white, and he held them responsible for his hard lot. Brownlow had grown up among his own kind, and when he came into contact with aristocrats he had become a man of some importance. In fact Brownlow was not sure that he would not like to be an aristocrat, if he could only learn the formula. The most that the Parson had to say about aristocrats was to make some good-natured fun at their expense.

He was well acquainted with the planter aristocrats and with their ways, for he travelled widely throughout the South as politician, preacher, moral lecturer, or delegate to any kind of a meeting to which he could get the appointment. He was an in-


12 Knoxville Whig, June 19, 1852.
veterate wanderer, and most of his travels were in the South. In 1848 he turned up at Madison, Georgia in the heart of planter aristocracy, with no other reason than to attend the meeting of the Georgia Conference there. In 1854 he set out on a lecture trip which took him down through the Lowlands from Charleston to Savannah and up through the heart of Georgia. He showed no distaste for the planters, though at times they showed a dislike for him. On this trip he visited the little intellectual and aristocratic center of Athens, Georgia, and spoke in the town hall on temperance. The élite of the town came out to listen, “attracted more through curiosity than anything else” and expecting to hear something “original and racy.” Their expectations were fully gratified, for the Parson soon dipped into low and vulgar allusions and set the aristocratic ladies to leaving the meeting or blushing behind their fans in the most approved fashion.

If no other evidence existed, the fact that the Parson attended some of the meetings of the Southern commercial conventions would be sufficient to show that he was climbing up among the planter aristocrats and was attempting to become respectable among them. By appearing at such meetings he was tending to identify himself with that longing in the South to develop Southern nationalism and Southern unity and to speed the day when the destiny of the South would be fully realized, under aristocratic leadership. He attended the convention which met in Charleston in 1854, and although he did not dominate the meeting like he would a Methodist conference, still he slipped in a speech whenever possible and in other ways made the convention realize that he was present. In 1857 the Southern Commercial Convention met in Brownlow’s home city, Knoxville, and, of course, the Parson was there. He announced his presence early in the session when he opposed a movement to keep out the “Black Republican” and Yankee newspaper reporters, by declaring that he would be in favor of admitting a reporter from his Satanic majesty if one should appear. Other East Tennessee

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14 *The Southern Banner*, April 27, 1851. For a trip into Alabama in 1858 see *Knoxville Whig*, February 13, 1858.
leaders such as Horace Maynard and Oliver P. Temple, were here also identifying themselves with Southern extremism. This Knoxville convention was so outstanding in the threatening attitude which many speakers took toward the Union that the Parson later admitted that these conventions were becoming too dangerous to please him.\textsuperscript{15}

But what were the Parson's definite views on slavery, this institution which made possible the great planter class? Having been born with a seeming prejudice against Negroes he naturally considered their proper position to be one of slavery as long as they remained in his sight. His earliest views were strictly in keeping with those of Henry Clay, whom he had chosen as his guide for all earthly affairs. While he was still riding the circuit, the question came up, and he admitted that to solve the problem would take a better mind than his "or those possessed by these emancipating preachers, who are continually bawling out \textit{set your negroes free}."\textsuperscript{16} As his own Methodists held a halting record on the slavery question, he was unable to attack other churches for opposing slavery, but he could at least say that the American Colonization Society would be an excellent organization, if it could be kept free from the Presbyterians. As a true disciple of Henry Clay's he favored colonizing all freed Negroes in Liberia or elsewhere outside the United States. He was opposed to free Negroes remaining in America, and when in 1840 it appeared that the testimony of a free Negro had been accepted in a trial in the navy, Brownlow made a bitter attack on President Van Buren for allowing such an outrage.\textsuperscript{17}

In line with the development of the slavery argument in the South, Brownlow declared that the free Negroes in both North and South were more miserable and destitute than the slaves. By the 1850's he stood as a strong friend of slavery, and in defending it he would go as far as the boldest—"even dying in


\textsuperscript{16} Brownlow, \textit{Helps to the Study of Presbyterianism}, p. 110.

\textsuperscript{17} \textit{Ibid.}, pp. 107-11; \textit{Parson Brownlow's Book}, p. 25; Brownlow, \textit{A Political Register}, pp. 184-90.
the last ditch!” Slavery was wholly scriptural throughout, di­

viney planned by the Lord, and clearly intended by Him to
“exist even to the end of time.”

Nothing aroused the Parson to a greater heat of passion than
to have the institution attacked by Northerners, whom he
variously denominated “fiery bigots,” “vagabond philan­
thropists,” and “vile Abolitionists.” Back in 1839 he announced in
his Whig: “A young upstart from Philadelphia, who figures
with as many ALIASES as the Emperor of Russia has titles”
visited East Tennessee for the purpose of getting converts to
abolition, but not a soul would hear him. Uncle Tom’s Cabin,
the Parson considered the greatest outrage ever perpetrated
in book form, and as for Mrs. Stowe, “We are sorry to say that
she is certainly a deliberate liar, and it is the greater pitty [sic],
as she is the daughter of a Clergyman, and has been better
raised!” Later on when the Parson saw her picture he passed
the further comment on her: “She is as ugly as Original sin—
an abomination in the eyes of civilized people. A tall, course,
vulgar-looking woman—stoop-shouldered with a long yellow
neck, and a long peaked nose—through which she speaks.”

The Parson was maddened to the extent of being willing to
accept any wager of battle the Abolitionists might throw
down. In 1853, in the most advanced fire-eating fashion he de­
clared, “‘A bloody revolution’ is the only alternative the Abo­
litionists of the North intend to present to the South. As a
Southern man, we accept the proposition for ‘a bloody revo­
lution,’ and we are ready to go into it, whenever the ball opens.”

Having thundered out against the Northern Abolitionists for
twenty years in his newspaper, Brownlow in 1856 decided to
preach a formal sermon against them. On June 8th he spoke

39 W. G. Brownlow, Americanism Contrasted with Foreignism, Romanism,
and Bogus Democracy, in the Light of Reason, History and Scripture; in which
Certain Demagogues in Tennessee, and Elsewhere, are shown up in their True
Colors, p. 197.
40 Elizabethton Whig, September 19, 1839.
41 Knoxville Whig, February 5, 1853.
42 Ibid., August 13, 1853.
43 Ibid., August 6, 1853.
44 Of course, he had much to say about slavery, in his sermons heretofore.
in Temperance Hall in Knoxville for an hour and fifteen minutes on slavery, showing the great part that institution had played in history, how Abraham had had more slaves than any cotton-planter in South Carolina or Mississippi, how it was through slavery that King Solomon built his Temple, how the Egyptians built the Pyramids, and how the great civilizations of Greece and Rome had been reared and maintained. It was nothing to their credit that Northerners did not own slaves, for “their virtuous and pious minds were chiefly exercised in slave-stealing and slave-selling.” As for the pious Abolitionists, they preached against slavery on Sunday, “and on the next day, in a purely business transaction, behind a counter, or in the settlement of an account, cheat a Southern slave out of the pewter that ornaments the head of his cane!” “Nay,” cried out the Parson, “the villainous piety of some leads them to contribute Sharpe’s Rifles and Holy Bibles, to send the uncircumcised Philistines of New England into Kansas and Nebraska, to shoot down the Christian owners of slaves, and then to perform religious ceremonies over their dead bodies!”

Having improved upon this sermon and made some additions, the next year he displayed his complete Southern orthodoxy before the meeting of the Southern Commercial Convention then being held in Knoxville, by delivering it in Temperance Hall before the assembled delegates and others. At this time he took the opportunity to renew his warfare against Elder Graves and to vindicate his beloved Methodist Church South from the slanders of the Reverend Presbyterian. His chief quarrel with Graves now sprang out of the latter’s statement that the Presbyterians in a recent schism in the New School wing were the first religious denomination to align itself definitely in support of slavery. Brownlow, after castigating Graves, reminded him that the Methodist Church South had wedded slavery back in 1844. So pleased were the Southern Commercial Convention delegates with this sermon that ten of them from Alabama and eighteen from various other Southern states called upon Brownlow to

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25 Brownlow, Americanism Contrasted with Foreignism, pp. 195-201.
print the sermon in pamphlet form to be scattered throughout the slaveholding South. They also respectfully begged the Parson to repeat his “Lecture” in all the principal cities and towns. Brownlow, greatly pleased by the reception he had received from these planter aristocrats, agreed to comply with both kind invitations.27

The Parson’s blood was now tingling for the fray with the Abolitionists. His slavery sermon appeared to him to be irresistible. He would not waste it on East Tennesseans and other Southerners, who were already favorable to slavery; rather would he challenge the combined hordes of all the North to come out and fight. He would especially like to cross swords with Theodore Parker or Henry Ward Beecher, and he was not afraid to have the combat on Boston Commons amidst a ten acre lot full of people. The reputation of the Parson was too well known in the North for his challenge to be immediately accepted or even considered. The first “black hope” of the North to come out was Frederick Douglass, whom the Parson spurned as an untouchable. It would be an immeasurable disgrace to debate with a Negro. But the Parson was in earnest in his desire to debate any white Abolitionist and he hoped one would appear. Late in the spring of 1858 a radical Garrisonian emerged from his retreat at McGrawville, New York, and informed the Parson that he would debate the question of slavery with him. This champion for the North identified himself as Abraham Pryne, a Congregational clergyman, and the editor of an anti-slavery paper, the Central Reformer. Should Brownlow like to know more he was referred to Joshua R. Giddings, Gerritt Smith, or Mark Hopkins. Pryne stipulated that the debate must be held somewhere in the state of New York, and that he must have four weeks notice.28

The Parson was eager to begin the fight, and he got his heart’s content, for hostilities began even before the terms of the debate had been settled. Pryne not getting an immediate answer to his acceptance of the Parson’s challenge addressed him

27 Ibid., p. 2.
28 Ought American Slavery to be Perpetuated, pp. 5, 6, 129, 281.
again with the hope “that after your blustering announcement that you would meet the entire North on this question, you will not back out from the first debate offered you.” Brownlow came back with a ready answer: He had not replied sooner because when Pryne’s letter arrived he was 1,000 miles away “on a tour of observation among the negroes, and sugar and cotton plantations of Mississippi, Arkansas, Louisiana, and Alabama.” Having already been insulted by the Negro, Frederick Douglass, the Parson was wary of Northerners whom he did not personally know. “There are two points of information I wish from you,” he wrote, “before I respond to your challenge. First, what church are you connected with? Next, are you a white man, or a gentleman of color?” Not to be trapped by a Negro or an atheist, Brownlow on the same day wrote Giddings, asking the same two questions about Pryne. Giddings informed him that Pryne was a Congregationalist, but he did not mention his color. This aroused Brownlow’s suspicions, and again he demanded of Pryne his color, stating that since there was a Negro college in McGrawville, he suspected that Pryne was its president. Pryne now replied that he was “not a very white man,” but that there was no Negro blood in his veins.

Now that Pryne’s color was established, Brownlow would consider the terms of the debate. He did not want to debate in the state of New York, but he would be satisfied with Philadelphia. Pryne acceded, agreeing to debate anywhere from Augusta, Maine to Chicago. As to the nature of the question and its statement, Brownlow wanted great latitude, for he had determined to take advantage of this occasion not only to defend slavery and all things Southern but to carry out a terrific assault against the North and all of its ways. He declared, “I will be the judge of what is to the point, and will not be ruled out of order, or off of the subject, by any moderators, or judges of the debate.” He would begin the debate and let Pryne close it, and it might continue through as many installments as Brownlow might desire. Each should speak an hour, and neither should

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continue more than an hour and a half. There should be no interruptions, and however much Pryne might need the help of others he must fight alone, but Brownlow would not object to him surrounding himself “with all the anti-Slavery leaders at the North, and with counselling them, and being prompted by them at intervals; and when we are through, if any one of them shall think you have not done me or the South justice, I will renew the contest with him.” Brownlow wanted it understood that he was not entering this debate for the purpose of making money. Therefore, it ought to be “a free fight”; but he could not afford to be at greater expense than his fare to Philadelphia and return and his lodging while there. Consequently, if the hall should not be free, then an admission price must be charged. Pryne was sure that it would be wholly permissible to charge an admission fee, for in fact that was the custom in the North. Although Brownlow would not debate with a Negro, he would not object to having Negroes listening to him debate. So it was agreed that all without regard to color should be admitted, if they presented the required tickets. The debate should be held in early September. Now that the terms were fixed and the date set, the Parson warned Pryne “to be fully ready, as I purpose to give you battle after a style you have not been accustomed to. . . .”

During the summer the Parson marshalled his facts at spare moments, and on September 3, he arrived in Philadelphia—but not ready for the fight: He had ammunition sufficient to annihilate the North, but he was unable to fire it at the enemy. He had lost his voice. He suggested to Pryne that the debate be postponed, explaining, “By speaking both too long and too loud, and by over-heating myself in a controversy during the last summer, I have brought upon myself bronchitis, rendering it impossible for me to speak, or even converse, without an effort somewhat painful.” With a feeling akin to humility he admitted that this was the first time he had found himself without a strong and powerful voice for thirty years. Pryne demurred: The hall had been engaged and the audience was ready;

31 Ibid., pp. 9-14.
no one must be disappointed. Brownlow had never been a coward and rather than have the appearance of being one now, he hired a reader to perform for him. But the great joy of appearing before an audience in exciting debate he was now forced to forego, and although those who listened to his speeches heard language unusual to their ears, they missed the greatest attraction which the joint debate had promised. 32

This forensic disputation was held in the National Guard Hall, and beginning on September 7, it lasted through five successive evenings, attracting considerable attention among the Philadelphians. On the first evening there were about 400 present, and according to the Pennsylvanian, the audience throughout the five days was a “mixture of whites and blacks—Southern students, Quakers, Black Republicans, and negro barbers and bootblacks, and the Abolitionists outnumbered the decent portion three to one.”33 Despite the fact that this debate was much like giving the play with Hamlet left out, the Parson’s arguments seem to have drawn much attention. One Philadelphia paper declared that his speech was received “with especial favor,”34 and another reported that it “abounded in racy denunciation, keen hits, and amusing and felicitous turns of expression” and “the audience applauded immensely.”35

As the two participants were fanatical in their zeal on opposite sides of the same subject, there was no reason for a polished debate, neither logical argument nor nice personal considerations. Perhaps the audience might have been disappointed and less appreciative had the debate turned out otherwise. The Parson very early complained of being interrupted by people in the audience crying out, “Time expired.” He charged the guilty ones with being “ruffians and insolent free negroes,” who were Pryne’s chief supporters, for “Southern men, unlike Abolitionists, are men of good breeding!”36 According to Brownlow’s estimate the audience was in the proportion of five to one

32 Ibid., pp. 15-16.
33 Ibid., 1858.
34 September 13, 1858.
35 North American and United States Gazette, September 8, 1858.
36 Pennsylvanian, September 8, 1858.
37 Ought American Slavery to be Perpetuated, p. 140.
against him, and he explained it by declaring that Pryne had "a horde of free negroes and fugitive slaves here all the time clapping for him, and hissing me." In closing the debate Brownlow said, "For the general decorum and most exemplary behavior of the decent portion of the audience, I return my sincere thanks. To the opposite class, largely in the majority, my competitor will no doubt make suitable acknowledgments!" Brownlow also found the newspapers of the city prejudiced against him. They gave to Pryne's speeches much more space than to his own—and he openly confronted them with charges of this favoritism. Pryne accused Brownlow of running over his time in almost every one of his speeches. Smarting under some of Brownlow's thrusts, he declared that he had stooped lower than he had anticipated when he agreed to debate the Parson. He took especial offense at this question which Brownlow asked him: "Would he be willing to see his daughter married to the son of such distinguished buck negroes as Sam. Ward or Fred. Douglass?" He answered that he would not stoop to such tactics as the Parson employed, but he would say that his daughter should never marry a Southern slaveholder.

At times during the debate Brownlow assumed that he had demoralized Pryne and had thrown him into a disorganized retreat. He challenged him to repeat the debate throughout the North and South—especially would he have it repeated in the South. Pryne snarled back at the Parson and refused, for Southerners "meet reason with brickbats and pistols, and settle questions of ethics and logic with gutta percha canes, even on the floor of the Senate. . . ."

Personalities added excitement to the debate, but most of the time was consumed with arguments, new and old, Southern and Garrisonian, in which the slaves sometimes got lost amidst the display of bitter sectionalism. At the outset Brownlow announced that slavery had been found to be in existence at the

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37 Ibid., p. 215.
38 Ibid., p. 278.
39 Ibid., p. 277.
40 Ibid., pp. 171-72, 216, 221.
41 Ibid., pp. 282-83.
dawn of history and that it would also be found at the setting thereof. He had traced slavery "up the stream of time to God's awful mysteries which enshroud the origin of society!" Abolitionists should know that "if their great-grand-children live to see 'American Slavery' eradicated from the States South, where it now is, by the sanction of law and the provisions of our Constitution, as well as with the approbation of God himself, they will live until their heads are as grey as a Norwegian rat." Indeed, he would go further: "When the angel Gabriel sounds the last loud trump of God, and calls the nations of the earth to judgment—then, and not before, will slavery be abolished south of Mason and Dixon's line!"

He found slavery Biblical throughout, and no Christian could deny that slavery had been ordained by God. He exhibited dozens of passages from the Bible to prove his point. He declared that Abraham owned "more slaves than any cotton-planter in South Carolina, Georgia, Alabama, or Mississippi; or any tobacco or sugar planter in Virginia or Louisiana." God not only established slavery but he ordained fugitive slave laws for its enforcement. The proof he found in Genesis 16:9, which reads, "And the angel of the Lord said unto her, Return to thy mistress, and submit thyself under her hands." This passage referred to Hagar's flight from Sarai. At the peril of having his audience charge that he was crazy, Brownlow declared that he would solemnly say "that the Angel of God, on this occasion, was acting in the capacity of a United States Marshal under the then existing fugitive slave laws of the Old Testament, and arresting a fugitive slave. . . ." Christ had seen slavery of the worst kind on all sides, yet he had never preached against it, neither had St. Paul. In fact St. Paul had opposed the abolitionists of his day.

Slavery was a great Christianizing influence. In Africa the black savages worshiped "stones, insects, and reptiles." In their

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43 Ibid., p. 270.
44 Ibid., pp. 217-18.
46 Ibid., pp. 79-80.
47 Ibid., pp. 212, 255.
barbarism they were “fierce, cruel, cowardly and treacherous,” ignorant and lascivious, constantly fighting among themselves, burning each other at the stake, and actually devouring each other. American slavery had rescued them from this terrible existence and had placed them in the salubrious South where they ate the bread of contentment and where every Sunday hundreds of thousands heard the Gospel preached.\textsuperscript{48} Slavery “has brought five times more negroes into the fold of the Church than all the missionary operations of the world combined. Slavery has tamed, civilized, Christianized, if you please, the brutal negroes brought to our shores, by New England kidnappers. . . .”\textsuperscript{49} The slaveholders, even those who were not members of any church, had encouraged the Christianization of their slaves. As a result there were in the South 466,000 slaves who were members of churches. The Parson had found slave churches in all the principal cities of the South, and he had preached to many slave congregations. In Mobile he had recently seen a slave congregation of 700 members, who owned a church building costing $7,000. In his own home town of Knoxville, there were two slave Sunday Schools.\textsuperscript{50}

The Abolitionists had attempted vast damage to God’s Kingdom among the slaves. They had forced the Methodist Church to divide into a Northern and a Southern branch, for “we cannot affiliate with men who fight under the dark and piratical flag of Abolitionism, and whose infernal altars smoke with the vile incense of Northern fanaticism!”\textsuperscript{51} The Southern Methodist Church was then doing “more for the souls and bodies of the negro race; than all the Wendell Phillipeses, Josh Giddingses, Horace Greeleys, Ward Beechers, Loyd [sic] Garrisons, Theodore Parkers, Madam Stowes, and other freedom-shriekers, now out of the infernal regions!”\textsuperscript{52} No Abolitionists merited a place in Heaven, and if the Parson should ever discover any of them there he would be forced to conclude that “they have entered

\textsuperscript{48} Ibid., pp. 98-99.  
\textsuperscript{49} Ibid., p. 101.  
\textsuperscript{50} Ibid., pp. 99-100, 166.  
\textsuperscript{51} Ibid., p. 41.  
\textsuperscript{52} Ibid., p. 39.
that world of joy, by practicing a gross fraud upon the door-
keeper!"53

The Abolitionists were continually shouting freedom for the
slaves, as if such a condition would be helpful. The free Negroes
already in existence were horribly treated in the North, and
those in the South found no possible position in which to live,
economical or otherwise. With few exceptions the slaves were
kindly treated by their masters. "Cruelty, starvation, and naked-
ness," declared Brownlow, "does not exist in the South, but in
the disordered imaginations of Abolition preachers, travellers,
and slanderers, who pass hurriedly through the South, getting
up materials for book-making."54 In fact, "In our cotton-grow-
ing States, our hardest task-masters are Northern men, by birth
and education!"55 The Parson was convinced that if given their
freedom, one-half of the slaves in East Tennessee would refuse
it.56 Furthermore, the Negroes were an inferior race, and only
ignorant and bigoted Abolitionists argued otherwise. Psycholo-
gists had determined that Africans at maturity did not have
brains equal to Caucasians at birth, and other scientists had
found that a dark skin was a mark of degeneracy.57

So excellent an institution was slavery that the United States
was under obligation to civilization and to Christianity to carry
it to other parts of the world. The Parson would not waste time
in minor filibustering expeditions to Cuba and to Central Amer-
ica. Rather he would become an imperialist in the grandest pro-
portions. He would seize Africa and develop it—a vision which
the imperialists of Europe did not catch for almost a quarter of
a century. Africa was vast and rich, and the Negroes there had
forfeited any further claim to it. "Let us seize upon the vast
territory of Africa," pleaded the Parson, "cultivate its rich
soil, and force its millions of indolent, degraded, and starving
natives, to labor, and thereby elevate themselves to the dignity of

53 Ibid., p. 41.
54 Ibid., p. 80.
55 Ibid., p. 94.
56 Ibid., p. 98.
57 Ibid., pp. 213-14. The discovery had been made that a certain tribe of Jews
who had inbred became darker.
men made in the image of God!” Such a move would accomplish more in Christianizing the Negroes than all the efforts of all the missionaries America could send. According to the Parson “God looks to the people of the United States to develop the resources of Africa, and I honestly believe he requires us to do that work.”

Brownlow found the Abolitionists detestable from every angle. “What an unmitigated generation of hypocrites! They stole and sold into perpetual bondage, a race of human beings it was not profitable to keep, and for whom they now, like so many graceless pirates, refuse all warranty. And what few American ships are in the trade now, at the peril of piracy, are New England ships.” He believed these craft were “owned and manned by the hypocritical freedom-shriekers of the Northern States, who desire to recover the several sums of money they have contributed, under excitement, to aid the cause of ‘bleeding Kansas.’”

The Abolitionists were despicable cowards. Pryne had said that the slave-owners slept with pistols under their pillows through fear of a slave uprising. At least the slaves would fight, declared the Parson, which was more than the Abolitionists would do. “If none but blue-bellied Yankees and unmitigated Northern Abolitionists come down upon us, we shall sleep with nothing more terrific under our pillows than spike-gimblets!” Pryne was almost as radical as John Brown, and he bespoke it before John Brown had acted his part in the drama. Pryne declared, “I would far rather contribute Sharp’s rifles, pistols, and bayonets—in order that the negro might be defended in possessing his freedom on our own soil, and living among us, where he has a right to live.” Brownlow charged that such agitation would break up the Union, for the South could not exist in such a situation. Pryne gave the answer characteristic of the extreme Abolitionists: “What if the agitation should drive the Southern

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58 Ibid., pp. 252-54.
59 Ibid., pp. 33-34.
60 Ibid., p. 109.
61 Ibid., p. 191.
States out of the Union? Who cares? Not I." If forced to a choice between Union and abolition, he would choose the latter. 62

Brownlow sincerely loved the Union and he had always glorified it. He, therefore, hated the Abolitionists the more for imperilling it. He believed that they were actually bent on breaking it up. But he would not be tricked by them, for he understood their low purposes. He gave the warning: "But we of the South intend to fight you in the Union, not out of it! And when your blue-bellied Yankees come South, with 'Sharp's rifles and Holy Bibles', to seize upon our slaves, let me say to you, that they will not find themselves in Kansas!" 63 Brownlow assumed the Union position in the debate, and commented on the fact that Pryne had said nothing in favor of the glorious government. In his concluding speech, for the special benefit of Pryne, the Parson dedicated to the Union this apostrophe:

Who can estimate the value of the American Union? Proud, happy, thrice happy America!" the home of the oppressed! the asylum of the emigrant; where the citizen of every clime, and the child of every creed, roams free and untrammelled as the wild winds of heaven! Baptized at the fount of Liberty, in fire and blood, cold must be the heart that thrills not at the name of the American Union. 64

Pryne sought to hold the debate as close as possible to a strict discussion of slavery. He side-stepped somewhat the Parson's Biblical arguments, and was soon off into a metaphysical dissection of the Constitution of the United States to show that slavery was not protected by that document. Pryne declared that the Declaration of Independence had abolished slavery, and it was only natural for him to continue with this species of logic to prove that the Constitution of all American law rested on the Declaration. And even if the Declaration of Independence had not by inference abolished slavery through the Constitution, there was the fact that the Constitution directly abolished it, for according to the preamble a more perfect union was to be

62 Ibid., p. 230.
63 Ibid., p. 271.
64 Ibid., p. 272.
set up and justice was to be guaranteed. But how, inquired Pryne, can these things be with slavery—especially if the Abolitionists declared that they would break up the Union if slavery were not abolished? 65

It would have been difficult for a Southerner and a Northerner in the 1850's to hold a debate over slavery without running off into a great deal of sectional arguments. Brownlow seized the initiative by devoting a whole evening to proving how criminal and undesirable Northerners were. He examined the latest reports of the penitentiaries in most of the Southern States and determined that most of the felons there incarcerated were of Northern birth, and by a similar examination of the reports of Northern penitentiaries he found that few of the criminals had been born in the South, "unless it be a villainous negro the Abolitionists have stolen from us, and then sent to prison to get rid of him?" He also discovered that the North had more bank failures, more deserters from the United States Army, and more mulattoes, while the South had a greater per capita wealth. Northerners were drifting into "Free Lovers, Free Soilers, Abolitionists, Spiritualists, Trance Mediums, Bible Repudiators, and representatives of every crazy other ism known to the annals of Bedlam." To Brownlow they were an extremely unattractive people, who outraged completely the old conservative principles of morality and homely virtues which still held sway in the South. 66

Pryne searched Helper's Impending Crisis for information to prove that the South was far behind the North in wealth and progress of every kind. Just as Brownlow held that slavery was the secret of the South's superiority over the North, Pryne now held the same institution responsible for the very reverse. In answer to Brownlow's charges of criminality against Northerners, Pryne declared that the South's 250,000 slaveholders were the greatest criminals of the age. He determined that the South was $12,000,000,000 poorer on account of slavery, at which he exclaimed,

65 Ibid., pp. 67-72.
66 Ibid., pp. 142-70.
What a sum to sink into the fathomless maw of such a monster crime! all for the purpose of allowing 250,000 slaveholders to lord it over their negroes, keep race-horses, and vary the amusements of gambling, fighting, and drinking, by an occasional dash into politics, to play the game of Southern statesmanship, and, when weary of that, to astonish the waiters and attachées of Northern hotels by blustering about Northern watering-places.67

Before the debate had been finished Brownlow developed into almost a perfect champion of the Southern position in the sectional dispute. An aristocrat with a thousand slaves could not have stated his own attitude better. Brownlow referred to John C. Calhoun as “that great and towering intellect, and tried patriot, . . . who literally died in Southern harness, battling for the rights of the South, under the Constitution.”68 He sang the familiar praises of Southern wealth and Southern might, with as flawless notes as J. D. B. De Bow or a hundred other Southern patriots would have used. The South could take care of herself—she was “throughout her whole extent, by the act of God, in contact with the commercial world.”69 “At any time, upon short notice, the South can raise, equip, and maintain in the field a larger force than any power on earth can send against her,” the Parson proudly stated.70 The South had both wealth and rights, “And these rights,” he declared, “we intend to enjoy, or to a man we will die, strung along Mason and Dixon’s line, with our faces looking North!”71 He then put forth his best effort on this panegyric of the South:

Yes, gentlemen, ours is the land of chivalry, the land of the muse, the abode of statesmen, the home of oratory, the dwelling-place of the historian, and of the hero; the scenes of classic recollections and of hallowed associations lie south of Mason and Dixon’s Line; and when the South is prostrated (which God in his mercy never intends), the genius of the world will weep amid the ruins of the only true Republic ever known to civilized man!72

Having finished his task, self-imposed, of going five hundred miles to defend at his own expense and with great vehemence the very soul of the South of which he was not a part, the

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67 Ibid., pp. 173-95.  
68 Ibid., p. 40.  
69 Ibid., p. 265.  
70 Ibid., p. 263.  
71 Ibid., p. 263.  
72 Ibid., pp. 259-63.  
73 Ibid., p. 271.
Black slaves and mountain whites

Parson returned to his Tennessee home to await, unknown to him, the next great contest which was to be the greatest of his life and of his country. Brownlow was neither a planter nor an aristocrat, yet he had all of their prejudices personified only awaiting their unloosening by the Abolitionists. Slavery played no basic part in the economic life of the Southern Highlanders, but it was absolutely fundamental in their mental complex. Two more bitter personal and political enemies never lived in East Tennessee than Brownlow and Andrew Johnson, yet these two were one on the question of slavery. Slavery was the great common denominator among the Southern Highlanders. Johnson declared that he would help carry on a war to exterminate the Negroes if the North forcibly freed them. He stated what the Southern Highlander as well as the Southern Lowlander felt, when he said "If you liberate the Negro, what will be the next step? . . . What will we do with two million Negroes in our midst? . . . Blood, rape and rapine will be our portion. You can't get rid of the Negro except by holding him in slavery." Slavery solved the race question, and so if there must be Negroes in his midst the Southern mountaineer was just as eager to maintain slavery for protection as the Southern planter was for profit. And there was no inconsistency in being for the Union and for slavery at the same time, for only through the maintenance of the Union, did it appear in the eyes of many people, that slavery could be continued. But if it should ever happen that the slaves were freed, then they must either be exterminated, as Andrew Johnson would have it, or they must be deported, a plan which many of the mountaineers thought to be the best solution.

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78 It must be kept in mind that there was a difference between disliking Negroes and disliking slavery. The ante-bellum Highlander felt that if there must be Negroes around, they should be slaves. Henry Clay, the patron saint of Brownlow and of his East Tennessee followers, felt the same way; and Hinton Rowan Helper, who knew that slavery was a great curse to the South, would rather see the Negroes exterminated than have them remain in the South free. The aversion of mountaineers to Negroes continues down to the present day, and in some sections of the Southern Highlands Negroes are not tolerated.