CHAPTER VII

SECESSION

Without a doubt, the majority of Tennesseans under ordinary circumstances were unwilling to break up the Union, and in 1860 they considered the times not sufficiently out of joint to constitute a provoking situation. They cast their electoral vote for John Bell, giving him 69,000 popular ballots; while about 65,000 Tennesseans recorded their preference for Breckinridge. As an added warning that Tennessee would have no seceding on her part, 11,000 citizens stood out for Stephen A. Douglas, the "Little Giant" from Illinois. By this vote 80,000 Tennesseans seemed to indicate a preference for the continuation of the Union, and it can by no means be said that the 65,000 who voted for Breckinridge were recording a preference for disunion.

Thus in the early stages of the secession movement Brownlow found himself with the overwhelming majority of Tennesseans. He was an original Union man with his Unionism dating back to Nullification days. For forty years he had gloried in his country's greatness, he had bragged about her, and had flung against his enemies as one of his ugliest thrusts the charge of being Tories. The Parson felt doubly important when he thought of his American citizenship, for the great mass of people in this world had not been blessed with this distinction. Like many other Americans, he felt this honor to be a definite personal possession. He declared "Our Government is the greatest and the best the world has ever seen." So, to jeopardize his country's integrity or to take him out of it through the secession of his state was to rob him of one of the great consolations of being alive.

1 Knoxville Whig, October 13, 1860, quoted in Parson Brownlow's Book, p. 67.
He had been arguing against secession long before the election of 1860 and he did not cease his opposition until as governor of the state six years later he saw it restored to the Union. Neither before the election of Lincoln nor afterwards was he able to find one good argument for secession. He was for the Union equally as much because he was a Southerner as he was because he was an American. He was convinced that there could be no peaceable dissolution of the Union; secession meant war and war of the most terrible character. Almost a month before Lincoln's election, he said, "The man who calculates upon peaceable dissolution of the Union is either a madman or a fool." In the war that would surely follow secession he saw the people "drafted as soldiers, and forced to abandon our peaceful homes, never to see them more, to perish by exposure, or hunger, or disease, on long and dreary marches, or to fall by the hands of our countrymen, in a war that never ought to have been waged." And, moreover, it would not be a short war; "this is to be the most fearful war that ever raged in the civilized world." And what was worse, Tennessee and the border states would become the great battlefields and the source of vast numbers of soldiers who would be driven into the maelstrom of war to fight the battles of the lords of the "Cotton South." Tennesseans would be "forced to leave their wives and children to toil and suffer, while they fight for the purse-proud aristocrats of the Cotton States, whose pecuniary abilities will enable them to hire substitutes!"

The Parson knew that the South was not a unit in its thinking and in its needs and desires. He knew that what the cotton barons wanted would not of necessity be advantageous to his East Tennesseans. Many Southerners had been gradually during the past decade and more coming to the belief that the South could never attain her destiny until she should become an independent nation. She had the potentialities for becoming the richest and most powerful nation on earth. All she needed was

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2 *Knoxville Whig*, October 13, 1860, quoted in *Parson Brownlow's Book*, p. 68.
4 *Knoxville Whig*, April 27, 1861.
freedom from the grasping and parasitic North, and then, indeed, would she come into her destiny. Brownlow knew that such a Southern Republic would be dominated by leaders and interests foreign to the upper South, so he registered a solemn determination to oppose all schemes for Southern nationality.

He lost patience with the Southern leaders who were precipitating secession for not being able to see that they were playing the game of the Abolitionists—they were allowing themselves to be driven out of their own house. The Abolitionists were the mutineers and the revolutionists—why allow them to take control? Brownlow would fight them to the last—to hand over the country to the Abolitionists and withdraw was exactly what these revolutionists wanted. The Parson was too bold and tenacious a fighter to engage in such an unwise course. He remembered well the disunion sentiments expressed by the arch-Abolitionist Parson Pryne, whom he had debated a few years previously in Philadelphia. The detested Northern Abolitionists might drive out of the Union the senseless Southern leaders, but he refused to be dispossessed of his heritage, his glorious Union. He would allow no Abolitionists to deprive him of the right to be called an American, and neither would he submit to being dragged away from that title by silly Southerners, who were so foolish as not to see what the Abolitionists were doing. The Parson called upon the people to stay in the Union and help fight the Abolitionists where there was some chance of winning. "Secession," he declared, "is no remedy for any evils in our Government, real or imaginary, past, present, or to come."

It was because he was so ardently in favor of slavery that he so vigorously upheld the Union. The Abolitionists wanted to drive the South out of the Union in order to demolish the institution of slavery. As soon as the South should set up a government of its own, the old fragment of the Union would abolish slavery there, and then Canada would in effect be brought to the very front door of the South, and slavery would then fast disappear. And it would not be entirely due to the fact that many slaves might run away to the land of freedom. Conditions

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*Knoxville Whig*, December 8, 1860, quoted in *Parson Brownlow's Book*, p. 43.
among the slaves who might choose to remain in the South or who might not be so lucky as to escape would become chaotic and the institution would become untenable. Then the Negro would attain a degree of freedom which would bring up that deep and fundamental fear in the South of the rise of a race question. And this fear was no less present among those who never owned slaves than among the greatest planters. The Negro free might indeed become a greater menace to the social, economic, and political position of the non-slaveholders than to the lord of a thousand black serfs.

Brownlow, who was just as anxious as the most loyal Confederate soldier to preserve slavery, thought that the institution could be best maintained by remaining in the Union and fighting for the rights that amply guaranteed it and protected it under the Federal Constitution. And this was the position assumed by the East Tennessee Unionists. Brownlow was throughout the secession struggles as strongly determined in his support of slavery as was the most advanced secession slaveholder. He declared in the presidential campaign that if Lincoln should advocate interference even with the interstate slave trade and if Congress should pass hostile legislation and the Supreme Court should uphold it, then “I would take the ground that the time for Revolution has come,—that all the Southern States should go into it; AND I WOULD GO WITH THEM.” Not until the war had changed the whole aspect of slavery did the Parson weaken in his wholehearted support of it. Two months after the Southern Confederacy had hoisted the flag of a new nation, he was as loyal to its position on slavery as if he had been its president. Mindful of his former battles with Abolitionists, he continued to declare that God had placed slavery upon the earth for a good purpose. “And, however much the bonds of the slaves of the South may provoke the wrath of the ultra Abolitionists of the North, the Redeemer of the world smiles alike upon the devout master and the pious slave!” He looked upon slaveholders as God’s chosen people, declaring “that all the finer feelings of humanity may be cherished in the bosoms of

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7 *Knoxville Whig*, October 13, 1860, quoted in *Parson Brownlow’s Book*, p. 69.
slave-owners. He quoted with approval in 1862 what he had said thirty years previously, that those who fed and clothed their slaves well “and instruct them in religion, are better friends to them than those who set them at liberty.”

In fact so thoroughly did Brownlow defend slavery and so completely did he consider it to be of the essence of the South that he made it the principal position from which he would not retreat—the ground he would hold even to the point of revolting against the Union. In May, 1861, he declared that when he was convinced that Lincoln “contemplated the subjugation of the South or the abolishing of slavery, there would not be a Union man among us in twenty-four hours. Come what might, sink or swim, survive or perish, we would fight you to the death, and we would unite our fortunes and destinies with even these de-moralized seceded States, for whose leaders and laws we have no sort of respect.”

Brownlow was convinced that the election of Lincoln was no proper cause for seceding. In fact, he denied the right of secession under any provocation whatsoever. When conditions should become unbearable, then the proper method would be through revolution. But the time for revolution had by no means arrived with the coming in of the Rail-splitter. He admitted that Lincoln was a sectional president, elected without a single vote in the Southern States, but the Parson queried whether the Constitution required a person to receive Southern votes in order to be validly elected. Lincoln could not carry out the program of the Abolitionists even should he desire to do so. His oath of office would prevent it. “And who will say that he intends taking that oath with treason in his heart and perjury on his tongue?” To break up the Union merely on the supposition that Lincoln would

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9 Parson Brownlow's Book, pp. 21-25.
do illegal acts "would be wicked, treacherous, unjustifiable, unprecedented, and without the shadow of an excuse." The South should wait for the overt act; then there would be time aplenty. If the Black Republicans should succeed in violating the Constitution, then in 1864 conservative men both north and south would join together and put the government on a more solid basis than it had been within the past quarter of a century.

But Lincoln could do no harm even if he should try. He was only the President. The House, the Senate, and the Supreme Court must all agree before any act of importance could be done; and Lincoln and his party controlled not one of these important bodies. The South should not complain of its opportunities in the past for running the government. Out of the seventy-two years of the country's existence, it had held the presidency forty-eight years to the North's twenty-four. And the Parson might have added that out of those twenty-four years, the South controlled the Northern-born presidents most of the time. Despite the company in which Brownlow found Lincoln, he was inclined to favor the President-elect because the latter had been a great admirer of Henry Clay, and held much the same position on slavery as Clay held.\footnote{Knoxville Whig, November 17, 1860, quoted in Parson Brownlow's Book, pp. 30-37.}

Brownlow found a great deal to condemn in the attitude the Southern leaders had taken throughout the secession movement. He did not believe that secession had sprung from the desires of the mass of the people. On the contrary he repeatedly stated that the whole conspiracy had been hatched in the dead of night by fourteen senators from seven Southern states. He and other Tennesseans felt that the ground for this conspiracy had been prepared consciously and unconsciously over a period of years by a few people—some wily, some deluded, and some stupid. The editor of the Banner of Peace, a Tennessee newspaper established to carry out the purpose announced in its name, declared that those responsible for the troubled condition of the country could easily be grouped into three classes: first, newspaper editors; secondly, demagogues in politics; and third-
ly, political preachers. He asked, "Who does not see that if the press was generous, just, honest, and pure; if we had a race of statesmen; and if we had no political preachers, our country today would have been one broad land of contented, prosperous, and happy brothers."  

If the Southern leaders had felt sure of their cause, why, queried the Parson, did they rush into secession in the dark and without consulting with all the Southern States. The border states had been ignored by the cotton states leaders, who hoped to cross the Rubicon and commit the rest of the South so completely that it would be forced to follow. They had refused to call a general convention of all the slave states for that was not the way of conspirators. These Southern leaders would forcibly deprive the people of their greatest heritage. They would drag out of the Union Florida, Louisiana, and Texas, territories for which the United States had paid, according to the Parson's ready mathematical calculations, $617,822,928. Such actions could not be considered "in any other light than that of dishonesty and treason, meriting the scorn and contempt of the civilized world."  

The Parson had never liked South Carolinians since they had driven him out in Nullification days. It was only natural to expect them to be the first ones to attempt to break up the Union. Addressing one of them shortly before South Carolina seceded, he said, "You may leave the vessel,—you may go out in the rickety boats of your little State, and hoist your miserable cabbage-leaf of a Palmetto flag; but, depend upon it, men and brethren, you will be dashed to pieces on the rocks!" The great mass of South Carolinians had been Tories in the Revolution, he declared, and as proof he called the roll of Tory South Carolinians through 206 names. R. Barnwell Rhett, one of the South Carolina fire-eaters, had grown up under the name of Smith, but because of his Tory ancestry and because of high crimes

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12 December 13, 1860.
14 Knoxville Whig, December 8, 1860, quoted in Parson Brownlow's Book, pp. 43-44.
he himself had committed, he induced the legislature to change his name to Rhett. Indeed, declared Brownlow, "there have been more names changed in South Carolina, by Act of General Assembly, than in any State in the Union!" South Carolina still had many of the royal trappings, reminiscent of the days when she was ruled over by a king. He sounded the warning:

These are not the people to head a Confederacy for Tennesseans to fall into. Their notions of royalty, and their contempt for the common people, will never suit Tennesseans. . . . Let Tennessee once go into this Empire of Cotton States, and all poor men will at once become the free negroes of the Empire! We are down upon the whole scheme.\(^\text{15}\)

Secession ordinances, declared the Parson, were "covenants with death and agreements with hell." Southern senators were in Congress receiving nine dollars a day "for proclaiming treason, rank and damning,—for which they ought to be hung, and would be if the laws of the land were enforced." If Tennessee should madly plunge into secession, still he would fight on against "fanaticism at the North" and "demagogues and traitors at the South," and for doing so he fully expected to be hung. Thus mused the Parson in January, 1861.\(^\text{16}\)

In early February, the Confederate States of America was born in Montgomery, Alabama, and the Parson launched forth on more bitter and blighting denunciations of the new government and of all who had had a part in its making. He now became savage in his defiance:

I would as soon be engaged in importing the plague from the East, as in helping to build up a Southern Confederacy upon the ruins of the American Constitution. I expect to be abused for my defence of the Union. "Tray, Blanche, and Sweetheart" will all bark at me. The kennel is now unloosed: all the pack—from the deep-mouthed bloodhound of South Carolina and Florida to the growling cur of Georgia—are baying at me. If I were to stop to

\(^{15}\)Knoxville Whig, January 12, 1861, quoted in Parson Brownlow's Book, p. 88.

\(^{16}\)Knoxville Whig, January 19, 1861, quoted in Parson Brownlow's Book, pp. 89-95.
throw stones at all the snarling puppies that yelp at my heels in South Carolina and elsewhere, I should have little time to do any thing else.\textsuperscript{17}

The Parson was not disappointed in his prediction that he would be bitterly set upon and condemned for his course, and he might well have guessed that some of the most threatening missiles would be hurled at him from South Carolina. One of the citizens of the Palmetto State wrote the Parson to tell him that he was “the greatest liar out of hell, and one of the most infamous scoundrels living between heaven and earth” and adding “that nothing would afford us as much pleasure as to see you in Abbeville, where we could treat you to a coat of tar and feathers.” The Parson answered that he expected the “vials of contumely, reproach, and defamation will be poured upon me by a hireling press of a corrupt and plundering Southern Confederacy, by the insolvent bullies, hardened liars, and vulgar cut-throats whose only ambition is to serve as tools under an arrogant and hateful pack of aristocratic leaders.” He informed the South Carolinian “that our Constitution is not built upon such a sandy foundation as to be shaken and demolished without the rotten pillar of reputed South Carolina orthodoxy to support it.” He concluded his defiant answer: “Finally, sir, when you put forth your batch of villainous falsehoods, through the \textit{brawling Jacobin journals} of a demoralized Southern Confederacy, have the \textit{candor} and \textit{charity} to accompany them with this reply, and I will remain the defiant opponent of a wilful and despicable South Carolina rascal!”\textsuperscript{18}

South Carolinians were not the only ones to feel aggrieved at the Parson’s course. A flood of denunciation and threats poured upon him from throughout the South. A Georgian, writing with more pity than anger for the Parson, informed him, “From all appearances, you have turned from a \textit{private} and \textit{respected citizen} to a \textit{contentious, quarrelsome} politician,—from a Southern-Rights man to a friend of the North. . . .” A Mississippian

\textsuperscript{17} \textit{Knoxville Whig}, February 16, 1861, quoted in \textit{Parson Brownlow’s Book}, pp. 99-100.

\textsuperscript{18} \textit{Knoxville Whig}, February 16, 1861, quoted in \textit{Parson Brownlow’s Book}, pp. 96, 98, 99, 103-4.
threatened him as follows if he should turn against the South: "Now, Parson, if you adopt this policy, what do you think will be the consequence? You will certainly be hung, as all dogs should be, until you are 'dead, dead.' Your crime will be treason of the deepest dye." He declared the Parson was a "money-making Yankee; and, if you will give me time, I will look into your nativity. When Tennessee secedes, I will head a company of Tennesseans and Mississippians and proceed to hang you by law, or by force if need be. The South can look upon you in no other light than as a traitor and a Tory, and the twin brother of Andrew Johnson. Remember, and beware, you shall be hung in the year 1861, unless you conclude to live the life of an exile." In his answer the Parson declared that instead of being a Yankee, he was a native of Virginia, "and, although I am now fifty-five years of age, I walk erect, have but few gray hairs, and look to be younger than any whiskey-drinking, tobacco-chewing, profane-swearing Secessionist in any of the Cotton States, of forty years." As for being hanged he asked for ten days' notice "and I will muster men enough in the county where I reside, to hang the last rascal among you, and then use your carcasses for wolf-bait!"19

It was incomprehensible to many Southerners that Brownlow could submit to Lincoln and defend the Union without being a Republican. To the charge that he belonged to that political faith he pithily answered, "Any man saying—whether of high or low degree—that I am an Abolitionist or a Black Republican, is a LIAR and a SCOUNDREL."20

So easy was it to set the Parson loose on a withering flow of invective, so original as to become amusing, that now and then he was baited for the entertainment that would come in his reply. So the report was spread that General Gideon J. Pillow, who was organizing a Confederate regiment, was counting on the Parson to become his chaplain. This was an insult the Parson could not refrain from answering in the most resentful language. "When I shall have made up my mind to go to hell," he

19 Knoxville Whig, January 19, 1861, quoted in Parson Brownlow's Book, pp. 89-95.

20 Knoxville Whig, May 25, 1861, quoted in Parson Brownlow's Book, p. 58.
replied, "I will cut my throat, and go direct, and not travel round by way of the Southern Confederacy."\textsuperscript{21}

In assessing the blame for the secession movement, the Parson laid a huge proportion of it at the doors of the churches, and so completely had he become steeped in his Unionism that he was not afraid to charge his erstwhile beloved Methodist Church with deserving the lion's share of it. He declared that the clergy, high and low, without regard to denomination, "have raised the howl of Secession, and it falls like an Indian war-cry upon our citizens from their prostituted pulpits every Sabbath."\textsuperscript{22} These "reverend traitors to God and their country" went about delivering "inflammatory stump-speeches." "The South is now full of these reverend traitors," he declared, "and every branch of the Christian Church is cursed with their labors."\textsuperscript{23} In Nashville, in 1862, he said, "Here, as in all parts of the South, the worst class of men are preachers. They have done more to bring about the deplorable state of things existing in the country than any other class of men."\textsuperscript{24} And a little later he said, "The worst class of men who make tracks upon Southern soil are Methodist, Presbyterian, Baptist, and Episcopal clergy-men, and at the head of these for mischief are the Southern Methodists."\textsuperscript{25}

It was becoming a practice among the Secession preachers "to take the hides off Union men by holding them up before their congregations in prayer." The Parson thought that the parties assailed ought to be "allowed a division of time, in laying the other side before the Lord." He charged a Presbyterian minister in Knoxville with attacking Horace Maynard in a prayer in which he begged the Lord "that his traitorous feet might never again press the soil of Tennessee." Another Presbyterian in the same city implored the Lord to raise the blockade of the South and fervently prayed for Him "to strike Lincoln's ships with lightning and scatter them to the four winds of

\textsuperscript{21} Frank Moore, ed., \textit{The Rebellion Record}, I, 60.
\textsuperscript{22} \textit{Knoxville Whig}, May 18, 1861, quoted in \textit{Parson Brownlow's Book}, p. 111-12.
\textsuperscript{23} \textit{Knoxville Whig}, July 6, 1861, quoted in \textit{Parson Brownlow's Book}, p. 146.
\textsuperscript{24} \textit{Parson Brownlow's Book}, p. 382.
\textsuperscript{25} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 189.
heaven!" In one of these blockade prayer-meetings this pastor "assisted by several old clericals, made a desperate effort to raise the blockade!" This was the same preacher, according to the Parson "who boasted in his pulpit that Jesus Christ was a Southerner, born on Southern soil, and so were His apostles, except Judas, whom he denominated a Northern man! Speaking of the Bible, he said he would sooner have a Bible printed and bound in hell, than one printed and bound north of Mason & Dixon's line!"26

So far did the distempers of the times affect Brownlow that he began to advocate destroying the chief foundations of the past thirty-five years of his existence. He would depart from denominationalism, which had made possible so many joyous fights for him in the past, and have a union of all the churches. He argued:

We have—among us—brought disgrace upon the church, destroyed confidence in the ministry, disbanded our congregations, and broken up the social and religious ties that formerly bound us together. It is useless for us to meet in our churches on the Sabbath, put on long, pious faces, offer up long prayers, hand round the bread and wine, and then pass out in society and vilify each other as a set of pickpockets, liars, and traitors, and keep up this holy and patriotic warfare until we meet again the next Sabbath. The fool, the wayfaring man, and the untutored African can see that we are wicked, and on the high-road to the devil! Let us break up our hypocritical organizations called churches, and out of a half-dozen of them make up one new one, whose pastor and members shall neither preach, exhort, nor pray anything connected with party politics.27

But the Parson was not so blind in his support of the Union as not to see that the Northern preachers were just as guilty of departing from Christianity as were the Southerners. He declared that "the curse of the country has been that, for years, north of Mason & Dixon's line, you have kept pulpits open to the abuse of Southern slavery and of the Southern people."28

Brownlow had not been alone in Tennessee in his opposition to secession; only in the devastating language with which he opposed it was he unique. John Bell in the early stages of the movement stood by the Union, then he halted in the twilight zone of neutrality, and finally he deserted for the Confederacy. Andrew Johnson in the United States Senate poured out his condemnation of the Southern secessionists, as one Southerner after another departed with maledictions upon this Tennessee renegade. But he won the applause of Brownlow, who had not spoken to him for twenty years. Other East Tennesseans held true to the Union and backed up Brownlow and Johnson—T. A. R. Nelson, Horace Maynard, Nat Taylor, and many more.

But the South was aflame; Tennessee would not fiddle while Rome burned. The withdrawal of South Carolina set going a wave of secession which swept all of the Gulf states except Texas out of the Union before the close of January, 1861. Governor Isham G. Harris, whom Brownlow denominated "Eye Sham," seized with the contagion, called immediately after South Carolina's secession an extra session of the legislature to determine what Tennessee should do in the crisis. He recommended that a Sovereign Convention be provided for. The legislature met on the 7th of January and on the 19th it called upon the people to vote on the 9th of the following February whether they would have a Sovereign Convention and at the same time to elect delegates to that convention.

Brownlow, fearing that this was the first step which would plunge Tennessee into secession and ruin, called upon the people to force all candidates who should seek election to the Sovereign Convention to declare their position unequivocally. He declared, "It will not be Whig and Democrat, Bell and Breckinridge, or Douglas, but Union or Disunion." And immediately he intensified his campaign against the Southern secessionists, filling his Knoxville Whig with warnings against the

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29 George Fort Milton, The Age of Hate, Andrew Johnson and the Radicals, p. 103.
30 Knoxville Whig, December 22, 1860, quoted in Parson Brownlow's Book, p. 49.
evils to come and with denunciations of the Southern conspirators, as has heretofore appeared. In the election for the Convention, Tennessee clearly declared that she did not consider the election of Lincoln sufficient excuse for seceding, or, indeed, for even considering the matter at all. More than 91,000 votes were cast for Union delegates, whereas a few less than 25,000 voted for the Disunion delegates. All three of the grand divisions of the state, East, Middle, and West Tennessee, overwhelmingly voted for the Union. But there was less unanimity of feeling on the propriety of calling together a convention. Many who were for the Union felt that there could be no harm in discussing the distempers of the times, but Brownlow declared that as every convention that had been called had passed secession ordinances, the safest way would be to reject the Convention. So it was that Tennessee after electing Union men in a vast majority, nevertheless refused to trust those same Union men. The majority against the Convention was almost 12,000. Only the cotton-growing West Tennesseans gave a majority for the Convention. East Tennessee voted it down by more than 25,000 majority, and even the stock-raising gentlemen farmers of Middle Tennessee declared against it by a majority of 1,382. Only two counties in East Tennessee voted for the Convention.  

Then Fort Sumter was fired upon, Lincoln called for troops, and the lid was blown off Pandora’s box. In answer to Lincoln’s call for troops, Governor Harris defiantly replied, “Tennessee will not furnish a man for purposes of coercion, but 50,000, if necessary, for the defense of our rights, and those of our Southern brothers.” He immediately issued a call for a special session of the legislature to meet on April 25, an ominous move. Union-loving Tennesseans were frightened; John Bell and others issued an address to the people deploring the bitter choice that was now held out—either to secede from the Union or to aid in the despicable business of coercing the South. Mindful of what was going on in the hearts of their neighbor Kentuckians, they

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counselling neutrality as against the insanity that was sweeping all before it in both North and South.

But there was no staying the fate that awaited. The legislature met, and listened to the recommendations of Governor Harris that Tennessee declare her independence and consider a Union with the Confederate States of America. A month back was now ancient history, so swiftly had events been moving. There was no time to call a Sovereign Convention, a procedure, which under much less provocation, the state had recently rejected. To save time, the legislature should do these things, and then submit its work to a vote of the people. One after another of the neutrality men saw the impossibility of their position and fell in with Governor Harris. Acting with swift precision the legislature on May 1 directed the Governor to enter into a military league with the Confederacy, so that preparations might immediately be made to hold the northern frontier against the invaders. On the 7th the Governor reported that a league had been formed with the Confederacy and awaited ratification. The legislature accepted it immediately. The previous day it had paved the way for this action by adopting a Declaration of Independence and an Ordinance dissolving its relations with the Federal Government. They wasted no time arguing over the abstractions of secession; they chose the road hallowed throughout history. They asserted the right of revolution. On June 8, the people should vote whether they would accept the Declaration and the Ordinance and also whether they would join the Confederacy.

In the meantime the state began organizing for war. By the time the day for the voting had arrived, the state had provided for raising 55,000 troops and the borrowing of $5,000,000. Democracy does not operate most efficiently amidst the alarms of war, and undoubtedly the din of military preparations carried many Tennesseans out of the Union in their voting and riveted others to the Union or deterred them from voting at all. To friend and foe of Union alike, by the time the month of June had dawned, the state seemed to have already been committed to a policy from which there appeared no turning back.
The voting was general over the state and when the ballots were canvassed and announced on June 24 it was found that a majority, of 57,675 had favored independence and about the same majority, a union with the Confederacy. So, on June 24, Governor Harris proclaimed the new position of Tennessee, the last of the states to leave the Union.32

Parson Brownlow had been thundering out denunciations on all sides while the disjointed times had been fast sweeping Tennessee out of the Union. His influence was great but with all the other Union leaders of Tennessee he was unable to hold the state in the final plunge. The vote for the three divisions of the state in the June 8 election follows:

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Division</th>
<th>Disunion</th>
<th>Union</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>East Tennessee</td>
<td>14,780</td>
<td>32,923</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle Tennessee</td>
<td>58,265</td>
<td>8,198</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West Tennessee</td>
<td>29,127</td>
<td>6,117</td>
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<tr>
<td>Military Camps</td>
<td>2,741</td>
<td>0</td>
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Thus alone of the state’s divisions did East Tennessee hold true to the Union, and this was largely due to Brownlow, Andrew Johnson, T. A. R. Nelson, Horace Maynard, and other Unionists in the eastern part of the state. Six of the East Tennessee counties voted for independence and union with the Confederacy and thereby repudiated the Parson’s counsel and leadership. The East Tennessee secessionists, according to a Unionist, were the “rich and persons of best social position.”33 The majority in the state the Parson rather wildly declared had been dragooned into disunion by Southern bayonets.34

In August Tennessee would elect a governor. The Parson began thinking about it in March, while Tennessee was yet peacefully in the Union. He had visions of becoming the state’s governor and guiding it for the next two years through the perils that were besetting the nation. His campaign for this

33 Humes, op. cit., p. 91.
honor sprang up, flourished, and died within the scope of a month. But during that time the Fighting Parson had the pleasure of carrying war into Africa. His platform was one of support of the Union and denunciation of the Southern Confederacy, and he carried out his campaign through his Knoxville Whig and in handbills, which he scattered over East Tennessee by the thousands. He could not take the stump, as he had been unable for the past two years to speak "loud enough to be heard ten steps." He promised not to use cheap political tricks by telling about an humble origin, but his enthusiasm for himself soon led him to repeat his familiar story of having no "influential relatives," of having been left a destitute orphan when quite small, and of working at the trade of house-carpenter. His was a self-starting campaign; he would run of his own accord and not be nominated by a convention. Specifically he was "for the Union as it is, first; for a Border State Confederacy next; and for the Southern Confederacy never, in any contingency, or under any circumstances that may arise!" In his platform he repeated his indictment of the secession conspirators and the Southern Confederacy. On the traitors' "heads will be gathered the hissing curses of all generations, horrible as the forked-tongued snakes of Medusa." He would rather join the worst European monarchy than this "bogus Confederacy." People shouted coercion. "Coercion of a State," rejoined Brownlow, "is an adroit form of expression, coined in the school of Secession to give dignity to treason." The rebels were breaking up the Union, and he would fight them back; "Let the gates of the temple of Janus open," he exclaimed. He indorsed Lincoln's Inaugural Address "for its temperance and conservatism and for its firm nationality of sentiment." Though most of his platform was made of denunciation, he had thought somewhat on state policy. He would build two more penitentiaries, and he would sweep the secessionists out of the bank and railroad positions they held. The Parson wanted to be governor not only to checkmate the secessionists but with all candor and perhaps a touch of levity, he "would like to fill the office for two

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years, for the sake of the THREE THOUSAND DOLLARS PER ANNUM.”

As has been noted, the Parson’s campaign did not last long. A few county meetings were got up to support him, but he did not appear to the Unionists to possess the proper temperament they would have in their candidate. He was accused of being a Lincoln hireling which displeased him and which brought forth this disclaimer: “We are no Lincoln man—we neither admire him or his councillors, nor do we approve of his policy or principles—and we have the consolation of knowing that we did all in our power to prevent his election!” But it was foolish to say that Lincoln began the war; and as for the Parson, he would never admit that “honor, patriotism, or a love of country, influenced the vile, hypocritical, corrupt, and insincere leaders who have plunged the Cotton States into this revolution.” So, having no great expectation of becoming governor, Brownlow soon withdrew in favor of William H. Polk. By the time of the election in August, conditions had so completely changed that Harris easily defeated Polk.

Brownlow’s reaction to secession differed vastly from that of many other Southern Unionists. While the question was yet in the argumentative stage he used much the same line of reasoning employed by Alexander H. Stephens of Georgia. Stephens’ speech before the Georgia legislature on November 14, 1860, and Brownlow’s newspaper editorials ran parallel in a great many instances. But when secession came in Georgia, Stephens bowed to the inevitable, and like thousands of other Unionists, embraced the new order with the zeal becoming the principle of majority rule. Brownlow and most of his East Tennesseans became defiant and determined to fight the Confederacy. But the development of the secession movement in Georgia and in Tennessee were not similar, and in that difference there is much to explain the Parson’s position. In Georgia the Unionists were not strong enough to prevent the first effort from succeeding; in Tennessee the Unionists were so powerful that they prolonged

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36 Knoxville Whig, April 27, 1861; Parson Brownlow’s Book, pp. 224-44.
37 Knoxville Whig, April 27, 1861.
the fight through much bitterness and held the state in the Union so long that she became the last to leave.

The Parson's erratic temperament, however, opened up possibilities which no one could predict, and when finally Tennessee did leave the Union he had crossed the Rubicon and there was no turning back. Had Tennessee left the Union quickly, like most of the other states of the Confederacy, it would do no violence to his character to say that, following the example of Stephens, he might have cast his support to the Confederacy. A tradition has subsisted that he had in the early stages of the movement written an editorial in which, repudiating his old position, he announced his adherence to the South. An opponent hearing of the change, before the editorial had been published, seized the opportunity to charge Brownlow with inconsistency. Thereupon the Parson settled down to a position of Unionism from which he never budged. George D. Prentice, with whom he later had a bitter quarrel, declared that it took all the persuasive powers of Judge Trigg and John Williamson to prevent him from joining the Confederacy. During the decade directly preceding the Civil War, he had come much under the spell of the Southern planters. He had embraced slavery and had gone out valiantly to do battle against the Abolitionists. He had made frequent trips through the plantation country of the South, and he had developed an antipathy against Northerners as sharp as any to be found. He had even begun to attend the Southern commercial conventions, those nurseries of Southern nationalism. Two weeks after Lincoln's election he was making statements which might have served as easy entries into a Southern accord. On November 17 he said, "Individually, we are willing to go with the South, even unto death, but we feel bound to aid in making the South herself go right!"

John Bell called for neutrality and then joined the Confederacy; T. A. R. Nelson travelled farther along the road of Unionism and then strayed off slightly on a by-path; perhaps

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39 Southern Watchman, May 30, 1866.
40 Knoxville Whig, November 17, 1860, quoted in Parson Brownlow's Book, p. 34.
Parson Brownlow, just because he was not like other people, might have landed in the camps of the Confederacy. But East Tennesseans without the valiant leadership which they had in such abundance could never have developed the will or the power to make their region so menacing a stronghold of Unionism as to provide a major problem for the Confederacy.