Distribution Agreement

In presenting this thesis as a partial fulfillment of the requirements for a degree from Emory University, I hereby grant to Emory University and its agents the non-exclusive license to archive, make accessible, and display my thesis in whole or in part in all forms of media, now or hereafter now, including display on the World Wide Web. I understand that I may select some access restrictions as part of the online submission of this thesis. I retain all ownership rights to the copyright of the thesis. I also retain the right to use in future works (such as articles or books) all or part of this thesis.

Benjamin Craver **April 9, 2025**

Letters Across the Atlantic: William Henry Gregory and the Ill-Fated Confederate Bid for British Recognition

by

Benjamin Craver

Maria Montalvo
Adviser

Department of History

Maria Montalvo

Adviser

Thomas Rogers

Committee Member

Jonathan Prude

Committee Member

2025

Letters Across the Atlantic: William Henry Gregory and the Ill-Fated Confederate Bid for British Recognition

By

Benjamin Craver

Maria Montalvo
Adviser

An abstract of
a thesis submitted to the Faculty of Emory College of Arts and Sciences
of Emory University in partial fulfillment
of the requirements of the degree of
Bachelor of Arts with Honors

History Department

2025

Abstract

Letters Across the Atlantic: William Henry Gregory and the Ill-Fated Confederate Bid for British Recognition
By Benjamin Craver

When the American Civil War began, the Confederate states launched an extensive diplomatic effort aimed at seeking recognition as a legitimate nation from the major European Powers. The most significant of these efforts was directed towards the United Kingdom, where Southern diplomats received support from a number of British sympathizers. One of these individuals was named William Henry Gregory, a wealthy Anglo-Irish Member of Parliament. Gregory, through his travels, had developed close relationships with several Confederate statesmen and became a powerful advocate for British support of the Southern cause. This thesis explores why the Confederacy did not succeed in gaining British recognition by analyzing the *Gregory Family Papers,* a collection of letters sent to Gregory from his Confederate associates and like-minded British individuals primarily between the years of 1861 and 1865. Through a microhistorical approach, this study uses these correspondences to examine Confederate diplomatic outreach. This thesis is structured around three key themes. Chapter I examines how misinformation and rhetorical strategies weakened the effectiveness of Confederate diplomacy. Chapter II explores the Confederacy's "King Cotton" strategy and the miscalculations that undermined its success. The final chapter discusses British liberalism and its role in shaping the United Kingdom's perspective of the Confederacy. Through close analysis of the *Gregory Family Papers*, this thesis sheds new light on the limitations of Confederate foreign policy and highlights the broader transatlantic forces that shaped British neutrality.

Letters Across the Atlantic: William Henry Gregory and the Ill-Fated Confederate Bid for British Recognition

By

Benjamin Craver

Maria Montalvo
Adviser

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Emory College of Arts and Sciences
of Emory University in partial fulfillment
of the requirements of the degree of
Bachelor of Arts with Honors

Department of History

2025

Table of Contents

Introduction 1

Chapter I: Letters of Unshaken Faith 8

Chapter II: The Great Gamble on Cotton 23

Chapter III: Reform and Rebellion 36

Conclusion 46

Bibliography 49

Introduction

In October of 1859, British politician William Henry Gregory embarked on a journey that would shape his political beliefs and lay the groundwork for his involvement in one of the most contentious diplomatic struggles of the American Civil War. Gregory was an Anglo-Irish statesman and by the 1850s had long been well established in British politics. He was elected to the House of Commons in 1842 and played a pivotal role in aid restricting legislation during the Great Irish Famine.[1] Seven years later, the United Kingdom's (UK's) government appointed Gregory to the illustrious position of High Sheriff of County Galway and post-Civil war he served as the Governor of Ceylon, present day Sri Lanka.[2] Although his political legacy is often overshadowed by his marriage to famed playwright Isabella Augusta Gregory, also known as Lady Gregory, it was his 1859 travels to North America that would leave a lasting impact on the Civil War's Anglo-American relations.[3]

As he journeyed throughout the continent, Gregory found himself increasingly drawn to the Southern United States. He reportedly became enamoured by what he perceived as the courteous hospitality of Southern society and greatly admired the South's "patriarchal virtuous rule."[4] Though initially repulsed with the institution of slavery, he slowly came to regard slaveholders sympathetically and believed that there was no better alternative in managing a large Black population.[5]

---

[1] Brian Jenkins, *Sir William Gregory of Coole: The Biography of an Anglo-Irishman* (Colin Smythe LTD, 1986), 80.
[2] Jenkins, *Sir William Gregory of Coole: The Biography of an Anglo-Irishman*, 80.
[3] Jenkins, *Sir William Gregory of Coole: The Biography of an Anglo-Irishman*, 244.
[4] Jenkins, *Sir William Gregory of Coole: The Biography of an Anglo-Irishman*, 144.
[5] Jenkins, *Sir William Gregory of Coole: The Biography of an Anglo-Irishman*, 145.

Conceivably more importantly, Gregory developed close friendships with several high-ranking Confederate statesmen. Among them were Virginia Senator James Murray Mason, later infamous for his role in the Trent Affair, South Carolina Representative William Porcher Miles, and Robert M.T. Hunter, who would go on to serve as the Confederate Secretary of State.[6] Of all these connections, it appears Miles left the deepest impression. Historian Brian Jenkins notes in *Sir William Gregory of Coole: The Biography of an Anglo-Irishman* that, "Miles, in particular, became his guide, philosopher, and friend," successfully persuading Gregory of the South's right to secede.[7]

As the war broke out in 1861, Gregory emerged as one of Britain's most vocal advocates for Confederate recognition. He was in a unique position to lobby on the South's behalf due to his vast political influence, exorbitant wealth, and slew of personal connections. Gregory was often referred to as "the champion of the Southern cause" in Britain.[8] In his mission, he exchanged numerous letters with his newfound Southern companions as well as with like-minded British Confederate sympathizers. The letters he received between the years of 1861 and 1884 form part of the extensive *Gregory Family Papers* collection held here at Emory University. This particular box of correspondence offers a newfound perspective into Confederate diplomatic efforts to secure British intervention in the war and provides an insight into why those efforts ultimately failed.

My thesis will center around these letters, referred to here as synonymous with the larger *Gregory Family Papers*, to explore the question of why Confederate supporters were unable to convince Britain to join the war on their behalf. Through a microhistorical approach, I aim to

---

[6] Jenkins, *Sir William Gregory of Coole: The Biography of an Anglo-Irishman*, 144.
[7] Jenkins, *Sir William Gregory of Coole: The Biography of an Anglo-Irishman*, 144.
[8] Unnamed to William Henry Gregory, 1862, n.d. *Gregory Family Papers*, Processed by W. Bradford Smith, Stuart A. Rose Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Emory University, Letter 29.

examine these diplomatic exchanges as a lens into the broader dynamics of Confederate foreign policy and British nonalignment.

Microhistory seeks to illuminate broader historical phenomena by examining them through the lens of a narrowly focused case study.[9] Rather than presenting a sweeping narrative of diplomatic relations between Britain and the Confederacy, this thesis adopts the microhistorical approach by centering on the *Gregory Family Papers* as a way to explore foreign policy. It should be noted that this is not a microhistory of Gregory himself; instead, it is a study of how Confederate leadership communicated to Gregory regarding the Civil War. A microhistorical approach is particularly useful in this case because it allows for a novel and in-depth analysis of a uniquely comprehensive source. These letters, written by key Confederate diplomats, provide an accurate perspective on larger diplomatic trends and reveal how Confederates actively sought to influence British opinion and secure recognition for their cause.

There is a considerable, but nowhere near extensive, amount of scholarship on this topic, which can be broadly categorized into three main approaches, as inspired by the introduction of Hugh Dubrulle's *Ambivalent Nation*.[10] The first approach is the classic sociological interpretation, exemplified by R.J.M. Blackett's seminal work, *Divided Hearts, Britain and the American Civil War*. This class-based analysis asserts that liberal reformers and the English workforce supported the Union, viewing it as an entity that advocated for a free economy and democracy.[11] In contrast, the British Aristocracy and the Church rallied for the Confederacy primarily due to shared economic interests and cultural affinities.[12] This framework suggests a

---

[9] Jill Lepore, "Historians Who Love Too Much: Reflections on Microhistory and Biography," *The Journal of American History* 88, No. 1 (Jun, 2001), 131.

[10] Hugh Dubrulle, *Ambivalent Nation: How Britain Imagined the American Civil War* (Louisiana State University Press, 2018), 15.

[11] R. J. M. Blackett, *Divided Hearts: Britain and the American Civil War* (Louisiana State University Press, 2001), 119.

[12] Blackett, *Divided Hearts: Britain and the American Civil War*, 120.

stalemated balance of power, with a powerful elite minority supporting the Confederacy but outnumbered by a large pro-Union majority. Such a conclusion, while logically sound and compelling in its simplicity, ignores important nuances and has been determined in more recent scholarship to be only partially correct.

The second approach is referred to as the revisionist perspective and is showcased in works like *Diplomacy During the American Civil War* by David Crook. Authors operating under this framework assert that there were many singular events, such as the Trent Affair or Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation, that pushed both the upper and lower classes into internal disagreement, and, ultimately, the nation into a policy of nonalignment.[13] In general, while some strong partisans did exist, it is argued that the British policy of neutrality almost perfectly reflected an uncommitted public. While this event-focused analysis provides valuable insight, it also falls into the same trap as the class-based approach by failing to fully capture the complexity of British attitudes toward the war.

Scholars have recently proposed a third approach to explaining British neutrality, one that builds on the former two by examining perspectives in the context of the political and social relationship between Britain and Antebellum America. This third methodology, referred to as the "modern approach," highlights how British views evolved on a wide range of Anglo-American topics such as Antebellum slavery, the international cotton trade, and their perception of the United States as a true unified nation. This perspective is well represented in *Ambivalent Nation* by Hugh Dubrulle and *English Public Opinion in the American Civil War* by Duncan Andrew Campbell, both of which are central to my secondary source bibliography. In addition to these works, Blackett's *Divided Hearts, Britain and the American Civil War* provides essential background information on the broader nature of British-American relations during the war.

[13] David Crook, *Diplomacy During the American Civil War* (John Wiley & Sons Inc, 1976), 24.

Beyond those three books, additional secondary sources that inform this thesis include the aforementioned *Sir William Gregory of Coole: The Biography of an Anglo-Irishman*, which is instrumental in detailing Gregory's life, and James Rawley's *Turning Points of the Civil War*, that assists in providing information regarding the war's major events. A few other articles and books are utilized for more specific details, particularly regarding economic and political factors. Finally, several primary sources will play a role in analyzing the letters, which include the writings of Gregory, Robert E. Lee and Abraham Lincoln, transcriptions from 1863 UK parliament sessions, and a contemporary newspaper article. These sources combine to form the foundation of my historiography and help to contextualize the *Gregory Family Papers* within the larger diplomatic and political landscape of the Civil War era.

My thesis contributes to the historiography of the Civil War, and more specifically British Confederate diplomacy, by introducing the *Gregory Family Papers* into the scholarly conversation. While several existing books and articles acknowledge William Henry Gregory's role, coverage remains quite limited. His biography only briefly examines his involvement in the Civil War, with the discussion amounting to only a short chapter. Additionally, to my knowledge, no studies have ever utilized these letters as a primary source. By analyzing Gregory's correspondences, this thesis will provide a new perspective on Confederate diplomatic engagement with the British, filling a gap in the historiography of Anglo-American relations during the war.

The box itself contains exactly ninety-five letters, organized into six folders. I have numbered each letter according to its placement within the box; these numbers generally follow chronological order, with lower numbers corresponding to letters sent earlier during the conflict. The folders are structured as follows:

- Folder 1: March 5th, 1861 - November 24th, 1861, Letters #1-24
- Folder 2: January 21st, 1862 - December 18th, 1862, Letters #25-43
- Folder 3: January 3rd, 1863 - December 9th, 1863, Letters #44-69
- Folder 4: January 14th, 1864 - December, 1865, Letters #70-75
- Folder 5: February 12th, 1886 - May 13th, 1884 (Post War Reflections), #76-85
- Folder 6: Undated Letters #86-95

The *Gregory Family Papers* are full of information regarding the war's major events and the diplomatic climate between Britain and the United States. However, there are several concerns with this primary source that must initially be addressed. First, the letters are entirely one-sided.[14] This thesis is inherently focused on Gregory but we have little way of knowing how he responded to these diplomats and their comments because we do not have a record of the communications sent in return. Although we are aware of his views on the war and topics discussed in the letters, this limitation still makes it impossible to construct a fully cohesive picture of the exchanges. Additionally, these letters come from an incredibly wide range of authors. Some of them are well-known Confederate statesmen or British members of parliament; however, many were penned by completely unknown individuals, signed with only initials, or left unsigned altogether. Unfortunately, this lack of attribution does complicate efforts to determine the perspectives behind the authors of certain letters, leaving gaps in our contextual understanding. Given that this thesis attempts to examine these exchanges as a lens into the larger dynamics of Southern diplomacy, I primarily focus on letters written by known figures.

Secondly, these correspondences are generally very difficult to read due to the combination of 19th-century cursive, faded ink, and the common practice of writing across the

[14] For future research: Letters sent to both James Murray Mason and Henry Hoetze are housed at the Library of Congress and could theoretically contain William Henry Gregory's responses.

page when space ran out. To mitigate this challenge, I have scanned the letters and processed them through multiple online transcription models, cross-referencing the results with my own visual analysis. I firmly believe this method has ensured a very high degree of accuracy, but some margin of error remains. Finally, many of the correspondences are completely irrelevant to the war, often discussing mundane matters such as life updates, meetings or finances. Only about a third contain any significant insight into Civil War diplomacy, and thus these will serve as the primary source base of this thesis.

Each chapter focuses on a different aspect of the *Gregory Family Papers*. The first chapter examines how misinformation and rhetorical strategies weakened Confederate diplomatic outreach. The second chapter explores the Confederacy's “King Cotton” strategy. The final chapter discusses British liberalism and its role in shaping the UK’s perspective of the Confederacy. Together, this analysis of the *Gregory Family Papers* provides a comprehensive understanding of why the Confederacy ultimately failed to persuade Britain to intervene in the war.

Chapter I: Letters of Unshaken Faith

In Letter 20 of the *Gregory Family Papers*, Francis Lawley, a former politician and British journalist who sympathized with the Confederacy, claims that he is "satisfied that Southern independence is inevitable."[15] Lawley reflects the heightened sense of optimism espoused by many supporters of the South within the *Gregory Family Papers*. Despite troubling military logistics, severe economic struggles and the general unpredictable nature of the war, they maintained a persistent belief in the South's impending victory.[16] These correspondences are marked with a sustained stream of unwavering confidence, indicating a heavily biased coverage of both domestic and diplomatic aspects of the American Civil War.

This chapter examines letters from each section of the *Gregory Family Papers*, chronologically analyzing the commentary of various individuals invested in a Confederate victory on both key military events and efforts to secure British recognition of the Confederacy. These dispatches provide insight into the multifaceted nature of the bias within this primary source, which have a tendency to overstate Confederate successes and British affinity for the South, while underestimating the North's resilience and military superiority. Furthermore, this chapter illustrates how Confederate aspirations shaped diplomatic discourse and argues that such bias likely undermined William Henry Gregory and other British sympathizers in their effort to successfully persuade Great Britain to formally recognize the Confederacy. By presenting a distorted version of the conflict, Confederate diplomats and their British allies risked alienating

---

[15] Francis Lawley to William Henry Gregory, October 23, 1861, n.d. *Gregory Family Papers*, Processed by W. Bradford Smith, Stuart A. Rose Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Emory University, Letter 20.

[16] James Rawley, *Turning Points of the Civil War* (University of Nebraska Press, 1989), 1.

neutral or skeptical figures in the UK government, making formal recognition increasingly unlikely.

Folder 1 consists primarily of communications from Confederate Commissioner to Europe Ambrose Dudley Mann. In several messages, Mann appears to grossly misjudge the disposition of the British populace towards the Confederacy. In Letter 13, he states that "public opinion in Great Britain is rapidly coming up to [Gregory's] judicious views."[17] Similarly, in Letter 15, he asserts that the majority of the British public supports recognition of the Confederacy and expects this sentiment to grow as the South begins to secure more victories.[18] Mann's assessments illustrate a broader inclination among Confederate diplomats to interpret any sign of British ambivalence as a sign of impending recognition. At the time, while some aristocrats and commercial interests sympathized with the South, nearly all current scholarship contradicts his ideas, with Britain's pro-abolitionist population generally despising the Confederacy over its support of slavery.[19]

Furthermore, it was contemporary diplomatic knowledge that the 1861 parliamentary movement to recognize the Confederacy failed due to high levels of opposition from the press and a non committal public. This is further evidenced by the fact that membership of Confederate-supporting groups such as the Southern Independence Association or the Liverpool Southern Club were consistently quite miniscule.[20] Mann's exaggerated belief in British support for the Confederacy reveals a larger false sense of optimism of Britain interceding on their

---

[17] Ambrose Dudley Mann to William Henry Gregory, August 8, 1861, n.d. *Gregory Family Papers*, Processed by W. Bradford Smith, Stuart A. Rose Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Emory University, Letter 13.

[18] Ambrose Dudley Mann to William Henry Gregory, August 29, 1861, n.d. *Gregory Family Papers*, Processed by W. Bradford Smith, Stuart A. Rose Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Emory University, Letter 15.

[19] Campbell, *English Public Opinion and the American Civil War*, 48.

[20] Blackett, *Divided Hearts: Britain and the American Civil War*, 89; Campbell, *English Public Opinion and the American Civil War*, 165.

behalf. While this harm may be mitigated by the fact that Gregory, with his heightened awareness of British contemporary politics, would likely have been more attuned to the UK's true position on the matter, this is certainly not the case in respect to letters discussing domestic topics.

Folder 1 also contains extensive commentary on the military logistics of the Civil War as well as speculation regarding future events. The war officially began in April of 1861, but its first major land skirmish did not occur until July 21st in Manassas, Virginia at what would be called the First Battle of Bull Run. The battle resulted in a surprising, yet decisive, Confederate victory, as Southern forces launched a powerful counter attack forcing Union troops in a chaotic retreat back to DC.[21]

Following Bull Run, Mann confidently claimed that the Confederate victory "will prove fatal to the Lincoln Administration."[22] In reality, rather than causing the collapse of Lincoln's government, the defeat at Bull Run prompted the President to take decisive action and enlist nearly a half a million men into the Union Army, signaling his commitment to a long and drawn-out war.[23] It is not unreasonable for a Confederate statesman to believe that early victories could destabilize the North; however, other claims Mann makes regarding the aftermath of the battle are further disconnected from reality. For instance, Mann predicts the Confederate conquest of Washington would now be "easy and speedy."[24] This statement betrays either a misunderstanding of Union defensive capabilities or an overconfidence in Confederate military strength, referencing an objective that, despite multiple attempts, was never achieved and likely would have ended the war. Simply put, the difficulties of mounting an offensive campaign into

---

[21] Rawley, *Turning Points of the Civil War*, 65.
[22] Mann, letter to Gregory, 13.
[23] Rawley, *Turning Points of the Civil War*, 58.
[24] Mann, letter to Gregory, 13.

well-fortified Union territory were immense. Additionally, Mann writes that "in the Northern army, (...) no fresh recruits are available, and the old volunteers are demoralized," a statement contradicted by the North's substantial manpower reserves, especially when in comparison to those in the South.[25]

Likewise in error, in Letter 12, Irish MP and Pro-south campaigner James McCann predicted with apparent certainty that the border states, referring to Delaware, Kentucky, Maryland, and Missouri, would soon join the Confederacy. These states, despite being in line with McCann's vision of being "from their climate and soil compelled to retain slavery as a local institution," (i.e., pre-Civil War slave states), never joined the Confederacy.[26] In fact, by 1862, they were firmly under the Union's control and actively supported the war effort. Much like Mann, McCann clearly exaggerates and displays misguided optimism, painting a favorable yet unrealistic picture of the war's trajectory.

While maintaining optimism in the face of a cataclysmic war is understandable, the deliberate spreading of falsehoods, exemplified by Mann's statement on Union army recruits and McCann's comments on border states, damaged the Confederates' cause. The letters reveal a complete lack of urgency in providing Gregory, hailed by multiple Confederates in these letters as "the champion of the Southern cause," with an accurate depiction of the war. As an essential proponent for Confederate recognition in the House of Commons, it would be absolutely crucial for him to fully understand both the promising and troubling aspects of the situation.[27] Instead, it appears Gregory was often left at the mercy of these biased and inaccurate reports.

---

[25] Mann, letter to Gregory, 15; Rawley, *Turning Points of the Civil War*, 1.

[26] James McCann to William Henry Gregory, March 5, 1861, n.d. *Gregory Family Papers*, Processed by W. Bradford Smith, Stuart A. Rose Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Emory University, Letter 12.

[27] William Porcher Miles to William Henry Gregory, May 14, 1861, n.d. *Gregory Family Papers*, Processed by W. Bradford Smith, Stuart A. Rose Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Emory University, Letter 6; Unnamed, letter to Gregory, 29.

If Gregory was relying on such claims, for instance the McCann letter, to frame his parliamentary speeches, he would have been advocating for recognition under the belief that the early Confederacy was expanding rather than shrinking. This is a proposition that would have seemed increasingly ludicrous as quick Union diplomatic and military victories solidified control over the border states. By relaying such views to Gregory, they effectively armed him with a dangerously optimistic and misleading position, and Parliamentary figures who were closely following the war would have found it increasingly difficult to take Gregory's arguments seriously. The negative impact of these falsehoods spreading to Gregory and other Britons would become more tangible later in the war in several sessions of parliament.

Folder 2, which contains letters written throughout 1862, reveals a continuation of Confederate misconceptions overlaid with higher stakes and a worsening military outlook. The brutal Battle of Antietam took place in the fall of 1862, which though fought to a draw, was largely seen as a Union victory. As a result, the Confederacy suffered a strategic setback as their withdrawal from Maryland allowed Lincoln to issue the *Emancipation Proclamation*.[28] This famed executive order freed all slaves in Confederate-controlled territories and formally committed the North to eventual abolition. The proclamation made British recognition and support of the Confederacy highly unlikely, as any backing of the South would now be perceived as a direct endorsement of slavery.[29]

Despite this major complication, the Folder 2 contains letters filled with similar unwarranted optimism. For example, a few months after the Battle of Antietam, Confederate Secretary of State J.P. Benjamin addressed a letter to Gregory, claiming that the retreat from Maryland was simply misunderstood. He argued that rather than being an embarrassing loss, it

---

[28] Rawley, *Turning Points of the Civil War*, 104.
[29] Campbell, *English Public Opinion and the American Civil War*, 133.

was actually a strategic decision that "was the most successful move of the war."[30] This framing of the retreat as a rousing success is in stark contrast to the widely accepted view, as a significant Confederate disappointment, abruptly ending their first campaign into the North. Benjamin's insistence on portraying the retreat as a strategic maneuver rather than an operational failure reveals the Confederacy's broader pattern of self-justification. His letter serves as an example of the South's diplomatic rhetoric, which aimed to convince foreign supporters that the war remained on favorable terms. By maintaining an image of Confederate strength and control, figures like Benjamin sought to keep international sympathizers, particularly in Britain, invested in the Southern cause.

A slightly different perspective appears in Letter 38 to Gregory, in which Lawley urges him to not be discouraged by the withdrawal, suggesting that "at the worst, even if their invasion of Maryland is a failure, I think that it is a different kind of failure than the Northern failure before Richmond."[31] While this statement is not outright claiming that the outcome was positive, it appears this author is attempting to redirect Gregory's focus by downplaying the significance of the retreat and instead shifting the conversation towards the perceived failures of the Union. This rhetorical strategy again reflects a broader effort to control the war's narrative. Such justifications illustrate the South's need to maintain a sense of momentum, particularly as foreign recognition became a fading possibility.

Nevertheless, by the end of 1862, the Confederacy was able to secure one of its most significant victories of the war at Fredericksburg, Virginia. Union General Ambrose Burnside led

---

[30] J.P. Benjamin to William Henry Gregory, November 8, 1862, n.d. *Gregory Family Papers*, Processed by W. Bradford Smith, Stuart A. Rose Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Emory University, Letter 39.

[31] Francis Lawley to William Henry Gregory, September 22, 1862, n.d. *Gregory Family Papers*, Processed by W. Bradford Smith, Stuart A. Rose Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Emory University, Letter 38.

his troops against well-fortified Confederate positions on the causeway towards the Confederate capital of Richmond, only to suffer a devastating defeat. Letter 54 gives a succinct and accurate summary of the battle:

> You have before now received accounts of the disastrous repulse of the enemy at Charleston, and it will not be long before you will have heard of Lee's great victory on the 2nd & 3rd instant near Fredericksburg. He attacked the enemy greatly superior in numbers, behind their fortifications, and on ground of their own selection. The victory was complete, the carnage great.[32]

Former United States Senator, James Mason, the Confederate's leading diplomat at the time, echoes this sentiment in Letter 46, in which he describes the Union troops as "sheep to the slaughter."[33] The Confederate victory at Fredericksburg provided a crucial morale boost for the now jubilant South, particularly as it marked another failed Union attempt to take Richmond.[34]

This being said, the first half of Folder 3 in the *Gregory Family Papers*, still contains several exaggerated reactions to the events at Fredericksburg. In Letter 49, British Confederate sympathizer and merchant James Spence boldly asserts that the Confederates are now equal in strength to the Union.[35] Notably, General Robert E. Lee himself would have disagreed with this claim. Ruminating over the battle, Lee acknowledged its limited strategic value and the long odds still facing the South, writing "we had really accomplished nothing; we had not gained a foot of ground, and I knew the enemy could easily replace the men he had lost, and the loss of

---

[32] John Rutherford to William Henry Gregory, May 12, 1863, n.d. *Gregory Family Papers*, Processed by W. Bradford Smith, Stuart A. Rose Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Emory University, Letter 54.

[33] James Murray Mason to William Henry Gregory, January 4, 1863, n.d. *Gregory Family Papers*, Processed by W. Bradford Smith, Stuart A. Rose Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Emory University, Letter 46.

[34] William Goolrick, *Rebels Resurgent: Fredericksburg to Chancellorsville*, (Time Life, 1985), 92.

[35] James Spence to William Henry Gregory, January 23, 1863, n.d. *Gregory Family Papers*, Processed by W. Bradford Smith, Stuart A. Rose Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Emory University, Letter 49.

material was, if anything, rather beneficial to him."[36] While Fredericksburg provided a major morale boost for the South, Lee understood that true victory required more than defensive success. For its supporters to be truly optimistic about winning the Civil War, the Confederacy would need to gain and hold substantial territory.

In Letter 46, Mason makes another confusing claim regarding Fredericksburg, suggesting that the Lincoln administration was in the active process of disintegration, exemplifying the persistent belief among Confederate supporters that Northern resolve was fragile and military setbacks would soon force the Union to seek peace.[37] This an assumption that completely ignores the broader political and economic stability of the Union, with Lincoln remaining in control towards the end of the war. The persistence of this belief among Confederate sympathizers in Britain reflects their reliance on selective evidence, interpreting Union military defeats as signs of an inevitable collapse while disregarding the Union's capacity to recover and mobilize resources. This tendency also suggests a willful blindness to the industrial and demographic advantages that ultimately secured a Union victory.

Letter 59 provides a final example of hyperbole, as British politician Richard Cobden expresses the idea that their government needed to plan for the fall of Baltimore and Washington.[38] His remark is particularly mystifying given that neither city was in remote danger of being captured at the time. This alarmist stance suggests that he viewed a string of Southern offensive military successes as at least probable. Such hyperbole underscores how perspectives

---

[36] Henry Heth to J. William Jones, June 1877, in *Southern Historical Society Papers* 52 vols. (1876-1959; Millwood, N.Y. Kraus Reprint Co., 1977), vol. 4, pp. 153-54.
[37] Mason, letter to Gregory, 46.
[38] Richard Cobden to William Henry Gregory, July, 1863, n.d. *Gregory Family Papers*, Processed by W. Bradford Smith, Stuart A. Rose Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Emory University, Letter 59.

in the *Gregory Family Papers* were often shaped by speculation rather than objective military assessment.

The events at Fredericksburg also influenced discussions over recognition of the Confederacy, instilling renewed confidence among Southern supporters. This optimism is evident in Letter 44, written by Spence. In June of 1863, British Politician John Roebuck introduced a resolution in the House of Commons that called for the British government to collaborate with other European nations to collectively recognize Confederate independence.[39] Spence expressed enthusiasm at this attempt by dismissing the failure of the 1861 effort as ineffective due to bad leadership in the House of Commons. He believed that with a more capable figure at the helm the "difficulty encountered" would be reduced.[40] This assumption proved to be incorrect, as Roebuck was similarly inept; his speech, delivered in a sarcastic and offensive tone, contained falsehoods, violated parliamentary protocol and was swiftly dismissed.[41] Campbell argues that this speech happened at the height of Confederate strength, just two weeks before Gettysburg, yet failed to garner any tangible support. This reinforces the near impossibility of securing British support for the South, even in moments in which the Confederacy had military successes. Many of the assertions on recognition in the *Gregory Family Papers* amount to nothing more than wishful thinking, demonstrating how Confederate sympathizers in Britain consistently misjudged both the willingness and ability of the British government to defy its established policy of neutrality.

Roebuck's speech in support of Confederate recognition not only failed to achieve its intended goal but also exemplified how the misinformation spread by Confederate

---

[39] Campbell, *English Public Opinion and the American Civil War*, 169.
[40] James Spence to William Henry Gregory, August 8, 1863, n.d. *Gregory Family Papers*, Processed by W. Bradford Smith, Stuart A. Rose Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Emory University, Letter 44.
[41] Campbell, *English Public Opinion and the American Civil War*, 170.

commissioners actively harmed their own diplomatic efforts. Roebuck was given incorrect information directly from Gregory regarding his motion, highlighting how deeply Confederate propaganda had infiltrated British political discourse. In an earlier session of parliament, Gregory assured him that the more liberal, and thus Union-supporting, House of Commons was not actually opposed to Southern independence but hesitant to act by declaring "nevertheless, it would go forth to the world at large that the opinion of the House of Commons was against the independence of the Southern Confederacy, which I believe not to be the case."[42] This statement was not just misleading but completely divorced from political reality at the time. By 1863, the *Emancipation Proclamation* led the British government to be abundantly clear that it would not support the South.[43] Gregory, however, was still operating under the false premise that British elites were merely biding their time rather than firmly rejecting Confederate recognition. Likewise, Gregory's assertion, even before Gettysburg that, "we might expect, moreover, that there would arise in the minds of the Southerners, who will soon achieve their own independence," was baffling.[44] At this point in the war, the South, despite winning several battles, was still nowhere near securing victory.

Roebuck's actual statements in Parliament also reflect the same types of exaggerations and fabrications found in the *Gregory Family Papers*, suggesting that he had been misled by narratives the Confederates sought to circulate. For instance, Roebuck dramatically claimed that "their armies are melting away; their invasion is rolled back; Washington is in danger; and the only fear which we ought to have is lest the independence of the South should be established without us."[45] Such a statement, like Gregory's, was absurdly detached from military realities.

---

[42] London, Parliament Meeting, July 10, 1863, *Resolution*, vol. 172, pp. 563.
[43] Campbell, *English Public Opinion and the American Civil War*, 133.
[44] London, Parliament Meeting, July 10, 1863, *Resolution*, vol. 172, pp. 564.
[45] London, Parliament Meeting, June 30, 1863, *Resolution*, vol. 171, pp. 1779.

This hyperbole weakened his reputation, making it easy for his opponents to inevitably dismiss his arguments outright, a rebuttal they delivered with success during the same parliamentary session.[46]

Similarly, Roebuck's assertion that "in thirteen of the great towns [of Lancashire] there have been large meetings in favour of the recognition of the South, that that has been carried by an immense majority of ten to one" stands in stark contrast to contemporary accounts, which indicate that British public opinion was not thus swayed to one side or another.[47] Many working class individuals, even ones who worked in the cotton industry, actually tended to favor the Union.[48] By parroting these unfounded claims, Roebuck not only exposed his reliance on poor Confederate intelligence but also helped doom his own motion, demonstrating how misinformation undermined the legitimacy of their cause in Britain rather than persuading Parliament in favor of the Confederacy. Ultimately, Roebuck's failed motion highlights a broader flaw in the Southern diplomatic strategy, by prioritizing sensationalist claims over factual arguments, they destroyed their own credibility.

The summer of 1863 witnessed two major battles that severely weakened the Confederacy. The first was the Siege of Vicksburg in May, as Grant and the Army of Tennessee managed to successfully cross the Mississippi River, driving a large Confederate force into the fortified city.[49] Grant then laid siege to the city of Vicksburg and eventually forced its surrender in July. The fall of Vicksburg was critical because it represented the final Confederate stronghold on the Mississippi River and, with complete control of the waterway, the Union had effectively

---

[46] London, Parliament Meeting, June 30, 1863, *Resolution*, vol. 171, pp. 1782.
[47] London, Parliament Meeting, June 30, 1863, *Resolution*, vol. 171, pp. 1780
[48] Blackett, *Divided Hearts: Britain and the American Civil War*, 119.
[49] Rawley, *Turning Points of the Civil War*, 158.

split the Confederacy in two. The North could now restrict the movement of supplies and ferry their own troops along the river, making it easier to maintain control over Southern territory.[50]

Concurrently, Pennsylvania saw the Battle of Gettysburg, an even more decisive turning point in the war. General Robert E. Lee's Army of Northern Virginia had advanced deep into Union territory and threatened a potential march on Washington D.C. However, on the hills outside of Gettysburg, General George Meade and the Army of the Potomac successfully repelled Confederate forces, inflicting catastrophic losses on an already dwindling Confederate army.[51] The South would never again threaten Northern territory in such an aggressive manner.

Despite these crushing defeats, several letters in the second half of Folder 3 still contain a remarkable degree of optimism. Only a month before Vicksburg fell, Spence in Letter 55 ironically claimed that "as I understand Grant's movements they are a failure."[52] This is obviously a misread of the ongoing military situation but is also particularly striking as, even before this letter was sent, Grant had managed two successful assaults on fortifications outside of the city. Spence's inability to even acknowledge those Union success at Vicksburg underscores the persistent wishful thinking among Confederate sympathizers, attempting to downplay obvious examples of Northern military triumphs. Furthermore, in response to Gettysburg and Vicksburg, Lawley remained hopeful, writing that General Lee could not be beaten in Virginia. He even goes so far as to falsely assert that "I am positive that we have at this moment as many

---

[50] Rawley, *Turning Points of the Civil War*, 162.
[51] Rawley, *Turning Points of the Civil War*, 155.
[52] James Spence to William Henry Gregory, May 31, 1863, n.d. *Gregory Family Papers*, Processed by W. Bradford Smith, Stuart A. Rose Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Emory University, Letter 55.

men in the field as the Yanks and we can recruit, and continue gaining a great victory they cannot."[53]

Unsurprisingly, on the diplomatic front, some Confederate agents still clung to their belief that recognition was achievable. For instance, in Letter 34, Henry Hoetze, a Swiss-American propagandist who was sent to Europe during the war, expressed the view in the late summer of 1863 that:

> Things, however, appear to me to look bright for the Confederate cause on this as well as on the other side of the Atlantic, and I entertain strong hopes that within less than six months you will have the gratification of seeing the whole world acknowledge the justice and wisdom of your early recommendations and persistent efforts.[54]

Hoetze's optimism seems disconnected with the harsh reality faced by the post-spring 1863 Confederacy. By this point, two legislative efforts to push British intervention had imploded, and the political interest in the conflict had waned significantly. Parliamentary discussions about the war had become infrequent, reflecting the broader disinterest of the British government.[55] Given that Hoetze was in London during this time, he should have recognized and been upfront with the true nature of the prospect of Confederate recognition. If Britain was no longer seriously debating the issue, it certainly did not "look bright" for that aspect of the Confederate cause, and the recognition that Hoetze envisioned was no longer realistic.

In contrast, Mann appeared to have finally adopted a more resigned stance. Following the failure of Roebuck's motion and the loss at Gettysburg, Mann wrote regarding the movement to

---

[53] Francis Lawley to William Henry Gregory, September 16, 1863, n.d. *Gregory Family Papers*, Processed by W. Bradford Smith, Stuart A. Rose Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Emory University, Letter 63.

[54] Henry Hoetze to William Henry Gregory, August 1, 1863, n.d. *Gregory Family Papers*, Processed by W. Bradford Smith, Stuart A. Rose Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Emory University, Letter 34.

[55] Campbell, *English Public Opinion and the American Civil War*, 151.

recognize the Confederacy, "I freely confess to you that I am entirely indifferent to its success."[56] This statement marks a significant shift, suggesting that some within the Confederate leadership had finally begun to accept the shrinking prospects of any foreign intervention, likely acknowledging that the window for Britain to intercede was now closed. The stark contrast between Hoetze's peculiar optimism and Mann's growing disillusionment illustrates a division within Confederate circles over the feasibility of securing British support.

Throughout 1864, Lee's Confederate forces were never able to pose an immediate threat to Washington, D.C. and continued to lose territory. They were especially demoralized by General William T. Sherman's March to the Sea, during which Atlanta was burned and the Georgia countryside devastated.[57] In 1865, Grant was finally able to trap Lee at Appomattox Courthouse where Lee finally surrendered, officially ending the American Civil War.[58]

Despite the concerted efforts of Confederate diplomats such as William Porcher Miles, James Murray Mason, and Ambrose Dudley Mann and British Southern Sympathizers like James McCann, John Roebuck, and, of course, William Henry Gregory, Britain remained neutral throughout the conflict and never passed any legislation recognizing the Confederacy as a legitimate state.[59] After the war, Miles maintained correspondence with Gregory, writing to him many of the letters that make up Folder 5. In Letter 77, Miles expresses a perspective on British recognition that differs from what is present in earlier letters. Writing in 1870, he concludes that all attempts at British recognition were ultimately in vain, lamenting that the "the blind

---

[56] Ambrose Dudley Mann to William Henry Gregory, June 22, 1863, n.d *Gregory Family Papers*, Processed by W. Bradford Smith, Stuart A. Rose Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Emory University, Letter 56.
[57] Rawley, *Turning Points of the Civil War*, 204.
[58] Rawley, *Turning Points of the Civil War*, 215.
[59] Dubrulle, *Ambivalent Nation*, 15.

enthusiasm of the English people for the North cannot be removed."[60] Miles further criticizes the English press, stating that it teams "with Radical ideas, and Englishmen (I regret to say) encourage them here by their writings and speeches."[61] His frustration underscores the broader failure of Confederate diplomatic efforts, revealing the 1860s sense of disillusionment with Britain's steadfast neutrality. It seems as though, in retrospect, Miles indirectly admits that there was a degree to which Confederate sympathizers miscalculated British politics and thought.

The letters in the *Gregory Family Papers* provide a revealing look into the persistent optimism of Confederate diplomats as well as their British supporters, concurring with Miles' reflection that the Confederates had overestimated the likelihood of British intervention. Confederate statesmen appear to consistently misrepresent military events, miscalculate Northern resilience and misjudge Britain's philosophical opposition to slavery. The constant framing of events in a way that suggested Confederate victory, despite evidence to the contrary, did more than foster false hope: it actively hindered effective Confederate diplomacy by downplaying the urgency of British involvement and making their foreign advocates look foolish and uninformed. This idea only grew stronger in the war's later stages, as Confederate supporters remained reluctant to acknowledge the pressing realities of the battlefield, further reinforcing the disconnect between perception and reality. Ultimately, the *Gregory Family Papers* provide an interesting case study of how ideological commitment can obscure objective diplomacy.

---

[60] William Porcher Miles to William Henry Gregory, June 25, 1870, n.d. *Gregory Family Papers*, Processed by W. Bradford Smith, Stuart A. Rose Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Emory University, Letter 77.

[61] Miles, letter to Gregory, 77.

Chapter II: The Great Gamble on Cotton

In 1919, a bronze statue of Abraham Lincoln was erected in Platt Fields, Manchester, England. It was later relocated to the aptly named Lincoln Square, where it still remains today. The pedestal bears an inscription quoting a letter Lincoln sent to Manchester's textile workers on January 18th, 1863. The plaque reads in part:

> To the working people of Manchester 19th January 1863: I know and deeply deplore the sufferings which the working people of Manchester and in all Europe are called to endure in this crisis. It has been often and studiously represented that the attempt to overthrow this Government which was built on the foundation of human rights, and to substitute for it one which should rest exclusively on the basis of slavery, was likely to obtain the favour of Europe. Under these circumstances I cannot but regard your decisive utterances upon the question as an instance of sublime Christian heroism which has not been surpassed in any age or in any country. It is indeed an energetic and re-inspiring assurance of the inherent truth and of the ultimate and universal triumph of justice, humanity and freedom.[62]

Lincoln wrote this emotional message in response to workers refusing to process smuggled Southern cotton during the Civil War, all while these individuals were experiencing high unemployment and low wages during what would be known as the Lancashire Cotton Famine. This crisis stemmed from the Confederacy's "King Cotton" diplomacy combined with the Union's naval blockade of the South.

Scholars have traditionally understood "King Cotton" diplomacy as an attempt by the South to utilize their cotton exports as economic leverage. The Confederates believed that Britain's reliance on the crop would compel diplomatic recognition or even intervention. However, through a complex analysis of the *Gregory Family Papers*, this chapter argues that cotton diplomacy was not merely an economic strategy but also a broader ideological campaign that sought to reframe the war's narrative for British audiences.

---

[62] Abraham Lincoln to the Working People of Manchester, January 19, 1863, n.d. *Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln*, University of Michigan.

This chapter begins with a brief overview of the mid-19th century English cotton economy and moves to an analysis of a selection of letters from the first half of the *Gregory Family Papers*. These letters help to elucidate how, in the early days of the war, Confederate supporters sought to utilize the economic devastation of the Lancashire Cotton Famine for their own gain. The letters chosen for this purpose were the select few in the larger *Gregory Family Papers* that incorporate themes of both economic hardship and diplomatic persuasion. By focusing on correspondences from key Confederate figures including Ambrose Mann, Robert M.T. Hunter, and John Cowell, this chapter reconstructs the general mindset of those advocating for British intervention.

Mann, discussed in Chapter I, was one of the Confederacy's original commissioners to Europe.[63] He arrived in 1861 with the goal of advocating for diplomatic recognition. His letters to Gregory reflect the strategic thinking of Confederate envoys who capitalized on British economic anxieties while portraying the Confederacy as a legitimate nation in need of international support. His lobbying efforts involved meetings with British politicians, journalists, and aristocrats, demonstrating how his correspondence with Gregory was part of a wider campaign to shape elite opinion.

Hunter, a central figure in Confederate political circles, provides another crucial perspective. Having served as Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives before the war and later as Confederate Secretary of State, he was deeply involved in shaping the South's diplomatic strategy.[64] Hunter's letters to Gregory showcase awareness of Britain's economic struggles and the belief that British self-interest could be aligned with Confederate goals. Beyond his correspondence, Hunter was instrumental in drafting official Confederate foreign policy,

---

[63] Jenkins, *Sir William Gregory of Coole: The Biography of an Anglo-Irishman*, 144.
[64] Jenkins, *Sir William Gregory of Coole: The Biography of an Anglo-Irishman*, 144.

reinforcing the argument that these letters offer more than just personal opinion, rather they represent the thinking of Confederate leadership itself.

Cowell, although not a Confederate official, expresses the grassroots dimension of pro-Southern activism in Britain. A businessman and pamphleteer, he was part of a broader network of British sympathizers who sought to sway public opinion through the press and personal influence.[65] Cowell's letters reveal what British pro-Confederate campaigners believed as well as how they framed the war for their domestic audience. This usually included emphasizing topics like economic hardship, Northern aggression, and the possible benefits of a Southern victory for Britain. His engagement with Gregory reflects how Confederate sympathizers worked to create a transatlantic coalition of elites who advocated for diplomatic recognition.

Chapter II contributes to the historiographical discussion by examining how the letters written by these individuals illustrate a broader Confederate effort to manipulate British public opinion and policy, shifting sentiments from moral outrage regarding slavery to economic grievances over the cotton crisis. In addition, this chapter will explore why Britain chose to pursue their policy of nonintervention from an economic lens. This latter section will proceed as follows: first, by explaining how the South was unable to reach its goal of shifting the British's focus of the war away from slavery and towards economic concerns; next, by discussing how Southern supporters miscalculated Britain's ability to adapt by sourcing cotton from other regions; finally, by showing that Confederate diplomats never fully realized the extent to which supporting a slaveholding nation would be politically untenable for the British.

---

[65] "John Cowell," *Profile & Legacies Summary*, Center for the Study of the Legacies of British Slavery.

Current historiography regarding diplomacy during the Civil War extensively discusses the impact the conflict had on the British economy. The Union's blockade disrupted imports of cotton from the South, causing severe interferences in England's factory industry and exports, which in turn led to widespread unemployment and hardship.[66] While England eventually shifted to trade with its overseas dominions, authors agree that the economic strain was substantial and only further exacerbated by the recent repealing of the corn laws that had set a maximum price on grain.[67]

During the 1850s, the British cotton manufacturing industry was thriving, sourcing raw cotton from the Southern United States. British mills would process this cotton into textiles and export finished goods on a massive scale. By 1860, there were over 2,500 cotton mills in the Lancashire region alone.[68] The industry was central to the overall British economy, with cotton textiles accounting for approximately 30% to 40% of total exports and reaching an estimated £32 million in value.[69] One letter in the *Gregory Family Papers* estimates that in early 1861, the cotton industry was directly sustaining the wages of up to 1.5 million British workers; however, secondary sources place this figure closer to the still impactful, half a million.[70]

Initially, as the prospect of a Civil War grew, the British assumed that any conflict would be brief and their existing cotton reserves would be sufficient to last the duration of the disruption. On the eve of secession, Cowell wrote to Gregory in Letter 10, remarking that: "At

---

[66] Blackett, *Divided Hearts: Britain and the American Civil War*, 91.
[67] Campbell, *English Public Opinion and the American Civil War*, 76.
[68] James Narron, and Donald Morgan, "Crisis Chronicles: The Cotton Famine of 1862‑63 and the U.S. One‑Dollar Note," *Federal Reserve Bank of New York*, (2015).
[69] Lars Sandberg, "Movements in the Quality of British Cotton Textile Exports, 1815-1913," *The Journal of Economic History*, Vol. 28, No. 1, (1968), 2.
[70] John A. Green to William Henry Gregory, June 3, 1861, n.d. *Gregory Family Papers*, Processed by W. Bradford Smith, Stuart A. Rose Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Emory University, Letter 11; Sandberg, "Movements in the Quality of British Cotton Textile Exports, 1815-1913," 2.

this moment, the best thing England can do is to remain quietly neutral, but to prepare to act in case the blockade, or the proceedings of the North, seem calculated to interfere with our supply of cotton."[71] Cowell's statement not only showcases the initial uncertainty surrounding British policy but also suggests an early willingness among certain British industrialists to consider intervention if their economic conditions worsened. Moreover, it foreshadows later debates over whether economic hardship might justify aiding the Confederacy, an issue that Parliament would eventually be forced to consider.

The Lancashire Cotton Famine was caused by two consecutive factors, the Confederates' preemptive refusal to export their cotton in an attempt to force British recognition of the South followed by the Union blockade. As Mann explained to Gregory, in the summer of 1861, New Orleans had issued a directive instructing their planters to withhold cotton from the port city in an effort to restrict exports.[72] Mann also correctly asserts that this self-imposed embargo would likely impact the profitability of both the mills of New England and the British economy, destabilizing Europe.[73]

"King Cotton" was quite effective in harming British prosperity of both the lower and upper classes alike. More specifically, with limited cotton to manufacture, mills were shut down, workers were laid off and for those who were still employed, both hours and pay were greatly reduced.[74] Additionally, merchants hoarded their cotton in anticipation of rising prices,

---

[71] John Cowell to William Henry Gregory, June 5, 1861, n.d. *Gregory Family Papers*, Processed by W. Bradford Smith, Stuart A. Rose Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Emory University, Letter 10.

[72] Ambrose Dudley Mann to William Henry Gregory, August 19 , 1861, n.d. *Gregory Family Papers*, Processed by W. Bradford Smith, Stuart A. Rose Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Emory University, Letter 14.

[73] Mann, letter to Gregory, 14.

[74] Rawley, *Turning Points of the Civil War*, 102.

exacerbating and lengthening the depression.[75] The *Gregory Family Papers* suggests that this 1861 economic disruption was done in effort to shift the British attention towards economic grievances. Cowell argues that "the auxiliary causes of the Southern alienation (the slavery question, extension of territory, etc.) have nothing to do with the real cause of the alienation," and tries to point to tariffs and laws that affected the commerce between England and the Southern United States as the driving motivations behind secession and the resulting Civil War.[76]

This argument exemplifies a broader Confederate propaganda effort aimed at gaining British sympathy by framing the conflict as an economic dispute rather than a slavery-centric moral struggle. By emphasizing trade disruptions and economic hardship, Confederates were attempting to make the South more palatable to the abolitionist English parliament and general public. This strategy sought to portray the Union as the true aggressor, disrupting transatlantic commerce and harming British industry.

From the Confederates' perspective, this tactic meshed well with the second major cause of the Lancashire Cotton Famine: the Union Blockade. Although President Lincoln officially proclaimed the blockade in April of 1861, it did not firmly set in until later that year and was strengthened significantly in 1862 and 1863.[77] By then, the blockade had shut down a sizable portion of total Confederate exports, including vast quantities of cotton, by preventing ships from leaving major port cities.[78] This drastic reduction in trade frustrated British merchants and politicians, especially conservatives who viewed the blockade as an unjustified intervention in international commerce. John A. Green, a member of the British government writing to Gregory

---

[75] Narron, and Morgan, "Crisis Chronicles: The Cotton Famine of 1862-63 and the U.S. One-Dollar Note."
[76] Cowell, letter to Gregory, 10.
[77] Michael Bonner, and Peter McCord, *The Union Blockade in the American Civil War: A Reassessment*. (The University of Tennessee Press, 2021), 2.
[78] Bonner, and McCord, *The Union Blockade in the American Civil War: A Reassessment*, 2.

in Letter 11, expressed this aggravation, stating, "we should say we have a right to unfettered trade with the South, and if any exercise of war power interferes with it, the whole nation will rise & demand of the government to exert our power to protect us in the enjoyment of our rights."[79] The Union Blockade had, in part, transformed this Civil War into an international economic crisis, forcing Britain to navigate between its commitment to free trade and its powerful moral opposition to slavery.

As the blockade remained in place, the English economy continued to sputter, with the cotton famine persisting well into the latter part of the war. An 1864 article in the long-running British magazine *The Spectator* details that workers, unable to pay their rents, were driven out of Lancashire.[80] Meanwhile, mill businesses, many of which had purchased their manufacturing machines with lended money, went bankrupt and defaulted on their loans, resulting in a cascading downturn in the larger British economy.[81] The crisis became so severe that relief funds, including the Manchester Central Committee, were established to provide aid, with soup kitchens constructed to feed the unemployed.[82]

Southern statesmen, fully aware of Britain's dependence on cotton and the enduring economic disaster, believed the famine would force England to intervene on their behalf. As Hunter wrote to Gregory in 1863, "the Southern planters and leaders in authority are absolutely persuaded that the return of the old Union is impossible, and that England will ultimately be forced into the policy of intervention in order to save her own interests."[83] This perspective is

---

[79] John A. Green to William Henry Gregory, June 3, 1861, n.d. *Gregory Family Papers*, Processed by W. Bradford Smith, Stuart A. Rose Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Emory University, Letter 11.
[80] "The Facts of the Cotton Famine," *The Spectator*, August 13th, 1864.
[81] "The Facts of the Cotton Famine."
[82] "The Facts of the Cotton Famine."
[83] Robert M.T. Hunter to William Henry Gregory, February 20, 1863, n.d. *Gregory Family Papers*, Processed by W. Bradford Smith, Stuart A. Rose Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Emory University, Letter 50.

emblematic of the overall Confederate diplomatic paradigm as it reinforces the idea that Britain's economic well-being was inseparably tied to the South's survival, notably showing how Europeans still benefited indirectly from slavery. By exploiting economic hardship as a diplomatic tool, Confederate leaders hoped to pressure Britain into recognizing their independence or even intervening against the Union blockade.

Despite the hopes of the Confederate leaders and emissaries, "King Cotton" diplomacy was unsuccessful, and Britain never challenged the Union's tight blockade of the Confederacy. As mentioned above, Southern supporters in these letters had several goals that they were unsuccessful in achieving, highlighting the driving forces behind the failure of the Confederates' economical diplomatic strategy. One of their primary objectives appeared to be to shift the war's narrative away from slavery and toward financial concerns. Nevertheless, they made little progress in accomplishing this, as many in Britain, particularly after Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation, correctly identified the war as a struggle for abolition.[84]

Even for those who did consider the war in economic terms, there were still significant obstacles to the Confederate argument that the *Gregory Family Papers* are able to present to this historiographical discussion.[85] For instance, the Hunter letter introduces a new dimension by acknowledging that the economic arguments for British intervention were still inherently tied to slavery. Hunter expresses the belief that the war is "becoming more and more a contest between two opposing economic systems, the manufacturing and industrial system of the North and the agricultural and slave-based economy of the South."[86] This observation underscores an immense contradiction in Confederate diplomacy. While Southern advocates sought to present the war as a purely economic issue that threatened British industry, Hunter's framing revealed the inescapable

[84] Blackett, *Divided Hearts: Britain and the American Civil War*, 22.
[85] Campbell, *English Public Opinion and the American Civil War*, 31.
[86] Hunter, letter to Gregory, 50.

reality that the South's economy itself was built on slavery. As a result, whether intentional or not, his conclusion emphasizes the fact that the European cotton economy was completely reliant on enslaved labor. This was a connection that would make it increasingly difficult for British leaders and the public, especially the industrial working class, many of whom supported abolitionist ideals, to separate economic concerns from the moral and political implications of supporting the South.[87]

Additionally, Hunter's acknowledgment played directly into the arguments of British abolitionists who opposed intervention. This is particularly evident in the Manchester Cotton Mill Boycott discussed above. By refusing to process southern cotton, these industrial workers demonstrated solidarity with the Union and their abolitionist aims, and they showed how "King Cotton" could backfire. Before secession, these workers had no apparent issue processing cotton produced by enslaved labor, but once the war made the moral stakes more evident, their strong resistance undermined the South's economic leverage and further reinforced British neutrality. The fact that mill workers, among the people most directly impacted by the cotton famine, prioritized moral opposition to slavery over immediate economic relief was a major public relations victory for the North and highlights how Confederate diplomacy ultimately failed to achieve its intended effect. This letter supports the consensus that "King Cotton" was undermined by the growing alignment between British labor movements and the anti-slavery cause.[88]

A final explanation for why the South struggled to push the focus of the war away from slavery is the simple idea that the United States Civil War was, in fact, about slavery. This is certainly not a novel viewpoint, but the correspondence in the *Gregory Family Papers* strongly

---

[87] Blackett, *Divided Hearts: Britain and the American Civil War*, 22.
[88] Blackett, *Divided Hearts: Britain and the American Civil War*, 119.

reinforces this argument.[89] Nowhere is this clearer than in Letter 13, written in 1862 by Mann, where he discusses slavery as the cause of the war rather than abstract ideas of states' rights or economic policies. Mann first presents a highly racist justification for slavery, claiming that prior to the Transatlantic Slave Trade, Africans were poverty stricken and unproductive.[90] He even argues that slavery was a beneficial alternative to African "cannibalism," an assertion that reflects the extreme pro-slavery ideology of Confederate leadership. Moreover, he expresses fear about the future racial demographics of the Confederacy, warning that the Black population could reach 100 million in 300 years.[91] This concern reveals anxiety regarding racial control, demonstrating that the Confederates were not just fighting to maintain slavery in the present but trying to secure white dominance for generations to come.

Additionally, Mann points to the future expansion of the Confederacy as a slave holding power, asserting that "all the slave-holding States, contained in the late Union, will at an early day be embraced within the boundaries of the Confederate States."[92] This statement makes it clear that the Confederacy was built around the institution of slavery and its leaders wanted to expand their influence by uniting these states. He does refer in some respect to states rights but it is only in the context of their right to actually own slaves, indicating that the Confederate government was designed to protect and uphold slavery at the state level.[93] Mann, a high-ranking Confederate statesman, is essentially saying the quiet part out loud: That the Confederacy

---

[89] Dubrulle, *Ambivalent Nation*, 57; Campbell, *English Public Opinion and the American Civil War*, 48.

[90] Ambrose Dudley Mann to William Henry Gregory, September 15, 1862, n.d. *Gregory Family Papers*, Processed by W. Bradford Smith, Stuart A. Rose Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Emory University, Letter 37

[91] Mann, letter to Gregory, 37.

[92] Mann, letter to Gregory, 37.

[93] Mann, letter to Gregory, 37.

believed slavery was legitimate and benevolent and were fighting to keep it, making it abundantly clear that the Civil War was fundamentally about preserving and expanding slavery.

Another objective of Confederate diplomats and British sympathizers was to utilize the larger European economic downturn caused by the war to portray the North as the aggressor, thereby garnering British support for the South. However, secondary sources indicate that many in Britain attributed the war and, by extension, the cotton famine to the Confederacy's decision to secede.[94] Rather than viewing the Union's blockade as an unjustified act of aggression, they held the perspective that it was a reasonable response to Southern rebellion. Moreover, the Confederacy's "King Cotton" strategy was met with resistance, with British citizens offended by the fact that the South assumed they would prioritize economic interests over moral principles.[95]

Despite discussing strategic ways to paint the Union as the aggressor, the *Gregory Family Papers* provide further reasons for Britain to blame the Confederacy for the cotton famine. For example, Mann's correspondence discusses the Confederacy's 1861 self-imposed embargo as triggering the initial British economic shock.[96] Additionally, a separate Mann letter suggests that southern planters also played a role in prolonging the crisis by refusing to send their cotton through the blockade, despite profitable smuggling opportunities to do so.[97] Lastly, the assumption, discussed in Chapter I via the *Gregory Family Papers*, that Britain was moving to side with the South supports the idea that "King Cotton" diplomacy may have been overly optimistic and perceived by the British as abrasive.[98]

---

[94] Campbell, *English Public Opinion and the American Civil War*, 137; Blackett, *Divided Hearts: Britain and the American Civil War*, 22.
[95] Campbell, *English Public Opinion and the American Civil War*, 18.
[96] Mann, letter to Gregory, 14.
[97] Ambrose Dudley Mann to William Henry Gregory, October 22, 1863, n.d. *Gregory Family Papers*, Processed by W. Bradford Smith, Stuart A. Rose Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Emory University, Letter 18.
[98] Mann, letter to Gregory, 14.

A final component of "King Cotton" concerned Britain's ability to procure cotton from alternative sources. The Hunter letter claims "it is manifest that India cannot produce cotton to supply your mills, even a half-time—and that of its short quantity, it is common poor quality."[99] This reflects the key Confederate belief that Britain would be unable to replace Southern cotton with bales from other regions. This theory was certainly not unfounded, as nearly 80% of Britain's raw cotton supply came from America, making a transition into a new pipeline of global trade exceptionally challenging.[100] Furthermore, the cotton staple grown in the South was among the highest quality available, whereas Indian cotton possessed shorter fibers that were more prone to breakage.[101] The differences in fiber length also posed a challenge for British cotton machinery, which had been specifically designed to process the longer American cotton fibers.[102]

Despite these difficulties, Britain adapted with some success by increasing their cotton imports from Egypt and the East Indies, adding approximately a half a million bales from both regions combined.[103] While this increase did not fully compensate for the loss of American cotton, it was able to drive the price down, helping to stabilize the industry and combat economic devastation.[104] Britain preferred to absorb the remaining deficit rather than endorse a slaveholding rebellion, an outcome that those in the *Gregory Family Papers* neither desired nor anticipated, effectively destroying the premise of "King Cotton."

Ultimately, Britain's willingness to seek alternative sources of cotton and endure the economic hardships of the Lancashire Cotton Famine rather than support the Confederacy

---

[99] Hunter, letter to Gregory, 50.
[100] Rawley, *Turning Points of the Civil War*, 102.
[101] Uzramma, "Cotton to Cloth: An Indian Epic," *Textile Society of America*, (2006), 280.
[102] Uzramma, "Cotton to Cloth: An Indian Epic," 279.
[103] David Surdam, "King Cotton: Monarch or Pretender? The State of the Market for Raw Cotton on the Eve of the American Civil War," *The Economic History Review*, Vol. 51, No. 1 (Feb. 1998), 130.
[104] Surdam, "King Cotton: Monarch or Pretender? The State of the Market for Raw Cotton on the Eve of the American Civil War," 130.

underscores the fundamental miscalculation of "King Cotton" diplomacy. Assuming they could successfully paint the Union as the aggressor, Confederate supporters in the *Gregory Family Papers* were still gambling on the notion that economic hardship would trump moral and political considerations in Britain's foreign policy decisions. Yet, as exemplified by the anti-slavery sentiment of the working class, this economic coercion failed to achieve its intended effect. Instead, it highlighted the extent to which the authors of the *Gregory Family Papers* overestimated the indispensability of the South's cotton. The failure of "King Cotton" not only contributed to Britain's policy of neutrality but also signaled a broader shift in global economic power, one that would see the American South lose its near-monopoly on cotton production in the decades following the Civil War.

Chapter III: Reform and Rebellion

In 1832, the UK Parliament passed the Reform Act. This law, formally proposed as "an act to amend the representation of the people in England and Wales," introduced significant changes to the traditional quasi-representative electoral system.[105] The pre-1832 government had been designed so each member of parliament represented a borough. Concerningly, the number of eligible voters in these boroughs varied widely, with the number ranging from several dozen to as many as 12,000.[106] Most boroughs also required an individual to own property or pay specific types of taxes to qualify to vote, which effectively excluded the working class from participating in UK governance. The Reform Act sought to address these disparities by both significantly expanding voting rights and redistributing parliamentary seats to better represent previously marginalized industrial towns such as Manchester and Birmingham.

Changes to the electoral system had finally become law after years of criticism for its lack of fairness and representation. In 1831, a voting rights bill had actually passed in the House of Commons but was defeated in the House of Lords and, in response, there were violent riots and general unrest in towns across Britain.[107] The overdue passage of this act represented a larger push for democracy in the nation and marked the beginning of real change in the electoral system. The decades that followed saw subsequent legislative rulings that by the end of the 19th century had extended voting rights to approximately 60% of all British males.

The reform movement had forced the political establishment to grapple with the changing nature of government, and this dynamic would significantly play into the British perspective on the American Civil War. Hugh Dubrulle, in *Ambivalent Nation*, explores how the broader

[105] "What Caused the Great Reform Act," *UK National Archives*.
[106] "The Reform Act of 1832," *UK Parliament*.
[107] "What Caused the Great Reform Act."

democratic movement in Britain influenced the country's reaction to the conflict. Dubrulle highlights how the Civil War occurred at a period of heightened debate over the impact of the reform bills in Britain, making these issues particularly relevant to public discourse. In the minds of many Britons, America represented an experiment towards heightened levels of democracy, as a larger proportion of its citizens had long possessed voting rights. The reform movement was thus seen as a shift to more Americanized institutions.[108] As a result, liberal reformers tended to support the Union. That being said, some Britons were concerned that the Civil War was exposing the flaws of this "extreme American democracy," shifting their preference for the old conservative political system.[109] Furthermore, many anti-reformists argued that Southerners should be responsible for their own self-governance. They viewed the Southern planter class as akin to the British aristocracy and believed that governmental power should remain in their hands rather than ceding control to the more economically and culturally diverse North.[110]

Chapter III will utilize this complex British political dynamic to help contextualize the argument present in the *Gregory Family Papers* that the Confederacy had the legal right to secession. It will use six letters that explore the nature of this assertion and examine how the authors framed it within British political discourse, analyzing how well the arguments resonated with different sectorss of British society. By situating the *Gregory Family Papers* within this broader historical and political context, the analysis will demonstrate why the Confederacy's legal argument for secession failed to gain traction in Britain despite its forceful attempts to appeal to specific audiences.

The Confederate argument for their "legal" right to secession was straightforward and, in the *Gregory Family Papers*, almost always rooted in some type of constitutional interpretation.

[108] Dubrulle, *Ambivalent Nation*, 174.
[109] Dubrulle, *Ambivalent Nation*, 187.
[110] Dubrulle, *Ambivalent Nation*, 287.

For example, in Letter 6, South Carolina Confederate Representative William Porcher Miles articulates that "it is very difficult for Foreign Nations to understand that the 'United States of America' never were and never are, by the framers of the Constitution, intended to be a 'Nation' at all, but a confederation of separate nationalities, equal, sovereign states united for certain purposes."[111] His perspective reflects the broader Confederate belief that the United States was not an indivisible nation but rather a voluntary collection of states, each retaining their right to withdraw at will. This argument sought to frame secession as not only legal but an absolutely fundamental constitutional principle. By formulating their cause in these terms, Southerners positioned the Confederacy as the true contemporary version of the American Revolutionary tradition, standing as a collection of states that had resisted centralization in favor of local autonomy. Similarly, William Wilkins Glenn, a Baltimore journalist sympathetic to the Confederates wrote in Letter 3, "you can always rely upon it that the course adopted by the Southern current in Congress is based upon protection, usage, precedent, while their opponents have diligently and deliberately violated every article of the Constitution, which in any way interfered with their schemes."[112] This assertion not only reinforced the legality of secession but also implied that slavery was constitutionally protected, establishing any Northern attempt at abolition as an unlawful overreach. The Confederacy, by this logic, was not rebelling but rather defending its rights against Northern aggression.

Additionally, William Yancey, who was appointed by Confederate President Jefferson Davis to lead the first diplomatic delegation to Europe, presented the secession process as one that followed historical precedent. In his letter to Gregory, he equates the Confederacy's decision

---

[111] Miles, Letter to Gregory, 6.

[112] William Wilkins Glenn to William Henry Gregory, August 5, 1861, n.d. *Gregory Family Papers*, Processed by W. Bradford Smith, Stuart A. Rose Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Emory University, Letter 3.

to secede with the thirteen colonies, stating, "each of the Confederate States, but Texas, acted in precise conformity to the action of the original 13 States."[113] Yancey's objective was to emphasize that the Confederacy's independence was not a radical break from governance but a legitimate process. This appeal to constitutional order attempted to align the Confederate cause with Britain's own legal traditions, hoping to garner sympathy among conservative British politicians. Yancey was presenting secession as both an orderly and precedent-backed process, separating the Confederacy's cause from one of revolutionary radicalism and portraying it instead as a legal defense of sovereignty and self-determination.

Finally, Gregory himself echoes this sentiment in a reflection over one of his 1860 speeches to Parliament, in which he supported the Confederacy and voiced opposition to British reform, stating:

> I having recently returned from America, where I had seen the evils of democracy, was as anxious as were the majority, in their hearts, to delay the passing of the measure, or, at all events, to make the change as little violent as possible. Much of my speech, which I had carefully prepared, was illustrative of the evils resulting from the preponderating power of the masses in the United States.[114]

Gregory's statement is crucial because it ties together his skepticism of electoral reform domestically with his support for Southern secession abroad. By invoking the "evils of democracy" in both contexts, he reveals a shared ideological framework between British conservatives and Southern elites, that is, a mindset that prioritized institutional stability, social hierarchy, and the preservation of elite power. To Gregory and his peers, the developing Civil War served as a warning of what could result from unchecked democratic expansion: political instability, social disorder, and the erosion of traditional authority. Thus, the Confederacy's

---

[113] William Yancey to William Henry Gregory, 1861, n.d. *Gregory Family Papers*, Processed by W. Bradford Smith, Stuart A. Rose Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Emory University, Letter 24.

[114] Lady Gregory, *Sir William Gregory, K.C.M.G.:An Autobiography,* (London, 1894), 210.

appeal was not just about constitutional theory, it was a defense of a worldview deeply resistant to the forces of liberal modernity.

Taken together, these constitutional justifications for secession reflect an effort to craft arguments that would resonate with British anti-reformists, those who favored the concentration of political power among the traditional elite. This was an ideology that found a clear parallel in the South's planter class.[115] The interpretation of secession as lawful under the Constitution was thought to hold particular appeal among conservative Britons who valued precedent and institutional stability.[116] In addition, the Southern emphasis on self-governance and opposition to centralized authority reinforced the beliefs of those in Britain who favored aristocratic leadership over expanding suffrage through the 1832 Reform Act. This perspective was particularly strong among members of the House of Lords who held immense power in Britain and had been the primary opponents of electoral reform. The Confederacy's resistance to federal authority closely mirrored their own fight against increased democratization at home.[117]

Furthermore, the Confederacy's judicial establishment of secession allowed British elites to justify their support for the South without explicitly endorsing slavery. Arguments about states' rights and constitutional precedent provided a more palatable rationale for sympathizing with the South, especially in comparison to the extremely unpopular pro-slavery rhetoric.[118] Thus, many conservative Britons, including influential figures in politics and the press, framed their support for the Confederacy as a defense of the right to self-determination rather than an endorsement of forced labor.[119]

---

[115] Dubrulle, *Ambivalent Nation*, 287.
[116] Dubrulle, *Ambivalent Nation*, 195.
[117] Dubrulle, *Ambivalent Nation*, 195.
[118] Blackett, *Divided Hearts: Britain and the American Civil War*, 128.
[119] Campbell, *English Public Opinion and the American Civil War*, 163.

Beyond constitutional interpretations, the Confederacy also declared that it possessed the legal right to secede due to its actions as a fully independent government. It did this by asserting both its political legitimacy and ability to function as a sovereign state. This argument was designed to have general British appeal, attracting both sides of the reform spectrum. In the letters to Gregory, Confederates contend that the process of secession was not a lawless rebellion but a standard democratic decision carried out through established political mechanisms. In Letter 24, Yancey wrote that the "the question of secession was submitted to the people in every State," and informs Gregory that the people overwhelmingly voted in its favor and sent delegates to a convention, mirroring the process of the Presidential election.[120] This comment sought to justify secession as a legitimate exercise of self-determination, much like the reform movement, rather than an insurrection.

The Confederacy also presented itself as a de facto nation from the outset, drawing comparisons between its struggle and past European conflicts. In Letter 49, James Spence argued, "the South was not a protectionist as a nation in words. It was a nation from the commencement. When France made war upon Austria, Austria and all contended for her independence she fought in Italy, as the South had done."[121] This reference is to Austria during the Napoleonic Wars, a nation that Britain had enthusiastically supported.[122] The analogy is comparing the South's cause with European wars of liberation. By positioning themselves alongside these recognized historical struggles, Confederates attempted to strengthen their claim for sovereignty in the eyes of Britain and the larger international community.

---

[120] Yancey, letter to Gregory, 24.
[121] Spence, letter to Gregory, 49.
[122] Barbara Jelavich, *Modern Austria Empire and Republic, 1815-1986* (Cambridge University Press, 1987), 76.

The Confederacy also claimed to govern more responsibly than the North, emphasizing a model of economic restraint and free trade. In his letter to William Henry Gregory, McCann underscored the Confederacy's supposed commitment to limited government and minimal taxation, writing, "we have all to lose and nothing to gain by imposing upon commerce any higher tax than is barely necessary to support our Government."[123] This argument served multiple purposes. Domestically, it reassured Southerners that their new government would not replicate what they saw as the economic overreach of the Union. Internationally, it was a strategic appeal to British policymakers and intellectuals who favored laissez-faire economics, which had similarly been implemented during the reform movement.[124]

By portraying itself as a government that would avoid economic exploitation, the Confederacy sought to contrast its rule with what it characterized as the Northern model, one driven by tariffs, industrial protectionism, and coercion. This was a crucial rhetorical move given that British policymakers had for several decades viewed protectionist policies, particularly the Union's tariff system, with disgust.[125] Confederates thus attempted to frame their secession not only as a legal right but as a moral and economic imperative, one that would create a more just and economically free society.

Arguments for Confederate legitimacy were not without contradictions. While the South invoked democratic processes to justify its separation, it simultaneously maintained a rigidly hierarchical society built on slavery, a fact that undercut its claims to self-determination and responsible governance. Moreover, while Confederates touted their commitment to free trade, their use of "King Cotton" diplomacy and the self-imposed embargo discussed in Chapter II make their claims of independence somewhat hollow. Ultimately, while the Confederacy sought

[123] McCann, letter to Gregory, 12.
[124] Campbell, *English Public Opinion and the American Civil War*, 41.
[125] Campbell, *English Public Opinion and the American Civil War*, 41.

to convince foreign observers that it had the right to secede on both legal and practical grounds, its arguments often reflected an attempt to shape external perception rather than a consistent commitment to stable governance or economic liberalism.

Beyond this hypocritical dynamic and the previously discussed challenge of persuading Britain to support a slaveholding nation, the Confederacy's anti-reform diplomatic strategy failed for several other reasons. First, Britain was an inherently divided nation over the issue of reform, a fact that secondary sources, including Dubrulle, Campbell, and Blackett, all agree upon.[126] While the Confederacy attempted to appeal primarily to wealthy elites and anti-reformists, this narrow focus overlooked the complexities of Britain's evolving parliamentary system. Though not yet a full democracy, Britain was governed by a parliamentary structure in which a growing number of citizens had some political influence, either directly through limited suffrage or indirectly through public opinion and press coverage. Appealing mostly to the aristocracy was not necessarily a sufficient strategy.

Additionally, the political divide within Britain was not as straightforward as some Confederate sympathizers imagined. The notion that pro-reform Britons naturally supported the Union while anti-reformists aligned with the Confederacy oversimplifies the landscape. Even among anti-reformists, there was no guarantee of Confederate support. A particularly obvious example was the prime minister at the time, Lord Palmerston. Despite his staunch opposition to electoral reform, Palmerston was openly very critical of the Confederacy, citing both moral concerns and a refusal to endorse a government founded on the preservation of slavery.[127]

The British press, especially the conservative outlets that the Confederacy hoped would champion their cause, also failed to draw consistent ideological parallels between the Civil War

[126] Campbell, *English Public Opinion and the American Civil War*, 175; Dubrulle, *Ambivalent Nation*, 287; Blackett, *Divided Hearts: Britain and the American Civil War*, 120.
[127] Campbell, *English Public Opinion and the American Civil War*, 167.

and the state of democracy in Britain. While figures like William Gregory made explicit connections between the war and British debates over reform, these views were not widely echoed in major newspapers. As Dubrulle notes, Conservative publications such as *Fraser's Magazine* did not portray the Civil War as a referendum on democratic excess, nor did they consistently frame it in a way that would validate anti-reformist concerns.[128] Without a sustained media narrative reinforcing these ideological claims, the Confederate appeal lacked the public resonance it needed.

Moreover, as the war progressed and the Union began securing additional significant military victories, the momentum of the Confederate anti-reform argument declined further. Rather than reinforcing fears about democracy, the North's eventual successes appeared to inspire reformist sentiments in Britain.[129] According to Dubrulle, some Britons saw the Union victory as a vindication of democratic government, and reform advocacy gained renewed strength in the later years of the war.[130] By 1865, it was not uncommon for pro-reform voices to cite the triumph of the Union as evidence that a government based on broader popular participation could survive internal conflict and emerge stronger.

In 1871, in Letter 81, William Porcher Miles wrote to Gregory, lamenting the state of his country and the consequences of democratic governance, writing "you will see that the "Model Republic" is fast running the career that the unbridled & fierce democracy must always run sooner or later. God grant that dear old Mother England may profit by the lesson taught in the United States, as well as in unhappy France!"[131] His words reveal anger about the result of the

---

[128] Dubrulle, *Ambivalent Nation*, 148.
[129] Dubrulle, *Ambivalent Nation*, 190.
[130] Dubrulle, *Ambivalent Nation*, 218.
[131] William Porcher Miles to William Henry Gregory, May 4th, 1871, n.d. *Gregory Family Papers*, Processed by W. Bradford Smith, Stuart A. Rose Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Emory University, Letter 81.

Civil War and continued hope that Britain, particularly its elites, would view the American Civil War as a cautionary tale about the dangers of mass democracy. Yet this ideological appeal had already failed. The Confederacy's strategy of aligning itself with British anti-reformism faltered not only because of moral contradictions but also because of political miscalculations. The argument that the South represented a bulwark against democratic radicalism did not resonate widely, and by the end of the war, it was the Union, not the Confederacy, that had become the more compelling symbol of constitutional endurance and political progress.

Conclusion

One of the final letters in the *Gregory Family Papers*, dated June 29, 1877, provides a somber epilogue from William Porcher Miles. Writing to Gregory, he reflects, "I take it for granted you are still a warm friend of the South. I know how you exposed yourself to ridicule for your consistent & manly sympathy with the Confederacy. I hope you have not changed. There is no fault to criticise in our attitude, & surely some appeal of the great & just cause on behalf of those so sorely tried.[132] Miles' words, deeply steeped in nostalgia, details a lingering hope that the Confederate cause remained morally defensible and persuasive abroad. His claim that there was "no fault to criticise" Southern foreign policy showcases a refusal to acknowledge the political realities that had shaped the war's outcome. Furthermore, the phrase "some appeal of the great & just cause" romanticizes the Confederacy's defeat, casting it as a noble and righteous struggle. In doing so, Miles illustrates a lost cause diplomatic worldview that remained tethered to outdated assumptions and refused to evolve with changing political contexts.

Even more than a decade after Appomattox, Miles still believed that the South's struggle could be vindicated on the international stage. His letter reveals how deeply Confederate agents invested in a transatlantic alliance that never materialized and how difficult it was for them to accept the moral divergence that had come to define Britain's position. His tone, marked by resignation, is haunted by the memory of a lost war and an alliance that never came to be.

This letter is emblematic of how, taken together, the correspondences in the *Gregory Family Papers* detail a diplomatic campaign fraught with misplaced confidence, selective reporting, and fundamental misreads of both the American conflict and British political

[132] William Porcher Miles to William Henry Gregory, June 29th, 1877, n.d. *Gregory Family Papers*, Processed by W. Bradford Smith, Stuart A. Rose Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Emory University, Letter 83.

sentiment. Confederate envoys repeatedly relied on exaggeration and overly optimistic rhetoric to maintain morale and persuade foreign allies, narratives that were passed along to Gregory and spread through British political circles. Their strategy of appealing to Britain's economic dependence on Southern cotton ultimately backfired. Likewise, invoking shared ideals of aristocratic order proved insufficient. In a country where the press, Parliament, and public opinion had been increasingly shaped by anti-slavery sentiment and liberal reform, such strategies fell flat, reinforcing rather than challenging Britain's commitment to neutrality.

Yet perhaps the most interesting insight from this study lies in what the *Gregory Family Papers* say about the challenges of transatlantic alignment. These letters show that Confederate agents were not merely seeking formal recognition, they were attempting to persuade Britain that the Confederate worldview, built on the cotton economy and resistance to democratic reform, was compatible with British imperial dominance and tradition. This effort to manufacture connections across the Atlantic failed, not only because it purposefully ignored slavery's central role in the Southern cause but also because it depended on a static and outdated understanding of British society. While the Confederacy pitched itself as a guardian of constitutional liberty and elite governance, Britain in the 1860s was slowly evolving into something else: a state influenced by rising liberalism, working-class political consciousness, and a moral opposition to slavery.

Ultimately, this thesis underscores that the Confederacy's diplomatic shortcomings were not just the product of Union military dominance, but also the consequence of a series of self-inflicted strategic failures. The *Gregory Family Papers* offer critical insight into this history by documenting the beliefs, strategies, and eventual frustrations of those most committed to

securing British support. In doing so, the letters reveal how deeply ideology can shape and, alternatively, undermine diplomacy.

Bibliography

Primary:

Benjamin, J.P. Letter to William Henry Gregory. November 8, 1862. *Gregory Family Papers*. Processed by W. Bradford Smith. Stuart A. Rose Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Emory University. Letter 39.

Cobden, Richard. Letter to William Henry Gregory. July, 1863. *Gregory Family Papers*. Processed by W. Bradford Smith. Stuart A. Rose Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Emory University. Letter 59.

Cowell, John. Letter to William Henry Gregory. June 5, 1861. *Gregory Family Papers*. Processed by W. Bradford Smith. Stuart A. Rose Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Emory University. Letter 10.

Glenn, William Wilkins. Letter to William Henry Gregory. August 5, 1861. *Gregory Family Papers*. Processed by W. Bradford Smith. Stuart A. Rose Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Emory University. Letter 3.

Green, John A. Letter to William Henry Gregory. June 3, 1861. *Gregory Family Papers*. Processed by W. Bradford Smith. Stuart A. Rose Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Emory University. Letter 11.

Gregory, Lady. *Sir William Gregory, K.C.M.G.: An Autobiography*. London, 1894.

Heth, Henry. Letter to J. William Jones. June 1877. *Southern Historical Society Papers*. pp. 153-54.

Hoetze, Henry. Letter to William Henry Gregory. August 1, 1863. *Gregory Family Papers*. Processed by W. Bradford Smith. Stuart A. Rose Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Emory University. Letter 34.

Hunter, Robert M.T. Letter to William Henry Gregory. February 20, 1863. *Gregory Family Papers*. Processed by W. Bradford Smith. Stuart A. Rose Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Emory University. Letter 50.

Lawley, Francis. Letter to William Henry Gregory. October 23, 1861. *Gregory Family Papers*. Processed by W. Bradford Smith. Stuart A. Rose Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Emory University. Letter 20.

Lawley, Francis. Letter to William Henry Gregory. September 22, 1862. *Gregory Family Papers*. Processed by W. Bradford Smith. Stuart A. Rose Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Emory University. Letter 38.

Lawley, Francis. Letter to William Henry Gregory. September 16, 1863. *Gregory Family Papers*. Processed by W. Bradford Smith. Stuart A. Rose Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library. Emory University. Letter 63.

Lincoln, Abraham. Letter to the Working People of Manchester. January 19, 1863. *Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln*. University of Michigan.

Mann, Ambrose Dudley. Letter to William Henry Gregory, August 8, 1861. *Gregory Family Papers*. Processed by W. Bradford Smith. Stuart A. Rose Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Emory University. Letter 13.

Mann, Ambrose Dudley. Letter to William Henry Gregory. August 19 , 1861. *Gregory Family Papers*. Processed by W. Bradford Smith. Stuart A. Rose Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Emory University. Letter 14.

Mann, Ambrose Dudley, Letter to William Henry Gregory, August 29, 1861. *Gregory Family Papers*. Processed by W. Bradford Smith. Stuart A. Rose Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Emory University. Letter 15.

Mann, Ambrose Dudley. Letter to William Henry Gregory. October 22, 1863. *Gregory Family Papers*. Processed by W. Bradford Smith. Stuart A. Rose Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Emory University. Letter 18.

Mann, Ambrose Dudley. Letter to William Henry Gregory. September 15, 1862. *Gregory Family Papers*. Processed by W. Bradford Smith. Stuart A. Rose Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Emory University. Letter 37.

Mann, Ambrose Dudley. Letter to William Henry Gregory. June 22, 1863. *Gregory Family Papers*. Processed by W. Bradford Smith. Stuart A. Rose Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Emory University. Letter 56.

Mason, James Murray. Letter to William Henry Gregory. January 4, 1863, *Gregory Family Papers*. Processed by W. Bradford Smith. Stuart A. Rose Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Emory University. Letter 46.

McCann, James. Letter to William Henry Gregory. March 5, 1861. *Gregory Family Papers*. Processed by W. Bradford Smith. Stuart A. Rose Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Emory University. Letter 12.

Miles, William Porcher. Letter to William Henry Gregory. May 14, 1861. *Gregory Family Papers*. Processed by W. Bradford Smith. Stuart A. Rose Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Emory University. Letter 6.

Miles, William Porcher. Letter to William Henry Gregory. June 25, 1870. *Gregory Family Papers*. Processed by W. Bradford Smith. Stuart A. Rose Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Emory University. Letter 77.

Miles, William Porcher. Letter to William Henry Gregory. May 4th, 1871. *Gregory Family Papers*. Processed by W. Bradford Smith. Stuart A. Rose Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Emory University. Letter 81.

Miles, William Porcher. Letter to William Henry Gregory. June 29th, 1877. *Gregory Family Papers*. Processed by W. Bradford Smith. Stuart A. Rose Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Emory University. Letter 83.

Parliament Meeting. London. June 30, 1863, *Resolution*, vol. 171, pp. 1771-1841

Parliament Meeting. London. July 10, 1863. *Resolution*, vol. 172, pp. 554-571.

Rutherford, John. Letter to William Henry Gregory. May 12, 1863. n.d. *Gregory Family Papers*. Processed by W. Bradford Smith. Stuart A. Rose Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Emory University. Letter 54.

Spence, James. Letter to William Henry Gregory. August 8, 1863, *Gregory Family Papers*. Processed by W. Bradford Smith. Stuart A. Rose Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Emory University. Letter 44.

Spence, James. Letter to William Henry Gregory. January 23, 1863, *Gregory Family Papers*. Processed by W. Bradford Smith. Stuart A. Rose Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Emory University. Letter 49.

Spence, James. Letter to William Henry Gregory. May 31, 1863. *Gregory Family Papers*. Processed by W. Bradford Smith. Stuart A. Rose Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Emory University. Letter 55.

The Spectator, 1864.

Unnamed. Letter William Henry Gregory, 1862, *Gregory Family Papers*. Processed by W. Bradford Smith. Stuart A. Rose Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Emory University. Letter 29.

Yancey, William. Letter to William Henry Gregory. 1861. *Gregory Family Papers*. Processed by W. Bradford Smith. Stuart A. Rose Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Emory University. Letter 24.

Secondary:

Blackett, R. J. M. *Divided Hearts: Britain and the American Civil War*. Louisiana State University Press, 2001.

Bonner, Michael, and McCord, Peter. *The Union Blockade in the American Civil War: A Reassessment*. The University of Tennessee Press, 2021.

Center for the Study of the Legacies of British Slavery. "John Cowell," *Profile & Legacies Summary*, Accessed March 20th, 2025. http://wwwdepts-live.ucl.ac.uk/lbs/person/view/2146634202

Crook, David. *Diplomacy During the American Civil War*. John Wiley & Sons Inc, 1976.

Dubrulle, Hugh. *Ambivalent Nation: How Britain Imagined the American Civil War*. Louisiana State University Press, 2018.

Goolrick, William. *Rebels Resurgent: Fredericksburg to Chancellorsville*. Time Life, 1985.

Jelavich, Barbara. *Modern Austria Empire and Republic, 1815-1986*. Cambridge University Press, 1987.

Jenkins, Brian. *Sir William Gregory of Coole: The Biography of an Anglo-Irishman*. Colin Smythe LTD, 1986.

Lepore, Jill. "Historians Who Love Too Much: Reflections on Microhistory and Biography." *The Journal of American History* 88, No. 1 (Jun, 2001): 129-144. https://www.jstor.org/stable/2674921

Narron, James, and Morgan, Donald. "Crisis Chronicles: The Cotton Famine of 1862-63 and the U.S. One-Dollar Note." *Federal Reserve Bank of New York*, (2015).

Rawley, James. *Turning Points of the Civil War*. University of Nebraska Press, 1989.

Sandberg, Lars. "Movements in the Quality of British Cotton Textile Exports, 1815-1913." *The Journal of Economic History*, Vol. 28, No. 1, (1968): 1-27.

Surdam, David. "King Cotton: Monarch or Pretender? The State of the Market for Raw Cotton on the Eve of the American Civil War." *The Economic History Review*, Vol. 51, No. 1 (Feb. 1998), 113-132.

Uzramma. "Cotton to Cloth: An Indian Epic." *Textile Society of America*, (2006): 276-284.