

WILLIAM B. REED AND THE CIVIL WAR

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FEW Americans in 1861 looked upon the Civil War with more horror than William Bradford Reed, who realized that the conflict would bring death, debt, and destruction to the nation he loved so much. Little did he suspect that one of the war's casualties would be his own political career. Because he was an outspoken Copperhead and an intemperate critic of the Lincoln Administration, most voters and politicians refused to associate with him and Philadelphia newspapers alleged that his true sympathies were with the Confederacy. Yet, if he misjudged the President, his protests against arbitrary arrests and in favor of the preservation of civil liberties, showed true courage. Furthermore, he agreed to serve as counsel for many Pennsylvanians who were arrested for disloyalty so that they would be properly defended at court. Since he was one of the United States' first history professors and was a patron of the Historical Society of Pennsylvania,¹ it is ironic that most historians today are unfamiliar with his moderately distinguished—albeit tragic—career. This is undoubtedly due to the fact that he held no public office during the Civil War; moreover, despite his eloquence as a speaker, he lacked the dramatic flair of a Clement L. Vallandigham or a Samuel "Sunset" Cox.

Born into a prominent Philadelphia family in 1806,² Reed graduated from the University of Pennsylvania in 1822 and four years later was admitted to the bar. After building up a large and lucrative practice, he turned to politics and the writing of history. In both avocations he achieved some measure of success;³ but he was never convinced that his friends fully appreci-

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¹ From 1850-56 Reed served, without pay, as Professor of American history and English Literature at the University of Pennsylvania. See *New York Tribune*, February 21, 1876; Edward Cheyney, *The History of the University of Pennsylvania* (Philadelphia, 1940), 242.

² Joseph Reed, his paternal grandfather, served in the Continental Congress and had been a military secretary to George Washington.

³ His *Life and Correspondence of Joseph Reed* (Philadelphia, 1847) won some praise from Jared Sparks and George Bancroft, but the latter

ated his political talents. At first he was an organizer for the Anti-Masons, but when it became obvious that this political group had no future, he joined the Whigs. For nearly two decades he tirelessly campaigned for Whig candidates and managed party affairs in Philadelphia County. For his services he was rewarded with a variety of public offices: representative in the state legislature, attorney general of the Commonwealth, county solicitor, and district attorney of Philadelphia.⁴ He believed, however, that he was entitled to a congressional seat and was upset when suspicious party leaders repeatedly prevented him from attaining this goal.⁵ Though angry and disappointed, he continued to work for the Whigs until he was denied another political plum that he thought the party owed him. In 1854 he had energetically promoted the election of James Pollock for governor, and after Pollock's victory, he expected to be named to a spot in the new governor's cabinet. No such appointment was forthcoming, and he began to sever his ties with the Whigs.⁶

By 1856 he was a leading booster of James Buchanan,⁷ who, after the presidential election offered him the prestigious position of Minister to China. Ever since his temporary tenure as a private secretary to the United States Minister to Mexico in 1826, he had been interested in international relations and he hastened to accept the office. In China he proved to be an able diplomat, and he negotiated a treaty favorable to the United States with the Chinese on June 18, 1858. Some of his policies foreshadowed what would later be called the "Open Door"

of these two historians considered Joseph Reed to be a traitor. See William B. Reed, *President Reed of Pennsylvania, a Reply to Mr. George Bancroft and Others, February, A.D., 1867* (Philadelphia, 1867), 130-132. He also wrote the *Life of Esther de Berdt, Afterwards Esther Reed of Pennsylvania* (Philadelphia, 1853) and presented and published historical papers on several other subjects.

⁴ *New York Times*, February 21; *New York Tribune*, February 21, 1876; Roy F. Nichols, "William B. Reed," *Dictionary of American Biography* (New York, 1936), XV, 461-462; Hampton Carson, *A History of the Historical Society of Pennsylvania* (Philadelphia, 1905), I, 208-209.

⁵ Benjamin Rush, *William B. Reed of Chestnut Hill, Philadelphia, Expert in the Art of Exhumation of the Dead*, 2nd ed. (Philadelphia, 1867), 8 n.

⁶ Alexander K. McClure, *Old Time Notes of Pennsylvania* (Philadelphia, 1905), I, 219-220; Reed to Andrew G. Curtin, July 26, 1855, quoted in Bellefonte *Democratic Watchman*, May 10, 1860.

⁷ William B. Reed to James Buchanan, February 7; Buchanan to Reed, February 29, 1856, Buchanan MSS, Historical Society of Pennsylvania, hereafter cited as Buchanan MSS.

Policy.⁸ Therefore when he returned to Philadelphia in 1859, it was generally supposed that he had a promising political career yet before him. Had the Civil War not taken place, it is likely that he would have become a significant figure in Pennsylvania and national politics.

Reed had long deplored the increasing sectional animosity that was spreading over the country. Like many other leaders of Philadelphia society he had many friends in the South and he believed that slavery was a necessary evil. Never was there any doubt in his mind that Negroes were inferior to whites or that it was in Pennsylvania's best interests to halt the immigration of free blacks into the state. He thought that the political problems besetting the nation were a direct result of the activities of the anti-slavery leaders, who preached hatred of the South and its domestic institutions. As early as 1856 he had denounced "fanatical abolition[ism] which has always done wrong to us and which never has done Pennsylvania good."⁹

Shortly after he returned from China, he heard about John Brown's ill-fated raid at Harper's Ferry; and he began to fear that unless the South knew that it had friends in the North, it would soon leave the Union. On December 7, 1859, Reed and several other Philadelphians organized a rally at Jayne's Hall to demonstrate support of Virginia for hanging Brown and to call for the vigorous enforcement of the Fugitive Slave Law. Nearly twenty thousand Pennsylvanians attended the meeting, and Reed was gratified that they adopted resolutions of "the highest merit of orthodoxy." Unfortunately few newspapers outside of the Commonwealth bothered to take notice of the gathering, making him fear that his efforts had all been in vain.¹⁰

Believing that his sentiments were those of his townspeople in 1860, he confidently—although inaccurately—wrote:

⁸ Foster Farley, "William B. Reed: President Buchanan's Minister to China, 1857-58," *Pennsylvania History*, XXXVIII (1970), 269-280; *New York Tribune*, February 21; *New York Times*, February 21, 1876.

⁹ William B. Reed, *The Appeal to Pennsylvania, a Speech Delivered at the Meeting of the Friends of Buchanan and Breckinridge at Somerset, Pennsylvania, September 24, 1856* (n.p., 1856?), 28.

¹⁰ Reed to Jeremiah Sullivan Black, December 14, 1859, Black MSS, Library of Congress, hereafter cited as Black MSS; *Fanaticism Rebuked, The Philadelphia Meeting of December 7, 1859* (Philadelphia?, 1860?), 6, 10-11; Ellis Oberholtzer, *History of Philadelphia* (Philadelphia, 1912), II, 354.

There are probably not one hundred or at most one thousand men in the city of Philadelphia who hold extreme opinions on the subject of slavery. As a general rule our friends and neighbors are profoundly indifferent about it. . . .

Therefore, he declared, it was difficult for these people to realize "the extent of the Northern and Eastern fanaticism on the question."¹¹ What he failed to mention was that the "indifference" towards slavery he found in Philadelphia was at least partly related to the fact that the city annually sold tens of millions of dollars' worth of goods to the South.

Political events in 1860 greatly disturbed him, for he knew that the split in the Democratic Party was likely to insure that Lincoln would be elected.¹² Of the candidates for president only Vice President John C. Breckinridge appealed to him since he was the only one of the four willing to defend Buchanan's record. Certain that a fusion ticket would work to the advantage of the Vice President, Reed urged Democrats to unite or accept the responsibility for a Republican victory in Pennsylvania. After seeking advice from Buchanan and Attorney General Jeremiah S. Black,¹³ he prepared a speech endorsing Breckinridge, which he delivered on September 4.

This address was an eloquent plea for an end to sectionalism. Like most Democrats in the state, he tried to minimize the importance of Southern hostility to a high tariff and to show that Republicans were not the true friends of protection. What made his oration noteworthy was his insistence that "Pennsylvania's true interests, if she only knew them [lie] . . . in the South and Southwest from which Republicanism and Lincolnism and Abolitionism, if triumphant, will forever divide us." Unlike the North or Northwest which try "to take away our poor little Mint or Naval Asylum," he said, "Southern men vote with us." Pennsylvania's prosperity, he added, was dependent upon com-

¹¹ William B. Reed, *The Last Appeal* (Philadelphia, 1860), 1-2; Sister Francis Conlin, "The Democratic Party in Pennsylvania from 1856 to 1865," *Records of the American Catholic Historical Society*, XLVII (1936), 148-149.

¹² Reed to Buchanan, May 9, Buchanan MSS; Reed to Black, June 25, 1860, Black MSS; Philadelphia *Pennsylvanian*, July 3, 1860.

¹³ Reed to Buchanan, August 12, Buchanan MSS; Reed to Black, August 6, 1860, Black MSS.

merce with the slave states, and relations between the two were amicable. He concluded by asking, "What man in Pennsylvania looks with an alien eye on Kentucky, even though she be a Southern and slave-owning state?"¹⁴ Republicans alleged that such a speech could only have been made by a "fugitive from the North," who, in the event of Breckinridge's election, expected to be named to high office.¹⁵ At any rate Pennsylvanians ignored his arguments and overwhelmingly voted Republican in the November election.

After Lincoln's victory talk of secession and revolution filled the Philadelphia newspapers, and local merchants made known their fears that the loss of their Southern trade would force them into bankruptcy. Reed was perplexed and confused. Before the election he had written a pamphlet opposed to the use of force to keep the nation together, declaring that if blood had to be shed to save the Union, "it would not be the Union as it is now."¹⁶ But in November and during the first weeks of December he argued that Buchanan would have to be as firm as Andrew Jackson in opposing secession or "his character in history . . . [would] be gone."¹⁷ However, at the very time he was congratulating the President for unalterable opposition to the dissolution of the nation,¹⁸ he was proposing that Great Britain be allowed to mediate the quarrel between South Carolina and the United States. The British, he argued, desired the preservation of the republic, and South Carolina "would listen to such intercession tho' deaf to all else. Cotton is the king of her heart even when inflamed."¹⁹

Nothing came from this suggestion, and after the secession

¹⁴ William B. Reed, *Speech on the Presidential Question, Delivered Before the National Democratic Association, Philadelphia, September 4, 1860* (Philadelphia?, 1860?), 11-12, 15; see also *Philadelphia Sunday Dispatch*, September 5, 1860.

¹⁵ *Speech of the Hon. Charles Gibbons Delivered at National Hall, Philadelphia, October 5, 1860, in Reply to the Speech of the Hon. W. B. Reed, Delivered Before the National Democratic Association, September 4, 1860, on the Presidential Question and in Vindication of the Peoples' Party* (Philadelphia, 1860), 15, 23. In 1860, Pennsylvania Republicans ran for office under the banner of the Peoples' Party.

¹⁶ Reed, *The Last Appeal*, 8; Conlin, "Democratic Party," 149.

¹⁷ Reed to Black, December 1, Black MSS; see also Reed to Black, November 13, 20, December 2, *ibid.*; Reed to Buchanan, November 16, 30, December 4, 1860, Buchanan MSS.

¹⁸ Reed to Buchanan, December 4, 1860, Buchanan MSS.

¹⁹ Reed to Mr. Baker, December 6, 1860, *ibid.*

of the Palmetto State, Reed again became an opponent of coercion. At a large peace meeting held in Philadelphia on January 16, 1861, he called on Northerners to "put an end to this senseless clamor for coercion" and recommended instead that a national convention of the states be called to amend the Constitution in such a fashion that the South would be satisfied "on the points as to which they are naturally sensitive." Until this could be done, he stated, it was Pennsylvania's duty to purge its statute books of all laws offensive to the slave states. Apparently many in the audience shared his views, for several times their enthusiastic applause interrupted his speech.²⁰

Even more remarkable than his words was a resolution which he authored that was adopted at the meeting. It declared that if the South seceded, Pennsylvania "might" be released from "the bonds which now connect her to the Confederacy except so far as for temporary convenience she chooses to submit to them." Furthermore, the resolution added, the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania would be obliged to hold a convention

to determine with whom her lot should be cast; whether with the North and East whose fanaticism has precipitated this misery upon us, or our brethren of the South whose wrongs we feel as our own, or whether Pennsylvania should stand by herself as a distinct Community, ready when occasion offers, to bind together the broken Union and resume her place of loyalty and devotion.²¹

Reed was proud of this meeting and his resolution because they clearly enunciated "anti-coercion doctrines." He was distressed because non-Pennsylvania newspapers gave this meeting as little attention as they had given to the John Brown gathering of December, 1859, and he feared that Southerners would remain unaware of the activities of their friends in the Keystone State. "There seems to be a studied design," he wrote to a friend in Charleston, "to put *you and us* in the wrong."²²

²⁰ Reed to Buchanan, January 17, 1861, *ibid*; Philadelphia *Public Ledger*, January 17; Philadelphia *Inquirer*, January 17; Philadelphia *North American and United States Gazette*, January 17; Philadelphia *Evening Bulletin*, October 3, 1861.

²¹ *Ibid*; William Jones, *Mirror of Modern Democracy: A History of the Democratic Party* (New York, 1864), 249.

²² Reed to Robert Gourdin, January 22, 1861, Gourdin MSS, Emory University.

His frustration was evident in the letters he wrote to Robert Gourdin of South Carolina. Just after the Republican victories of October, 1860, he informed his friend that he had "more than strong Southern opinions." Three months later he sadly noted, "Reading [William] Seward's and [John] Sherman's speeches, I cannot repress the belief that they *wish* the whole South to go."²³ On several occasions he suggested meeting with Gourdin in Washington or Charleston, but no rendezvous was arranged.²⁴

Reed made another effort to maintain good relations with the South by offering to serve as an intermediary between the North and the Slave States. Secretary of State Seward, he later claimed, had assured him that the Federal Government would evacuate Fort Sumter and he had communicated this information to the Confederate Government. He was therefore surprised and disgusted when he learned that the fort would not be surrendered, and he believed that Seward had purposefully made a fool of him.²⁵

After the firing on Fort Sumter Reed wrote to Justice John Campbell of Alabama to urge him to remain on the United States Supreme Court. In his letter he noted that nearly all Philadelphians were in favor of the war, but a few "gentlemen," including himself, favored the doctrine of recognition and peace. He was especially unhappy that learned and "hitherto patriotic men" were defending the right of the President to suspend the writ of habeas corpus without Congressional approval. Later he claimed to have corresponded with no Confederate other than Campbell during the war.²⁶

Reed was given good reason to limit public expression of his anti-war sentiments. After the start of the conflict Philadelphia mobs terrorized the homes and businesses of those suspected to be sympathetic to the Confederacy. In April, 1861, rowdies visited his house while he was away at court. Not until a Negro servant displayed an American flag would the ruffians, who

²³ Reed to Gourdin, October 17, 1860, January 20, 1861, *ibid.*

²⁴ Reed to Gourdin, January 17, 20, 22, 1861, *ibid.*

²⁵ William B. Reed, *A Paper Containing a Statement and Vindication of Certain Political Opinions* (Philadelphia, 1862), 14, hereafter cited as *Vindication*.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 10-12; George McHenry, *The Cotton Trade* (London, 1863), xiii-xvi.

were frightening his wife and children, agree to leave the premises.²⁷ A few months later he was further irritated and intimidated when two of his friends, William Winder and Pierce Butler, were arrested for disloyalty. At the time Butler was imprisoned, some New York newspapers circulated a false story that he too had been incarcerated.²⁸ The Unionist press frequently linked his name with treasonable activities, and his friends feared social ostracism if they dared to defend him. Soon Reed developed a persecution complex and convinced himself that officials in the post office were censoring his mail.²⁹ Therefore it was not surprising that he made no public speeches until 1863 and published no pamphlets critical of the government until 1862.³⁰

But if he stopped addressing rallies, he did not completely disappear from public view. He served as one of the defense attorneys for William Winder, who had been imprisoned without a trial for having engaged in allegedly treasonable correspondence; and he also helped defend editor William Hodgson of the West Chester *Jeffersonian*, who published editorials sharply critical of the war.³¹ Admittedly he was not the only Philadelphia attorney willing to take such cases, but most lawyers preferred not to be associated with clients whose loyalty was suspect. Had he solely been interested in advancing his career, he would have refused to work for such men until the public showed some signs of war weariness. One reason he took such cases was that he believed that all men had a right to dissent, to disagree with the policy of their government—even when the nation was at war. Instead of being lauded for his courage, he was denounced as being “the ablest, most crafty, and most industrious enemy of the Government.”³² Admiral Samuel Francis

²⁷ Reed, *Vindication*, 14; Reed to Buchanan, April 29, 1861, Buchanan MSS.

²⁸ Reed, *Vindication*, 15-16; New York *Day Book*, August 20, 1861.

²⁹ Reed, *Vindication*, 15-16; Reed to Charles R. Buckalew, December 26, 1861, Buckalew MSS, Wilkes College; Reed to Black, February 1, 1862, Black MSS.

³⁰ Reed, *Vindication*, 8.

³¹ Both Winder and Hodgson had other attorneys as well. See William Winder, *Secrets of the American Bastille* (Philadelphia, 1863), 38; Ray Abrams, “The *Jeffersonian*: Copperhead Newspaper,” *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography*, LVII (1933), 260-283.

³² *Philadelphia Press*, October 14, quoted in *Harrisburg Patriot and Union*, October 17, 1861; see also Winder, *Secrets*, 38.

DuPont believed that he deserved "a halter" for his activities.³³

By 1862, anti-war sentiment was on the rise, and Reed began to voice his criticism of the government. Hoping to expose Seward "as an incapable, which he is,"³⁴ he authored an anonymous pamphlet which mocked his old nemesis. In this work he blamed the New Yorker for tolerating corruption in the government, for thinking that he was a prime minister, and for authorizing arbitrary arrests. One year later he wrote another political tract even more critical of Seward. In this second pamphlet he concluded, "The Ship of State is among the reefs and breakers, with gloom and danger threatening outside. The pilot to weather the storm," he declared, "is not among those on deck. The hands that steered it into peril cannot be trusted for rescue—the chief mate least of all."³⁵ The *Philadelphia Age*, which shared Reed's opinions about the war, gave this work a favorable review, stating that it proved Seward had a "fictitious reputation as a statesman and a scholar, a reputation 'utterly without foundation.'"³⁶ Sales of the pamphlet were brisk, and with obvious joy the author noted, "It has been a wonderful success, for I cannot supply the demand."³⁷

Many of Reed's complaints about Seward's diplomacy were petty—so petty in fact that one Unionist answered them in another anonymous pamphlet. This sarcastically-written reply mocked Reed's overly-eloquent style but was so critical in its tone that it made both its author and the object of its criticism look ridiculous.³⁸

However, Reed's most famous wartime work was his *Vindication* of his political beliefs. This was circulated in private until the *Philadelphia Sunday Dispatch* secured an imperfect copy, which it printed to prove that Reed was "a sympathizer with treason." The contents of the *Vindication*, predicted the

³³ Samuel Francis DuPont to wife, June 30, 1862, in John D. Hayes, ed., *Samuel Francis DuPont: A Selection from His Civil War Letters* (Ithaca, 1969), II, 141.

³⁴ Reed to Buchanan, January 18, 1862, Buchanan MSS.

³⁵ William B. Reed, *A Review of Mr. Seward's Diplomacy* (n.p., 1862); and his *The Diplomatic Year*, 2nd ed. (Philadelphia, 1863), 59.

³⁶ *Philadelphia Age*, March 27, 1863.

³⁷ Reed to Black, February 4, 1862, Black MSS; see also Reed to Black, February 1, 1862, *ibid.*

³⁸ Dr. Syntax, Jr., [S. Kimber?], *A New Sartor Resartus, Being a Critical Analysis of a Pamphlet Entitled "A Review of Mr. Seward's Diplomacy"* (n.p., 1862?).

Dispatch, would "make Mr. Reed more infamous than he has ever been before."³⁹ After the exposé, the author added an appendix to the work and printed a corrected version. Both friend and foe rushed to purchase copies, and for a few days the demand for the *Vindication* was so great that it could not be "conveniently met."⁴⁰

In the *Vindication* he argued that the war was bankrupting the nation, creating hundreds of thousands of widows and orphans, and widening the chasm that separated North and South. Moreover, he predicted, if the hostilities were not soon concluded, Europe would intervene militarily and settle the "contest to our ignominy." Convinced that the North could never win "this bloody war," he declared that it would be better to recognize the independence of the South than to prolong the misery and demoralization that was coming from the fratricidal conflict. Merely defeating the Confederate Army would not result in winning the struggle, he stated, for the Southerners would only bide their time and prepare for a new war of independence. Therefore, he insisted, "If it be a choice between the subjugation of the Southern States and their tenure as military provinces and peaceable recognition, I am for recognition." Only a national convention could bring about true reconciliation. Despite more than a year of fighting, his solution to end the war was virtually identical to the one he had proposed at the Philadelphia "peace" meeting of 1861; significantly though, he no longer spoke about the need for Pennsylvania to join the Confederacy.⁴¹

Reaction to Reed's work was predictable. "Peace" journals praised its author; Union newspapers such as the Pittsburg[h] *Dispatch* reprinted excerpts and denounced him as "an enemy of the country." Charles Stillé, a Unionist pamphleteer, wrote that Reed's proposal to recognize the Confederacy as a foreign power proved that he regarded the interests of his fellow countrymen "with a strange contempt." To Confederate agents in

³⁹ Philadelphia *Sunday Dispatch*, December 14, 1862.

⁴⁰ Reed to Black, December 16, 25, Black MSS; see also Reed to John Jordan, December 15, 1862, Autograph Collection, Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

⁴¹ Reed, *Vindication*, 19-23; Nicholas Wainwright, "The Loyal Opposition in Civil War Philadelphia," *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography*, LXXXVIII (1964), 297.

Britain this Northern call for peace had great propaganda value, and George McHenry, a native of Pennsylvania working for the South, printed sections of the *Vindication* in one of his books. In addition *The Index*, the Confederate organ in London, published all of the pamphlet and called it a "moderate" and "sad" appraisal of the war from the pen of William B. Reed, a "sober, thoughtful, educated man."⁴² It was no wonder that some Democrats tried to suppress the circulation of Reed's pro-peace tract.

Reed was even more daring on March 28, 1863, when he addressed the Democratic Central Club of Philadelphia. For the first time since 1861 he made an oration critical of the Lincoln Administration, stating:

I deplore and condemn the war and believe coercion to have been a mistake from the beginning, and pray, and hope and urge the necessity of Peace, and, if possible, "Reconciliation": but Peace, even if the bond of sympathy be, as I fear it is, irreparably broken.⁴³

Eloquently reiterating the arguments of his *Vindication*, he again called for a temporary cessation of hostilities.

Anti-war sentiment was then so prevalent that a number of Democrats praised him for his honesty and courage, though most admitted that his opinions were more radical than their own.⁴⁴ Rebel agents in London copied the text of the speech from the *Philadelphia Age* and without Reed's knowledge or consent published it in a pamphlet to which they added other propaganda in favor of the recognition of the Confederacy.⁴⁵ Supporters of the war in Philadelphia claimed that the speech definitely proved Reed was disloyal. "If language means anything," declared the *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, "Mr. Reed

⁴² Samuel Francis DuPont to wife, December 31, 1862, in *DuPont*, II, 331; Pittsburg [h] *Dispatch*, December 18, 1862; Charles Stillé, *Northern Interests and Southern Independence, A Plea for United Action* (Philadelphia, 1863), 35-36; McHenry, *The Cotton Trade*, xiii; *The Index* (London), January 22, 1863.

⁴³ William B. Reed, *A Northern Plea for Peace* (London, 1863), 12-13, 18-19, 36; *Philadelphia Age*, March 30, 1863; Henry Lea, *The Record of the Democratic Party, 1860-65* (n.p., n.d.), 8, 12.

⁴⁴ *Philadelphia Age*, March 30; Tunkhannock *North Branch Democrat*, May 20, 1863.

⁴⁵ Reed, *Northern Plea for Peace*, 5-11.

means treason.”⁴⁶ Even some War Democrats considered him to be a *bête noir*. When some friends asked Benjamin Rush to help organize a meeting of Democrats in favor of the war, he agreed to do so only on condition that Reed be excluded from the gathering. “His mere presence,” explained Rush, “would retard and might even defeat the object” of the rally.⁴⁷

By this time Unionists were linking Reed with every manifestation of disloyalty that took place in Pennsylvania; even his grandfather, Joseph Reed, was denounced for his alleged Tory sentiments during the American Revolution.⁴⁸ During the Confederate invasion of the state in 1863, supporters of the war accused him of hoping for a Confederate victory.⁴⁹ Even when he was on vacation, he was not immune from slurs. A Philadelphian who met him at Niagara Falls alleged that one morning he saw him approach his wife and in a low voice happily tell her, “We have had a great victory. We have our thumbs on them now. We have defeated Rosecrans.”⁵⁰

Probably these stories about Reed were apocryphal, but it was true that he was boldly attacking the government. In 1863, he campaigned for the Democratic gubernatorial candidate, George Washington Woodward, who in 1860 had openly called slavery an “incalculable blessing.” At Meadville on September 17, 1863, he catalogued the evils of the Lincoln Administration: it was usurping the powers of the states, it was drafting men to fill the army, it was arbitrarily arresting those who dared to criticize the government, and it was flooding the country with worthless greenbacks that would soon force the nation into bankruptcy.⁵¹ Woodward lost the election, but Reed was confident that the public would soon realize the folly of continuing the war.

On November 14, 1863, the London *Times* printed an anonymous letter from a Philadelphian who wanted an armistice with

⁴⁶ Philadelphia *Evening Bulletin*, March 30, 1863.

⁴⁷ Rush, *Reed*, 8 n.

⁴⁸ Philadelphia *Evening Bulletin*, October 12, 1863.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, June 15, 16, 26, 1863; George Wolff Fahenstock Diary, June 15, 1863, Historical Society of Pennsylvania; William Calderhead, “Philadelphia in Crisis: June-July, 1863,” *Pennsylvania History*, XXXVIII (1961), 146.

⁵⁰ Pittsburgh *Gazette*, October 13, 1863.

⁵¹ Meadville *Crawford Democrat*, October 6, 1863; Lea, *Democratic Party*, 27.

the South. The writer further suggested that the Confederacy be recognized *de jure* and that the Ohio and Potomac Rivers be declared the boundary between the United States and the Confederate States. He also recommended that the two nations agree to have a common tariff on foreign imports but not to tax each other's produce and to allow for the free navigation of the Ohio, Mississippi, Chesapeake, and Susquehanna Rivers.⁵² The Philadelphia *Evening Bulletin* claimed that this letter was the work of Reed, noting that the author's writing style was remarkably like his.⁵³ But even if he did not write this plea for peace, he would have found its contents quite compatible with his own beliefs.

A series of frustrations befell Reed during 1864. Newspapers and foes continued to abuse him,⁵⁴ friends considered him to be an "extreme peace" man,⁵⁵ ex-clients gave their legal business to his competitors,⁵⁶ and George McClellan, the candidate he supported for the Presidency,⁵⁷ lost the election to Lincoln. Yet despite all of these misfortunes, he continued to denounce coercion as unwise and illegal.⁵⁸ As the war drew to a close, his predictions of catastrophe proved to be groundless and only the most vocal Copperheads continued to value his friendship.

After Lee's surrender at Appomattox, his law practice was so meagre that he could no longer support his family.⁵⁹ Finally he was forced to move to New York and accept a position on the editorial staff of the *New York World*.⁶⁰ When he died on

⁵² *London Times*, November 14, 1863.

⁵³ Philadelphia *Evening Bulletin*, November 30, 1863.

⁵⁴ See, for example, *ibid.*, August 26, 1864. On November 22, 1864, Reed wrote to Black, "It is a fashion here to denounce and proscribe *me* in every way, and I am compelled to feel the persecution in more ways than one."

⁵⁵ Buchanan to Nahum Capen, March 14, 1864, in John Basset Moore, comp., *The Works of James Buchanan* (Philadelphia, 1910), XI, 358.

⁵⁶ Reed to Black, November 22, 1864, Black MSS.

⁵⁷ On August 26, 1864, Reed wrote to Black that he soon expected to hear "the gratifying news of McClellan's nomination." The Chicago Platform was undoubtedly acceptable to Reed, but he was probably distressed after reading McClellan's letter of acceptance. Nonetheless he considered the general to be a far more suitable candidate than Abraham Lincoln.

⁵⁸ Philadelphia *Age*, November 7, 1864; Lea, *Democratic Party*, 8.

⁵⁹ Reed spent some of his time trying to vindicate his grandfather's activities during the American Revolution. He published two pamphlets on this subject: *President Joseph Reed of Pennsylvania, Correspondence [from 1859] between Hon. William B. Reed and John C. Hamilton* (Morrisania, New York, 1867) and *President Reed of Pennsylvania*.

⁶⁰ He also served as an American correspondent for the *London Times*. See *New York Tribune*, February 21, 1876; McClure, *Old Time Notes*, I, 220; John Forney, *Anecdotes of Public Men* (New York, 1873), 55.

February 18, 1876,⁶¹ few could forget that Copperheadism had stained his career. To his enemies he would always be remembered as a "desperate, double-dealing, dethroned, disappointed, despised politician."⁶²

William B. Reed never committed treason, and he never really wanted the permanent separation of the North and the South. His rash statements in opposition to the war and in favor of recognition of the Confederacy, however, furnished the Rebels with ammunition they needed if they were to persuade Europe to assist the South. There is no proof that he encouraged this use of his speeches and pamphlets; without his consent he became a dupe for the Confederacy. Though he defended a number of men accused of disloyalty, he was often an ineffective defense lawyer since his mere presence in court convinced many Unionists that his client was guilty as charged. It was no surprise therefore that after 1865 he was unable to regain the power and prestige he had lost during the war. For thousands of politicians the Civil War was a catalyst that aided their careers; for William B. Reed, it was a Waterloo which shattered his political pretensions.

⁶¹ The date of Reed's death is sometimes erroneously given as February 16, 1876. See, for example, Nichols, "Reed," 461.

⁶² Rush, *Reed*, 7.