CHAPTER VI

ANTE-BELLUM POLITICS

In introducing himself to the North in 1862, the eccentric Parson stated that he had always been, and still was, “quite a politician,” though he had never been either an office-seeker or an office-holder. It would have been an eccentricity beyond credulity had he not embraced the proud opportunities for disputation and combat offered him by American politics, and in the face of facts to the contrary, it must be recorded against the Fighting Parson that his memory served him very ill when he rather boastfully said, “I have never been an office-seeker nor an office-holder.” True enough, he never made office-seeking a continuous occupation, and without a doubt, he had never been able to induce people to vote for him in sufficient numbers to gain an election, but the annals of ante-bellum politics have it that after having fought for other people for a decade and more he then sought spoils for himself, and that he failed.

As the Parson had a mind that ran on various tracks at the same time, there was no reason why he should not be selecting a political party about as early as he should join a church. He did not make a study of theology before selecting his religious denomination, neither did he enter into the mysteries of government before aligning himself with a political group. He hit upon both rather accidentally, and in doing so he may have had an experience different from most Americans. Yet he used no less reason, for it requires no more mental effort to gain a position by inheritance than to acquire one by accident. It is the common practice to find reasons for an act already done rather than to seek beforehand what it is best to do.

The Parson grew into political competency amidst shouts of “Bargain and corruption,” “Put the rascals out,” “Hurrah for Old Hickory Jackson,” and other expressions of equal de-
cisiveness. It would seem that the leader of such a fight would have immediately endeared himself to a person of Brownlow's characteristics, but perhaps it must remain one of the minor, if not insignificant, mysteries of history why the Parson turned so vehemently against Andrew Jackson. It might be best to leave it as merely another reason why the Parson was eccentric. It happens that Brownlow reached his majority in time to vote first in the presidential election of 1828, and that he cast his ballot for John Quincy Adams. The reasons which he recalled thirty-four years later were that Adams "was a learned statesman, of pure moral and private character, and because I regarded him as a FEDERALIST, representing my political opinions." Perhaps likes repel and unlikes attract in the mental realm as they do in the physical world. Whatever the cause, the Parson hated Old Hickory with stinging bitterness and did not cease attacking him in his grave.

Those who opposed Jackson and his species of democracy gradually drifted together and called themselves Whigs. They all knew what they disliked, but they found great difficulty in agreeing on anything to like. As Brownlow was a good hater, he naturally belonged to this group. With the passing of time the Whigs accumulated a stock in trade which they labelled with their trade-mark, composed of such principles as federal aid to internal improvements, a protective tariff, a strong central bank, and a strengthening of the national government with, at the same time, a debasing of the presidency. True to human nature, the Parson set to work in his newspaper, which he always called the Whig, to defend these Whig doctrines, for good reasons if he could discover them, or for no reason at all. He favored federal aid to internal improvements because it would help East Tennessee to reach a market, and perhaps if Whiggery in this region had any reasoned cause for existing it must have been due to this Whig principle. He fought valiantly for the recharter of the Second United States Bank, because Jackson had opposed it and Clay had championed it. The common man's knowledge of the Bank did not extend beyond the limits

1 Parson Brownlow's Book, p. 19.
of his prejudices, but he knew it was something about which it was easy to raise a fight, so it was one of the principal issues between the Democrats and Whigs in Tennessee. Brownlow was sure that the foreign stockholders did not control the Bank as the Democrats had argued, and when President Tyler vetoed the Fiscal Corporation bill, Brownlow called him a "corrupt traitor."2

Whether Brownlow knew why he joined the Whig Party or not, he spent the next twenty years informing himself and the country on the reasons why people should be Whigs. He wasted his first vote on John Quincy Adams in 1828; his vote for Clay in 1832 failed to bring victory; in 1836 he supported the forlorn hope of the Whigs in the South by voting for Hugh White. It began to seem that Brownlow had chosen to go through life voting for people who could never be elected. But as the next presidential election approached there were high expectations in the Whig Party, for it seemed that the old adage was about to come true, that it is an ill wind that blows no one good. The Panic of 1837 must certainly sweep Van Buren and his Democrats out of office, and plant the Whigs in power. The Whigs now pushed aside Brownlow's ideal, Clay, and put up William Henry Harrison, because Clay had tried for the presidency twice and had failed and furthermore he had not fought in the battle of Tippecanoe. This action outraged Brownlow somewhat less than it did his ideal, and soon in the midst of coon-skins, log cabins, and casks of hard cider he was the most enthusiastic Whig in America. He later declared, "I sung louder, jumped higher, and fell flatter and harder than anybody else in the whole state of Tennessee. I wrote upon log cabins, and waved coon-skins and water-gourds high and low."3

The inauguration of the first Whig president was for the Whigs as great an occasion as was the inauguration of Jackson for the common man. True enough it was a smaller army that invaded Washington, but among those who beat down upon the city was Brownlow. After attending the inauguration, he in-

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1 Brownlow, Political Register, pp. 29-49, 55-57.
2 Portrait and Biography, p. 29.
dulged his mania for travelling by visiting New York City. But rejoicing was soon turned into gloom, for Harrison was scarcely well placed in office when he died. Brownlow grieved after the fashion of having lost a close friend. And he added a rising anger to his grief when it became evident that John Tyler, who now became president, would continue to be what he had always been — an old-fashioned Democrat who could not endure Jacksonianism.

To win an office and then to be cheated out of it first by the Grim Reaper and then by a Traitor was too great a strain on Brownlow’s complacency. He heaped some of his choicest abuse on John Tyler, and wrote a book against Jackson and the Democrats. He called his book *A Political Register Setting Forth the Principles of the Whig and Locofoco Parties in the United States, with the Life and Public Service of Henry Clay*. The Parson as usual could not desist from including something about himself, so he added to the title *Also an Appendix Personal to the Author, and a General Index*. He wrote the book mostly in 1843, and he published it in his *Jonesboro Whig* office the next year, in time to make it the opening gun in the campaign of 1844. That it might in part live up to its title of being a political register, he inserted some statistics on the area of the states and the votes in previous elections and lists of the presidents and some of their cabinet members. But the main purpose was to give “the phantom of Jacksonian democracy a skinning.”

The Parson now had ample provocation for entering the fight with all the peculiar weapons he could command. The Whigs must regain what an unkind fate had taken away from them in 1841, and what could be more inspiring for Brownlow and most others in the party than marching again under the banner of Henry Clay! So enthusiastic did the Parson become that he decided the next year to add to the furor by himself running for Congress. But first he made haste to assault the reputation of Andrew Jackson, before death, which was fast approaching, could carry Old Hickory out of reach. Without hesitation he pronounced the “elevation to the Presidency of this wicked man and vulgar Hero” to be “the greatest curse that
ever befell this great and growing Republic." Furthermore, "I calculate that the victory of the eighth of January [the battle of New Orleans] cost five hundred of millions of dollars, besides the small expense of entailing upon the country a set of drivel-lers whose folly has taken away all dignity from distress, and made even calamity ridiculous." So malignant was the Parson's detestation of Jackson that he followed him to the grave with his abuse. In this wise did he inform the readers of the Jonesboro Whig that Jackson was dead, "After a life of eighty long years spent in the indulgence of the most bitter and vindictive passions, which disgrace human nature, and distract the human mind the existence of ANDREW JACKSON terminated" near Nashville. "We would not, if we could, turn aside the veil of the future, to show his deluded followers and blind admirers, what awaits him!"

Brownlow had the Whig contempt for Democrats greatly exaggerated. To him they were a "notorious band of political robbers," who went under various names in different parts of the country. In New York, they were the "Locofocos"; in New England they were known as "Pig-Ringers" and "Subterraneans"; "Butt-enders" was their name in Maryland; they were "Wring necks" in Maine; in South Carolina they went under the name of "State Rights Republican Nullifiers"; the decent people in Ohio called them "The Entire Swine Party"; in Virginia they were the "Republican Abstractionists"; in the Middle West they were called the "Relief Law Party"; and intelligent Tennesseans called them "Barn-Burners," "Wool-Stealers," and "Counterfeitors."

The Democrats were so slippery and ubiquitous that they reminded the Parson of the stanza,

They wire in and wire out,
And leave a body still in doubt.
Whether the snake that made the track;
Was going South or coming back.

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1 Brownlow, Political Register, p. 9.
2 Ibid., p. 63.
3 Ibid., p. 129.
4 June 18, 1845.
5 Brownlow, Political Register, pp. 13, 125.
All Democrats were bad; John Cataline Calhoun was the Parson’s way of referring to the great South Carolinian; all were disgusting, even eating with Negroes and going to their dances. In the eyes of the Parson, the whole world was sick, and the Democrats were the cause. “Every government in the civilized world is at present tottering,” he declared, and mob violence had broken out in most of the states of the American Union and in the great cities. Now was the time for action, when a man like Henry Clay was leading. Should the people sit and see the country go to ruin, asked Brownlow, “while the political quacks of the country, like the Madagascar Bat fan us to sleep with the wide spread wings of ‘free trade and sailors rights,’ at the same time literally sucking us to death.” Wages were low, prices were ruinous, people were starving, and the Democrats had brought it all about by the low tariff. The only remedy that would restore prosperity was Clay’s American System. Not only had the Democrats given the country hard times, but they had also piled up a huge national debt.

There was just one point on which Brownlow found himself standing with the Democrats; he favored the national bankruptcy law which the Whigs had recently repealed. He had no desire to take advantage of such a law to escape his debts, most of which had come by his going on surety bonds for his friends, in doing which he was following Biblical precedent. He declared that the fifteenth chapter of Deuteronomy contained the ancient Jewish bankruptcy law and differed from the late law of Congress only in phraseology. He also found another bankruptcy law recorded in the Lord’s Prayer.

The Texas question, on which the election of 1844 really turned, seemed to bother the Parson very little. Perhaps he was wise enough to see Clay’s predicament as the latter became more involved in explaining his position, and, therefore, he decided not to make Clay’s labors harder by enlarging the discussion. In fact, Brownlow’s unbounded idolatry of Clay became

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9 Ibid., pp. 9, 173; Jonesboro Whig, December 4, 1844.
10 Brownlow, Political Register, p. 120.
11 Ibid., pp. 50, 58-66.
12 Brownlow, Political Register, pp. 146-48.
as intense as ever his hatred waxed against his most detested enemy. The "bargain and corruption" charges which pestered Clay throughout his life enraged Brownlow. He declared that he had the proof of their falsity and that anyone who should read it and not be convinced "we hesitate not to pronounce a VILAIN, in the most extensive meaning of the epithet." 13 Two years before the election Brownlow began the movement for Clay, proclaiming, "For the Presidency, in 1844, we have declared for HENRY CLAY vs. THE WORLD." 14 The next year he paid tribute to his hero by writing his life which made up 81 pages in his so-called Political Register. He attended the Whig National Convention in Baltimore and helped to nominate his "Harry." In the campaign he rode the circuit for Clay with as much fervor as he ever displayed when he rode it for the Lord. He was in Raleigh, North Carolina, when Clay made his famous speech there, and he imitated his hero by speaking also. This speech the Raleigh Standard declared to be "smutty, ultra, insulting and blasphemous." 15

There was almost unbounded hope and expectation among the greater part of the Whigs that Clay would be successful, so when the sad intelligence of his defeat reached Brownlow, he wept. According to his son, John Bell Brownlow, the Parson was never known through his long life to have given way to his emotions in such a fashion except once, when a near relative had died. The Parson sobbed, "Heaven spare our friends the bitter pang we feel in announcing this horrible intelligence," and with all the reverence at his command he printed in his Whig a live coon upside down—so unexpected was the defeat that he had never dreamed he would need a dead coon with which to illustrate the election news. 16

Brownlow had made much use of Whig coons in his journalistic activities, but never before had he been inclined to feel that the old coon had died. Only a few years previously in announcing a Whig victory in Tennessee politics, he represented

13 Ibid., p. 315.
14 Jonesboro Whig, May 18, 1842.
15 Ibid., February 28, May 1, 1844; Brownlow, Political Register, p. 205.
16 Jonesboro Whig, November 20, 1844.
the Whig coon destroying the Democratic rooster, adding the explanation, "The Coon in Tennessee, has covered himself with glory, and a portion of that imperishable renown, he is about to impart to the Dominecker of Locofocoism." The Parson naturally took much interest in state politics, and when in 1842 after the Whigs had captured the legislature, thirteen Democratic senators by obstructive tactics prevented the election of the United States senator, he bitterly attacked them and published their names under the heading, "Thirteen Black Knights."

The defeat of Clay for the presidency was immeasurably a greater calamity to Brownlow than his own failure of election to Congress the next year. In his own campaign he obtained what was after all dearest to his heart, for he had an opportunity to assault throughout East Tennessee the character and reputation of his bitterest political enemy, Andrew Johnson. That Johnson was a Democrat was sufficient in Brownlow's eyes to brand him a traitor to the best interests of his country. That he was a rival for the leadership of East Tennesseans was further provocation. Before the campaign was over, employing the sort of abuse that he liked best to administer, Brownlow declared Johnson to be an atheist, a coward, and a bastard. But as Johnson was more reasoned in his political methods and was more ambitious for political preferment, he won in 1845 and many times thereafter. A personal and political feud already bitter was now made devastating, and disaster to either one or to both was prevented only by Brownlow and Johnson never speaking to each other again until the Civil War.

There was yet another chance for Clay, Brownlow thought. So a year before the party should make the nomination, he began running in his Whig the name of Clay for president and "Old Rough and Ready" Taylor for vice-president. But the manipulators in the Whig Party were not taking orders or advice from Brownlow; they nominated Taylor for president and

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17 Brownlow, Political Register, p. 203.
18 Ibid., pp. 138-45.
20 For instance, Jonesboro Whig, May 26, 1847.
Millard Fillmore for vice-president. Clay felt the sting of traitorous friends almost as keenly as he did in 1840, while Brownlow was angered beyond repair. With sorrow and revenge he took down the name of Clay, but he refused to raise the Taylor banner. If he could not support Clay, he would support no one. On November 1, he informed the people what he proposed to do. He would vote for the regular Whig electors and he would do something just as constitutional as what the Whig National Convention had done: He would instruct the electors to vote for Clay for president and John Morehead of North Carolina for vice-president, by writing their names on his ballot. He had now respected his conscience, but his reason seemed to tell him that in so doing he might be throwing away his vote. So thorough a Whig was the Parson that he advised no other Whig to vote in this method, and in addition he promised to convert two Democrats to regular Whiggery.  

Satanic luck seemed always to follow the Whigs when they succeeded in capturing the presidency. President Taylor did not survive his inauguration long. He was succeeded by Fillmore, who lived long enough to win the approval of the Parson. The troublesome problems growing out of the Mexican War were leading many Southerners to talk of disunion. Brownlow agreed with them on the slavery question, but he let it be known that he would follow no one out of the Union. Naturally he opposed the Nashville Convention of 1850, and if for no other reason than Clay's part in it he supported the so-called Compromise of 1850. The next year he showed his love for the Union by sarcastically referring to South Carolina's enthusiastic observance of the Fourth of July as likely being due to her threat that this would be the last Fourth which would find her in the "meshes of this accursed Confederacy."  

Brownlow like Clay was beginning to despair of the Whig Party ever making the proper nomination for the presidency. It had never named the Great Commoner when the Whigs could win, and at other times it had merely sacrificed him. The Parson  

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118 WILLIAM G. BROWNOLOW

18 Ibid., August 30, November 1, 1848. Brownlow attended the inauguration, met Taylor, and marked him down as lacking vehemence.

19 Knoxville Whig, July 5, 1851.
looked upon the haggard countenance of Clay and feared that he would not live to be proposed again, in 1852. In June of this year, the famous Kentuckian died, and Brownlow lost the only man he had ever idealized and loyally followed. He declared that "the territories of the dead on the continent of America, never were honored with richer spoils." The Parson's feelings toward Clay show that he could love an ideal as tenderly as he could bitterly hate an enemy.

With Clay gone, Brownlow decided upon Fillmore as his choice for the presidency, but again the Whig National Convention disappointed and displeased the Parson by nominating Winfield Scott. He especially opposed this choice because he claimed Scott was a Northern candidate put forth by sixty-six Abolitionists and that his election would mean the overthrow of slavery and the beginning of sectional strife. But Brownlow had no strong convictions on giving Fillmore a second term; he was still longing for Clay. He later said that he "would have willingly voted for Clay's last pair of pantaloons, stuffed with straw!" He never forgot Clay. While in New York City during the Civil War, he facetiously declared that he intended to have a national convention called to nominate the last suit of clothes worn by Clay.

The Whig National Convention might want Winfield Scott and William A. Graham, of North Carolina, for president and vice-president, but the Parson preferred Daniel Webster and Charles J. Jenkins, of Georgia. But the grim old joker, Death, came in on the 24th of October and robbed the Parson of Webster. Not to be outdone even by Fate, the Parson together with tens of thousands of other Americans, voted for the great Massachusetts leader in his grave.

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23 Ibid., July 3, 1852.
24 Portrait and Biography, p. 69; Knoxville Whig, October 23, 1852. The chief reason for Brownlow's preferring Fillmore rests on the fact that at the very end of his term, Fillmore appointed the Parson on a commission to improve navigation on the river between Knoxville and Chattanooga. When Pierce became president, he filled the commission with Democrats, and according to the Parson, nothing was accomplished and no one received any pay. See V. M. Queener, op. cit., p. 74.
25 Ought American Slavery to be Perpetuated, p. 42; Knoxville Whig, October 23, 1852.
During the late 1840's and the early 1850's, Brownlow busied himself with the temperance movement, but not to the extent of deserting the Whigs and joining it as a political party. The temperance leaders generally took control of the Fourth of July celebrations with the hope of gaining converts through guile, but on such occasions the amount of liquor was almost certain to destroy the effects of all temperance propaganda. Speaking of the celebration in 1848 at Jonesboro, Brownlow declared that there was "liquor enough in our houses to counteract the influence of any Temperance address that can be made here." He wrote voluminously for temperance and made many speeches for it, but he never accepted money for his services. For a time he was one of the editors of the Sons of Temperance, a semi-monthly published in Knoxville.

Andrew Johnson's continued political activities in Tennessee appeared to the Parson to be particularly pernicious, both to him personally and to the state. After serving in Congress for ten years, Johnson became governor of Tennessee in 1853 and again in 1855. As these successes were entirely too regular to please Brownlow, he never ceased attacking Johnson. It was an outrage that Tennessee could not elect a religious man to be her ruler, and it was equally disastrous that she must have an Abolitionist. Brownlow claimed that Johnson had voted for the Wilmot Proviso, and as further proof of his anti-slavery proclivities, he cited Johnson's attempt to have the Negroes left out of the count in determining population for state purposes. This, Brownlow held, was a direct thrust at the large slaveholders, and represented an attempt to array class against class.

In 1855 the Whigs made a desperate attempt to defeat Johnson for the governorship. They nominated Meredith P. Gentry to bring success, but Gentry soon turned out to be too dignified in his campaign methods to please Brownlow. The Parson headed a committee which went to Gentry to inform him that East Tennessee was not accustomed to gloved methods in political

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26 Jonesboro Whig, July 5, 1848; Knoxville Whig, July 5, 1851.
27 Ibid., December 28, 1850; February 21, March 29, 1852.
28 Brownlow, Americanism Contrasted with Foreignism, pp. 22-24.
campaigns. They demanded that Johnson be dragged out into the open and that all of his terrible sins both private and public be exposed. Gentry's refusal to make such a campaign did not lessen Brownlow's insistence. 29

To Brownlow the campaign against Johnson was perpetual; the mere fact that he had been reëlected in 1855 only intensified the fight that must be continued against him. So vitriolic had been Brownlow's attacks on Johnson that a mob surrounded the Parson's home in Knoxville after the election, jeering and groaning against him, and singing songs for his benefit. 30 That an atheist even if he were governor of Tennessee, should issue a Thanksgiving Proclamation recounting the mercies of the Lord and calling for more seemed to Brownlow an intolerable usurpation of power. There must be a rebuttal to such impudence, so he inserted in his Knoxville Whig a long prayer against Johnson, begging the Lord to forgive Tennessee for her great sin in electing him governor. He called upon the churches to use this prayer in their services. 31 The Parson felt quite sure that in a contest with Johnson for the affections of the Lord he could easily win.

He both prayed and preached against Johnson and used every occasion to villify him. On October 9, 1856, he spoke to an immense crowd in the public square in Nashville, almost under the window of the Governor, and assaulted Johnson in the most pronounced fashion. He declared, "I therefore pronounce your Governor, here upon his own dunghill, an UNMITIGATED LIAR AND CALUMNIATOR, and a VIL LAINOUS COWARD." Continuing he said, "He is a member of a numerous family of Johnsons, in North Carolina, who are generally THIEVES and LIARS; and though he is the best one of the family I have ever met with, I unhesitatingly affirm, tonight, that there are better men than Andrew Johnson in our Penitentiary." 32 More than a dozen years previously he had pub-

29 Temple, op. cit., p. 287.
30 Brownlow, Americanism Contrasted with Foreignism, p. 66.
31 December 1, 1855; Brownlow, Americanism Contrasted with Foreignism, p. 75.
32 Ibid., pp. 66, 71.
lished in the *Jonesboro Whig* Johnson's pedigree, accompanied by a cut of a man hanging on the gallows, who ought to have been Andrew Johnson but who happened to be a first cousin.\(^{33}\)

Johnson was an atheist, according to the Parson, and he was wise enough to belong to a political party which was fast becoming the tool of the Pope of all the Roman Catholics. Back in the 1830's Brownlow saw on the horizon a small cloud no larger than a man's hand, but to him it looked threatening. It was the cloud of Catholicism, against which the people must quickly be warned. In 1834 in his *Helps to the Study of Presbyterianism* he had raised storm signals, and five years later when he set up his *Whig* at Elizabethton he raised them still higher. He ran a series of articles during 1839 and 1840 warning the people against Catholics. Again in his *Political Register*, in 1843, he called upon the people to give heed.\(^{34}\)

The great danger to America was to be seen in this Democratic alliance with the Pope. Had not Martin Van Buren, as Secretary of State, in 1830, written a letter to the Pope in which he had called him "Holy Father"?\(^{35}\) The Catholics were fast dominating all Europe and now they were seeking through the Democratic Party to seize America. Should we aid those "feeding us and our children, upon *latin masses* and *wafer gods*?"\(^ {36}\) The Democrats were already carrying crosses in their processions. They were preaching that Christianity and Democracy were the same; they would unite church and state. Not only were the Democrats embracing the un-American Catholics, they were also absorbing such other monstrosities as the Mormons and the Millerites. And there were certain Democratic "clerical stump-orators" who were so blind as not to see all these things.\(^ {37}\) The Parson was not afraid to speak out, even to interrupt a prayer if necessary, as actually happened in the campaign of 1840. "Old Father Aiken," a Democratic Methodist, entered into an agreement with Brownlow at a camp-meeting

\(^{33}\) March 29, 1842.
\(^ {34}\) Brownlow, *Political Register*, pp. 75-119.
\(^ {37}\) *Tennessee Whig*, September 19, 26, 1839; *Jonesboro Whig*, December 14, 1842.
that the former should pray and the latter preach. In the midst
of his prayer, "Old Father Aiken" suddenly overcome by his
love for the Democratic Party cried out "Lord, deliver us from
Whiggery!" Brownlow quickly interrupted, "God forbid,"
whereupon "Old Father Aiken" left praying long enough to
exclaim, "Billy, keep still when I am praying."

All down through the 1840's and 1850's Brownlow was issu­
ing warnings against the Catholics and calling attention to
their alliance with the Democrats. In 1846 he offered a reward
of $20 to anyone who would tell him how much President Polk
and his officeholders had given to the new Catholic Church in
Washington. He would give an additional $10 if it fell under
$1,000. In 1856 there was to be another presidential election.
The small cloud no bigger than a man's hand which the Parson
had spied a quarter of a century earlier, had now almost overcast
the sky. There could be no doubt that if the growing numbers
of Catholics in this country portended evil, then the Parson's
cloud was positively threatening. In 1830 there had been only
600,000; twenty years later the number had jumped to 3,500,-
000; and by 1856 there were likely 4,000,000. The influx of
the Irish and Germans had contributed much to this growth.
To Brownlow's way of thinking, foreigners were bad enough,
but to be Catholics in addition was intolerable. Something must
be done about it. As the old Whig Party had been disrupted in
1854 by the Kansas-Nebraska Law, there was now an excellent
chance to organize a new party out of the old Whigs and turn
it against the foreigners and Catholics. In the 1830's the Native
American Party had been organized for this very purpose, but
it had died out by the end of the 1840's, and in 1850 its germ
of life passed over into the Order of the Star Spangled Banner.
This new order soon developed into the so-called Know-Nothing
Party, and it was into this secret group that many of the old
Whigs entered. As the Democrats decried this proscription of
the newcomers, Brownlow might truthfully say that Catholic
Irishmen were voting the Democratic ticket.

38 L. P. Stryker, Andrew Johnson, p. 10.
39 Knoxville Whig, July 1, 1846.
While the country was organizing a party against the Catholics the Parson was writing a book against them. In 1856 he brought it out and called it *Americanism Contrasted with Foreignism, Romanism, and Bogus Democracy, in the Light of Reason, History, and Scripture; in which Certain Demagogues of Tennessee, and Elsewhere, are Shown up in their true Colors*. He dedicated his book to the Young Men of America and called upon them to save the country from the greatest dangers that had beset civil and religious liberties in America since the Revolution. No argument was ever complete with the Parson until he had summed up the figures against the enemy. Now would he expose the Catholics through the simple rules of arithmetic. He determined from history that the Catholics had killed 68,000,000 human beings "for no other offense than that of being Protestants." If one were to "average each person slain at four gallons of blood, ... it makes TWO HUNDRED AND SEVENTY-TWO MILLIONS OF GALLONS!—enough to overflow the banks of the Mississippi, and destroy all the cotton and sugar plantations in Mississippi and Louisiana!"41

The methods by which this blood-letting had been carried on, the Parson illustrated by various cuts throughout the book, with such titles as "Roman Cruelties of the Inquisition—The Rack," "Burning of Bradford, Ridley, Latimer, Philpot, and Others; and the Holy Bible!" "Horrible Cruelties Inflicted by the Catholics on the Protestants in Ireland, in 1641," and "Horrible Cruelties by Catholics." These scenes represented the kind of people the Democrats were embracing, and he was sorry to see otherwise good Methodist ministers following along. He declared that the title of Augustus B. Longstreet, a Democratic Methodist minister, now president of the University of Mississippi, should read "Professor of Methodism, Romanism, and Locofocism."42

By the end of 1854 Brownlow was promoting the Know-Nothings with all of his might. It mattered not to him that Catholics and foreigners were almost non-existent in East Ten-

41 Brownlow, *Americanism Contrasted with Foreignism*, pp. 56-57.
nessee. As long as there were any in the United States, and as long as he was convinced that the charges made against them were true, he would have them crushed. He set aside a column in his Whig for his new party and transformed his Whig coon into a Know-Nothing coon.\(^{43}\) He became a member of the National Council and attended the National Convention of the Know-Nothings in Philadelphia in 1856.\(^{44}\) Two weeks after the Whig defeat in 1852, Brownlow ran up the name of Fillmore for the nomination in 1856.\(^{45}\) With the break-up of the Whigs and the rise of the Know-Nothings, he switched over to John Bell, of Tennessee, for president, but by the beginning of 1856 he had switched back to Fillmore. At this time he wrote Bell that he was for Fillmore first and then for Bell.\(^{46}\) When the convention met, Brownlow for once saw his choice for nominations confirmed. Fillmore was nominated for president and Andrew Jackson Donelson for vice-president.\(^{47}\) Indeed had the Parson travelled a long distance when, in order to support to the fullest a namesake of Andrew Jackson, he should heap full praise on "Old Hickory" and discover that he had had Know-Nothing principles in their pristine vigor.\(^{48}\) Many Southerners joined the Know-Nothings in an attempt to lay the Banquo ghost of slavery, and others like Brownlow joined because they could never degrade their pride to the level of becoming Democrats, and too, because the Know-Nothings offered some objects on which it was easy to muster up a full-sized amount of native hatred. But the Know-Nothings were forced in the North to divide the opposition to the Democrats with a new crusading party called the Republicans. As a result Brownlow saw Fillmore defeated, but he rejoiced at the victory of Buchanan over the Black Republican candidate John C. Frémont.

Politics offered quite a problem for Brownlow for the next four years, but there were a few points that he always kept straight. He knew that he continued to love the Union and that

\(^{43}\) Knoxville Whig, December 2, 1854.
\(^{44}\) Brownlow, Americanism Contrasted with Foreignism, pp. 14, 86.
\(^{45}\) Knoxvillle Whig, November 13, 1852, January 20, 1855.
\(^{46}\) John Bell MSS. Letter dated January 15, 1856.
\(^{47}\) Knoxvillle Whig, January 26, March 15, 1856.
\(^{48}\) Ibid.
he hated as much as ever the Democrats and the Abolitionists. With the shrivelling up of the Know-Nothing movement, there was the question as to where he should go next, but he knew it would not be to the Democrats. In 1859 he said, “With the Democratic party, we never can act, even in a conflict between them and the Devil. We would as soon be engaged in importing the plague from the East, as in promoting the principles and policy of the party calling themselves DEMOCRATS.” According to Brownlow the Democratic Party was still the refuge of the “unwashed and uncombed Foreigners,” who were all Abolitionists.

His hatred of the Democrats did not mean that he considered himself less Southern or that he liked the North better. John Brown’s crazy scheme enflamed Brownlow as completely as if he had been the owner of a plantation of ten thousand acres and a thousand slaves. He declared that Brown was a vile creature and that Pryne, whom Brownlow had debated a few years previously in Philadelphia, was even worse. He wrote an open letter to Pryne in which he said, “Had you, as a ‘Preacher of Righteousness’ exhorted the old scoundrel, and his villainous boys, to repentance and faith, they might have become religious, instead of dying in this disgraceful act of rebellion and going to Hell, as they doubtless have done. Shame on you, you vile hypocrite.” Thereafter for a season Brownlow pelted Pryne with a series of open letters. He believed activities like John Brown raids were the conscious efforts of people in the North to break up the Union. He felt that Northern people were mostly alike and should be looked upon with suspicion. In 1859, when a Mr. Wheeler of Vermont was elected president of the University of East Tennessee, Brownlow declared that the patrons of the University did not want their sons placed under a man “who has encountered the snows and chills of SIXTY winters, in the notorious Free Soil State of Vermont.”

“Bleeding Kansas,” Brooks’ assault on Sumner, and riots

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40 Knoxville Tri-Weekly Whig, August 4, 1859.
41 Ibid., February 24, 1859.
42 Ibid., October 27, 1859.
43 Knoxville Whig, July 30, 1853.
over attempts to rescue runaway slaves tore the North and the South still further apart. The principal churches had long ago parted company between their Northern and Southern membership. The Whig Party had disappeared, and the sectional Republican Party had arisen to contest the control of the nation. What a gloomy outlook for those who loved the Union so thoroughly as did Brownlow! Any one who would deliberately endanger the Union further was worse than a traitor. And so when the Democrats took up the months of April, May, and June of 1860 to split into two parties, Brownlow concluded that the perpetrators of this deed deserved a fate worse than eternal damnation. Douglas, of the Northern wing, was no appealing figure to the Parson, and Breckinridge, of the Southern wing, was even much less so. Brownlow supported John Bell and Edward Everett. He went to the National Convention of that group of people who said they stood for the Constitution and the Union, and he saw these two men nominated. He now had a party to support as well as three to condemn, for the Republicans under Abraham Lincoln were as bad as the Democrats.

But there seemed to be some question in the mind of a certain Jordan Clark, of Arkansas, as to whether the Parson might not soon come out and join the Democrats. At least he thought there might be no harm in dropping the Parson a note to inquire if the rumor were true and when the happy event would be announced. For this inquisitiveness and his pains Jordan Clark got addressed to himself one of Parson Brownlow's most celebrated phillipics. Brownlow wrote him on August 6, 1860:

I have your letter of the 30th ult., and hasten to let you know the *precise time* when I expect to come out and formally announce that I have joined the Democratic party. When the sun shines at midnight and the moon at mid-day; when man forgets to be selfish, or Democrats lose their inclination to steal; when nature stops her onward march to rest, or all the water-courses in America flow up stream; when flowers lose their odor, and trees shed no leaves; when birds talk, and beasts of burden laugh; when damned spirits swap hell for heaven with the angels of light, and pay them the boot

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in mean whiskey; when impossibilities are in fashion, and no proposition is too absurd to be believed,—you may credit the report that I have joined the Democrats!

I join the Democrats! Never, so long as there are sects in churches, weeds in gardens, fleas in hog-pens, dirt in victuals, disputes in families, wars with nations, water in the ocean, bad men in America, or base women in France! No, Jordan Clark, you may hope, you may congratulate, you may reason, you may sneer, but that cannot be. The thrones of the Old World, the courts of the universe, the governments of the world, may all fall and crumble into ruin,—the New World may commit the national suicide of dissolving this Union,—but all this, and more, must occur before I join the Democracy!

I join the Democracy! Jordan Clark, you know not what you say. When I join the Democracy, the Pope of Rome will join the Methodist Church. When Jordan Clark, of Arkansas, is President of the Republic of Great Britain by the universal suffrage of a contented people, when Queen Victoria consents to be divorced from Prince Albert by a county court in Kansas; when Congress obliges, by law, James Buchanan to marry a European princess; when the Pope leases the Capitol at Washington for his city residence; when Alexander of Russia and Napoleon of France are elected Senators in Congress from New Mexico; when good men cease to go to heaven, or bad men to hell; when this world is turned upside down; when proof is afforded, both clear and unquestionable, that there is no God; when men turn to ants, and ants to elephants,—I will change my political faith and come out on the side of Democracy!

Supposing that this full and frank letter will enable you to fix upon the period when I will come out a full-grown Democrat, and to communicate the same to all whom it may concern in Arkansas, I have the honor to be, &c.,

W. G. Brownlow. 54

Brownlow was no more positive that he would never be a Democrat than he was that preachers should keep out of politics. He severely condemned P. P. Neely, an Alabama Methodist preacher, for taking part in the campaign of 1860 and

54 Parson Brownlow's Book, pp. 62-64.
for calling upon the people not to submit to the inauguration of the Black Republican Lincoln if he should be elected.\textsuperscript{55} Others besides Brownlow had similar feelings, and the \textit{Banner of Peace} was set up by the Cumberland Presbyterians in Nashville in 1860 for the purpose of promoting peace. This paper solemnly asked, “How can a man get down from a successful political harangue on Saturday, and enter the holy desk to preach a meek and lowly Saviour on Sabbath?”\textsuperscript{56} But people forgot then as they have often done since that churches will always enter politics, promote wars and support them to the extent and to the degree that their membership are convinced of the righteousness of their causes. Churches are man-made institutions managed by men to promote their longings to find and worship the Supreme Being, but in supporting these things it often seems necessary to deal with human affairs no less than divine.

Parson Brownlow was somewhat of a chameleon. He could pose as a preacher when it was to his interests to do so, but at other times he could choose from a variety of occupations what he would be. In 1860 it was more convenient not to be a preacher. Yet he dealt in the paraphernalia of preachers and used it in politics. Hearing that the Episcopal Church had composed a special prayer to be used in South Carolina he decided to interpose against it one for all the local preachers in East Tennessee to use “in all their public ministrations.” He prayed for those who were seeking to preserve the Union and frowned upon “those traitors, political gamblers, and selfish demagogues who are seeking to build up a miserable Southern Confederacy, and under it to inaugurate a new reading of the Ten Commandments, so as to teach that the chief end of Man is Nigger!” The rest of this prayer was characterized by such words and expressions as “Southern mad-caps and Northern fanatics,” “fire-eaters,” “mean whiskey,” “corrupt Democracy and its profligate leaders,” and “wicked leaders of Abolitionism.” This prayer he published in his \textit{Knoxville Whig} in January of 1860.\textsuperscript{57}

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\textsuperscript{55} Ibid., pp. 75-80.
\textsuperscript{56} Ibid., August 16, 1860.
\textsuperscript{57} Parson Brownlow's Book, pp. 28-30.
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As the campaign of 1860 became more heated, Brownlow was maneuvered into an extreme position by his strong will and his characteristic methods of carrying on a fight. He had visited too much among planter aristocrats and extreme Southerners to have any latent antipathy to them, yet before November of 1860 he was thundering out abuse against them as terrible as any he had ever used against the Abolitionists. But his opposition to both was born of the same reason; each was bent on a program which would destroy the Union.58

Brownlow made the direct charge that the Southern Democratic leaders had plotted secession, that they had broken up the Convention at Charleston deliberately as a step in the plot, and that they had nominated John C. Breckinridge for no other reason. He declared, "The leaders of the Democratic party who procured his nomination by a rebellious faction at Baltimore, took that method of accomplishing a long-cherished object,—the dissolution of this Union and the 'precipitating of the Cotton States in a revolution.' "59 They had no intention or desire to elect Breckinridge, for he was not even a slaveholder. In fact he had an anti-slavery record, contended Brownlow. Their whole purpose was to see Lincoln elected and then secede, as they had been openly threatening. "TO MAKE THAT CONTINGENCY CERTAIN, THEY ARE RUNNING BRECKINRIDGE," charged Brownlow. If the Democrats wanted a slaveholder as president, why should they not vote for John Bell, who owned 83 slaves in his own name—and his wife owned 83 more. Brownlow declared that he intended to stand by the Union and that if a Southern Confederacy were organized he would rebel against it. Nay, he would do more, "I will sustain Lincoln if he will go to work to put down the great Southern mob that leads off in such a rebellion!" These sentiments and others he expressed in a speech before the Bell and Everett Club of Knoxville in October, 1860. Nearing the close, he declared:

These are my sentiments, and these are my purposes; and I am no Abolitionist, but a Southern man. I expect to stand by this

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58 Portrait and Biography, p. 30.
Union, and battle to sustain it, though Whiggery and Democracy, Slavery and Abolitionism, Southern rights and Northern wrongs, are all blown to the devil! I will never join in the outcry against the American Union in order to build up a corrupt Democratic party in the South, and to create offices in a new Government for an unprincipled pack of broken-down politicians, who have justly rendered themselves odious by stealing the public money. I may stand alone in the South; but I believe thousands and tens of thousands will stand by me, and, if need be, perish with me in the same cause.  

The Parson had not been afraid of the Nullifiers in South Carolina in 1832 when he was riding the circuit there; with equal vigor would he oppose the Nullifiers of 1860. Nullifiers throughout all history had come to grief. Adam and Eve had nullified God's law in Eden, and they had been thrown out; Cain nullified God's will, and he was branded in the forehead as a traitorous murderer; the Jews nullified holy law, and they perished in the siege of Jerusalem; Sodom and Gomorrah nullified it, and they were consumed with fire and brimstone; the King of the Egyptians nullified the will of God, and he and his army were drowned in the Red Sea; and if South Carolina had kept up her nullification in 1832, "Old Hickory Jackson would have drowned them in the harbor of Charleston."  

There could be no doubt that Brownlow was pursuing a course which would make trouble for himself. There was always freedom of speech in the South, at least for Southerners, but there were limits beyond which the Southern leaders could not be attacked without replying. Brownlow's nervous excitability and his exaggerated style had long made him an object of merriment or contempt among Southern leaders, although they did not consider him important enough or serious enough to be resented. And so in this campaign he was noticed chiefly by the lesser leaders of the South. Only once did he have a brush with a Southern fire-eater of the first magnitude, and in dramatic effect it stood out boldly. In the heat of the campaign William L. Yancey appeared in Knoxville to advocate the election of Breckinridge.  

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80 Ibid., p. 206.  
81 Ibid., p. 73; Knoxville Whig, October 13, 1860.
After the speech had passed the three-hour mark, a voice from the audience cried out, "Hurrah for Bell!"; another shouted, "What will you do if Lincoln is elected?" In order to deal effectively with the disturbers Yancey invited them to the platform. After quizzing one of the audience who answered the invitation, Yancey learned that the heckler was merely acting for a committee of five headed by Brownlow. He now invited this group to the platform. Brownlow, with "a cocked Derringer" in his pocket acted as spokesman. With what Yancey considered insufferable impudence, the Parson boldly said, "I propose, when the Secessionists go to Washington to dethrone Lincoln, to seize a bayonet and form an army to resist such an attack and they shall walk over my dead body on the way." Yancey with great seriousness turned to the audience and replied, "If my state resists I will go with her and if I meet this gentleman marshaled with his bayonet to oppose us, I will plunge mine to the hilt through and through his heart, feel no compunctions for the act, but thank God my country has been freed from such a foe."

Such encounters as this greatly excited the South, but they riveted Brownlow's control over his pugnacious East Tennesseans. John W. Palmer, a South Carolina subscriber to the Knoxville Whig, wrote Brownlow that "your remarks to Yancey convince me fully you are a traitor to the South and to your country." He informed Brownlow that if he found him in the ranks of the Abolitionists, "I will kill you the first man." He promised that if Brownlow were ever caught in South Carolina he should have thirty-nine lashes on his bare back and "a coat of tar and feathers afterwards to heal up the stripes." He closed: "If my time is not out, stop my paper, anyhow. I make you a present of all you owe me, believing you would steal it if I did not." Brownlow answered, enclosing twenty-four cents in stamps, which he said was the amount still due. He was glad to be rid of

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the South Carolinian and all of his disunion friends. The *Knoxville Whig* still had 12,000 subscribers, which was a greater number than any other paper in the state. As for the thirty-nine lashes, if Palmer would leave his mob behind, Brownlow would be willing to meet him at any time and place he should designate. He then proceeded to read a lecture to the South Carolinian on patriotism.63

The election came, and those in the South who had feared the victory of Lincoln sorrowed and those who had silently hoped for it secretly rejoiced. The former knew not what to do; the latter knew that they would secede and set up a Southern nation.

63 *Parson Brownlow’s Book*, pp. 65-74; *Knoxville Whig*, October 13, 1860.