

"BRICK" POMEROY AND THE DEMOCRATIC PROCESSES:  
A STUDY IN CIVIL WAR POLITICS\*

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Marcus Mills Pomeroy drifted to La Crosse in April, 1860, to invest his small capital and his extraordinary talents in a Democratic newspaper which needed an editor and a purpose. He brought with him some newspaper know-how, the sobriquet "Brick," and a devotion to Stephen A. Douglas. He purchased a one-third interest in the *La Crosse Union and Democrat*. Soon "Brick" Pomeroy, champion of Douglas doctrines, feuded with one of the other partners who liked President James Buchanan's views. The feud led to a sheriff's sale, stock transactions, and the birth of the *La Crosse Democrat*, debt-encumbered and with Pomeroy as sole proprietor and editor.<sup>1</sup>

Pomeroy lost no time in gaining the attention of friends and foes. He was witty and fearless, vindictive and vain. He wrote in such a readable and interesting style that "even his enemies could not resist buying his newspaper."<sup>2</sup> He knew the role of the press in shaping public opinion, and he tried to convince his subscribers that they should hate President Buchanan as intensely as he. Irritated by Buchanan's "weak-kneed" policy and "vacillating tactics," Pomeroy waged a campaign of abuse against the President. "What a weak and imbecile old fool Jim Buchanan is," he editorialized. "Buchanan," added Pomeroy, "is a traitor to his Country—a traitor to his party—a traitor to his word." He suggested to his readers that they add a postscript to their prayers: "Save our Country, but damn our President."<sup>3</sup>

Pomeroy's strong language seemed to be due more to his hatred of Buchanan than to his desire to see the federal government coerce South Carolina. In fact, Pomeroy justified his anti-coercion views by quoting Horace Greeley's statement about allowing the erring

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<sup>1</sup> Marcus Mills Pomeroy, *Journey of Life; Reminiscences and Recollections of "Brick" Pomeroy* (New York, 1890) is the best single source for Pomeroy's early life. Mrs. Mary E. Tucker combines fact and fiction indiscriminately in her *Life of Mark M. Pomeroy* . . . (London, 1868).

<sup>2</sup> Benjamin F. Bryant, *Memoirs of La Crosse County* (Madison, 1907), 116.

<sup>3</sup> *La Crosse Democrat*, Dec. 24, 1860, quoted in Charles Seymour, "The Press," in *History of La Crosse County, Wisconsin* (Western Historical Company, Chicago, 1881), 550.

sisters "to go in peace." "We are opposed," he editorialized, "to forcing a State to remain where she is determined not to." He viewed coercion as "a pretty thing to talk about," but impractical, impossible, and froth with danger.<sup>4</sup>

Like Douglas and most Democrats, Pomeroy hoped that compromise would ease the crisis and reunite the quarrelsome sections. Compromise was an historic American process. The Constitution had been evolved out of a series of compromises. Furthermore, compromise had resolved national crises in 1820, 1832-3, and 1850. When the compromise efforts in Congress and at the National Peace Convention came to naught in 1861, Democrats blamed Republicans for adhering to their no-slavery-in-the-territories principle—no matter what the consequences. There was a genuine fear, among some of Douglas' followers, that an inter-sectional struggle might bring an end to the American experiment in democracy. European civil wars had ended in dictatorships, and there was some fear that a Napoleon or Cromwell might emerge in America.<sup>5</sup>

After Fort Sumter fell, Pomeroy wrote and talked like a zealous patriot. He penned an editorial polemic entitled "The Stars and Stripes Forever." He wanted the insult to the flag avenged and he wanted the rebellion speedily crushed. He endorsed the sentiments of a fellow-Democrat, Stephen D. Carpenter of the Madison *Wisconsin Patriot*: "Let blood flow until the past is atoned, and a long future secured to peace, prosperity, happiness, and honor."<sup>6</sup> Pomeroy even tried to organize a company of volunteers, the "Wisconsin Tigers," to do business in "Marion's style."<sup>7</sup> But Pomeroy had neither the friends, funds, nor influence to make his dream of military glory come true.

His patriotic binge endured for several months. The Union debacle at First Bull Run served as a spirituous stimulant. When some opponents of the war raised their voices in La Crosse, Pomeroy promised vigilante action to quash the talk of "treason."<sup>8</sup> He did not advocate civil action nor educational means to convert the recalcitrants, but threatened to use extra-legal measures as patriotism stirred his spirit.

<sup>4</sup> *La Crosse Democrat*, Jan. 11, 14, 1861.

<sup>5</sup> Democratic interest in compromise is revealed in such works as: Mary Scrugham, *The Peaceable Americans of 1860-1861* (New York, 1921); Robert Gunderson, *Old Gentlemen's Convention; The Washington Peace Conference of 1861* (Madison, 1961); and George Fort Milton, "Stephen A. Douglas' Efforts for Peace," *Journal of Southern History*, I (August, 1935), 261-75. Kenneth Stampp, *And the War Came: the North and the Secession Crisis* (Baton Rouge, 1950), offers an explanation of why coercion replaced compromise. Robert Schwab, "Wisconsin and Compromise on the Eve of Civil War" (M. A. thesis, Marquette U., 1957), reveals that Wisconsin helped defeat compromise efforts.

<sup>6</sup> *Madison Wisconsin Patriot*, May 4, 1861.

<sup>7</sup> *La Crosse Democrat*, April 26, May 2, 1861.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, Aug. 19, 1861.

Time tempered Pomeroy's patriotic passions, aided somewhat by political opportunism and the prophecies of the abolitionists. The approach of the fall elections of 1861 gave Democratic editors like "Brick" Pomeroy a chance to substitute partyism for patriotism. The "howls of the abolitionists," who wanted the war turned into an antislavery crusade, also chilled the patriotic passions of Democrats. Pomeroy, ever bold and blunt, put his protests into print:

There is not today half the enthusiasm in the country there was two months since. . . . A chill has already set in. . . . We are willing to fight till death for the common good of a common people, but will not be forced into a fight to free the slaves. The real traitors in the North are the abolitionists, and they are the ones who will do more to put off the day of peace than all the soldiers of the South.<sup>8</sup>

Republican party strategists, meanwhile, launched the Union Party movement to take advantage of the tidal wave of patriotism. "Brick" Pomeroy, unwittingly, got tangled in the Union Party net. He endorsed a non-partisan slate in the county elections and gradually retreated from supporting bipartisanship on the state level. By September he had reached the conclusion that even in wartime it was desirable to keep the two-party system functioning. He also reached the conclusion that the Union Party movement was really "a Republican swindle"—a political feast in which the Republicans took the loaves and gave the Democrats the crumbs.<sup>9</sup> The Union Party stratagem paid dividends to the Republican sponsors—they elected their candidate, Louis P. Harvey, over Benjamin Ferguson, nominee of the straight-line Democrats. Pomeroy claimed to have learned a valuable lesson. He pledged never to be caught again in a game "where the Republican cat was well concealed under the Union meal."<sup>10</sup>

Pomeroy, erratic on many counts, hewed a steady line in opposing abolitionists and abolitionism. He learned to hate those who favored freeing the slaves and he turned his sarcasm and intemperance upon them full force. He detested Sherman M. Booth, Wisconsin's best-known abolitionist, and applied a string of epithets to him. "He is to respectable people," Pomeroy wrote one day, "what a blooming pole cat would be in a ballroom."<sup>11</sup> Pomeroy also condemned General John C. Frémont for trying to free the slaves of rebels within his military district. Pomeroy did not defend slavery as a desirable institution, but he argued that constitutional guarantees were binding upon the people North and South. He believed that it was unconstitutional for Congress or political generals to tamper with

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, Sept. 6, 20, Oct. 4, 11, 1861.

<sup>10</sup> *Sheboygan Journal*, Oct. 7, 1861; *Madison Wisconsin Patriot*, May 10, 1862; *La Crosse Democrat*, Nov. 15, 22, 1861; Pomeroy, *Journey of Life*, 122.

<sup>11</sup> *La Crosse Democrat*, Sept. 27, 1861.

slavery where it existed. Pomeroy's antipathy toward abolition became more intense with each passing month—it would help to transform him into a violent critic of the Lincoln Administration.

Pomeroy's aversion to abolition also helped him to become a critic of New England. That section of the country was the home of William Lloyd Garrison and Wendell Phillips, the two best-known abolitionists. New England fanaticism had helped drive the South out of the Union. It wanted the Morrill Tariff which was anathema to Western farmers. Pomeroy believed that New England mouthed pious platitudes while stuffing its pockets with money. It furnished fewer soldiers and it pursued a policy which would make the Great West the slave and servant of New England. Pomeroy spoke the language of a Western sectionalist—it was good politics to condemn New England in many sections of the Midwest.<sup>12</sup> One of Pomeroy's fellow Democrats and fellow-editors sarcastically suggested that Republicans could best support a mistaken president by "drinking lots of coffee at thirty and thirty-five cents a pound."<sup>13</sup>

Pomeroy did not hew to a narrow partisan line during the fall campaign of 1862. He considered the Democratic party "Address" of September 3, 1862, too narrowly partisan and too critical of the war. He refused to publish the "Address," the handiwork of Edward G. Ryan of Milwaukee, in his newspaper. He also brought Matthew H. Carpenter, a self-styled "War Democrat" who was both a personal and professional rival of Ryan's, to La Crosse to talk to a "Union rally."<sup>14</sup> He even gave support to the Union Party movement which he had denounced a year earlier—partisan Democrats thought Pomeroy sought a spot on the state Union slate. On the other hand, he denounced Lincoln's preliminary proclamation of emancipation (September 23, 1862) as "indiscreet," unnecessary, and unconstitutional. He believed it "would be powerful in producing evil results." He accused Lincoln of giving way to abolitionist pressure and perverting a war to save the Union into one to free the slaves.<sup>15</sup>

The election returns revealed a strong Democratic trend and emboldened Pomeroy. He blasted President Lincoln's removal of General McClellan, condemned presidential suspension of the writ of habeas corpus, and criticized arbitrary arrests made during the fall of 1862. To Pomeroy it seemed that the President had scrapped the Constitution, had assumed the role of despot, and had "bungled" and "experimented" too much.<sup>16</sup> He even regretted his support of

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, Feb. 7, 1862.

<sup>13</sup> *Sheboygan Journal*, Feb. 18, 1862.

<sup>14</sup> *La Crosse Democrat*, Sept. 8, Oct. 7, 1862.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, Nov. 18, 25, 1862, Jan. 6, 1863.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

the Union Party movement. He told Republicans that they had abused the Union Party principle. "In the past," "Brick" Pomeroy wrote, "they [the Republicans] were not willing to divide their victories—in the future we will not share their defeats."<sup>17</sup>

After the election post-mortems were over, Pomeroy took a three-week trip to St. Louis to see how the war was going in that sector. His Quaker blood curdled at what he saw and he recorded his impressions for his readers. Hospital ships were described as "boatloads of pain and agony." War produced "mangled bodies," sorrow, and death. War contractors and army quartermasters made money "by the cord."<sup>18</sup> Pomeroy lost some of his enthusiasm for the war.

His three-week tour of the St. Louis sector was followed by a two-month visit to Helena, headquarters of the Army of the Southwest. He held a first lieutenant's commission signed by Governor Edward G. Salomon, but it was little more than a newsman's pass. He was "assigned" to no regiment, company, detachment, or duty and on the margin the Governor wrote: "By request of M. M. Pomeroy no pay chargeable against the State under this commission."<sup>19</sup> Pomeroy sought the commission so he could stay at the headquarters of General Willis A. Gorman, a friend from Minnesota. He occasionally accompanied army units pursuing guerrillas, hunting for cotton on outlying plantations, or sloshing through Arkansas mud. In time General Gorman was assigned elsewhere and General Benjamin S. Prentiss took over command of the Army of the Southwest. Pomeroy wrote exposés of army life for the *Chicago Times*, the *Milwaukee News*, and his own *La Crosse Democrat*. Each week's epistles became more critical of the war, the Lincoln Administration, and the army's Arkansas activities. He called the war "a murderous crusade for cotton and niggers," he plumped for peace, and he insulted his host.<sup>20</sup> General Prentiss, in turn, banished the *La Crosse* newsman from his sector, threatening to arrest him as a spy if he returned.<sup>21</sup>

Pomeroy returned to the editorial offices of the *La Crosse Democrat*, hating General Prentiss and disillusioned with the war. He wanted political compromise substituted for military coercion. War was a "frightful" thing. "Its glories," he wrote, "are those of death and grief—its pomp and vanities, those of crazed ambition; of sorrow and ruin."<sup>22</sup>

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, Nov. 11, 1862.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, Dec. 9, 16, 23, 1862.

<sup>19</sup> Pomeroy, *Journey of Life*, 182–83.

<sup>20</sup> *La Crosse Democrat*, Feb. 27, March 3, 1863.

<sup>21</sup> "General Orders, No. 19," March 24, 1863, District of Arkansas, Volume XLIV, Records of the War Department, The National Archives.

<sup>22</sup> *La Crosse Democrat*, April 18, 1863.

Pomeroy became a bitter critic of the Lincoln Administration in the months that followed. He condemned the Conscription Act of March 3, 1863, as a measure which would crush "the sovereign power of the States" and make Lincoln the "permanent ruler of the nation." "The late Conscription act," he editorialized, ". . . is one that elevates Abraham Lincoln to the position of MILITARY DICTATOR . . ." He believed federal conscription violated American principles and tradition. Furthermore, the provision which excused from service those who paid \$300 in commutation money, favored the rich at the expense of the poor.<sup>23</sup>

Pomeroy viewed the arrest of Clement L. Vallandigham of Ohio by General Ambrose E. Burnside as an extension of presidential tyranny. He also deplored General Burnside's suppression of the *Chicago Times* as proof that Lincoln was a despot—Burnside was his "western satrap." The President was "intoxicated and entranced by the whirl of the mighty events around him." Pomeroy called Lincoln "a tyrant," and Vallandigham and Storey (editor of the *Chicago Times*) "martyrs" to free speech and free press. It seemed, to Pomeroy, that a despotism was enveloping the government and that civil liberties retreated as Lincoln & Company ruled the land.<sup>24</sup> When President Lincoln set aside August 5, 1863, as a day of fasting and prayer, the editor of the *La Crosse Democrat* composed a "prayer" which he recommended to his readers: "Remove by death the present Administration from power and give us in their place Statesmen instead of clowns and jokers—honest men instead of speculators—military ability instead of conceit and arrogant assumption."<sup>25</sup>

Democratic critics of Lincoln made a distinction between the government and the Administration. They insisted they were loyal to the first, critical of the second. They spoke of the government and the Constitution in the same breath. They viewed themselves as the defenders of the Constitution and of civil rights against the usurpations of a "mistaken Administration." They emphasized the primacy of the Constitution, arguing that "when the Administration violates the Constitution, loyalty to the Administration may become disloyalty to the Union."<sup>26</sup> "We revere the Constitution," wrote Pomeroy, "but we have no faith in those administering it."<sup>27</sup>

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, Feb. 17, April 14, 1863.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, June 2, 9, 16, 1863.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, July 28, Aug. 12, 1863.

<sup>26</sup> "Address to the People by the Democracy of Wisconsin, Adopted in State Convention in Milwaukee, September 3, 1862" (Milwaukee, 1862), 11.

<sup>27</sup> *La Crosse Democrat*, Aug. 25, 1863.



Later Pomeroy stated his mistrust of the Lincoln Administration more boldly and bluntly:

Abraham Lincoln is the traitor. It is he who has warred against the Constitution. We have not. It is policy—his Administration which has prolonged the war. We have not. It is his proclamations—not our editorials—which have disgusted the country. . . . Abraham Lincoln was elected President by the People; he has been President for the Republican party. He has broken his oath—lent himself to corruptionists and fanatics. . . .<sup>28</sup>

Pomeroy received, in full measure, criticism of the same kind which he dispensed so generously in the columns of the *La Crosse Democrat*. Some Republicans boldly denounced him as a "Copperhead," a "secessionist," and a traitor whose newspaper was "a mouthpiece for damnable treason."<sup>29</sup> The *La Crosse Democratic Journal* condemned "the treasonable doctrines of those who sympathize with the rebellion."<sup>30</sup> Indignant La Crosse patriots threatened Pomeroy with bodily harm and mob action. Members of the Third Minnesota Regiment, while passing through La Crosse, attempted to "clean out the *Democrat* office" via mob action, but prompt action by Mayor Pettibone kept things in hand. Soldiers, writing from the war front, threatened to "get" Pomeroy when they returned home.<sup>31</sup> Patriotic businessmen quit advertising in Pomeroy's paper and some subscribers told the intrepid editor to cross their names off the mailing list. The circulation of Pomeroy's *Democrat* dropped to 360 copies—publishing the paper became a money-losing venture.<sup>32</sup> Members of the Union League, partiotic arm of the Republican Party, even organized a social boycott.

Pomeroy walked the streets of La Crosse defiantly and unafraid—like a true curmudgeon. He returned taunt for taunt. When they called him a "Copperhead," he retorted "Blowsnake!" He carried a gun when he went out at night. He advised his Democratic friends how to react to threats of arson:

Matches are cheap. If fanatics and fools seek mob law and anarchy, by all means let them have it. Burn down and destroy theirs as they have or may yours. By dark or by daylight—by fire or by powder—feed those who may injure you the dish they prepare. On no account inaugurate violence or excitement, but for every dime of your property destroyed by political opponents, destroy a dollar's worth in return.<sup>33</sup>

Later, when defiant patriots again talked and threatened, Pomeroy repeated his warnings. He would fight fire with fire: "When this

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, Oct. 27, 1863.

<sup>29</sup> *Milwaukee Sentinel*, April 1, 1863.

<sup>30</sup> *La Crosse Democratic Journal*, July 8, 1863.

<sup>31</sup> *La Crosse Democrat*, October 3, 1864.

<sup>32</sup> *History of La Crosse County, Wisconsin*, 546.

<sup>33</sup> *La Crosse Democrat*, Feb. 19, 1864.

office is destroyed, a hundred buildings in this city will keep it company. Matches are cheap and retaliation sweet. If anyone wants a little riot, they shall have a big one—one to last them forever.”<sup>34</sup> “When they ignite the match,” he again admonished his fellow Democrats, “let us apply the torch.”<sup>35</sup>

Pomeroy and his fellow Democrats insisted that the government could not expect loyalty from its citizens if it failed to give them protection. One prominent Midwestern Democrat, arbitrarily arrested in the fall of 1862, stated that thesis:

Allegence [*sic*] is that fidelity or obedience which a citizen owes to the Government. . . . *But it is reciprocal.* The Government owes to the citizen or subject *protection.* Without protection, no allegence [*sic*] can be due. Such is the nature of the contract—our allegence [*sic*] is due, where our protection is secured.<sup>36</sup>

President Lincoln countered by contending that critics of the Administration wanted protection from the Constitution which their policy was helping to destroy. He defended arbitrary measures “as indispensable to the public safety.” He insisted that the carping critics damaged the country rather than the Administration.<sup>37</sup> There seemed to be a no-man’s land between loyalty and treason as defined by the Constitution.

When Pomeroy learned that Lincoln was seeking re-nomination in early 1864, the bumptious editor cut the cords of restraint. His shower of epithets showed that he had discarded moderation for madness. “May Almighty God forbid,” he wrote angrily, “that we are to have two terms of the rottenest, most stinking, ruin-working small pox ever conceived by fiends or mortals in the shape of two terms of Abe Lincoln’s administration.”<sup>38</sup>

As the election campaign of 1864 gained momentum, Pomeroy became more abusive and more intemperate. Entangled in his own web of hate, he spewed forth frothy editorials. He wrote of “widows in black” who were “living monuments of Lincoln’s imbecility.” He called Lincoln “clown,” “buffoon,” “teller of smutty jokes,” “orphan maker,” and “the poorest apology for a chief magistrate the world ever saw.” He suggested to Republicans that they “Shout for Abraham—for taxes—for Fort Lafayette—for the draft—for usurped power—for suspension of sacred writs—for a nigger millennium—for worthless currency—for a ruined nation—and for desolate

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, April 2, 1864.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, Oct. 10, 1864.

<sup>36</sup> “Dissertation upon Constitutional Rights” (mss.), n.d., in Madison Y. Johnson Papers, Chicago Historical Society.

<sup>37</sup> Letter, Lincoln to Erastus Corning *et al*, June 12, 1863, Robert Todd Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress.

<sup>38</sup> *La Crosse Democrat*, July 5, 1864.



cities." He contended that Lincoln was "hell's viceagent on earth," the "fanatical tool of fanatics," "flat boat tyrant," and "the lurer drunk with madness." He claimed that the people wanted peace in a land filled with "fear and mourning."<sup>39</sup> In the August 23, 1864, issue of the *La Crosse Democrat*, Pomeroy placed a picture of Lincoln on the front page and above it put the caption: "The Widow Maker of the 19th Century and Republican candidate for President." That day's editorial rantings reached an all-time low:

The man who votes for Lincoln now is a traitor and murderer. He who, pretending to war for, wars against the constitution of our country is a traitor, and Lincoln is one of these men. . . . And if he is elected to misgovern for another four years, we trust some bold hand will pierce his heart with dagger point for the public good.<sup>40</sup>

The intemperate editor even suggested an epitaph for Lincoln's tomb-stone:

Beneath this turf the Widow Maker lies,  
Little is everything; except in size.<sup>41</sup>

The adamant editor conducted a negative campaign. He seldom said what McClellan (Democratic candidate for the presidency) and the Democratic Party stood for. He just abused Lincoln and tried to scare voters from casting their ballots for the incumbent. He appealed to the spirit of Negrophobia and to Western sectionalism—antipathy to New England. He sought votes in the field of war weariness and he spoke the language of the defeatists. "It can never be done," he editorialized. "The south can never be subjugated"<sup>42</sup>

Consistently he revealed that hating Lincoln had become an obsession. He tabbed Lincoln "a usurper who wears a No. 5 hat and No. 14 boots." He insisted that President Lincoln had ignored his oath of office, spit upon the Constitution, and "woven the chains of slavery about the people." "Lincoln," wrote the self-styled curmudgeon, "has been a worse tyrant and more inhuman butcher than has existed since the days of Nero. He has listened to the counsels of fools; and millions of mourners weep over the result of his incompetency."<sup>43</sup> Pomeroy even turned his wrath against the provost marshal in La Crosse—the representative of the "slaughtering machinery." Pomeroy wrote that the provost marshal was "unfit for duty," a "captain in the widow maker's service."<sup>44</sup>

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, Aug. 2, 9, 16, 24, 1864.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, Aug. 23, 1864.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.* Pomeroy reprinted the epitaph from the *Appleton Crescent*, but he did not state from what paper he clipped it.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, Sept. 5, 19, Oct. 10, 17, 1864.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, Oct. 17, 1864.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, Oct. 10, 1864.

Pomeroy's putrid propaganda failed to halt the Republican tide which swept Lincoln back into office. The editor, then, appeared dispirited and disconsolate. He wrote that he regretted Lincoln's election "more than words could tell." He blamed fraud and intimidation for Lincoln's re-election, and he refused to accept the verdict in good grace. "For the first time in the history of our country," he rationalized, "a corrupt and ambitious President has abused his office by making it a source of terror and fraud to influence political opponents."<sup>45</sup> He suggested that those who voted for "Lincoln and the war" should volunteer for army duty. "Election being over," he noted, "we look to those who voted for Lincoln and the continuance of the war, to go to the front."<sup>46</sup> He spoke the language of the appeasers, predicting that the Union was "lost forever" and stating that the South could "never be subjugated." He supposed that the Northwest might break away from the East, establishing its own confederacy. He wrote that more "thieving generals" would fill their pocketbooks and that more widows and orphans would be "created." The sullen scribe added a prophecy: "There is no hope for the Union now."<sup>47</sup>

When the editor of the Republican newspaper in La Crosse wrote that Pomeroy talked boldly and sought attention but would not dare assassinate Lincoln, the saucy editor retorted: ". . . if Old Abe ever comes into our office to tell one of his stories, or crosses our path, we'll go for him with a culvereen [*sic*] of corn cider. Dare not assassinate Lincoln! We'd shoot him quick as any man."<sup>48</sup>

When Lincoln met death at an assassin's hand there were some who pointed a finger of guilt at Pomeroy, suggesting he was involved in the conspiracy. Some spread rumors of his impending arrest and they quoted from Pomeroy's most vicious editorials.<sup>49</sup>

The editor of the La Crosse *Democrat* shed crocodile tears when he decked his newspaper in mourning grab—he turned the column rules—and reported that the country had lost a statesman. Several months later Pomeroy supposed that "God generously permitted an agent to make a martyr of the late president . . ."<sup>50</sup> He followed with remarks even more villifying. "We deprecate assassination," he wrote, "yet we feel to thank God for calling Lincoln home, wherever that may be." Then the defiant *Democrat* suggested that the act of assassination "gave the country a statesman for a President" and "halted the advance of usurpation most effectively."<sup>51</sup>

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, Nov. 9, 1864.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, Nov. 14, 1864.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, Nov. 21, 1864.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>49</sup> Milwaukee *Sentinel*, May 8, 1865; La Crosse *Democrat*, May 8, 1865.

<sup>50</sup> La Crosse *Democrat*, June 19, July 3, 1865.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, Oct. 2, 1865.

Having drunk deeply from the cup of self-righteousness, Pomeroy believed that time would vindicate him and would treat Lincoln harshly. "They may denounce me," he wrote of his contemporaries, "but their children will not, for they shall know the truth."<sup>52</sup> Pomeroy's cross-town rival gave posterity an evaluation which found its way into history: "He out-jeffed Jeff Davis in treasonable utterances and out-deviled the Devil in deviltry."<sup>53</sup>

Little did Marcus Mills Pomeroy realize that a century later historians would classify him as a carping critic, a man who preached the doctrine of a free press and ignored the responsibilities such a principle imposed upon editors. He claimed that democratic processes must function, even in times of civil war, yet his practices and preachments did more to endanger the processes than to preserve them.

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<sup>52</sup> Quoted in Tucker, *Life of Mark M. Pomeroy*, 91.

<sup>53</sup> Charles Seymour, "The Press," *History of La Crosse County, Wisconsin*, 545.

