THE War between the States, like every long conflict, tried men’s souls. Civil wars are always bad enough in themselves, because brother is likely to be pitted against brother; but the American Civil War was made worse by the fact that, added to the political issue of secession versus unity, there was the race question, that is, the Negro. The American Revolution, which was also a civil war, produced its share of hatreds and heart-burning between brother and brother—witness the maltreatment of the Tories—but it had little to do with the race question.

As in the Revolution, there were both disunity and dissatisfaction in the North during the War for Southern Independence. If all the Secessionists had been south of the Mason-Dixon line, and if all Unionists had been north of the line, the issue would have been more clear-cut and the animosities engendered might have been less lasting. But such was not the case. The pro-Southern party in the North—usually including the Copperhead wing of the Democratic party—appeared, in the eyes of good Unionists, to be reptiles who clandestinely struck at Republicans when they were least expecting it; or worse, to be spies who concerted together to stab the Unionists in the rear as they fought, backs to the wall, to save American nationality. The disloyalty, real or unreal, of large numbers of Southern sympathizers at the North created a detestation for Democrats which lasted, like an incurable cancer, long years after the war ended—often terminating only with the death of the haters and the hated. Since many of the Disunionists were allied with the Democratic party, this party—deservedly or not—suffered for years from the reputation for treason which it had gained during the war. The Republicans wrung many a victory out of the “bloody-shirt.”
Northern opponents of the war were of various shades and degrees. There were those who actually conspired to aid the South; many of these were, or were charged with being, members of secret societies, such as the Knights of the Golden Circle in the Middle West. This order claimed a large membership. Whether it had entirely disloyal purposes or not, its members were hunted down and jailed.

Another variety of opposition centered around those who, while not conspiring secretly, criticized the war openly, by speech and by editorial. These critics stressed the suppression of free speech and press, the arbitrary methods of the Union government, and the futility of trying to defeat the Confederacy. Most of them supported the peace promises made by the Democratic platform in 1864. One of these open opponents of Lincoln (for there is no evidence that he ever conspired secretly) was Franklin Weirick (1829-1915), editor of the Selinsgrove Times, whose Copperhead editorials have become part of the folklore of Central Pennsylvania. So effective was his denunciation of the war that once a group of returned soldiers had a halter around his neck, ready to lynch him; he was saved only by allowing himself to be persuaded to mutter: "Three cheers for the Union." More than once his printing office, called the Pepper Box, was threatened with destruction by irate Unionist mobs. Desertion in Snyder county became so rampant that once a squad of Federal soldiers occupied the town of Selinsgrove.

What sort of man was Franklin Weirick? What were his doctrines and attitudes? How do his anti-war preachments fit into the larger story of Copperhead resistance to the winning of the Civil War? There are no letters extant to help in answering these questions. There are a few of his books, most of them religious works which show his non-conformist proclivities. Chief reliance must be placed on the broken files of Editor Weirick's Selinsgrove Times, a weekly newspaper of the Civil War period. These volumes are preserved as a prized possession by the present editor of the Times, the genial Marion S. Schoch, who continues the best traditions of Democratic journalism in an area predominantly Republican. Without Wierick's bitterness, secessionism and hatred of the Federal government, Schoch pens his weekly comments under the caption "The Pepper Box." His well-written editorials are read
by most Snyder county people, who as in the case of those who read Weirick's paper during the Civil War, then go out and vote Republican.

II

Weirick hated abolitionism, even going so far as to advise Democratic soldiers to desert when abolition became one of the aims of the Lincoln government. He considered it a travesty on justice that a war should be fought over what he called the "nigger." Abolitionists, in his eyes, were the lowest variety of humanity. Thus when a new state militia law exempted the insane, he said: "This is unquestionably for the benefit of the Abolitionists, who are all crazy as March hares" (May 27, 1864). Everything unfavorable to the Negro was printed and played up. On September 9, 1864, he quoted the Richmond Enquirer concerning the horrible crimes of the Negro soldiers upon women; so, also, on October 28, 1864, the Chicago Post on "One of the most shocking cases of miscegenation," when the daughter of a Chicago merchant married a Negro drayman. Even high prices were blamed on the Negro; on September 9, 1864, appeared a poem of which the following are typical lines:

They say speculation causes all,
True, for ONE NIGGER, five white men fall;
Nigger lives,—white man goes under ground,
While butter's fifty cents a pound!

O! this is a glorious war,
We should have known it long before,
And thanks we say to Old John Brown,
For butter's fifty cents a pound!

On December 2, 1864, he demanded that, since Lincoln's sons were old enough to go to war, they also should be put into the army to fight for the Negro. If the slave must be freed, the sons of the President were no better than anyone else. Likewise he denounced Sigel and Schurz for fighting against liberty in America, after they had fought for it in Germany (December 9, 1864). Almost two pages were given to the speech delivered by Pendleton on January 11, 1865, in the House, against the amendment to
abolish slavery. He printed the names of the sixteen Democrats who voted for the amendment, surrounded the list with a heavy black line, and entitled the whole “The Roll of Infamy!” (February 10, 1865).

Weirick blamed the preachers of the North for most of the abolition heresy. In fact, his skeptical attitude towards religion must have helped to make him an outcast in the eyes of good Pennsylvania German Lutherans. He quoted, with favor, the Harrisburg Patriot and Union,\(^1\) which dubbed abolitionist clergy “repudiators of the gospel, these re-crucifiers of the Christ, false prophets” (January 8, 1864).

At the end of the rebellion Weirick said that prayer had received a set-back because before the war, at least 5,475,000 prayers had been offered, yet war had come; and that after the bloodshed began, there had been 16,435,000 prayers for peace. He stated: “What is the use of praying at all, if such an enormous quantity seems to do no good whatever?” (May 5, 1865). In this issue Weirick was in an especially ribald mood, for in speaking of a preacher who had been holding forth in the streets of Selinsgrove, he said: “If Hershey would take the hoe and raise a single potato, it would be of more benefit to the human race than all the sermons he can preach.” A fight in the Pennsylvania Legislature over the choice of a chaplain led him to opine: “If members of a Legislature cannot do their own praying, they ought to be driven out of the Capitol” (February 3, 1865).

III

The very nature of Weirick’s position, unpopular and disloyal as it must have appeared to Republicans, made him the champion of a free press and free speech. In an advertisement a column long (January 8, 1864), asking for subscribers, he praised his paper as:

Unmoved by the Hopes of Unrighteous Gain, Unshaken by the Frowns of Unprincipled Demagogues, Unintimidated by the Clamors of the Rabble and the Threats of Insolent Mobs, and Fearing Neither the

\(^1\) At one point in the war, four editors of this paper were jailed (according to a list in the Cincinnati Enquirer, January 25, 1867).
Unhallowed Precincts of Presidential Dungeons and Tyrants' vaults, nor the Rock-bound Fortresses of any Modern Caligula.

The open opposition to which his own paper was subjected by Unionists made him the champion of all other editors when their criticism of the government got them into trouble. He protested every time a Union general closed any Copperhead sheet, such as happened to the New York World, the New York Journal of Commerce and the Boston Transcript. He undoubtedly saw himself endangered when Sam Medary, editor of the Columbus (Ohio) Crisis, was imprisoned (May 27, 1864).

In spite of the fact that he could quote figures to prove that his own paper had a larger circulation than any other in Snyder county, and all other English-speaking papers in the county put together (January 8, 1864), he was always in hot water. The year of 1862 was the most trying to him. He charged that Republican postmasters were attempting to persuade subscribers to discontinue the Times (June 13, 1862). A law passed by the state Assembly on April 9, 1862, was, said he, directed right at him. This law provided that all public advertisements must be published in at least one German paper in Snyder county; Weirick showed that this enactment was passed for the purpose of breaking the Times, since the paper at Middleburg was the only German one in the county. Ritter, the Snyder county Assemblyman, would not even send legislative documents to the Times office (June 13, 1862).

This kind of persecution went as far as the threat of physical violence. One of these instances was described by Weirick on June 13, 1862, as follows:

During Court, at Middleburg, a bevy of Abolition patriots happened together one evening at a certain hotel. The principal topic of conversation was the editor of the Times. One proposed that he ought to be hung; another proposed that a rope should be tied to his neck and that he should be drawn through the streets; another proposed that he should be driven full of pine-knots and then set on fire . . .

We believe they all were professed Christians. Among them was Mr. David Spitler, of New Berlin. This
person while on his way home next day died instantly upon the road. If there is a hell, we pray that his soul did not go into it. . . .

This sort of writing indicates that Weirick was no coward, whatever else he might have been. Threatened with lynching, he used his virulent pen to dare his critics to do their worst. In that same issue of his paper, he called one of his newspaper detractors, Burgess Kurtz of Bellefonte, who was also editor of the Central Press, a "damned scoundrel" who edited a "dirty paper."

In spite of threats of hanging, Weirick did not pull his punches, for in 1863, he was preaching outright disloyalty. On October 30, 1863, he admitted: "... we never yet claimed to be loyal, nor do we mean to be loyal, to any one who claims our allegiance. We despise the word loyal; we hate it; we spit upon it. . . ." He carried his point right into the Republican camp by declaring that the Republican party was the "revolutionary" party, and that "The Almighty Dollar had become the great man of the age." In the fall of 1863 he fought for free elections by charging that soldiers had been posted in strategic places to carry doubtful areas for the Republicans, and he instanced Huntingdon county, Wilkins township in Allegheny county, and the first ward in Pittsburgh (October 30, 1863).

By 1863 he was also using his columns to fight the draft because he felt it was unconstitutional and should be contested in the courts. He advised the draftees to "unite in purse" for that purpose. The draft, said he, was as "infamous" a "despotism" as that which drove the Poles to revolt. "None but abject slaves will cheerfully or without earnest protest submit to it" (July 17, 1863). In the very issue in which he was counseling against conscription, he carried in a prominent place the following advertisement:

Copperheads.—The badge of Liberty known by the name of "copperhead" is for sale at the TIMES office. Price only 15 cents. Let every Democrat get one and wear it too. Same by mail.

*The state Supreme Court did declare the draft unconstitutional in November, 1863, only to change its mind in January, 1864.*
In the Presidential election of 1864 he hoisted McClellan and Pendleton to the masthead, printed many articles drubbing Lincoln, and praised the Chicago platform. One of his main arguments for electing McClellan was that it would stop the draft (October 28, 1864). Just at election time he was brash enough to declare that since secession was not war, the South had not started the conflict.

The defeat of McClellan did not put a stop to this disloyal editorializing. Early in 1865 Weirick seemed to be counseling mutiny on the part of Democratic soldiers. On February 10, 1865, he quoted Senator Wade who said there should be no peace until slavery was abolished. Weirick declared that this should indicate to Democratic soldiers “How they have the Wool drawn over their Eyes. They are but the tools of the Abolitionists.” He reminded them that he had told them so at the opening of the war, but that they had not listened to him. “We ask how many have laid down their arms? None dare lay down their arms except at the risk of their lives. If they refuse to obey orders, they are instantly punished. If they desert and are caught, they are shot.”

Just as Weirick was talking in that vein, he gave his enemies a chance to attack him: he inserted an advertisement (January 27, 1865) which said he wished to sell his printing establishment. Republicans thought he was giving up. He himself quoted the Sunbury American as saying: “If he does not find a purchaser very soon, it will not bring a BAUBEE, as every movement of Sherman and Sheridan, renders rebel stock, always valueless, still more worthless” (March 31, 1865). Either no buyer appeared or else Weirick reconsidered, for his editorial attacks continued even after the war ended. On May 5, 1865, he told how John Bilger, editor of the Middleburg Tribune, wanted the Times office destroyed and was urging loyal people “to pitch in and smash it.” Weirick, always impudent in the face of opposition, answered: “Johnny, you should not urge others to do what you are too big a coward to do yourself.”

The war ended with Weirick still in control and still as cocky as ever. When the Selinsgrove Post was revived in the summer of 1865, he reminded his readers that during the war the Post had
been loyal but had gone broke; but that the *Times* had been disloyal and had increased its circulation (August 11, 1865).

IV

To Weirick, the *bête noir* of the Civil War was Abraham Lincoln who was the head-center of abolitionism, centralization, autocracy and everything else which a Democrat could find to criticize in the conduct of the North. As early as June 13, 1862, he printed a poem which included the following verses:

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God made man,  
And man made money,  
God made bees,  
And bees made honey.  
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God made the Union  
Nice and slick,  
In came old Lincoln,  
And spoiled it quick!
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By 1863 the editor's opposition had passed from that of ridiculing the President to that of vituperating him. On July 17 of that year Lincoln was "a disgrace to the people and to the government." Weirick ransacked all the Democratic exchanges to find attacks upon the Chief Executive; hence he was delighted to quote the *Juniata Democrat* which said: "The Belshazzar of America, Abraham Lincoln, . . . robs the people of freedom and protection, and revels with the sacred things in the Temple of Liberty" (October 30, 1863). As a sort of Christmas gift to his readers, Weirick launched into a rabid denunciation of the Chief Magistrate in his issue of December 25, 1863. One wonders how he was able to get away with it. Lincoln, he said, was

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... one of the most deceptive, cold-blooded, unfeeling and basest men. He is a bloody monster. He is hell's Pandora box brought to earth, and opened [sic.] for the destruction of this foolish people who hug him to their bosoms until, like an Egyptian adder, he stings them to death. . . . He is a liar, a thief, a robber, a brigand, a pirate, a perjurer, a traitor, a coward, a hypocrite, a cheat, a trickster, a murderer, a tyrant, an unmitigated scoundrel, and an infernal fool . . . like Attila [sic.], who ordered the strangulation of the slaves who dug his grave to prevent them discovering it to his enemies, this modern tyrant will yet order those to be strangled who, at his bidding, dug the grave of liberty, to prevent them and the people from regaining it.
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The unprejudiced modern scholar must admit that there was something real and vital about the right of free speech when, in the midst of the darkest days of the war, Weirick could write such things.

In view of the vilification poured upon Lincoln by the Selinsgrove editor, it is of interest to study his reaction at the news of the President's assassination. Would he, now that death had removed his great enemy, take back what he had been saying during the war? Did he praise the martyr as a saint? He did not. For him Lincoln dead was the subject of just as much criticism as was Lincoln alive. The nearest he came to saying anything favorable about the murdered President was on April 21, when he called the assassination "deplorable," and "a great crime against the law," because Lincoln had been showing some reasonableness lately. In his next issue, April 28, he made a frontal attack upon those Democratic papers which had formerly condemned the President, but who "are now putting on long faces and speak of the late President as a wonderful, good, kind, great and merciful man." Weirick said he did not favor assassination, yet "on the other hand we had no inclination to run wild and crazy over the death of a man, who whilst living, could never challenge our respect or good opinion." He continued in that vein as follows:

We have the same opinions of him now we had heretofore, and his death cannot cover up his faults. We are opposed to man-worship, and especially where it is undeserved. Mr. Lincoln was neither a great nor a wise man, and his sole merit consisted in being the representative of one idea—fanatical abolitionism. . . . Had he lived and failed, his name would have gone down to posterity with infamy by the side of that of George III.

This was consistency to the point of bravado; moreover, it was not the leading editorial of that week. It was second in position to one on "Selinsgrove the County Seat." Weirick's penchant for impudence had to have a chance to express itself; he said, at another place in the same issue: "In a little speech, Secretary Stanton lately declared that Abraham Lincoln went to Heaven and was now sitting at the right hand of God. Wonder if he
has a private box!” On June 30 he inserted the following tidbit which must have been read with anything but pleasure by Republicans:

*Dead Investment.*—To subscribe and pay for a copy of the “Life and Services of Abraham Lincoln.” A copy of “Gulliver’s Travels” would be much more useful and entertaining.

V

When, early in 1865, it seemed that the Northern arms would finally conquer a peace, Weirick refused to abate opposition. Peace with a Union victory would be, to him, just as horrible as the present unholy war. To him, the South was still to be loyally defended, for its cause was sacred. Thus, when the editor of the *Lewisburg Chronicle* had criticized James H. Hammond as an aristocrat, Weirick called the editor “an unprincipled dog” (December 9, 1864). On January 27, 1865, he refuted the abolitionist doctrine that “God designed this great country to be under one and the same government.” A long article in the same issue declared that the war would end at once if the North would recognize the principle of state rights.

All this, obviously, was baying at the moon; the North, just at the point of victory, would hardly give in on what was considered to be one of the causes of the war. As peace rumors became frequent in February, 1865, Weirick pooh-poohed the reports, declaring that the war would be just as bloody during the coming summer as it has been before. Moreover, “the war will not and ought not to stop until the independence of the Confederate States has been secured and acknowledged” (February 3, 1865).

Such statements were merely defying the facts, yet in the same issue the editor reiterated his Copperhead intransigence by reminding Republicans, who needed no reminding, that “We never polled a vote with greater pleasure and satisfaction than that we polled for John C. Breckinridge, and we feel proud of it to this day.” Nor did impending defeat of the right of states to secede change his views on that subject. “None,” said he, “will go, unless it is to their interest to go; and, whenever it is their interest to go, it is also their right to go.”
Weirick was no less adamant after the surrender of Lee. On April 21 he quoted the *Bellefonte Watchman* in an editorial which justified state rights and secession; and on June 30, he declared:

> We can view the subjugation of the South in no other light than did the celebrated poet view the subjugation of Poland, of which he said: "Oh bloodiest picture in the book of time, Sarmatia fell, unwept, without a crime."

Yet he did not believe that the South was permanently defeated. As late as August 4 he was saying that there could be a rebellion every twenty years: "It is not probable that this is the last time the South will attempt revolution."

VI

Weirick was a Copperhead, but he was somewhat out of his bailiwick. He should have been in the Middle West. He was a member of that fraternity, too numerous for good Unionists' comfort, which included Clement L. Vallandigham, Henry Clay Dean, James W. Singleton, and Washington McLean. Weirick was a fighter, not with the sword, but with the pen. His verbal thrusts cut and cut deeply. Like all Copperhead editors he had to be denunciatory and impudent in order to be heard. With an excellent command of the English language, he used it for all it was worth. He slashed with abandon, forgot the niceties of style such as commas, and vilified with the zeal of a Garrison.

His king's English was pungent; it stung; and it penetrated the weak places in his opponents' armor. His command of sarcasm made it hard for his enemies to get the better of him on the printed page; they had to threaten to hang him. His sarcasm was not a kindly variety; nor was it subtle. It was a bludgeon which he wielded with careless unconcern for whom it hit. His shafts and thrusts were not those of the expert fencer, for he was writing for common "Pennsylvania Dutchmen." His ridicule must be broad and easily understood; sometimes it was crude and vulgar. Weirick did not, therefore, mince words when his ire was up. An editor was a "dirty scoundrel" or a "damned rascal," even

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*This paper's editor was also jailed (Cincinnati Enquirer, January 25, 1867).*
if that editor was also burgess of a neighboring town. To him a spade was a spade.

But behind all this cat-calling and low sarcasm was a keen, trenchant mind which worked overtime. He was more than merely a scavenger or a hackwriter. He had ideas, even if they were often couched in vulgarity. His political philosophy was centered around the old Jeffersonian doctrine of state rights, carried to the point where he believed in secession. He hated tyranny, centralization, and any suppression of free speech. Hence Lincoln, to him, was a monster crushing out the rights of the people as well as of the states. He held to the Jeffersonian doctrine that the Federal government should be weak; as he put it, the general government was “a mediate or ministerial agent” (October 30, 1863). If the South wished to repudiate this agent, that was the South’s business; the North was committing a heinous crime in attempting to keep the slave states from exercising that right.

He denounced the war, castigated the leaders at Washington, preached disloyalty, and praised Copperheads and Southerners. Little wonder that Unionists considered his name anathema. He represents perfectly the tragic plight in which a minority finds itself during a war. In the midst of a struggle in which he did not believe, too honest to truckle and play the game, too earnest not to have his say, he lived during times, which for him were grievously out of joint. Weirick’s career epitomizes the conflict between the necessity of winning a war on one hand, and on the other, the demands made by dissidents for the basic right of free speech. In most wars, free speech takes a back seat. That Weirick had his say, blatant and uncompromising as it was, speaks volumes for the patience of the Lincoln government, as well as of the Unionists of Snyder county. He came close to it, but after all he was not hanged.