SAMUEL A'COURT ASHE:
NORTH CAROLINA REDEEMER,
1840-1894

A Thesis

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the Faculty of the Department of History

East Carolina University

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts in History

by

Ronnie Wayne Faulkner

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Ronnie Wayne Faulkner. SAMUEL A'COURT ASHE: NORTH CAROLINA REDEEMER, 1840-1894. (Under the direction of Joseph F. Steelman) Department of History, September 1975.

The purpose of this study is to evaluate Samuel A. Ashe as a North Carolina Bourbon who reflected the Redeemer mentality and philosophy. Ashe, a soldier, lawyer, legislator, and editor, was prominent in postwar state politics from 1870 to 1894. In politics Ashe was an extremely partisan conservative and intransigent defender of the Democratic party.

Born near Wilmington in 1840, Ashe was the son of a secessionist congressman and railroad president, William S. Ashe. He was first educated in the local school and later attended Abbott's Classical Academy, Rugby Academy, and the United States Naval Academy (1855-1858). At the Naval Academy Ashe became a close friend of Alfred Thayer Mahan and the two men continued a life-long correspondence. Ashe due to seasickness left the Academy to study law.

At the outbreak of the Civil War he enlisted in the Confederate Army and soon rose to the rank of captain and assistant adjutant-general to Brigadier General William D. Pender's brigade, a component of A. P. Hill's "Light Division." Ashe was captured at the Second Battle of Manassas, but was soon released in a prisoner exchange and eventually served at Fort Wagner and the Fayetteville Arsenal.

After the war, he worked at odd-jobs and finally got his license to practice law in North Carolina. Soon thereafter, in 1870, he was elected to the legislature as a Conservative member from the Wilmington

district. In the legislature Ashe proved himself a partisan Conservative and became an expert on questions of state debt and finance. He was a strong proponent of the impeachment of Governor William Woods Holden.

After one legislative term, Ashe entered the law firm of Augustus S. Merrimon, United States senator, and Thomas C. Fuller. He remained with the firm until 1879 and in that time was editorially associated with Blasting Powder (1872) and the Raleigh Evening Crescent (1874).

In 1876 the Conservative lawyer was elected secretary of the State Democratic Executive Committee and in 1878 he became chairman, but was displaced in 1880 by the forces of Governor Thomas J. Jarvis. In the meantime he had become editor of the Raleigh Observer which was consolidated with the News in 1880 to form the News and Observer. Ashe remained the state's leading Bourbon editor for fourteen years.

As an editor he became the great defender of entrenched Redeemer supremacy. He fought the rising tide of independentism in the 1880's and also fought such editorial contemporaries as Walter Hines Page and Josephus Daniels. His greatest struggle, however, was with Leonidas L. Polk, editor of the Progressive Farmer and president of the National Farmers' Alliance and Industrial Union. From 1890 to 1894, Ashe became the outspoken enemy of compromise with the Alliance and the Populists. Such a position led to the election of the Fusionist legislature of 1894.

The year 1894 also saw the end of Ashe's editorial career due to the panic of 1893 and his own financial inability. The editor, however, lived on for many years and remained active until his death in 1938.

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CHAPTER I
ASHE IN PERSPECTIVE

In any consideration of the Redeemers, or of Bourbonism, one is always aware that individuals by their collective efforts formulated the policy of retrenchment. In the post-Civil War decades few men in North Carolina became more intimately associated with Bourbonism than Samuel A'Court Ashe. R. D. W. Connor, the noted historian, said of Ashe: "As soldier, jurist, legislator, and editor, he himself contributed largely and permanently to the greatness of the State. . . ." and "future historians will give Captain Ashe's political services to the State high rank. . . ."[1]

When one examines Ashe's career it is easy to see the basis for Connor's high estimation of his place in the history of North Carolina. Born in 1840 into a family long established in the annals of the state, Ashe was expected to live up to the family name and serve North Carolina. His life spanned almost a century, but the Civil War and Reconstruction left a lasting imprint on his formative mind. In the decades of Democratic rule of the state he exerted his greatest influence on politics as an advocate of Bourbon principles. Ashe embodied the very essence and mentality of the Redeemer. Even in his old age his historical writing reflected the esteem in which he held the Redeemers and the righteousness he saw in the lost cause.

This study is concerned with Ashe's development from his birth in 1840 to his journalistic demise in 1894 and the role he played as

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[1] R. D. W. Connor, "S. A. Ashe, Historian of North Carolina," North Carolina Historical Review, III (January, 1926), 132, 133.

a Bourbon leader who reflected the Redeemer philosophy. To understand the meaning of redemption it is necessary to understand the philosophy and motivations behind Redeemer actions. Few men provide a better insight into these aspects of Bourbonism than Samuel A. Ashe.

Ashe, throughout his life, was associated with men of influence. In his formative years he lived in Washington with his father, a Democratic congressman of the secessionist persuasion. There he became associated with the great issues that were ripping the nation apart and that were threatening the foundations of southern society. The young Ashe was temporarily removed from the world of conflict when he attended the United States Naval Academy where he came to know Alfred T. Mahan who became a life-long friend.

The Civil War, the most shattering event in Ashe's life, was a struggle that Ashe entered with supreme optimism and hope. He departed the struggle maturer but embittered and, in the years that followed, the Republican party took the brunt of his venom. He never forgot nor forgave the role of the Republicans in the war and its aftermath.

Reconstruction, if it did anything, convinced him of the evils of Radical rule. From that time on he interpreted politics in North Carolina as a struggle between Anglo-Saxon civilization, represented by the Democratic party, and what he termed "African barbarism," represented by the Republicans. Thus, when he was elected to the state legislature in 1870, he stood by the white man's party and fought what he considered the dangers of a return to Radicalism.

His greatest role in the post-Reconstruction politics of the state was as editor of the Raleigh News and Observer which, under his

direction, became the voice of entrenched Bourbon conservatism. At every election he called the faithful to the polls with an almost religious fervor. His political faith was simple: Individual preference must always yield at the time of decision in the interest of the continued supremacy of the white race. Any man who left the party ranks was a deserter and a traitor. The punishment for those who departed from the "true doctrine" was excommunication—a terrible separation from Democratic political salvation.

Ashe, a leading Democratic editor for fourteen years, came to hold absolute political views and looked with disfavor on political independence or any kind of deviation from the party line. He was uncomfortable with young and progressive editors like Walter Hines Page and Josephus Daniels who represented the new breed of journalists. But where he was disconcerted by Page and Daniels, he was completely unhorsed by the possibilities represented by Leonidas L. Polk, president of the National Farmers' Alliance and Industrial Union. By virtue of his editorial battle with Polk, Ashe gained his first degree of national attention and he was always proud to claim that it was he who drove the farm leader into the open arms of the Populists. Ashe's stodgy brand of Bourbonism wanted nothing to do with any efforts at "class" legislation for farmers. Thus in his last years as a journalist Ashe came to represent embattled and intransigent Bourbonism in an uncertain retreat before the advancing army of Republican and Populist fusion at the state level. The year 1894 was doubly significant for Ashe: It saw the end of his editorial career and it saw the election of the Fusionist legislature and congressional delegation.

Ashe was significant as a political leader and journalist for he was always close to the scenes of conflict and frequently advised men of influence such as Augustus S. Merrimon and Zebulon B. Vance. Indeed, in Ashe's years as a journalist Democratic politicians in the state habitually turned to the editorial page of the News and Observer so they could more easily discourse on the issues. The Bourbon editor, however, did not live in a vacuum, but was the product of the forces around him. He came to represent a certain type of conservatism—a paradoxical admiration for the virtues of the South's agrarian past combined with a yearning for an industrialized future South. Ashe was moulded by a high estimation of the importance of the family name and its place in the history of the state; but, more than that, he was a forthright southern apologist. Like most southerners he was put on the defensive by the Civil War and he battled valiantly for a lost cause all his life.

CHAPTER II
EARLY YEARS AND MILITARY CAREER, 1840-1865

On September 13, 1840, a second son was born to William Shepperd and Sarah Ann (Green) Ashe, who was but another to bear a name that had long been prominent in North Carolina politics.[1] Born at Wrightsville Sound, near Wilmington, in the state's Tidewater[2] region, Samuel A'Court Ashe was destined to be a spokesman for redemption after the Civil War as his father was a spokesman for secession before it.[3] He was to gain renown throughout the state as a soldier, political leader, journalist, and historian. At his death the state legislature authorized the erection of a monument to his memory on the Capitol grounds at Raleigh.[4] But his contributions to the state he loved made a more enduring monument to the Ashe name than could any memorial of granite and bronze.

Descended from low country aristocrats, the Ashes were a conservative family steeped in tradition and proud of their heritage. This pride in ancestry, in the dignity of the family name, was to be a motivating force in the life of young Ashe. Engrained with a deep

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[1]Samuel A. Ashe and others (eds.), Biographical History of North Carolina: From Colonial Times to the Present (Greensboro, 8 volumes, 1905-1917), I, 66, hereinafter cited as Ashe, Biographical History.

[2]News and Observer (Raleigh), September 11, 1927, clipping in Ashe Family Papers, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, hereinafter cited as News and Observer.

[3]Ashe, Biographical History, VIII, 33.

[4]Heriot Clarkson, "Memorial to Capt. Samuel A'Court Ashe in Capitol Square, Raleigh, N.C." (Raleigh: n.p., April 1, 1941 [copy in North Carolina Collection, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill]), 4.

respect for the past, he often recalled with reverence the family tradition of service to the state. The first of his ancestors to set foot upon American soil was John Baptista Ashe who came from England in 1717 and served as speaker of the lower house of the provincial assembly and as a member of the colonial governor's council. His son, Samuel Ashe, was governor-elect, 1795-98,[5] and was a strong supporter of Thomas Jefferson.[6] Governor Ashe's son, also Samuel, served not only as a lieutenant of the Continental line and a colonel in the War of 1812,[7] but was among the state's notable Federalists. On at least one occasion he spoke for the Federalist cause in a campaign in which his own father was his leading adversary.[8] The esteem in which Samuel A'Court Ashe held these men extended to all members of that hardy English stock who were his ancestors. Of his great-uncle John Ashe, speaker of the General Assembly and outspoken opponent of the Stamp Act, he once wrote that it was said "that there were not four men in London his intellectual superior," and as Ashe pointed out that was "at a time when Pitt, Fox, Burke and others of that splendid galaxy of British orators and statemen gave luster to British annals."[9] Of John Ashe's son, Sam, who fought in the Revolution, he once said that

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[5]The National Cyclopedia of American Biography (New York, 54 volumes, 1898-1973), XXVIII, 9, hereinafter cited as Cyclopedia of American Biography.

[6]Ashe, Biographical History, VIII, 23-24.

[7]Ashe, Biographical History, VIII, 34.

[8]Ashe, Biographical History, VIII, 23-24.

[9]Samuel A. Ashe, "The Stamp Act on the Cape Fear," North Carolina Society of the Colonial Dames of America Addresses (Wilmington, 1926), 71.

he was "a very fine officer . . . and very excellent [in] every way."[10] Thus young Ashe venerated the exploits of his illustrious forebears.

This noble family had for well over one hundred years been situated in New Hanover County where William S. Ashe owned a summer home along the coast and, being a prosperous lawyer, had a "town house" above Wilmington. When Sam was but five, his father bought the country estate of Colonel Edward Mosley[11] and left his law practice to devote more time to the plantation.[12] In later years Sam recalled fond memories of life on this antebellum estate, with its hunting, its servants, and its restrained and aristocratic air. He compared life there to that of the English gentry and said that along the Cape Fear "the people retained many English customs. The owner of a large plantation with his slaves lived very much like the old English squire surrounded by his tenantry." But in addition to the modest patrician life and southern hospitality "that welcomed the coming day," there was in the countryside considerable ignorance of "booklore."[13]

On account of this fact Ashe's early education, in a region where schools were very few, served to deepen his provincial outlook. First taught by private tutors, he later attended the district public school,

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[10]Samuel A. Ashe to Cornelia A. Little, February 26, 1928, Mrs. C. A. Little Papers, Manuscript Department, Duke University Library, Durham, hereinafter cited as Little Papers.

[11]News and Observer, September 11, 1927.

[12]Ashe, Biographical History, VIII, 30.

[13]Samuel A. Ashe, "Old Christmases I Remember, 1845-65; Joyous Holidays in the Antebellum South and Courageous Cheer in War Times," (N.p.: N.p., n.d., unpaged [copy in the North Carolina Collection, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill]), hereinafter cited as Ashe, "Old Christmases I Remember."

of which his father was a trustee, and was there instructed by an aunt, Miss Rosa Ashe. He also received instruction from Giles Teitch, a Robeson County attorney, and probably got some early moral training from his third teacher, a young Presbyterian minister.[14]

Ashe's education was interrupted in 1848 when his father was elected to Congress as the representative of the Wilmington district. At this time Sam was sent to a school in Macon, Georgia for six months,[15] after which he went to Georgetown, a suburb of Washington, where he joined his father. They later moved into the city of Washington, and Ashe always considered it among the finest places to live. While serving in Congress, Ashe arose at 4:30 a.m. to do his preliminary work and tutor his son so that the young Ashe never had to study at night. To this practice Ashe always attributed his life-long good eyesight.[16]

Needless to say, with his father in Congress, Ashe was no stranger to politics. Even while at home on the family plantation, the magnitude of political concerns on the Lower Cape Fear was always apparent to him.[17] By observing his father, Ashe was to learn the first crucial political lessons of his life. Taking his seat in the House in December, 1849, William Ashe immediately aligned himself with the "ultra-southern" wing of the Democratic party and such men as Robert Barnwell Rhett. Doubtless Congressman Ashe had this predisposition as a result of the

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[14] News and Observer, September 11, 1927.

[15] Ashe, Biographical History, I, 67.

[16] News and Observer, September 11, 1927.

[17] Ashe, "Old Christmases I Remember."

apparent Calhoun leanings of his own father, who had been a rabid anti-Jackson man.[18] At this early date the freshman congressman became not only an opponent of compromise on the California question, but he was a convinced secessionist. Though the young Ashe always considered his father "a strong party man," it was not unusual for him to align himself with Whigs against northern Democrats.[19] It is little wonder that Samuel A. Ashe came to view the verbal attacks of northern abolitionists as a threat to the southern way of life. To the day of his death, he always saw a sublime and tragic righteousness in the "Lost Cause."

In 1854, nearing the end of his third term, William Ashe decided not to run for reelection and departed Washington to become president of the Wilmington and Weldon Railroad.[20] He, however, left his son at the home of James C. Dobbin, Secretary of the Navy.[21] Congressman Ashe, a member of the Naval Committee, had been instrumental in securing the position for Dobbin from President Franklin Pierce.[22] At Dobbin's home Ashe furthered his already numerous contacts with prominent figures of the day, many of whom visited the Dobbin residence. Having attended Abbott's Classical Academy[23] and finally Rugby Academy,

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[18] Ashe, Biographical History, VIII, 23-24.

[19] Ashe, Biographical History, VIII, 31-33.

[20] Ashe, Biographical History, VIII, 33.

[21] News and Observer, September 11, 1927.

[22] Ashe, Biographical History, VIII, 32.

[23] News and Observer, September 11, 1927.

1852-54,[24] his position as a protégé of the Secretary of the Navy proved to be a desirable one, for it was of value when he wished to enter the Naval Academy. After his appointment in 1854, Ashe was sent to Oxford Military School in Maryland to prepare for admission to the Naval Academy at Annapolis in the fall of 1855.[25]

When Ashe first saw the Academy in the fall he noted that "a broad walk led to the most pretentious building on the premises—the messhall." The chapel, the recitation hall, the barracks which stretched towards the bay, old Fort Severn where the boys "practiced at the great guns," all were an important part of the young southerner's life for three years. At the time of his arrival, Annapolis was an infant institution boasting an enrollment of 124 cadets, all of whom upon admission were rated as "Acting Midshipmen on probation." There were of course the "Oldsters," midshipmen who attended the Academy prior to taking a "standing examination" for promotion. These men, who had been in the service from five to seven years, "occupied a separate building and were on a different footing from the youngsters."[26]

Ashe was greatly influenced by the array of capable officers and instructors with whom he became acquainted while at Annapolis. Particularly impressive was the Superintendent, Captain Louis M. Goldsborough,

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[24]Albert Nelson Marquis (ed.) Who's Who in America (Chicago, 1899—), XIX, 194, hereinafter cited as Who's Who in America.

[25]News and Observer, September 11, 1927.

[26]Samuel A. Ashe, "Memories of Annapolis," South Atlantic Quarterly, XVII (July, 1919), 197, hereinafter cited as Ashe, "Memories of Annapolis."

six foot two or three, approximately 275 pounds,[27] a man of "immense proportions" who was affectionately referred to by the cadets as "Old Goldy." In later years Ashe remembered him as "a very efficient officer"[28] who gained fame in 1862 when he was made commander of the North Atlantic Squadron with the rank of rear admiral.[29] This rotund though gifted officer was replaced by the very polished Captain George S. Blake. Ashe had attended Rugby Academy with his son, Frank Blake, and Frank was in the class ahead of him at the Naval Academy.[30]

Among the noteworthy officers at the Academy was Lieutenant John Taylor Wood, grandson of President Zachary Taylor and nephew of Jefferson Davis. Ashe admired his great abilities in handling the practice ship Prebel in a storm and was later to hear of his exploits in "several perilous undertakings" as a naval officer in the service of the Confederacy. There was also Lieutenant James Iredell Waddell, a kinsman of Ashe's mother, future commander of the C.S.S. Shenandoah, and a man that was "a hero in the eyes of the young men." The boys were much impressed by his stature, and Ashe remarked that "it was said that he had fought a duel or two before breakfast--and that he limped a little gave color to the report."[31]

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[27]Rosa Pendleton Chiles (ed.), Letters of Alfred Thayer Mahan to Samuel A'Court Ashe, 1858-59 (Durham: Duke University Library Bulletin No. 4, July, 1931), 121n, hereinafter cited as Chiles (ed.), Letters of Mahan to Ashe.

[28]Ashe, "Memories of Annapolis," 198.

[29]Chiles (ed.), Letters of Mahan to Ashe, 121n.

[30]Ashe, "Memories of Annapolis," 198.

[31]Ashe, "Memories of Annapolis," 198.

As in the case of Academy officers Ashe found the instructors at the school to be men of high caliber. Despite what must have been very stringent academic demands, he felt that "the faculty at the Academy were sympathetic with the students. . . ." Seagar, the fencing master, taught him proper consideration for one of the oldest and most worthy of the martial arts. There were such understanding men as Roget, the Spanish instructor, and the elderly Frechman Girault, who had taught Ashe's aunts. But the most notable of the scholars was William Chauvenet whom Ashe "esteemed the most learned man in America," and who bestowed upon the young cadet a tremendous compliment by expressing particular regret at his resignation from the Academy in 1858.[32]

Having a pronounced respect for leadership, Ashe saw his superiors at Annapolis as men to emulate and hold in high regard. Like his ancestors before him, he had a keen awareness of the martial virtues; duty, honor, courage, etc., and, like numerous other southerners, he felt these virtues to be of supreme importance. The romantic Sir Walter Scott mentality of southern aristocrats placed a premium on such military virtues. In the years that followed the Civil War, though Ashe put aside his military garb, he was to pursue his course with the same stubborn determination that he displayed as a soldier. Such were the seeds sown at the naval school; but these seeds were sown not only by his superiors but by his own youthful companions.

Ashe often thought of the capable young men he came to know at the Naval Academy. Of them he said: "They were indeed a fine lot of young men. In particular was my class a good one. It had in it some

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[32]Ashe, "Memories of Annapolis," 201.

very excellent characters." In retrospect his judgment was justified, for his class contained many who were to become outstanding navy officers. Foremost among his friends was Alfred Thayer Mahan who won fame as an admiral and author of numerous Darwinist books on naval expansionism. Among his works were The Influence of Sea Power Upon History (1890), The Influence of Sea Power Upon the French Revolution and Empire, 1793-1812 (1892), Lessons of the War With Spain (1899), Types of Naval Officers (1901), and Armaments and Arbitration (1912). His writings greatly influenced the naval policies of the great powers prior to World War I. A close and life-long friendship was cultivated by Mahan and Ashe; one a New Yorker and the other a southern aristocrat, two more different backgrounds could scarcely be conceived. They did, however, share a common admiration for the military. Ashe found Mahan to be "the most intellectual man I ever have known" and who possessed "a clarity of perception that rendered him distinguished among men of intelligence."[33] Purported to be second in his class,[34] Ashe was no man of small intellectual ability himself, but Mahan came to call him by the misnomer "coot," and dispairing the weakness of Ashe's stomach in stormy seas was to declare him jokingly a "poor miserable God-forsaken heaving North Carolina lawyer."[35] Reportedly this was because Ashe had spoken of Mahan as a "seasick devil." Ashe did not consider Mahan "apt as a sailor," for his ambition, as the young northerner

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[33]Ashe, "Memories of Annapolis," 202-203.

[34]Ashe, Biographical History, I, 67.

[35]Alfred T. Mahan to Samuel A. Ashe, November 28, 1858, Alfred T. Mahan and Samuel A. Ashe Papers, Manuscript Department, Duke University Library, Durham, hereinafter cited as Mahan Papers.

revealed on a cruise in 1858, was "to win renown in his profession through intellectual performance." Mahan sincerely felt that the days of personal heroism such as Stephen Decatur's had passed forever.[36] After Ashe left the Academy, he and Mahan continued to correspond. Their exchanges were interrupted by the Civil War when the two served on opposite sides. In politics they also stood in opposition, for Ashe was a Democrat and Mahan a Republican.

Ashe also associated with George Dewey while attending the Academy. Dewey was first captain of a gun-crew of which he was second captain and, in that position, he learned from the other's experience. Dewey was a year his senior. Ashe saw him as a mature youth who was "thoroughly conversant with his duties, endowed with a quick apprehension, he was rapid, determined, efficient . . . commanding; but he had a kindliness about him. . . ."[37]

Ashe also knew future Admiral Winfield Scott Schley, who was to become a subject of some controversy after the American victory at Santiago in 1898. Though Schley "was always in a good humor" and "had a big warm heart," he was somewhat deficient in academic ambition. But Ashe noted that he "possessed that fibre out of which heroes are made—a purpose to do manly things better than other men."[38] A man raised in the vigorous tradition of southern chivalry could easily admire the type of manliness Schley displayed.

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[36]Ashe, "Memories of Annapolis," 203.

[37]Ashe, "Memories of Annapolis," 207.

[38]Ashe, "Memories of Annapolis," 204.

The development of Ashe's personality was probably more deeply affected by the military aura that permeated his daily life at Annapolis. Every activity was organized around the basic component of the gun crew, consisting of eighteen men, commanded by a first captain and a second captain. Every morning the gun-crews fell in at the front of the messhall for roll call, after which they marched to the chapel for religious services. This completed, they marched back to the messhall, in proper formation, for breakfast. Each person sat in his assigned place and at the assigned table of his crew, with the first captain at the head of the table and the second captain at the foot, which was Ashe's location. During periods of inclement weather the boys would practice at the guns in Fort Severn, but would carry out their planned duties otherwise.[39] So went much of the cadets' day, except for those times when the stalwart future sailors had to take to water.

Having been saved from drowning by a classmate on at least one occasion,[40] Ashe and the water were hardly on the best of terms; but it was during his first cruise in 1858 that he discovered a condition that would seriously impair his functioning as an effective sailor. He became terribly seasick, a state which was persistant with him on rough seas, and one which Mahan would never permit him to forget. Lieutenant James I. Waddell, a relation and fellow North Carolinian, told him, "If I were you damn if I didn't quit."[41] At this stage the robust youth was not ready to call it quits.

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[39]Ashe, "Memories of Annapolis," 198.

[40]Ashe, "Memories of Annapolis," 201.

[41]News and Observer, September 11, 1927.

One might think that Ashe's sailing days had permanently ended with his first attack of seasickness, but that was not the case. In 1858 he went on a rather long cruise on the 22-gun sloop Plymouth. The ship sailed up the Gulf Stream and crossed the Atlantic, entering the English Channel and anchoring at the French port of Cherbourg, where the docks were about to be opened. The young cadets arrived just prior to tremendous festivities and as Ashe later related: "Many thousand French troops were there for the celebration, but we boys looked more at the pretty French girls than on the soldiers." After leaving France the ship was caught in a storm in the Bay of Biscay and the inexperienced Ashe said: "the staunch Plymouth was only a cockle shell in the hands of Neptune."[42] But he gave no account of the effect this must have had on his delicate stomach. Weathering the storm, the ship arrived at Cadiz in Spain where he "saw not only Spanish girls; but the tawny Moors." Ashe always recalled Cadiz when looking at the battery at Charleston "lined with its fine white buildings." After a stop in Madeira, where he was not overly impressed at the sight of an Austrian Duchess who was once reputed "the most beautiful woman in the world," the ship sailed for America. Encountering the seaweed in the Sea of Saragossa, they at last struck the tradewinds homeward. All the while Ashe was supposed to be engaged in learning all an "old salt" should know,[43] and doubtless learned much, but as he made clear: "The spirit indeed was willing but the flesh is weak."[44]

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[42]Ashe, "Memories of Annapolis," 198.

[43]Ashe, "Memories of Annapolis," 198-201.

[44]News and Observer, September 11, 1927.

By this time it was quite obvious to Ashe that his seasickness militated against any further naval career. Though he had already determined to leave the navy, it was rumored that there might be a war with Paraguay, and he was willing to brave the perils of "mal de mer" in order to see action. On behalf of himself and his classmates he wrote a letter to Secretary of the Navy Isaac Toucey stating their desire to serve. The war, however, failed to materialize when the Paraguayan government officially apologized for an attack on an American vessel in the Parana River three years earlier. Ashe decided to return home and enter the legal profession, where many of his ancestors had gained distinction. On October 8, 1858, he wrote his resignation to the Secretary of the Navy and on October 11 it was accepted.[45] As Ashe departed Annapolis he left behind many friends and, at this stage, he was probably well aware of the great schism that was rapidly emerging between the North and South. In less than three years the nation would be plunged into war, and some of the very same classmates he came to know as friends and comrades at the Naval Academy would be fighting against him and the other defenders of Fort Wagner, South Carolina, in 1863.

Young Mahan, as on many former occasions, was voluble with advice upon the departure of his friend from the naval school:

> Sam, take a little advice. Don't gorge yourself with the law, remember that anything like repletion is extremely disgusting. I know your propensities; you could always eat more cake than any of us, and I have no doubt that the law will be equally punished, but take care, although you may not

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[45]Isaac Toucey to Samuel A. Ashe, October 11, 1858 (typed transcript), Samuel A. Ashe Papers, North Carolina Division of Archives and History, Raleigh, hereinafter cited as Ashe Papers.

> immediately feel the effects of your over indulgence, yet in future times, when I will be a hale old Commodore or parson, as the case may be, and you will be—God knows what you will have come to by that time—you will remember my warnings with tears of sorrow.[46]

Summarily ignoring the warnings of a young man he considered to be like unto a brother, Ashe returned home and commenced to "gorge" himself upon the law.

After a period on the family estate at Rocky Point, where the young scholar read assorted works on law and history such as Reeve's History of Common Law and Turner's Anglo-Saxons,[47] he was ready to read law under a capable attorney. He began his study at Haw River under William Ruffin, the one-legged son of Thomas Ruffin, Chief Justice of the North Carolina Supreme Court.[48] Ashe's teacher was "endowed with great faculties"[49] which contributed to his own perception in later years.

The young man's studies were made lighter by the frequent letters he received from his dearest friend, Alfred Mahan, who was still at Annapolis. Friendly and intimate letters were exchanged between the two men relating to such weighty matters as girls and gossip. Ashe, being more stationary, made a point of preserving Mahan's letters, though this did not prove practicable for Mahan. However, one can get a picture of both men through Mahan's writing. Though aware of

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[46]Alfred T. Mahan to Samuel A. Ashe, October 29, 1858, Mahan Papers.

[47]Ashe, Biographical History, I, 68.

[48]News and Observer, September 11, 1927.

[49]Ashe, Biographical History, I, 68.

politics they did not care to discuss such depressing matters in their letters until after the Civil War. The fact that they were in their teens and were unable to vote also contributed to a marked lack of political interest. Like all young men their concerns were primarily of a personal nature, lacking deep philosophical overtones except on a few occasions which served to reveal maturing personalities. On one occasion Mahan wrote: "Who knows how many of us in a year may be of that mysterious throng who sailed from their ports and were never heard of more."[50] Fortunately this did not occur, for Mahan lived over seventy years while Ashe lived almost a century. After Mahan's death, someone, upon reading one of his letters to Ashe, suggested it be destroyed due to its intimate nature. Ashe acquiesced saying: "It hurts me. I hesitate to do it because he signed it 'affectionately'."[51]

In addition to his exchange of letters and his study of law, Ashe was once again in the company of his father, who was able to prepare him for his part in "transportation, manufacturing and industry"[52] as well as law. President of the Wilmington and Weldon Railroad and a rather adept businessman, William Ashe was made for the task. He worked conscientiously for the development of southern railroad interests with other men of his persuasion. At the same time he was extremely interested in politics and served in the state Senate.[53]

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[50]Alfred T. Mahan to Samuel A. Ashe, February 7, 1859, Mahan Papers.

[51]Quoted in Chiles (ed.), Letters of Mahan to Ashe, xiii.

[52]"Address of George Gordon Battle at the Unveiling of the Captain Samuel A. Ashe Memorial, Raleigh, N.C., September 13, 1940," Ashe Papers.

[53]Ashe, Biographical History, VIII, 33.

In a period of increasing political activism, Ashe could hardly avoid the tendency to share both the exaltation and fears of his activist father. William Ashe, who apparently viewed the situation in "Bleeding Kansas" with alarm in 1854, could only see greater foreboding in 1859 with John Brown's raid on Harper's Ferry, Virginia. The fear of slave revolts seemed very real to many southerners, including the Ashes, for they felt that the masses of the North considered Brown a martyr.[54] But the most terrifying threat of all was the rising power of the "Black" Republican party. A coalition of elements hostile to the South's "peculiar institution" and strictly sectional in nature, it was odious to "ultra-southerners" such as the Ashe family.

The year 1860 was singularly important for the Ashe household. Prior to the Democratic Convention in Charleston in April, a group of eminent North Carolinians met at the Ashe home at Rocky Point. At this meeting it was agreed that the state's delegates would support Governor John Ellis for the presidential nomination because, at the time, no nominee acceptable to the South appeared in sight.[55] Governor Ellis also decided to push William Ashe as a possible vice-presidential choice.[56] When the Convention met it was controlled by the more numerous Stephen A. Douglas Democrats of the North and the North

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[54]Samuel A. Ashe to William A. Smith, March 31, 1930, William A. Smith Papers, Manuscript Department, Duke University Library, Durham.

[55]Ashe, Biographical History, VIII, 33.

[56]Samuel A. Ashe, "Events Leading up to Secession, A Review of Conditions as They Existed on the Eve of the Great Conflict," North Carolina Review, May 7, 1911, 13, hereinafter cited as Ashe, "Events Leading up to Secession."

Carolina delegation found it inexpedient to introduce Ellis' name.[57] Besides, the Democrats were in turmoil over the slavery question, which was very sensitive in the South. With the southerners demanding the acceptance of the "rightness" of slavery, William Shepperd Ashe rose and spoke to the convention. As was the case with numerous other southern delegates, he rejected "Squatter Sovereignty" and said if such a position were adopted by the party he would walk out.[58] The northern delegates would never concede a moral "rightness" to slavery and, by force of numbers, they adopted the Douglas position of popular sovereignty, resulting in a mass of walk outs. The northern Democrats went on to nominate Stephen A. Douglas by a simple majority, while the southern Democrats nominated John C. Breckinridge, Buchanan's vice-president.

The Republicans, after three ballots, nominated Abraham Lincoln of Illinois for president, and went further to adopt a strong statement against the extension of slavery. John Bell of Tennessee was nominated by a coalition of old Whigs and Know-Nothings who called themselves the Constitutional Union party. They claimed the supremacy of the Constitution and the Union, while subordinating all other issues in the campaign. Thus the stage was set for the most divisive election in American history.

In North Carolina the election was really between Breckinridge and Bell, though the state's leading Democratic paper, the Raleigh Standard, edited by William Woods Holden, endorsed Douglas. As one might expect,

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[57] Ashe, Biographical History, VIII, 33.

[58] Samuel A. Ashe, History of North Carolina (Greensboro and Raleigh, 2 volumes, 1908, 1925), II, 537, hereinafter cited as Ashe, History of North Carolina.

Lincoln's name did not appear on the ballot in North Carolina. The govenor's race was between John Ellis, the Democrat, and John Pool, a Whig, with the major state issue being the Whig proposition to adopt an "ad valorem" system of taxation of slaves according to value. Despite the interest aroused by the national election, the vote for governor exceeded the vote for president in the state. The vote for governor stood at 59,463 for Ellis and 53,123 for Pool, while the presidential vote was 48,539 for Breckinridge, 44,990 for Bell, and 2,401 for Douglas.[59] On the national level, however, the greatest fear of the South was fulfilled, the Republicans gained control of the executive branch, and William Ashe doubtless considered it only a matter of time before they gained predominance in the legislative branch as well. With the secession of South Carolina in December of 1860, he became "one of the most urgent secessionists in North Carolina."[60]

In retrospect Samuel Ashe said of this momentous period: "The Republicans in Congress were aggressive and would listen to neither Northern Democrats nor Southern Unionists."[61] He spoke thus, as if he were hardly aware that it had been the uncompromising southern attitude that destroyed Democratic unity and led to the resultant belligerence of a new party flushed with victory.

In January, 1861, upon hearing that the Star of the West was sailing from New York for Fort Sumter, Charleston Harbor, South Carolina,

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[59]Ashe, "Events Leading up to Secession," 13.

[60]Ashe, Biographical History, VIII, 34.

[61]Ashe, "Events Leading up to Secession," 13.

the over-zealous Wilmington Light Infantry took possession of Fort Caswell, but Governor Ellis ordered its return to Federal authorities. Despite this event, there was still strong Union sentiment in much of the state. Prominent men in the state were defending the Union. William W. Holden was calling for a "watch and wait" policy, while Kemp P. Battle, future president of the University of North Carolina, was the leader of the Union Club of Wake County. The secession of more southern states notwithstanding, the conservative legislature took no action, for it regarded South Carolina's course as "unwise, hasty and unnecessary, and fraught with evil consequences."[62]

Then came April 12, 1861, Confederate General Pierre Gustave Toutant Beauregard had been given orders to take Sumter by whatever means necessary, while Major Robert Anderson had received orders to hold the Fort and await resupply. Lincoln had pledged that no force would be used, but many took the strong statement issued on the supply of the Fort as a threat. The battery at Charleston, on orders from Beauregard, fired the first shots of the Civil War. Anderson surrendered without any casualties. Lincoln's immediate reaction was to call for troops to put down the rebellion, but Governor Ellis rejected his request and called a special session of the legislature for May 1, by which time Virginia had already seceded. Ashe himself noted a rapid change in public sentiment on the secession question. When the legislature had called for a convention to meet in March 1861, Ashe said that "the agitation was well calculated to arouse Southern feeling

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[62]Ashe, "Events Leading up to Secession," 13.

and make progress against that conservatism which had prevented action. . . ."[63] And it might be added that Ashe's father was among the agitators, but the effort had failed. Now, at the second convention, the Whigs and Democrats presented a substantially united front and voted to repeal North Carolina's ratification of the Constitution. While the convention was still in session and William Ashe, as his son pointed out, was favoring a liberal reform to give Jews the right to hold public office, a communication came from President Jefferson Davis which placed the elder Ashe in charge of all railroad transport of the Confederacy east of the Mississippi. Major Ashe, later to be made colonel in the Quartermaster's Department, resigned from the convention to assume his new duties.[64]

All the while, the young Samuel Ashe noted the passing events with interest, being animated by the same lofty desires for southern independence that animated his father as well as by the same fears of northern aggressions. He said years later: "Conceived in sin and brought forth in iniquity, actual war had been begun by a breach of faith on the part of the malignant Republicans." By calling up troops Ashe felt that Lincoln merely began "the work of drenching America with blood."[65] To Ashe the war was a conspiracy on the part of the "Black" Republican party; a conspiracy to undermine and destroy the

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[63]Ashe, "Events Leading up to Secession," 14.

[64]Ashe, Biographical History, VIII, 33-34.

[65]Samuel A. Ashe, "Oration: General Robert E. Lee, the South's Peerless Soldier and Leader," Johnson Pettigrew Chapter, United Daughters of the Confederacy (Raleigh, 1906), 14.

very foundations of southern society. In fact, this view was to prevail throughout his life and he, though an able historian, would never totally abandon this simplistic approach.

Seeing the threat of war in the actions of the Union, Ashe joined the North Carolina state troops in Wilmington in April, 1861, prior to the state's official secession. He volunteered to Major William H. C. Whiting, Inspector General of the area's Provisional Forces, for the North Carolina troops were not yet integrated into the Confederacy.[66] He was appointed lieutenant of artillery on the staff at Whiting's headquarters on April 28, 1861,[67] but shortly thereafter was ordered to report to Raleigh by Warren Winslow, secretary of the Board of Military and Naval Affairs of North Carolina.[68] He was soon ordered to go to the camp of instruction at Garysburg, North Carolina, for ordnance duty[69] and on May 30 was instructed by Winslow to report to Thomas L. Clingman and accompany him to Richmond.[70] Upon completion of this assignment, Ashe returned to the lower Cape Fear where he remained for some months and was instrumental in preparing the defenses of the area. Though his commission expired on August 20, he received a new order from Samuel L. Fremont, Chief of Artillery in the District of the Cape

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[66]Ashe, Biographical History, I, 67.

[67]"General Orders No. 4," April 28, 1861 (typed extract), Ashe Papers.

[68]Warren Winslow to Samuel Ashe, n.d. (typed transcript), Ashe Papers.

[69]Jas. A. J. Bradford to S. A. Ashe, May 29, 1861 (typed transcript), Ashe Papers.

[70]Warren Winslow to Samuel Ashe, May 30, 1861 (typed transcript), Ashe Papers.

Fear, assigning him to ordnance duty under Captain John C. Winder at Forts Johnson and Caswell.[71] On October 31, Ashe was directed to erect and take command of the battery at "Nixons," on the lower Cape Fear.[72] In August 1861 the state had assigned its troops to the Confederacy without provision for engineer and artillery officers, but Ashe remained on duty without rank or pay until Federal troops captured Beaufort, South Carolina.[73]

Ashe sought an appointment with the regular Confederate army, and Colonel John A. Brown, Commander on the Lower Cape Fear, sent a very complimentary request for such a position to George Davis, future Confederate Attorney General. Before the arrival of new orders, however, Ashe went to the front in South Carolina with a friend, Fred Nash, and there they enlisted as privates in Company I of the Eighth North Carolina Regiment, later known as the Eighteenth North Carolina Troops.[74] The two young men went to the place where "chances of being first engaged were best." Beaufort was something of a disappointment, for though it was occupied by a small group of Union troops "being hospitably entertained by the negroes," there was no apparent intention on the part of the Confederate command to drive the Yankees out. Ashe was full of enthusiasm for the cause, but this was hardly his idea of

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[71]"Special Order No. 2," September 4, 1861 (typed transcript), Ashe Papers.

[72]"Special Order No. 60," October 31, 1861 (typed transcript), Ashe Papers.

[73]Ashe, Biographical History, I, 68.

[74]Ashe, Biographical History, I, 68; Fred Nash to Samuel A. Ashe, March 11, 1867, Ashe Papers.

valiant soldiering.[75]

In February, 1862, Ashe received his appointment by President Davis as a lieutenant in the corps of artillery. Upon reporting for duty, he was assigned to serve under Captain Frederick L. Childs, commander of the Charleston Arsenal.[76] In Childs, Ashe found a man of great ability and admirable character. At the Arsenal, however, chances of seeing combat were somewhat limited, but in June of 1862 the young lieutenant was appointed captain and assistant adjutant-general to Brigadier General William D. Pender's brigade, a component of A. P. Hill's "Light Division."[77] Pleased with his promotion, he departed for Virginia to see his first real action.

The year 1862 was doubly important to Ashe because not only did he reach an important point in his military career, but he also displayed his first active interest in politics. In that year Zebulon Baird Vance was making his bid to become North Carolina's Civil War governor. Not having close contact with his father at the time, Ashe never knew how his father voted in that election, but as for himself he was an active Vance partisan, campaigning for Zeb among his fellow

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[75]Samuel A. Ashe to William K. Ruffin, December 2, 1861, J. G. de Roulhac Hamilton (ed.), The Papers of Thomas Ruffin (Raleigh, 4 volumes, 1918-1920), III, 197-198.

[76]The Secretary of War to Samuel A. Ashe, January 24, 1862 (typed transcript); "Special Orders No. 28," February 19, 1862 (typed transcript), Ashe Papers.

[77]Walter Clark (ed.), Histories of the Several Regiments and Battalions from North Carolina in the Great War, 1861-65 (Raleigh and Goldsboro, 5 volumes, 1901), IV, 551, hereinafter cited as Clark, Histories of the North Carolina Regiments.

troops.[78] In later years Vance and Ashe became steadfast friends and political allies. At the time, however, this was only an interlude before the coming military struggle.

Shortly after taking his position with Pender's brigade, Ashe got his first taste of combat. A. P. Hill's division was placed under Stonewall Jackson's corps and was ordered to the Valley of Virginia, where, on August 9, 1862, they struck a blow at the right flank of Bank's army at Cedar Mountain.[79] The enemy was routed and driven back. This was Ashe's first real encounter on the battlefield and he handled himself superbly. General Pender gave special note of his services in his official report by saying that "Captain Ashe, my assistant adjutant-general, deserves notice for his conduct, being found at every point almost at the same time, cheering the men. . . ."[80]

On August 26 Pender's brigade participated in action at Manassas where Jackson, with a small force of 15,000, was holding General John Pope's army in check. On August 28 the three-day Second Battle of Manassas began and its immediate result was to rout Pope and force him to move "his Headquarters in the Saddle" nearer to Alexandria.[81] Ashe himself was impressed by the Federal drive despite its failure. As he

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[78]Samuel A. Ashe to Zebulon B. Vance, January 17, 1885, Zebulon B. Vance Papers, North Carolina Division of Archives and History, Raleigh, hereinafter cited as Vance Papers, Raleigh.

[79]Clark, Histories of the North Carolina Regiments, IV, 552.

[80]R. N. Scott and others (eds.), The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies (Washington, 70 volumes, 1880-1901), Series I, XII, Part II, 225, hereinafter cited as Official Records (Army).

[81]Clark, Histories of the North Carolina Regiments, IV, 551-552.

later related General Porter's Union corps "made the most determined onslaught of the battle. Indeed, Porter did then as heavy, hard, steady fighting as ever was done at any time by any Federal force." Though Pender's brigade was at first half a mile removed from the fighting "Porter resolutely pressed back the weak Confederate line; every foot was contested, but back it came, until at length the enemy's bullets began to fall thick and fast where we were. Our men lay down, each intent on what was going on at the front and awaiting with impatience the order to move in." The thought that the Federals might take the Confederate position gave Ashe "great pain." However, with the arrival of Longstreet, Ashe's fears were dissipated: "The ecstacy of that moment cannot be described. The exaltation was supreme." The line's advance was ordered, and it was only momentarily halted as it cleared some woods. After a pause the line swept left and captured some Union artillery, while striking a body of Federals to avoid flanking. It was not until something struck his chest, that Ashe became aware of the possibility that he could be killed. With firing all around, his position at the front was a dangerous one. But though it was only a swarm of bumblebees that hit him, he "incontinently ran . . . along the line" while it advanced.[82] For a few brief moments the possibility of death must have disconcerted the otherwise steadfast Ashe.

At half past nine on August 30, the last of the enemy were driven off, and Pender's troops took up positions near a house that had been

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[82]Samuel A. Ashe, "Unusual Experiences as Soldier and Prisoner," Confederate Veteran, XXXV (September, 1927), 341, hereinafter cited as Ashe, "Soldier and Prisoner."

converted into a Federal hospital. As reports of the battle revealed, Pender had penetrated far into the enemy lines and had taken up a position amidst the disjointed, confused, and retreating Union troops.[83] At this point General Pender directed Ashe to return to the old headquarters, report the brigade's position, get orders, and bring up the command's belongings. After reporting to General Hill at twelve a.m., Ashe started back to the front with two couriers, a Negro cook, and a horse for the baggage. Indeed, Ashe might well have made it back to his own camp if it had not been for some directions he was given by some of Longstreet's troops. Taking a short-cut, he came to the crest of a hill and saw some camp fires, and as soon as he saw them he knew that it was no place for him. Returning along the trail he had taken, he later said he was hardly seventy-five feet from Longstreet's force when he was jumped by a group of gun-wielding Federals who seized them whispering, "Hush, not a word." The Union captain told him that they had observed him and his company talking with Longstreet's men and had decided to lay in wait for their probable return. Ashe and his companions were taken to Pope's army, which was "in full retreat." They travelled along a densely packed pike with thousands of troops. Ashe noted that behind him was a German brigade, being constantly reviled by the native troops.[84]

Arriving at Centerville, Ashe was allowed to sleep in a tent until morning, when he was brought before General David B. Birney.

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[83] Official Records (Army), Series I, XII, Part II, 671-672.

[84] Ashe, "Soldier and Prisoner," 341.

The young southerner always considered it a mystery that he was treated so well, but years later he was to think it was because Birney's father may have been an Alabamian.[85] His first encounter with the general was not a pleasant one, for Birney, it would seem, threatened to have some of the prisoners hanged for wearing Union uniforms and carrying American flags to entrap his men. Ashe told him that company flags were of an irregular design and that Confederates might well wear Union clothing out of necessity. He then related that if such deception were perpetrated it should be reported so that it might come to the attention of President Davis, who would act accordingly. When Birney informed Ashe that he failed to report the incident because the Confederate officer involved was a kinsman, the North Carolinian's indignation was aroused. He insulted Birney by denouncing the general's lust for vengeance at the expense of the innocent.[86] However, from Ashe's highly colored account, it would seem that General Birney was not serious in his threat, but may have considered it as a way to elicit some information. In any event, he had no one executed.

Later that day, while in the process of being transferred to General Pope's headquarters, Ashe met a man from Massachusetts with whom he had an interesting conversation. The Federal asked about some relatives in Wilmington, particularly his father. The Union man said that he and his brother often worked in Wilmington during the winter.

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[85]Samuel A. Ashe to Cornelia A. Little, February 26, 1928, Little Papers.

[86]Ashe, "Soldier and Prisoner," 342.

As he related it: "Fall before last, affairs were so excited at the South that we thought it best not to go. . . . Then the war fever took the country. Everybody enlisted. We could not stay at home but fel/l/ in with the others. But had we been at the South, we would doubtless have enlisted on your side." This statement struck Ashe as an unusual declaration to be coming from a Union soldier "in the middle of Pope's army."[87]

When Ashe was brought before General Pope, the Union commander was conversing with some officers and two Germans, whom he took to be princes. After appropriate introductions Pope, looking to Ashe, said: "I will have to ask you to accept parole to report to Washington." At first, obviously thinking of his duty as a prisoner of war, he refused, but Pope insisted: "Why, sir, you must. You see my condition. I cannot spare an officer to go with you. I am even now, this moment, moving my headquarters and I have no officer to send with you."[88] Ashe reluctantly assented, and Pope ordered a pass written for him to get through Union lines. The parole read simply:

> Headquarters, Army of Virginia
> Centerville
> August 31 1862 5 o'clock P.M.
>
> Pass Capt. Samuel A. Ashe Asst Adjt Genl in the service of the so called Confederate States (a prisoner of war) to Washington City to report to Maj Genl Halleck paroled for that purpose.
>
> By command of Maj Genl Pope
>
> Geo. D. Ruggles
> Colonel & Chief of Staff[89]

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[87] Ashe, "Soldier and Prisoner," 342.

[88] Ashe, "Soldier and Prisoner," 342.

[89] "Parole of Samuel A. Ashe," August 31, 1862 (original), Ashe Papers.

Temporarily sent to the headquarters of General William B. Franklin, Ashe was called on by some twenty odd Union officers requesting information about old friends in the Confederate forces. The next morning he was taken to Fairfax station and transferred on a train full of wounded to Alexandria. One Union officer he encountered boasted that he could have shot Stonewall Jackson, but was unwilling to hurt "that extraordinary man." This was ironic in view of the fact that Jackson was mistakenly shot by one of his own men. On the last leg of his journey to Washington, Ashe rode on horseback, with his parole in his pocket, accompanied by a correspondent of the New York Herald.[90]

When he arrived in Washington he was taken to Henry W. Halleck's headquarters; however, the general was in conference with Lincoln, and Ashe never saw him, though he conjectured later that that may have been the evening that they settled the question of returning command of the army to George B. McClellan. On this occasion he got an opportunity to speak with Colonel George Ruggles, the officer whose name appeared on his parole. Ruggles asked the prisoner if he would take further parole to stay at some residence in the city, but Captain Ashe recalled that he rejected this offer because he had no money and besides, he would be subject to insults in a hotel. "You have friends?" asked Ruggles. He answered in the affirmative, but did not care to "direct attention to them."[91]

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[90]Ashe, "Soldier and Prisoner," 342.

[91]Ashe, "Soldier and Prisoner," 343.

After some conversation, Colonel Ruggles sent Ashe with an orderly to provost marshal Todd. Todd had a note in his possession and was in a quandry about what to do with the Confederate captain. He remarked that if it were not for the note he would send Ashe "to some of these damned secesh women round here" because "the town's full of them." At Ashe's request, Todd allowed him to see the note which instructed the officer to make Ashe "as comfortable as you can, but let his quarters be the most secure you have."[92]

Ashe was sent to the Old Capitol Prison by carriage and was there interned as a prisoner of war. The prison contained an assorted lot of common criminals, southern sympathizers, and rebel soldiers.[93] The conditions in the prison were not good, and eventually it had to be shut down after an outbreak of smallpox.[94] However, at the time he entered the deterioration of the place had not progressed to that stage. The conditions were superior to those in most southern prisons, but then of course the North was not strangled by the blockade. While he was there, the prison keeper seemed very interested in Ashe's origins and told him that secessionist women had been asking about him. Ashe told the jailer to tell them he had lived in Washington about 1853, on H Street, between ninth and tenth. Every morning after that he received gifts of fruits, foreign newspapers, and money.[95]

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[92]Ashe, "Soldier and Prisoner," 343.

[93]Official Records (Army), Series II, II, 276.

[94]Official Records (Army), Series II, VII, 1183.

[95]Samuel A. Ashe, "The Treatment of Prisoners in 1864-5," Confederate Veteran, XXXV (April-May, 1927), 142-5, 172-4, hereinafter cited as Ashe, "The Treatment of Prisoners"; Ashe, "Soldier and Prisoner," 343.

One day Ashe was called into the office at the prison and there he saw his cousin and a young woman he did not recognize. The two of them had gotten to see him on a pass obtained through the good graces of the Roman Catholic Archbishop of Washington. According to Ashe the kinswoman threw her arms around his neck and, because there was a Federal officer present, faked sobbing while whispering in his ear her adoration of Jackson, Winder, and other noble Confederates. She whispered that the other lady came as her sister and should be treated as such. It certainly made a colorful tale as Ashe put it: "Necessarily, I had to embrace her, and she had to sob, while I did the kissing." After the war, when asked by a man about this incident, Ashe stated that he remembered it. "Well," declared the questioner, "she was my sister." Dumbfounded as he was by this revelation, he could but think that she was indeed "a good Confederate."[96]

After having been in prison a fortnight, Ashe read of Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation in the newspapers that were delivered to him. He recalled in later years that Lincoln had considered this action as merely a war measure and that if the southern states came back into the union, the status of the slaves would not be changed.[97]

At one time the prison keeper informed him of the death of a prisoner and, as in a former case, he wished to bury him on his own lot in the Congressional Cemetery, though this was strictly forbidden in the regulations. The jailer took Ashe and some other prisoners to

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[96]Ashe, "Soldier and Prisoner," 343.

[97]Ashe, "Soldier and Prisoner," 343.

help bury the man and, trusting in their honor as gentlemen, allowed them to "ramble about the cemetery" as he reportedly went somewhere for a couple of hours. All being southern gentlemen, and not wishing to get a man so sympathetic to the South in trouble, none of them even attempted an escape.[98]

In October, 1862 Ashe received word of his impending release in a prisoner exchange.[99] After he was released from the obligations of his parole, he was landed with some others on the James River, twenty miles from Richmond. It was night when he arrived in Richmond and there a friend informed him of a yellow fever epidemic in Wilmington and the accidental death of his father. This shocking news was the first that he had heard of his father in more than a month.[100]

After having been directed to collect guns by buying them from civilians in early 1862, William Ashe was authorized to raise a legion. This was interrupted because of his duties at the salt works at Wrightsville Sound. Returning from the works in September of that year, the colonel heard of the capture of his son. He procured a hand-car to rush home, some fifteen miles away, and met with a fatal accident when a train without headlights struck him in the darkness. He clung to life for three painful days before succumbing to his injuries.[101]

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[98]Ashe, "Soldier and Prisoner," 343. The Prison Records are not adequate to substantiate the supposed death in Old Capitol Prison.

[99]William Robinson to Capt. S. A. Ashe, October 16, 1862 (typed transcript), Ashe Papers.

[100]Ashe, "Soldier and Prisoner," 343.

[101]Ashe, Biographical History, VIII, 34-35.

This was the sad news that confronted Ashe upon his return from prison. After searching out a place to sleep for the night, he awoke the next morning with a raging fever. He was removed to the suburb residence of William Hill and, after a period of convalescense, was permitted to start home. At Weldon he encountered his brother, John, who was also on his way home from Longstreet's corps. It was an occasion Ashe could hardly forget: "It was a sorrowful meeting, yet we were so happy to embrace."[102]

After a period at home, Ashe resigned his position as captain and assistant adjutant-general to Pender and, under his regular army commission, was assigned ordnance duty as an officer under General Thomas L. Clingman, commander of the Second North Carolina Division, First Military District of South Carolina.[103] It appears that he departed for this new post in February, 1863.[104] The young Lieutenant Ashe had accompanied Clingman to Richmond earlier in the war and they were no strangers. In July of 1863 Ashe was assigned to Morris Island, South Carolina with another ordnance officer, Edmund Mazyck. He was told to make his "habitual station" at Cummings Point and to visit Battery Wagner "as often as . . . duties require."[105] Little did Ashe know how often that would turn out to be.

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[102]Ashe, "Soldier and Prisoner," 343.

[103]Ashe, Biographical History, I, 69.

[104]Samuel A. Ashe to John Judge, February 5, 1863, John Judge Papers, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

[105]"Special Orders No. 260, VIII," July 27, 1863 (typed transcript), Ashe Papers.

The Union assault on Wagner commenced July 10, 1863, and Ashe felt that "the holding of Wagner is one of the memorable events in warfare." Fort Wagner had been constructed in the summer of 1862, one-thousand yards from Battery Gregg on Morris Island, as an added precaution for the defense of Charleston harbor. In the siege that followed the Union landing, it proved to be important in delaying the loss of the port. Immediately after the landing, the Union fleet opened fire on the fort, while the Confederates brought in an additional 1300 men to hold the position against the coming assault. At about 4 a.m. on July 11 the first wave assailed Battery Wagner. Of this futile effort Ashe said:

> The defense was incomparable. When light broke, the blue coats were seen seeking the shelter of the distant hills. Then for five days the Federals erected batteries with the heavy rifled cannon and mortars about sixteen-hundred yards from Wagner.[106]

Some years later, Ashe found out that a classmate of his, F. M. Bunce, had commanded the howitzer launchers in the landing operation, and Ashe commended the "masterly way he handled" the boats.[107]

On July 18 eleven Union ships began to shell the batteries at a rate of twenty shells a minute for around eight hours. Another night attack was repulsed when the advancing Union troops were forced to pass along a narrow beach which was being swept by Confederate artillery. Ashe noted that then "began an incessant rain of shot and shell, and

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[106] Samuel A. Ashe, "Life at Fort Wagner," Confederate Veteran, XXXV (July, 1927), 254, hereinafter cited as Ashe, "Fort Wagner."

[107] Ashe, "Memories of Annapolis," 208, see also Official Records (Army), Series I, XXVIII, Part I, 11.

there were such difficulties in holding the position that evacuation was recommended, and was being favorably considered. . . ," but at this juncture General Beauregard wished to wait until interior batteries, commanding the harbor, could be completed.[108]

During the ordeal, the garrison was changed every third night and provisions, water, and supplies came, under cover of darkness, to Cummings Point where Battery Gregg was located. Ashe and Lieutenant Mazyck, acting as alternate ordnance officers, were responsible for seeing to the removal of debris at nightfall. Ashe at some times worked more than two hundred men as enemy mortar shells came raining down. He took a snatch of sleep whenever he could and on those occasions when he was not on duty. He remarked that "Night and day, with scarcely an intermission, the shells would come, while, generally, with dawn the ironsides and monitors would deliver terrific broadsides, seeking to prevent breakfast."[109] In his report Colonel Lawrence M. Keitt, commander at Wagner, commended Ashe as one of the officers who "worked hard and rendered much service" during this trying period.[110]

As to the accuracy of the Federal fire, Ashe considered it admirable and on one occasion nearly met his death as a result of its precision. Another of his classmates, George C. Remey, was assigned to the naval battery off the coast of Charleston. Whether he had anything to do with the bombardment that almost cost Ashe his life is

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[108] Ashe, "Fort Wagner," 254.

[109] Ashe, "Fort Wagner," 254.

[110] Official Records (Army), Series I, XXVIII, Part I, 465.

uncertain; but, with a characteristic lack of personal rancor for the men in blue, he said that the shelling "was certainly worthy of Annapolis."[111]

On August 2 the last gun of any consequence at Fort Wagner was out of commission, but Ashe assisted in getting a ten-inch Columbiad in working order. The carriage of one of the guns would not operate, and Major Henry Bryan, Assistant Adjutant and Inspector General, was prevailed upon to write a note to Colonel Alfred Rhett, commander of Fort Sumter, requesting that he supply the parts to repair the weapon. When Ashe arrived at Sumter, he found Rhett quite distraught at the damage inflicted on the fort by enemy bombardment. But seeing that he was attended to, Rhett took him back to Morris Island on his own rowboat. When dawn came the Confederates were ready and replied to the enemy fire.[112]

The Federal troops from this point on were very determined to press the attack. As Ashe described it:

> One day was very much like another, unless it was worse. The constant shelling, the scarcity of supplies, the difficulties of the situation, the expediences resorted to, taxing ingenuity to the utmost, and the heavy night work in repairing the damages, the working parties swarming everywhere to restore the parapet, the traverses, and the bombproof, where on one occasion seven feet of sand covering had been displaced. All this tried the souls of men, but I have no recollection of there being a single failure in anyone to do his duty promptly; although the garrison was changed a dozen times while I was there.[113]

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[111]Ashe, "Memories of Annapolis," 209. Official Records (Army), Series I, XXVIII, Part I, 453-488 contains the reports of Col. Lawrence Keitt, commander at Wagner.

[112]Ashe, "Fort Wagner," 255.

[113]Ashe, "Fort Wagner," 255. Keitt's report Official Records (Army), Series I, XXVIII, Part I, 482 confirms Ashe's observations.

He may well not have recalled any man failing "to do his duty promptly," but morale at the fort was another matter. By August 24 the situation was very serious on Morris Island, for Major Henry Bryan reported the "demoralization" of the troops whom he believed were in fear "that Sumter will fall and their retreat will be cut off."[114]

All the while Federal troops were coming ever nearer by digging approach parallels. The enemy being less than five-hundred yards away, attempted to assaults on August 21 and 25, but both failed. By this time, however, communication with the city was interrupted and there were no reenforcements or supplies coming to the garrison's aid. As the Federal trenches came nearer to Wagner the Union troops used "calcium lights" to blind the defenders. They pushed forward until they reached the moat of the fort, and Ashe said they were so near "that I could have tossed a bisquit into their trench." It seemed that "hand-to-hand conflict was imminent."[115] Colonel Keitt reported on the fifth of September that further heavy bombardment would make the fort "almost a ruin." On September 6 Keitt said he could not stay where he was, either he had to attack the enemy, who was only fifty yards away, or withdraw.[116] On that evening General Beauregard issued orders for the evacuation of the fort.[117] That night all the men were evacuated, but, Ashe, having been relieved two days before, was not on

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[114] Official Records (Army), Series I, XXVIII, Part I, 412.

[115] Ashe, "Fort Wagner," 255-256.

[116] Official Records (Army), Series I, XXVIII, Part I, 482-483.

[117] Official Records (Army), Series I, XXVIII, Part I, 106.

hand for the operation. The fort held out for fifty-eight days and Charleston was not abandoned until eighteen months later.[118]

Ashe had been notified of his transfer to the Fayetteville Arsenal in August, but because Colonel Josiah Gorgas, Chief of Ordnance, had overlooked the formality of ascertaining General Clingman's approval, the transfer was delayed.[119] Major Frederick L. Childs, commander of the Arsenal, however, wanted Ashe badly and notified Clingman to the effect: "I beg you to transmit this order to him. His services are very much needed here, and I want him particularly, because he is a North Carolinian and because I know his qualifications, he having been my assistant when commanding Charleston Arsenal."[120] Upon getting this communication General Clingman permitted Ashe to depart for his new post.

At Fayetteville he assumed duty with the Sixth Battalion Armory Guard. In the laboratory he acted as an assistant to Childs, who was promoted to lieutenant colonel. Ashe's particular task was to supervise the magazines, testing powders, and the making of fireworks and ammunition. He remained at the Arsenal and even served on guard duty until Federal troops moved into the area.[121]

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[118]Ashe, "Fort Wagner," 256.

[119]Colonel Josiah Gorgas to General Thomas L. Clingman, August 27, 1863; Gorgas to Gen. S. Cooper, August 27, 1863; Gorgas to Maj. F. L. Childs, August 27, 1863, Thomas L. Clingman Papers, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, hereinafter cited as Clingman Papers.

[120]Major F. L. Childs to T. L. Clingman, September 2, 1863, Clingman Papers.

[121]Clark, Histories of the North Carolina Regiments, IV, 293, 296 299.

In August, 1864, he had the opportunity to visit Charleston while it was under concerted enemy attack. Here, according to Ashe, he came near death once again, for while he was asleep in a private home, a shell "passed a few feet over the room . . . and buried itself in the street beyond. Had it gone thirty feet farther it would have entered the city hospital." This greatly angered the young southerner who recalled that the Confederates took action by moving some Federal prisoners into the city, reporting their decision to the Union commander.[122] This move, said Ashe, was designed "to put a stop to this pastime of murdering sleeping women and children in their homes." Of course, the Union reaction was to remove four-hundred captured Confederate officers from Fort Delaware to the front at Morris Island[123] (Ashe remembered six-hundred). Ashe considered the placing of these men under fire an outrage, in view of the fact that no women and children were threatened by Confederate shelling.[124]

December 25, 1864, was a sad Christmas for Samuel Ashe and for all the other members of the Ashe family. Three days earlier William T. Sherman, leaving a trail of pillage sixty miles wide, had entered the city of Savannah, Georgia, while Ulysses S. Grant was waging a war of attrition against Robert E. Lee's remaining forces in Virginia. Ashe himself related the occasion:

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[122]Ashe, "The Treatment of Prisoners," 172.

[123]Richard Rush and others (eds.), Official Records of the Union and Confederate Navies in the War of the Rebellion (Washington, 30 volumes, 1894-1914), Series I, XV, 637.

[124]Ashe, "The Treatment of Prisoners," 172.

> There was grief and suffering everywhere. Of our family only a fragment remained, my sisters and I, to gather around the Christmas table. We were in a state of siege. Not only were we without the luxuries of ante-bellum Christmases, but no flour was to be had, no sugar, no coffee or other delicacy. Anything of that kind that could be found had been commandeered for sick soldiers and prisoners. And yet the spirit of Christmas Day remained. Our women met adversity as bravely as our men met the enemy on the battlefield. They gayly ate cake made of meal and sorghum, and drank coffee made of parched peas. Our Christmas griefs were hidden and the day passed with songs and laughter and merriment, though these often hid an aching heart.[125]

After the brief celebration of Christmas, Ashe returned to his duties at the Arsenal. In February, 1865, Childs sent him to see to the obstruction of the Cape Fear River at Elizabeth, North Carolina, but he was immediately recalled by order of General Braxton Bragg through Assistant Adjutant-General Archer Anderson. Childs was directed to see to the destruction of the trestle on the railroad below Lumberton and to be ready to burn the bridge over the Lumber River at the approach of advance contingents of Sherman's army.[126]

In April the Confederates abandoned Richmond and soon thereafter the disheartening news of Lee's surrender reached Childs. President Davis had fled to Charlotte. Childs and Ashe abandoned the Arsenal prior to its fall and joined Davis there. At first the tired President, through Josiah Gorgas, instructed Ashe to meet him across the Mississippi with some others, but seeing the futility of the situation, he released him to return home. Ashe was on the family estate near Wilmington when Davis was captured in Georgia in the disguise of a

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[125] Ashe, "Old Christmases I Remember."

[126] Official Records (Army), Series I, XLVII, Part II, 1289, 1294.

woman. The war was over, but Ashe later pointed out that "no one ever surrendered me then as a prisoner."[127]

What was Ashe to do? His father was dead, leaving him largely responsible for his sisters and his mother. He was penniless, for the war had impoverished the Ashe family. Samuel A'Court Ashe, descended of leaders, became a sleeping car conductor and even worked for the Wilmington and Weldon Railroad, the very railroad his father had made a success. This was indeed demeaning for a man of high breeding and extraordinary mental faculties.

The Civil War was one of the greatest influences on Ashe's life, far overshadowing his immature days at Annapolis. He always held those who died for the Confederacy in the highest esteem. With these words he honored their memory on Confederate Memorial Day 1875:

> We bear a keen remembrance of their woful destiny—how mangled and torn and bleeding they suffered even as martyrs suffer, and in terrible anguish and pain they passed through the dark horrors of death, and died as soldiers die. . . . For myself—if there be aught in that sweet belief, so full of consolation to the mourning heart—that disembodied spirits revisit the scenes of their earthly habitation, I now invoke the presence of those whose virtues we commemorate and whose valorous actions we applaud, as I briefly sketch the plain, unvarnished tale of their heroism and oblation upon the altar of their country.[128]

For Ashe the memory of the dead always held him to an unvarying faith in Southern righteousness, but the war taught him that force of arms alone could never give victory to the weak, no matter how firm their

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[127]Samuel A. Ashe, "A Review of the War Between the States," November 19, 1936, Ashe Papers.

[128]The Sentinel (Raleigh), May 15, 1875, "Scrapbook of Addresses and Articles by S. A. Ashe," North Carolina Collection, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, hereinafter cited as "Ashe Scrapbook," Chapel Hill.

faith. The war and its results made him a practitioner of Bourbon expediency and retrenchment became the mark of his politics and journalism. In his own mind, he had to help restore, rebuild, and reinvigorate the shattered South. To him the only possible instrument of this reconstruction was the Democratic party. Thus, Ashe saw the restoration and maintenance of Democratic rule in North Carolina as his especial mission in the history of the state.

CHAPTER III
FROM DEFEAT TO REDEMPTION, 1865-1879

The depressing reality of defeat had settled upon the shoulders of Samuel A. Ashe when he arrived at the family estate above Wilmington in April, 1865. He came from Charlotte where he and his commander, Colonel Frederick L. Childs, had said their last farewell to the Confederacy. He said later of this time that "in those days of sorrow, dismay, humiliation and anxiety there was nothing certain but that the Confederacy had passed away and the end of the war had come and all of the resolution, fortitude, sacrifices and griefs had been in vain."[1] Ashe often thought of those happy days that preceded the South's subjugation. "All that life has passed forever," he said, "but sometimes the memory of it brings me a wave of nostalgia."[2]

In April, 1865, Ashe was faced with a staggering responsibility; he had to replace his father as head of the household. As a friend later wrote: "His father's property having been swept away by war, he began life absolutely without means and with a considerable family dependent upon him."[3] The young Ashe, his legal education having been preempted by the war, was responsible for his invalid mother and three sisters. His only surviving brother was living in Texas. Samuel's personal tragedies had barely begun with the downfall of the

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[1] Ashe, History of North Carolina, II, 1015.

[2] Ashe, "Old Christmases I Remember."

[3] Ashe, Biographical History, I, 69.

Confederacy; before the year was out, his sister, Mary, was dead.[4] Shortly thereafter his brother, John, died[5] and, in 1872, he lost another sister, Josephine.[6] Friends could only hope that Samuel had inherited the strong constitution of his father and not that of his sickly mother.

To meet the pressing needs of the family Ashe engaged in a variety of pursuits, such as trading iron and homemade cloth for goods in Marlboro County, South Carolina, and making tar on the Cape Fear River above Fayetteville with his friend, Jeff Robinson. For a while he worked on a special freight train on the Wilmington and Weldon Railroad, loading tar with the aid of thirty workers. The tracks were in terrible condition and cars were derailed almost every day near Enfield.[7] After serving briefly as a mail train conductor in 1866, he was transferred to passenger service and later became a sleeping car conductor on a train that ran from Wilmington to West Point, Georgia.[8] These jobs were hardly substantial but they kept the family in food and shelter. In December, 1866, Ashe took leave of his railroad work and for a month devoted himself to study for admission to the bar. On January 14 he obtained his license to practice law in the North Carolina courts.[9]

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[4]C. M. Whitney to Samuel A. Ashe, October 20, 1865, Ashe Papers.

[5]F. L. Childs to Samuel A. Ashe, October, 28, 1865, Ashe Papers; see also Ashe, Biographical History, VIII, 36. The date, 1867, is incorrect.

[6]John L. Holmes to Samuel A. Ashe, September 2, 1872, Ashe Papers.

[7]News and Observer, September 11, 1927.

[8]Ashe, Biographical History, I, 70.

[9]Ashe's Law License (copy), January 14, 1867, Ashe Papers.

It was at this time that Ashe received an unexpected check from one of his dearest friends, Alfred Thayer Mahan. Mahan, realizing that Ashe must be in dire straits as a result of the recent conflict, sent him a check for $500, imploring him to keep it and pay him at a later date. As Mahan put it: "If you have survived the war, you will need it. I would take it from you; you must take it from me."[10] This sum helped Ashe until he could repay his old compatriot of his Naval Academy days. Mahan was pleased with his friend's legal work and, commenting on Ashe's letters, said that one had noted that "time has imperceptibly elapsed" since Ashe last wrote. Mahan said that Ashe knew "damned well" that a considerable time had passed adding: "Yes, you'll be a lawyer. Never fear!" Then he advised Ashe to follow the Christian rule, for "a lawyer should never get into a passion."[11] Of course the future admiral must have realized that if there was one thing his friend was prone to do it was to "get into a passion."

Despite the help of friends such hardships as Ashe faced only served to embitter him further and to fuel his hatred for the Republican party. But there was another side to the coin, his attraction to the church. According to his friend, Theodore B. Kingsbury, suffering turned Ashe to the reading of religious works.[12] The young Ashe saw about him a turning inward of the people and wrote Frederick

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[10]Quoted in Ashe, Biographical History, I, 70.

[11]Alfred T. Mahan to Samuel A. Ashe, February 12, 1867, Mahan Papers.

[12]Ashe, Biographical History, I, 75.

Childs of his concern. Childs praised him for "turning your thoughts to the future world to which dear ones were so rapidly hastening." He exhorted him to find "a good and religious wife," who could induce him to "profess openly before men what was in your heart."[13] Such sentiments doubtless influenced Ashe's decision to seek confirmation as a vestryman in St. John's Episcopal Church of Wilmington.[14] He felt that hardship made one "develop a deeper religious sentiment."[15]

Ashe's view of Negroes was little affected by religious considerations, except insofar as he placed high value on their Christianization. He felt that "African slavery at the South had exerted a benign influence" upon the black race. Though he acknowledged that emancipation was "not attended by any great disorders," he was inclined to take an unfavorable view of early Negro education at what he considered the expense of the white taxpayers. In addition to this, he felt that black schools established by northern societies were atrocious because they were "conducted by Northern women, whose sympathies for the blacks led them to the verge of social equality" and acted as "an element in fomenting race conflict."[16] To Ashe, steadfast defender of southern righteousness, the war had resolved little in regard to the race problem. Childs, suggesting that blacks might be brought up to the

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[13]F. L. Childs to Samuel A. Ashe, January 11, 1866, Ashe Papers.

[14]Ashe, Biographical History, I, 75.

[15]Ashe, History of North Carolina, II, 1037.

[16]Ashe, History of North Carolina, II, 1028, 1060.

educational level of lower class whites, told him:

> I do not quite agree with you about educating the negroes. Whether the rest of the world was right & we were wrong as to the justice & policy of slavery is no longer a question. That question has been disposed of forever & we are not responsible for turning loose upon society three or four millions of people with the intellects of children & the appetites & passions of men. We have in the future to live with them as equals before the law. I think that we should be unsparing in our efforts to bring these children up as near manhood intellectually as is possible for them to come.[17]

Thus Ashe came to reflect upon the place of the Negro in southern society and that place in his view was to be one of marked inferiority.

Along with new racial questions the end of the war brought William Woods Holden to the forefront in North Carolina politics as President Andrew Johnson's gubernatorial appointee. Holden, who had been defeated by Vance in the gubernatorial campaign of 1864, told the people that they had "just been delivered by the armies of the Union from one of the most corrupt and vigorous despotisms that ever existed in the world." Ashe had no love for Holden and, having taken the loyalty oath under Johnson's plan of Reconstruction, he doubtless proceeded to the polls in November, 1865, and voted for Jonathan Worth. Ashe said that Holden was correct in blaming his defeat in that election on the state's secessionist element. Though many abstained from voting on the thirteenth amendment and another declaring secession a "nullity," both passed. The 1866 legislature, however, which Ashe said "was fairly representative of the intelligence of the state," was unalterably opposed to Negro suffrage. It immediately rejected the fourteenth

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[17]F. L. Childs to Samuel A. Ashe, October 28, 1866, Ashe Papers.

amendment by an overwhelming vote. Instead the legislature proposed a national convention and the adoption of an amendment allowing a $250 property qualification and an educational qualification for voting.[18]

Ashe and others expected repercussions in Washington and indeed they came. When Congress met it refused to seat the southern representatives and subsequently proceeded to impeach President Johnson. Childs had written Ashe earlier: "When the time comes for a Coup d'etat has Johnson the nerve to make it?"[19] Watching what transpired from afar Ashe later said that though he had only "slight regard for President Johnson, as he had deserted his people in their hour of need," he was glad of the Republican failure to remove him from office. In the meantime Holden, whom Ashe considered an unabashed and bitter opportunist, had gone over completely to the Radicals. In December, 1866, the Holden forces had sent some delegates to Washington with the expectation that Worth's defeat of Alfred Dockery and the subsequent repudiation of the fourteenth amendment provided grounds for Holden's return to power. "The scheme," according to Ashe, "being the disfranchisement of the whites and the universal enfranchisement of the negroes." Such gross exaggeration was to become a trademark of Ashe, a thoroughly unreconstructed rebel. In March, 1867, the same month the Reconstruction Acts passed, Holden helped organize the state

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[18] Ashe, History of North Carolina, II, 1045-1048, 1020-1021, 1031-1032.

[19] F. L. Childs to Samuel A. Ashe, January 11, 1866, Ashe Papers.

Republican party with himself as its first chairman. "Holden," reported Ashe, "now became the essence of bitterness."[20]

Holden could use his position as leader of the Radicals to return himself to the governor's chair and to strike at his enemies. He became a leader of the Union League, an organization which Ashe blamed for much of the violence of the period. Ashe said that the League made the usually docile blacks "a menace to society."[21] He was in accord with an old friend who declared: "Radical & Conservative niggers, what have we come to Oh My Country!"[22] The enfranchisement of the illiterate blacks constituted what Ashe came to call "this high political crime."[23] Negro rule was a bogus issue in almost every respect, but not to Ashe, for he lived in Wilmington where the blacks were in fact a majority.[24]

In the ensuing gubernatorial campaign the Conservatives saw little hope of victory. Thomas S. Ashe, a friend and distant relative of Samuel Ashe, was easily defeated by Holden, and the Republicans won control of the legislature. In addition, the Congressional Reconstruction plan prompted a call for a vote on a constitutional convention on October 18, 1867. When the day came many Conservatives did not cast ballots and the results stood at 93,406 for the convention and 32,966 against. In the convention the Republicans had almost absolute control

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[20]Ashe, History of North Carolina, II, 1045, 1047, 1049-1052, 1073.

[21]Ashe, History of North Carolina, II, 1058-1060.

[22]F. L. Childs to Samuel A. Ashe, June 5, 1867, Ashe Papers.

[23]News and Observer, January 22, 1881.

[24]Ashe, History of North Carolina, II, 1022.

and when their proposed constitution was submitted to the people it was ratified by a vote of 93,084 to 74,015. Ashe may not have voted on the convention question for he later said: "It was not a free expression of the will of the whites that was being recorded. They would have no part in the matter." In this as in other things "the Secession Democrats were not drawn from their distant homes. Their quietude remained unbroken" and the League and the Negroes formed "a solid black phalanx, arrayed against the native whites."[25] Ashe surely must have realized that the failure of the Conservatives to participate insured a Republican triumph, but stubborn resistance to this fact ruled the day.

A period of unparalleled public disorders soon commenced, all of which Ashe blamed on the policies of the Republican legislature and Governor Holden. Violence and racial unrest mounted through 1867 and 1868. In September, 1867, Thomas C. Fuller, Ashe's future law partner, came to the public eye in a case permeated with grave racist overtones. Fuller defended a white man, William J. Tolar, who was charged with murdering a Negro, Archy Busbee, while he was being conveyed to a Fayetteville courthouse. Busbee had been charged with attempted assault on a white girl. Others associated with Tolar were charged with conspiracy in connection with the murder. The case was tried before a military court and Ashe later said of Fuller's defense: "He managed the case admirably. . . . and Colonel Fuller at once became

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[25]Ashe, History of North Carolina, II, 1053, 1055, 1070-1071.

famous as an attorney." Fuller's success later prompted him to appear for the defendents in the Ku Klux Cases resulting from the Enforcement Act.[26]

As he saw racial antagonisms mount, Ashe turned his searching gaze on the 1868-69 legislature and said that it was obvious that the Republican party "did not represent one percent of the property of the State, and, if the intelligence of the State could have been graded, probably not one-hundreth of the intelligence." Ashe said the legislature was dominated by a "triumvirate": Milton S. Littlefield, carpetbag railroad speculator, John Deweese, a Republican congressman, and Byron Laflin, a Republican legislator. He felt that the members of the General Assembly were out of touch with the voters and doubtless considered them to be a low breed of whites in combination with Negroes. The young lawyer was particularly disgusted with the representation of his native Wilmington which consisted of two carpetbaggers, a mulatto, and a Negro, though he referred to the latter as "a very good negro man." The election of such a legislature came about, Ashe asserted, because of the disfranchisement of many whites. However, the fact that many former Whigs voted Republican while many Conservatives abstained from voting as a form of protest is a more logical explanation of the election results. The story was often told of a northern gentleman who dined at Chapel Hill with many prominent citizens of the state and reportedly remarked that the only persons present who could vote were

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[26]Ashe, Biographical History, I, 281-282; and also Ashe, History of North Carolina, II, 1055-1056. Ashe is unclear as to whether Tolar was convicted, for these two sources are contradictory on this score.

the two Negroes waiting on table.[27] True or not, such things were bound to have a decided impact on Ashe's future attitudes toward both blacks and the Republican party.

Violence was becoming increasingly prevalent in Wake, Granville, Alamance, Person, and Orange counties. Ashe felt that the actions of Judge Albion Tourgeé and Holden were largely responsible for these disorders. Though Ashe saw the Klan violence as a natural outcome of the administration's actions, in reality it seldom had any reasonable justification. The Invisible Empire never arose in the Wilmington area, but was restricted to areas where the black population was much smaller. Ashe later stated:

> Indeed it was true that in some communities where the Union League had become most lawless the people were determined to protect society, and were pursuing the only road open to them. Secret crimes were punished by a strong hand. As deplorable as was the condition, the remedy lay in the Governor's hands, but he forbore to use it while excoriating the Ku Klux, he never sought to remove the occasion of their existence.[28]

The supposed lawless activity of the Union League generally consisted of barn burnings, but this was largely rationalization for Klan actions. Whereas the condemnation of Tourgeé was a result of the personal animosity of Josiah Turner, editor of The Sentinel, who lost a case in Tourgeé's court.[29]

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[27] Ashe, History of North Carolina, II, 1069-1070, 1076, 1086.

[28] Ashe, History of North Carolina, II, 1099.

[29] Otto H. Olsen, Carpetbagger's Crusade: The Life of Albion Winegar Tourgee (Baltimore, 1965), 150. Olsen maintains that the Klan initiated sporadic violence and always searched for justification after the fact.

On November 16, 1869, Holden addressed himself to the question of violence in the state. He told the legislature:

> The outrages . . . are confined almost exclusively to counties in which the white and colored populations are about equal in number, or in which the whites have a small majority.
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> . . .
>
> No "war of the races" as it is called, will be permitted in this country. No organized resistance to established authority would for a moment be tolerated.[30]

But rather than improve, things got worse and on December 16 Holden again decried the outrages in various counties. On January 19, 1870, the General Assembly granted him the power to use the necessary force to protect life and property,[31] but he did not act immediately. Klan violence intensified and on March 7, Holden declared Alamance County to be in a state of insurrection and directed the hated Tennessee Unionist George W. Kirk to restore order and make arrests. Thus commenced the infamous Kirk-Holden War which was to bring about the governor's downfall. Many of the Conservatives were aroused by the use of Negro troops and the fear of "Negro domination." In May, Senator John W. Stephen of Caswell County, a Holden Republican, was murdered in cold blood. It had been rumored that he was inciting blacks to burn down barns. Local officials were slow in finding the assassins and in July Holden directed Kirk to proceed to Yanceyville in Caswell County where he, on the 25th, arrested a large number of persons. The governor had temporarily suspended the writ of habeas

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[30] Journal of the House of Representatives of North Carolina, 1869-70, 18-19, hereinafter cited as N.C. House Journal.

[31] N.C. House Journal, 1869-70, 189-191.

corpus in certain areas. With the election in August, Conservatives charged that the entire affair was a political maneuver while appeals to Richmond M. Pearson, Chief Justice of the state Supreme Court, were to no avail.[32]

The actions of the administration caused a considerable reaction in the Conservative press. In June the Tarboro Southerner stated that in times past "the knife of the assassin felt, uneasily but surely, for the heart of the ruffian ruler." Holden's paper, the Standard, replied that the governor was unafraid and if he were murdered those responsible "will be instantly put to death."[33] The fiery Josiah Turner, editor of the Raleigh Sentinel, whom Ashe considered "audacious, fearless and ingenious in argument," added his voice to the chorus of Holden's enemies. His persistant attacks brought about his arrest in August.[34] Finally, an appeal by Matt W. Ransom to Federal District Judge George W. Brooks resulted in the release of the prisoners.[35] Ashe had been outraged at the actions of the governor and like any good Conservative had denounced him vigorously.

While all these things transpired, the Conservative Executive Committee of New Hanover County nominated Ashe as a candidate for the legislature. Although always an active party spokesman, the young lawyer had not expected to be drafted by his party. The Republicans,

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[32]Ashe, History of North Carolina, II, 1113-1115.

[33]Tarboro Southerner, June 10, 1870, and Raleigh Standard, June 11, 1870 are quoted in Ashe, History of North Carolina, II, 1113.

[34]Ashe, History of North Carolina, II, 1116.

[35]Ashe, Biographical History, I, 420.

however, nominated a large slate of candidates for the three available seats in the state House of Representatives. New Hanover Conservatives saw a chance to get one of their own into the legislature. An able speaker with a prominent name was considered their best bet.[36] Ashe was not expected to do well in predominately black Wilmington, but the white rural vote could certainly be counted on. In the end, planning and organization paid off.

The campaign in the Wilmington area was vigorous and relatively peaceful, in spite of Conservative declarations that they would meet Kirk at the county line if he was ever dispatched to Wilmington. When the votes were counted, it was determined that Ashe had barely won a seat in his race with eight other persons. The winners, in order, were George Z. French, Republican, 2438 votes; George Mabson, black Republican, 2408 votes; and Ashe, Conservative, 1934 votes. As was expected, Ashe was devastated in the city of Wilmington, but did better in rural areas. He ran first in no precinct, but the division of the vote redounded to his benefit.[37] There was nothing spectacular in Ashe's victory, for a shift of five votes would have defeated him, but for a Conservative to win a victory in such an overwhelmingly Republican district was something of an exploit. This combined with a statewide Conservative triumph, prompted mass demonstrations to celebrate the redemption of the legislature.

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[36] Ashe, Biographical History, I, 70.

[37] Morning Star (Wilmington), August 7, 1870, hereinafter cited as Morning Star.

On August 11 a torchlight procession of 10,000 Conservatives marched through the streets of Wilmington, stopping at the houses of victorious Conservative politicians. From the balcony of his residence on Second Street Ashe spoke to the cheering crowd. He displayed an oratorical flare few could equal as he declared:

> It is true we despise with loathing the low artifices of the carpet-bagger who misleads the colored voters to secure a perpetuation of his power. It is true we spurn the miserable demagogue who falsely announced for political effect, that Conservative success would restore the institution of slavery.
>
> Long, long ago, we told the colored people that such things had passed away forever, but they would not heed our utterances—they placed no faith in our professions. Now we have gained victory without their assistance: We have achieved success without their aid in spite of their efforts to defeat us, we are yet victorious; we owe them nothing. But we still tell them, as we told them before, that the platform of the Great Conservative Party is broad enough for them to stand upon; that around the flag of North Carolina they can rally in company with Conservatives, and feel assured that their best interests and dearest rights will be fully protected.
>
> . . .
>
> The rich and the poor, the whites and the blacks, Conservatives as well as Radicals, are subject to the law, and we will make the law for the best interest of all classes. . . .[38]

When Ashe concluded his speech the cheering procession continued their march. In view of his later actions and pronouncements one might doubt the sincerity of what Ashe said, but, at the time, he doubtless believed every word, for victors can afford to be generous.

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[38] Morning Star, August 14, 1870; and also Journal (Wilmington), August 19, 1870.

In November, leaving others to tend to his small holdings in New Hanover, Ashe departed for Raleigh, a move that was to become permanent. Considered a singularly religious man by his friends, he was quick to join the Episcopal Church in Raleigh. He became a vestryman in the Christ Church Parish and, later recalling his first visit there, he said:

> I came to Raleigh in November, 1870, and my acquaintance with the parish and congregation then began. At that time there was no other parish in town or vicinity, and the congregation was large and the Church well filled, especially by the attendance of visitors drawn to the capital by public business.[39]

Ashe said he was always grateful for the memories of the many persons of note he came to know in Christ Church, for "they were intermingled in many agreeable ways with the current of my daily life." It was in this church that the young legislator married Hannah Emerson Willard, the daughter of William H. Willard, a prominent manufacturer and banker.[40] Ashe spoke of his marriage as "the most happy occasion" and appeared to have been extremely optimistic about the pleasures of domestic life.[41] Nine children resulted from this happy marriage and it fulfilled Mahan's declaration that Ashe would be patriarchal.[42]

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[39]Samuel A. Ashe, "Reminiscences and Personal Sketches of Christ Church," Centenial Ceremonies Held in Christ Church Parish, Raleigh, N.C., A.D. 1921 (Raleigh, 1922), 42, hereinafter cited as Centenial Ceremonies Held in Christs Church.

[40]Cyclopedia of American Biography, XXVIII, 9; Centenial Ceremonies Held in Christ Church Parish, 43.

[41]Centenial Ceremonies Held in Christ Church Parish, 43; F. L. Chreas to Samuel A. Ashe, July 5, 1871, Ashe Papers.

[42]Alfred T. Mahan to Samuel A. Ashe, December 22, 1882, Mahan Papers; Cyclopedia of American Biography, XXVIII, 9.

In truth, Ashe had married into a wealthy family for his father-in-law was a man with numerous business connections. Ashe had a great deal of respect for Willard, whom he considered "an enterprising merchant." He gave Willard considerable credit for his ability to "minimize the disastrous effects of the closing of the Northern banks" on the Raleigh banks in 1873. For a time Ashe even acted as a director of the Bank of the State in Raleigh where Willard was president.[43] It was in Raleigh that Ashe's life took a turn for the better, for there he came to be an important legislator, a respected attorney, and a happily married man.

On November 21, Ashe took his seat in the legislature and voted with other Conservatives to make Thomas J. Jarvis speaker. On the 29th he cast his vote for Zebulon B. Vance for senator,[44] though Vance later resigned when the Congress would not seat the ex-Confederate governor and Matt W. Ransom was elected to replace him.[45] On the second legislative day Ashe had to listen to the speech of a man he had so roundly denounced, for the governor's message was read. Much to the chagrin of the legislature, Governor Holden defended his actions in regard to Lenoir, Jones, Orange, Chatham, Alamance, and Caswell counties. He denounced secret societies saying that "these secret

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[43]Ashe, History of North Carolina, II, 467, 1161; Samuel A. Ashe to David M. Carter, March 7, 1873, David M. Carter Papers, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, hereinafter cited as Carter Papers.

[44]N.C. House Journal, 1870-71, 4, 48-49.

[45]The Sentinel (Raleigh), January 30, 1872, hereinafter cited as The Sentinel; Ashe, History of North Carolina, II, 1148.

Klans began to commit murder, to rob, whip, scourge and mutilate unoffending citizens. . . . The members were united by oaths which ignored or repudiated the ordinary oaths or obligations resting upon all other citizens to respect the laws and uphold the government. . . ." He closed imploring "that peace and good order may continue: that partizan rancor and bitterness may abate."[46] But the governor's words fell on deaf ears, for men like Ashe, who felt that the governor had conspired to suppress his opposition, were not going to let so thorough a Radical as Holden escape unscathed.

On November 28 Ashe was appointed to two important committees; Finance and Judiciary.[47] As a member of the Judiciary Committee, he strongly advocated the impeachment of Governor Holden. After due consideration of the question of impeachment, on December 9 the Judiciary Committee presented a statement signed by all Conservative members of the committee, the Republicans dissenting.[48] Ashe doubtless assisted in drafting the statement which charged that Holden did "arm and equip a military force not recognized by, but in subversion of the constitution of the state of North Carolina," which was "subversive of the civil authority." The governor was further charged with arresting and imprisoning "many of the peaceable and law-abiding citizens of the state" and subjecting them to "cruel and unusual punishment," while having unlawfully suspended the writ of habeas

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[46] N.C. House Journal, 1870-71, 24-25, 30.

[47] N.C. House Journal, 1870-71, 44.

[48] Ashe, History of North Carolina, II, 1126.

corpus. The committee closed by urging the adoption of the following resolution:

> Resolved, that William W. Holden, Governor of the state of North Carolina, be impeached of high crimes and misdemeanors in office.[49]

Republicans and Conservatives opposed to the impeachment failed in their attempts to block the resolution and the effort to remove the governor was commenced. On December 15 a Committee of Seven was appointed to draw up the articles of impeachment while a Committee of Three was sent to the Senate to inform that body of the House action. On December 19 the House resolved into a committee of the whole to consider the articles of impeachment and a board was elected to prosecute Holden before the Senate. Thomas L. Sparrow, Chairman of the Judiciary, was chosen to be on the board with several other persons[50] and this threw Ashe into a leadership role on the Judiciary Committee. Indeed, he spoke for the committee on numerous occasions. The trial started in January and many witnesses were called. Persons who had been arrested by Kirk came forward to testify despite the strong opposition of the Republicans as well as Zebulon B. Vance and other leading Conservatives. The Senate, however, was determined to convict and Holden was found guilty and officially removed from office in March, 1871.[51] Seven years later Ashe attempted to use Vance's

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[49] The Impeachment Trial of William W. Holden (Raleigh, 3 volumes, 1871), I, 1-2.

[50] N.C. House Journal, 1870-71, 122, 146-164.

[51] N.C. House Journal, 1870-71, 529.

stand on the impeachment against him in the senatorial election.

The ouster of Holden was not all the Conservatives had in mind, for they had planned a more radical action; the scrapping of the Constitution of 1868. T. D. Johnston introduced a bill to call a convention of the people and it was adopted on February 8, 1871.[52] The legislature ran into immediate trouble when the measure came to the attention of Governor Tod R. Caldwell, Holden's successor. Caldwell refused to permit the election of delegates to a convention[53] because he considered the action of the General Assembly to be unconstitutional. He addressed the legislators in belligerent terms:

> Our people are praying every day and hour of their lives that they may never see again the scenes of commotion, strife, bitterness and bloodshed through which they have so recently passed; and that there is no prevailing reason why they should again buckle on their sabres, shoulder their muskets and at the point of their bayonets, and at the mouth of their cannon, enforce their views of what ought to be the constitution upon their dissenting neighbors.[54]

Ashe, as chairman of the House branch of the Select Committee of Five on the Question of a Constitutional Convention,[55] wrote a reply on March 7. He said that the existing constitution was "framed in haste and without due consideration of the welfare of the people, and contains many glaring inconsistencies and various provisions that are

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[52] N.C. House Journal, 1870-71, 71; North Carolina Public Laws, 1870-71, 119-125, hereinafter cited as N.C. Public Laws.

[53] N.C. House Journal, 1870-71, 332-335.

[54] Quoted in "Resolutions in Reference to the Message of His Excellency the Governor Concerning an Act Providing for a Convention of the People," March 7, 1871, Legislative Papers, North Carolina Division of Archives and History, Raleigh, hereinafter cited as "Resolutions in Reference to the Convention," Legislative Papers.

[55] N.C. House Journal, 1870-71, 269.

grievously oppressive and burdensome to the citizens." With classic exaggeration of its influence upon the people, he said the document "operates to check their prosperity, to destroy their substance, to impair their energies and to entail upon them grievances too intolerable to be borne by freemen." Ashe levelled the charge of "usurpation of power" at Caldwell and continued that "it is not to be credited that at this era in the history of America, any North Carolinian would attempt treason for the sole purpose of retaining the spoils of office among his party associates."[56] Unfortunately, insofar as Ashe was concerned, the legislature was cowed by the governor's determination and his strong declaration against "usurpation" was left on the calender and may never have been seen by Caldwell.

Convinced that the governor was not going to call a convention, the legislature moved to have the proposition put to a popular vote. In March, a proposition was passed which called for a vote on the issue on the second Thursday in April. Ashe and other Conservatives were convinced that at the polls the convention question would be settled to their advantage. Governor Caldwell was not alone in his anger, for Attorney-General Amos T. Ackerman, speaking for the Grant Administration, expressed dissatisfaction with the idea. The state Republicans argued that a change of the constitution might lead to Federal intervention. When the people went to the polls, they

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[56]"Resolutions in Reference to the Convention," March 7, 1871, Legislative Papers.

rejected the convention by 95,252 to 86,007.[57] The Conservatives expressed their general amazement at the setback,[58] but this was not the end of the issue for they were determined to have a convention and, in 1875, their will prevailed, but by a narrow majority.

The convention plan so dear to Ashe's heart was dead for the moment, but the young Bourbon was connected with another bill that was to have far more impact on his later career. This was the bill to abolish the office of the public printer. It was the practice of the Printing Committee to award the state printing to a suitable firm on the basis of bids, but the Conservatives wanted to insure that the printer become an agent of the legislature through party patronage. Ashe, on behalf of the Finance Committee, reported favorably on the bill to abolish the office of state printer on December 3, 1870.[59] The bill stated "that the joint committee on printing are hereby authorized to let and make contracts for the public printing upon such terms as they may deem reasonable."[60] By the passage of this measure on December 5 the legislature insured that never again would such steadfast Radicals as Milton S. Littlefield and Joseph Holden be public printers.

The successful effort to oust the governor occupied much time and aroused considerable excitement in the first of Ashe's two

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[57] Ashe, History of North Carolina, II, 1140-1141.

[58] The Sentinel, August 11, 1871.

[59] N.C. House Journal, 1870-71, 65.

[60] N.C. Public Laws, 1870-71, Chapter 3, 43.

legislative sessions. In the 1871-72 session Ashe manifested once again an important concern for action by his legislative role. Particularly close to his heart was a plan to adjust and settle the state debt. In 1870 Holden estimated the debt at $30 million and said that the sum needed to be consolidated. He called for "early and earnest attention to this subject" and urged "such legislation as will meet the wishes of the people, and satisfy as far as may be, the just expectation of our creditors."[61] Ashe was probably little concerned with what the Radical governor might consider a "just expectation" for the state's creditors, but he did manifest more interest in this vital subject than any other member of the legislature. Early in the 1871-72 session Ashe introduced a bill concerning the public debt. In its essentials the bill did not look toward complete repudiation and was somewhat more liberal than the bill that was adopted in 1879.[62] The measure provided for the issuance of new bonds at 50 per cent of the principal plus interest for all those bonds issued prior to May 20, 1861; at 30 per cent for those issued under the Funding Acts of 1866 and 1868, and at 25 per cent for all other bonds since April 17, 1865, with the exception of the special tax bonds, the penitentiary bonds, and the bonds issued by the Convention of 1868.[63]

On January 15, 1872, Ashe gave his most memorable speech in the legislative halls on the question of the debt and he strongly defended

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[61] N.C. House Journal, 1870-71, 13-15.

[62] N.C. Public Laws, 1879, Chapter 98, 183-188.

[63] House Bill 33, November, 1871, Legislative Papers.

his proposals. Stating that the credit of the state demanded action, he contended that the sources of revenue did not justify a total funding of the debt; therefore, it had to be scaled down. He rejected any consideration of the payment of the bonds issued by authority of the "revolutionary" Convention of 1868 and declared that all other obligations required compromise. His basic proposals were:

1) The exchange of $6,764,200 in pre-war bonds for a new issue of $3,382,000.

2) The exchange of $1,511, 550 for internal improvements during the war for a new issue of $755,755.

3) The exchange of $4,883,784 in bonds under the Funding Acts for a new issue of $1,465,025.

4) The exchange of $3,557,700 in post-war bonds, minus the convention and special tax bonds, for a new issue of $889,425.

Ashe's proposals would have scaled a debt of roughly $16 million down to around $6,500,000, a considerable reduction, but he justified this by pointing out that the proposed debt would work to the advantage of the creditors because the bonds were bringing far less on the open market at that time than their new value under his plan. To pay the yearly interest on the debt would require a sum of $130,000 until 1875 and $65,000 every five years thereafter until 1900. He said that it was the best possible time to raise revenue to pay this sum because of the frugal Bourbon rule which facilitated growth and the ability to pay. He then gave a table to show the considerable decline in state expenditures from 1869 to 1871 and he projected a further decline in 1872. "We may well be proud of such a record," he declared and went on to suggest that the voters should be thankful. Ashe added that

"to take property by taxation for any other than necessary expenses, is highway robbery under the forms of law." Necessary expenses in Ashe's mind would include the cost of operation and a very limited sphere of social responsibility such as the maintenance of schools and prisons. He closed by urging immediate action and cautioning the legislature against timidity which might lead to disaster:

> Future legislatures will not deviate from the road we mark out--and this road leads to repudiation--utter, entire, unequivocal repudiation.' Now is public opinion prepared for repudiation? If we fail to act we are responsible for it, and will our constituents sustain you in such a course? Are the people of honest old North Carolina so changed in sentiment as to accept such a deplorable result without a murmur of dissatisfaction? . . . But even if it were so--even if the misfortunes of the past have hardened the hearts of our people and rendered them indifferent to their good repute--even if the deadly influences of our corrupt State and Federal Governments have been successful in destroying the healthy tone of public sentiment, yet we as representatives would be inexcusable should we pander to a perverted public opinion.[64]

Despite Ashe's appeals opposition mounted in the Finance Committee and on the floor of the House. Though Thomas Sparrow and James W. Dunham supported Ashe, F. N. Strudwick, chairman of the Finance Committee, and others favored the alternate bill of William P. Welch. The Ashe bill finally got through the House on January 27, 1872, but failed in the Senate.[65] Thus, despite the passage of a Senate debt

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[64] The Sentinel, January 16, 1872.

[65] The Sentinel, January 17, 18, 19, 24, 29, 1872; Ashe, History of North Carolina, II, 1149. B. U. Ratchford has written several articles on the state debt question for the North Carolina Historical Review: "The North Carolina Public Debt, 1870-78," X (January, 1933), 1-20; "The Adjustment of the North Carolina Public Debt, 1879-1883," X (July, 1933), 157-167; "The Conversion of the North Carolina Public Debt After 1879," X (October, 1933), 251-272.

bill, the issue of the state debt was not to be settled until 1879.

In December, 1870, an Ashe bill reorganizing the voting districts of the city of Wilmington had been passed,[66] but this bill could not rearrange the voting strength of the overwhelming black majority. John W. Holmes, an old Wilmington friend, was writing Ashe that the city certainly had "a real fine nigger court."[67] Such sentiments doubtless prompted Ashe to introduce a cumulative voting proposition in the 1871-72 session. The amendments he proposed were designed to increase Conservative strength in his hometown. They provided for challenges to voters by the city mayor on suggestions from the candidates at the polls and allowed a voter to cast all his alloted votes for the ten city councilmen for a single man. In writing the report for the Judiciary Committee on what came to be House Bill 232, Ashe said that cumulative voting had been well defended by Senator Charles Buckalew of the Select Congressional Committee on Representative Reform. He said there were three good reasons for adopting the new method: 1) the unrestricted free vote would be just to property holders, 2) the new poll safeguards would check corruption, and 3) cumulative voting would "allay antagonism of race" by allowing for minority white representation. Ashe stated that Negro suffrage should be given a fair chance and added "that the proposed reform is in accordance with Republican principles, for while it will leave the control of the city with the colored people who are the majority, it

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[66] N.C. Private Laws, 1870-71, Chapter 3, 22-29.

[67] John W. Holmes to Samuel A. Ashe, April 21, 1872, Ashe Papers.

will render it possible for the white race comprising the bulk of the property holders to secure partial representation in the Board of Alderman."[68] This measure, which was integrated into the new city charter, had the support of the Wilmington Morning Star.[69] John Wheeler may well have influenced Ashe's predisposition toward cumulative voting for his efforts were integrated into the Buckalew Report. As a proponent of the new suffrage idea he had even received commendation from John Stuart Mill.[70]

Aside from cumulative voting, Ashe also showed particular interest in the penitentiary. He felt that it was too big an expense and therefore introduced a resolution "to render the penitentiary self-supporting by the immediate erection of suitable workshops."[71] In the subsequent session the young Conservative stalwart created a furor by proposing to pay the contractor at the prison, who was reported defaulting on his responsibilities, $15,000 to relinquish his right of construction. He suggested a superintendent be appointed who, with the necessary skill and convict labor, could complete the work under the supervision of a board of directors.[72]

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[68] Judiciary Report on Bill 232, January 26, 1872, Legislative Papers.

[69] Morning Star, May 3, 1872; N.C. House Journal, 1871-72, 322; N.C. Senate Journal, 1871-72, 345, 394.

[70] John Wheeler to Samuel A. Ashe, February 5, 1872, Ashe Papers.

[71] House Resolution 175, February 7, 1871, Legislative Papers; N.C. House Journal, 1870-71, 297.

[72] The Sentinel, January 30, 1872.

In every way Ashe was a typical Bourbon legislator who worked hard to reduce state expenses,[73] who desired to see Congressional districts arranged so as to decrease Republican strength,[74] and who supported the Shipp Fraud Commission to investigate Republican bond frauds.[75] In accord with the local concerns he favored Federal aid to improve the Cape Fear Bar,[76] and, at the urging of Wilmington merchants, he worked to insure liens.[77] Though an active legislator and able speaker, he was not of an independent turn of mind and was disdainful of any innovation that did not bolster the Conservative, later the Democratic, party. Ashe generally followed the party line and, on those rare occasions when he failed to do so, it was always for a partisan reason. In all his many years he never voted for, or even considered voting for, a Republican. When he left the legislature in 1872 he had just begun to fight.

In 1872, flushed with the successul removal of Holden from office, the Conservatives turned their wrath upon his successor, Tod R. Caldwell. During the 1872 campaign Ashe and John Spelman edited a political newspaper entitled Blasting Powder.[78] Possessed of an

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[73]House Bill 314, January 30, 1871, Legislative Papers; N.C. House Journal, 1870-71, 297.

[74]House Resolution 174, February 7, 1871, Legislative Papers.

[75]N.C. House Journal, 1870-71, 258, 301.

[76]House Resolution 115, January 30, 1871, Legislative Papers; N.C. House Journal, 1870-71, 259; N.C. Public Laws, 1870-71, 476.

[77]N.C. House Journal, 1870-71, 363-364, 664.

[78]Ashe, History of North Carolina, II, 1155.

almost fanatical devotion to the Conservative cause, Ashe launched a concerted attack on the bastions of Republicanism. An uncompromising belligerent who saw little or no good in the Republican party, his attacks were characterized by charges of corruption coupled with open appeals to white prejudice. While editorially Ashe's paper gave reluctant support to Horace Greeley, the Liberal Republican nominee for president, as opposed to "Horse Grant,"[79] as it disdainfully referred to the incumbent, Ashe himself realized that many southerners considered this "tender of the olive branch to Northern sentiment . . . as vile prostration."[80]

Though little enthusiastic support for Greeley could be expected, the battle for the state house presented a different picture with Judge Augustus Summerfield Merrimon heading the ticket. Standing by this stalwart Conservative, Blasting Powder assailed Governor Caldwell as "the demagogue who heads the Radical Ticket,"[81] but Ashe, in a less partisan and more reflective mood, later confessed that Caldwell was a man "of decided personal honesty."[82] At the time, however, the Spelman-Ashe paper displayed no such magnanimous attitude toward its political adversary. Without compunction the editors printed articles charging the governor with attempting to swindle the state of millions by a corrupt bargain with George Swepson, president of Raleigh

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[79] Blasting Powder (Raleigh), June 10, 1872, hereinafter cited as Blasting Powder.

[80] Ashe, History of North Carolina, II, 1156.

[81] Blasting Powder, June 10, 1872.

[82] Ashe, History of North Carolina, II, 1166.

National Bank, and Milton S. Littlefield, a New York carpetbagger.[83] These men were intent upon plundering appropriations to the Western North Carolina Railroad, and Littlefield later fled the state to avoid prosecution while Swepson, though indicted, was never tried.[84] Although any connection between these unscrupulous characters and Governor Caldwell is doubtful, the mere charge of a connection, it was hoped, would cause a voter backlash. In addition to this type of allegation, the paper consistently attacked Republican extravagance, giving particular note to the state debt of over $34,000,000.[85]

Even more effective than charges of corruption and excessive spending, were appeals to white fears and prejudices. In this vein the paper told its readers that the notorious Union League was being reinstituted and "that its re-organization will lead to the excess and crime that begat the Kuklux—that the land may become red with blood and the incendiary torch again make the heavens glare." The paper intimated that the Klan need not be feared as much as the Republicans, for "the Kuklux can be put down. Lowrey's gang cannot—the League cannot. The former is anti-Radical the two latter are the reverse. That simply is the difference."[86] In connection with the

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[83] Blasting Powder, June 19, 1872.

[84] R. D. W. Connor, North Carolina: Rebuilding an Ancient Commonwealth, 1584-1925 (Chicago and New York, 4 volumes, 1929), II, hereinafter cited as Connor, Rebuilding an Ancient Commonwealth. More recent scholarship suggests that Conservative complicity was not lacking in regard to the plunder as in W. H. McGee's"North Carolina Conservatives and Reconstruction" (unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, 1972).

[85] Blasting Powder, June 26, 1872.

[86] Blasting Powder, June 19, 1872.

Robeson County raids of the aforementioned Lowrey gang, a band of outlaws composed primarily of Indians, the paper reported that Caldwell, rather than arm the so-called "law abiding" Conservatives, armed a detachment of Negro troops so that he might insure continued Republican dominance on the Lower Cape Fear.[87] But, of all the appeals to white prejudice, the most pronounced was the attack on the Civil Rights Bill of 1872 which, though defeated, would have resulted in "forced Social Equality in all of our schools authorized by law."[88] As the Radicals declared there would be "no kitchen and no parlor" for the blacks if Republicans were elected, the Spelman-Ashe paper called on white retaliation:

> Upstart negro fellows and "colored ladies" always think themselves better than "the poor white trash," as they call our industrious working men. To your tents O Israel! and preserve the difference which God has made and which man has recognized as existing between the two races. Beat down this party which advocates putting negro children and white children together in schools--which makes it a $500 crime for any teacher to refuse to take a negro scholar. The next step will be to make it a crime for any white woman to refuse to marry a negro man.[89]

Despite the inflamatory nature of such appeals, the paper insisted that it was not hostile to the Negroes, but said that it was simply "after" the Radicals.[90]

When the August election was held, it seemed that editorial appeals had not been as effective as might have been hoped, for

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[87] Blasting Powder, July 10, 1872.

[88] Blasting Powder, June 26, 1872.

[89] Blasting Powder, June 26, 1872.

[90] Blasting Powder, June 26, 1872.

Caldwell received 98,135 votes to 96,234 for Judge Merrimon. In spite of Conservative suspicion of fraud, Merrimon decided that it was not well founded and chose not to contest the election results. When the presidential election came in November the state results were about as expected, with Grant defeating Greeley 94,304 to 70,322. The Conservatives, however, did have one consolation, they maintained their control of the state legislature.[91]

The campaign paper, having failed in its desire to defeat Caldwell, was soon discontinued and in January, 1873, Ashe joined the Raleigh law firm of Colonel Thomas Fuller and Judge Merrimon, soon to be named United States senator. Ashe remained with this law firm until July, 1879.[92] He had a great deal of praise for both his law partners and described Fuller as . . .

> . . . rotund and with fine features that bespoke the benevolence which was a prominent trait of his character. He was always bland and gracious, thoughtful for the feelings of others, temperate in all things, never profane, calm and philosophical, and seeking to enjoy the blessings of life. . . . his walk in life was that of a Christian gentleman.[93]

Ashe claimed that Fuller "exerted a strong influence in the councils of the Democratic party."[94]

He also found his other law partner, Senator Merrimon, praiseworthy: "He was among the most forceful of public men, a man singular

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[91]Ashe, History of North Carolina, II, 1156-1157.

[92]Ashe, Biographical History, I, 71.

[93]Ashe, Biographical History, I, 283.

[94]Ashe, Biographical History, I, 283.

for purity. . . ."[95] Ashe said that in all the years of their partnership. . .

> . . . never was there a hasty or an impatient word uttered by either partner and never was there any accounting of fees. As there was no apportionment of labor, so there was no strict apportionment of the common fund to which all contributed by their best endeavors.[96]

Merrimon, who was in the United States Senate from 1873 to 1879, was frequently away and trying the cases fell to Fuller while "the labor of preparing" them fell chiefly to Ashe as junior partner, a task he no doubt found tiresome. Probably the most important action of the firm was that as chief counsel for the railroads in establishing the validity of the lease of the North Carolina Railroad to the Richmond and Danville Railroad. Ashe later spoke with pride of his firm which "won the great fight that has proved of such advantage to the state and benefit to the people. . . ."[97] Considering his pronouncements against outside domination, one can see a clear inconsistency in this statement. Ashe was doubly connected to Merrimon for they both served as directors of William H. Willard's Bank of the State.[98] As a member of the firm of Merrimon, Fuller, and Ashe, the former legislator was to gain some reputation as a lawyer but, more importantly, he was to form a friendship with Merrimon that was destined to be both an advantage and a liability.

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[95]Ashe, History of North Carolina, II, 1160.

[96]Ashe, Biographical History, I, 285.

[97]Ashe, Biographical History, I, 282.

[98]Samuel A. Ashe to David M. Carter, March 7, 1873, Carter Papers; S. A. Ashe to William A. Graham, March 8, February 18, 24, 1874, William A. Graham Papers, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, hereinafter cited as Graham Papers.

Though Ashe remained with the Raleigh law firm until 1879, he did not withdraw either from politics or journalism during the period. In 1874 he became editor of the Evening Crescent, a Raleigh Conservative organ founded by Theodore B. Kingsbury, editorialist for the Wilmington Morning Star.[99] The short-lived Crescent, parroting Conservative charges that the Republican party had "despoiled the State of millions of dollars heretofore appropriated for railroad purposes,"[100] was instrumental in the 1874 Conservative victory. The paper made political capital out of the fact that a revised version of Charles Sumner's Civil Rights Bill, granting considerable social equality, had passed the United States Senate though "not a single Democrat voted for it."[101] Such attacks struck home and the Conservatives carried the state by impressive margins, capturing over two-thirds of the seats in each house of the state legislature. This victory combined with the death of Governor Caldwell in July added fuel to the fire of Conservative hopes for 1876. Ashe felt that the lieutenant governor, Curtis H. Brogden, the man who succeeded Caldwell, was not equal to the task which confronted him, being "inferior in intellect and social standing."[102] The facts, however, do not support this conclusion for Brogden was an experienced political leader of proven

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[99]Ashe, Biographical History, I, 71.

[100]Evening Crescent (Raleigh), June 7, 1874, hereinafter cited as Evening Crescent.

[101]Evening Crescent, July 10, 1874.

[102]Ashe, History of North Carolina, II, 1166.

ability.[103] Ashe of course was not known for praise of Republican leaders.

The folding of the Crescent temporarily ended Ashe's journalistic pursuits, but in 1875 he was glad to see one of his fondest hopes fulfilled; the calling of a constitutional convention. As a member of the Conservative Executive Committee, he may have had something to do with the vote of the party caucus to push for a convention without putting the issue to a popular vote which might have led to a second defeat. In March the Conservatives were able to rally their strength in the legislature and pass a bill calling for a convention delegate election in August. On election day the Conservatives started to worry for early returns appeared unfavorable and Republican victory seemed likely. Soon it developed that the results in Robeson County would be decisive, and William R. Cox, chairman of the Conservative Executive Committee, telegraphed the returning board of Robeson: "As you love your State, hold Robeson." When the votes were counted, the Republicans had a majority, but the Conservative Returning Board certified the Conservative delegates. The convention line-up stood at 59 Conservatives, 58 Republicans, and two independents, one of whom favored the Conservatives, thus giving them a one vote majority. As one might expect, Dr. R. M. Norment and Neil McNeill, the Republican candidates in Robeson, challenged the seating of Duncan Sinclair and C. A. McEachin. Ashe, the working member of the State Executive Committee, presented the case for the Conservative party. He, in a

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[103]Ashe, Biographical History, VI, 106-112.

charge that sounded highly suspicious, said that three hundred Negroes from Virginia, working on railroad construction, had been illegally registered in Robeson County. The Committee on Privileges was instructed by the convention to appoint a commission to look into the charges, but the Republican challengers realized their case was hopeless and abandoned their claim. The Conservatives controlled the convention, but because of their small majority none could be absent for fear the Republicans would adjourn. All measures were agreed on in party caucus and, as Ashe said, "The business of the Convention was thus determined in the Conservative caucus." Fearful of public sentiment, the Conservatives were loath to make drastic changes in the constitution of the state. They proposed numerous minor reforms of little consequence, but they did pass one blatantly partisan measure of which Ashe was a strong advocate; the General Assembly was given "plenary power in regard to county government." This amendment was to become the basis of the totally undemocratic county government law which effectually deprived the Republicans of control in the eastern counties. The convention adjourned stipulating that the amendments be voted on by the people.[104]

In 1876 Samuel A. Ashe became secretary of the State Democratic Executive Committee,[105] the name Conservative having been dropped due to the expected victory of Samuel J. Tilden in the presidential race

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[104]Ashe, History of North Carolina, II, 1170-1173.

[105]Morning Star, July 6, 1876.

of that year. The new party secretary worked actively in the famous 1876 gubernatorial campaign of "the two giants." The Democrats, after a series of successes, were confident that this would be their year to capture the state house. They chose as their gubernatorial nominee Zebulon B. Vance, the state's Civil War governor, while the Republicans selected the capable orator and jurist, Thomas Settle. In a series of debates across the state, which Ashe felt were equal to the Lincoln-Douglas confrontation, the two men eloquently upheld their respective causes. These speeches, coupled with the excitement of the Tilden-Hayes presidential race, were expected to bring out a heavy vote. The chairman of the Republican party, Thomas Keogh, confidently predicted that the Republicans would carry North Carolina by a ten thousand vote majority. Ashe retorted that this could not be for "enrollment in the clubs indicate that we will increase our vote more than 30,000." When the votes were tabulated Vance had defeated Settle by almost 14,000 votes, while Tilden carried the state over Hayes by more than 17,000. The Democrats took all the state offices and carried seven of the state's eight congressional districts, but, on the national level, Tilden was denied the laurels of victory.[106]

In March, 1878, William R. Cox resigned as chairman of the Executive Committee and was succeeded by Ashe.[107] On April 5 the new chairman issued a statement:

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[106]Ashe, History of North Carolina, II, 1177-1180.

[107]Observer (Raleigh), March 27, 1878, hereinafter cited as Observer.

> The Democratic Party is the party of the people. It is the instrument by which the people accomplish their aims and purposes. It is the people banded together in one great organization or society to protect their rights, to advance their interests, to promote their prosperity and to perpetuate those liberties which make our country at once the envy of oppressed nations and the crowning glory of mankind. . . . But harmony must prevail--order must be observed! The will of the organization is the will of the people! When expressed it must be respected--it must be obeyed.
>
> Private judgment must yield to the collective judgment.[108]

Ashe declared that independents were a grave threat, for they pretended to be true to the Democratic faith and were "more hurtful than avowed antagonists." Ashe believed, it would seem, in strict adherence to a rigid party discipline that permitted no deviation from the party line. It is ironic that Ashe, the party stalwart, was to lose his position as party leader because he failed to maintain strict adherence to an incumbent Democrat.

In the very year he rose to the chairmanship of the Executive Committee, Ashe became inmeshed in the controversy surrounding the Senate campaign between Zebulon B. Vance and Augustus S. Merrimon. In 1872 Merrimon had been the Conservative gubernatorial nominee with the understanding, according to Ashe, that he would be elected United States senator if he failed of election as governor. After Caldwell's victory, he turned to the party caucus in the hope of getting the party nomination to the Senate, but Vance had obtained pledges from a majority of the Conservative legislators. The caucus subsequently voted to place Vance's name before the legislature. The Merrimon

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[108] Observer, April 5, 1878.

forces were enraged, particularly Lott W. Humphrey who had held a grudge against Vance since 1862 for appointing another man colonel of a company of which it was understood Humphrey was to be commander. This prompted him to insist upon putting Merrimon's name before the legislature.[109] In five votes for senator between November 26 and 30, 1872, the legislature was unable to elect because the three way split prevented any candidate from obtaining a majority, the vote being divided between, Vance, Merrimon, and John Pool, the Republican.[110] According to Merrimon at this juncture both he and Vance agreed to withdraw from the race, but another caucus renominated Vance.[111] On December 3, Pool's name was not placed in nomination and as the vote progressed it became clear that all the Republicans were switching to Merrimon which brought about his election over Vance by a vote of 87 to 80.[112] Ashe supported the Merrimon account that the senator-elect knew nothing of his election, being in court at the time it was reported to him. Governor William A. Graham and other friends of Merrimon urged him to accept the nomination even though it seemed questionable. There were, however, numerous doubts surrounding the election and many thought that secret arrangements had been made.[113]

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[109] Ashe, History of North Carolina, II, 1158-1159.

[110] N.C. House Journal, 1872-73, 77-78, 82-83, 85, 90-91, 96-97.

[111] Observer, June 9, 1878.

[112] N.C. House Journal, 1872-73, 108-109.

[113] A. J. Morrison to William A. Graham, November 22, 1872, Graham Papers. Morrison, a member of the Conservative caucus, seriously questioned Merrimon's actions and suggested a deal with the Republicans was afoot.

Ashe later reported that "after a while, some of Vance's particular friends set out to make Merrimon and Humphrey odious. . . ." Humphrey became a Republican, said Ashe, but "it did not disturb Merrimon."[114]

The truth was that the attacks disturbed Merrimon considerably and prompted him to make a long reply to all charges in June, 1878.[115] In the senatorial controversy of that year Merrimon kept in touch with his junior law partner who had the double advantage of also being chairman of the Executive Committee. Ashe's position forced him to avoid open public pronouncements in favor of his friend and associate. Merrimon quite reasonably assumed that a conspiracy was under way that would make Vance senator, Jarvis governor, and James L. Robinson, lieutenant-governor. The senator was of the opinion that Jarvis would be unacceptable as far as western Carolina was concerned.[116] Merrimon was very perceptive as to the line of attack his enemies would pursue. On April 25 he wrote Ashe:

> It is manifest that the purpose of Gov. V. and his friends is to make the Senatorial election turn on the manner of my election, instead of upon the merits & fitness of gentlemen to be Senator. The object of Gov. V. & his friends is to secure his election by an appeal to prejudice & not to principle, truth and merit, & prejudice is to be created against me by misrepresentation of myself in connection with the Senatorial election.[117]

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[114] Ashe, History of North Carolina, II, 1159-1160.

[115] Observer, June 9, 1878.

[116] Augustus S. Merrimon to Samuel A. Ashe, April 6, 1878, Ashe Papers.

[117] Augustus S. Merrimon to Samuel A. Ashe, April 25, 1878, Ashe Papers.

Though there was an underground opposition to Merrimon because of his former association with George W. Swepson, notorious for his railroad dealing,[118] and a portrayal of him as a disgruntled Whig who was angry with a party that rewarded only Confederate veterans,[119] the basic attack centered around Merrimon's failure to abide by the caucus in 1872 and his election by Republicans.

Ashe wrote Merrimon and informed him as to developments while, in the state, he and Colonel Fuller were largely responsible for coordinating efforts to re-elect the senator. The party chairman was well aware of the disadvantages under which he labored. The Vance partisans were fully mobilized and most of the Democratic press favored the governor. Ashe instructed S. S. Satchwell who wrote, under a pseudonym, a number of anti-Vance letters for the Newtonian. With the election in January, Satchwell wrote Ashe about moving his base of operations to Raleigh, nearer the legislature. He informed Ashe of his latest December article:

> It is my best and strongest of all the numbers. It is a regular broadside—a sweeping fire upon Vance—carrying the war into Africa as you suggested. It embraces the points named in your letter to me of the 22nd inst.[120]

Satchwell then proceeded to list the things his letter to the Newtonian included. The things he listed bore a marked resemblance to the

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[118] S. S. Satchwell to Samuel A. Ashe, December 27, 1878, Ashe Papers.

[119] Observer, December 3, 1878; News (Raleigh), January 6, 1879, hereinafter cited as News.

[120] S. S. Satchwell to Samuel A. Ashe, December 27, 1878, Ashe Papers.

general line of attack that Ashe employed. Satchwell said he attacked Vance's attitude toward Negro magistrates and Negro troops as well as the governor's New Year's day speech to Negroes in Raleigh in 1878 and his "dallying with negroes generally since his inauguration in order to promote his aspiration for the Senate." Then he listed briefly Vance's "bolting" record: his failure to support the convention movement, his opposition to the impeachment of Holden, and his quietude on the Ku Klux bill. He also mentioned the governor's "electioneering with radicals in order to get into the Senate." Satchwell said that Vance had run the state government "as if it belong to him, in his own interests, and not of the party and State." He levelled a vigorous attack upon state appointments which he claimed were reserved for the governor's personal friends and relatives. Soon after reading this Ashe must have arranged for Satchwell to move his operations to Raleigh, for a letter containing much the same arguments appeared in the Observer on January 4, 1879, signed "Democrat."[121]

Satchwell advised Ashe to have one-hundred copies of his latest article produced and distributed to members of the legislature. This was obviously done, for on January 11 an article in the Raleigh News, a Vance paper, labelled as "slanderous" the circulars it said were being sent to members of the General Assembly.[122] The Vance forces were slightly perturbed.

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[121] Observer, January 4, 1879.

[122] News, January 11, 1879.

In all his various articles Satchwell tried to juggle the language so as to avoid their identification with him or with similar articles in other papers. His work came to be surrounded by a conspiratorial atmosphere and no statement better revealed this than one which purported to be in response to a similar declaration by Ashe:

> I agree with you that in a common undertaking like this there must be no reserve, but the utmost freedom and frankness among us.

So behind the scenes Ashe worked and saw to arrangements for Merrimon's supporters to lodge in Raleigh. He realized that the senator's friends were "scarce of money" while "Vance's friends will spend money as free as water to elect him. . . ."[123]

The superior strength of the opposition, though disheartening, was not absolute and it was felt that written appeals would help the Merrimon cause. Letters signed variously "Democrat" and "Smith" appeared in the Observer at Raleigh and strongly defended the senator while criticizing Vance.[124] "Smith" was particularly active in his correspondence. The Vance partisans were little disturbed by these letters, for as one wrote, "all bear the same ear mark and if not written by the same man must have been inspired by the same mind."[125] One correspondent of the News even went so far as to speak of "the distinguished gentleman who writes over the nom de plume 'Smith,'

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[123] S. S. Satchwell to Samuel A. Ashe, December 27, 1878, Ashe Papers.

[124] Observer, November 19, 26, 30, December 1, 3, 7, 13, 1878, January 4, 1879

[125] Observer, November 22, 1878.

and whose surname is Samuel."[126] Could this be a reference to Ashe? Indeed, it must have been, for on January 11, 1879, an article appeared in the same paper entitled "Merrimon's Law Partner" which stated:

> It is asserted that a law partner of Mr. Merrimon as Chairman of the Democratic Executive Committee is using its mask to advance the ends of Mr. Merrimon. The breast of every honest North Carolinian swells with indignation at such unscrupulous means.[127]

This attack called for an immediate reply by Ashe in the Observer:

> Messrs Editors: The Raleigh News of this morning publishes an article from another paper in which I am in effect charged with having prostituted my position as Chairman of the Democratic Executive Committee to promote the interest of Judge Merrimon. I denounce all such statements as falsehoods and their authors as base slanderers.
>
> S. A. Ashe
> Chairman Democratic Executive Committee.[128]

Probably Ashe felt that he was not "prostituting" his position, but he certainly was using secretive tactics to promote his choice for senator.

It is noteworthy that, while Ashe doubtless suggested the line against Vance's "dallying with the negroes," the News was attacking Merrimon as a defender of black suffrage and suggested that "that was right and becoming Senator Merrimon, because negro votes elected him to the United States Senate."[129]

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[126] News, January 6, 1879. The word "surname seems to have been a mistake and probably should have been "given name."

[127] News, January 11, 1879.

[128] Observer, January 12, 1879.

[129] News, January 5, 1879.

Those who were not behind the scenes might have been fooled by the election of John Moring, a Merrimon man, as Speaker of the House in January, but as the News said, the position was "an offering from the Vance to the Merrimon element."[130] Merrimon arrived in the capitol to lead his troops, but found them too weak to carry the day and, prior to the meeting of the Democratic caucus on January 13, the senator wrote a message withdrawing from the race. It was first read at the caucus meeting. Merrimon wrote that friends had told him that "influences have been brought to bear that will prevent my re-election," and added, "I have no desire to disturb the quiet of the Democratic party by further contest over the Senatorship, and, hence, beg my friends not to mention my name further now in that connection."[131] Publicly the struggle was over, but Merrimon confided to Ashe that he thought his opponents had been unjust.[132]

For the sake of party unity all animosities seemed to drop from sight and on January 22 the legislature easily elected Vance as senator.[133] But Ashe must have felt that the merciless enemy had misrepresented and maligned his dear and "pure" friend, Judge Merrimon. One of the persons who most benefited from the new arrangement was Thomas J. Jarvis, an old legislative associate, who now became governor. It is true that for about a year tranquility prevailed on

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[130] News, January 11, 1879.

[131] Observer, January 14, 1879.

[132] Augustus S. Merrimon to Samuel A. Ashe, February 4, 1879, Ashe Papers.

[133] Observer, January 22, 1879.

the surface, but there was an undercurrent. Ashe had a good hold on the Executive Committee and doubtless many notes of displeasure with Jarvis came to his ear. Samuel L. Fremont was quick to denounce Jarvis for allowing the sale of the Western North Carolina Railroad.[134] The fact that Jarvis benefited from the downfall of Merrimon may have alienated Ashe from the governor, but conservative disaffection provided stronger grounds for opposition to his renomination.

In July 1879 Ashe abandoned legal practice to pursue a journalistic career.[135] From his new vantage point he exerted new efforts for the party, but he also faced new failures. His first defeat was the confrontation with Governor Jarvis.

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[134]Samuel L. Fremont to Samuel A. Ashe, September 9, 1879, February 27, 1880, Ashe Papers.

[135]Though Ashe left the firm he had worked with for six years, he maintained an active interest in law and the North Carolina bar. For his activities along this line one can consult Fannie Memory Blackwelder, "Organization and Early Years of the North Carolina Bar Association," North Carolina Historical Review, XL (Autumn, 1963), 465-488.

CHAPTER IV
JOURNALISM, 1879-1889

Samuel A. Ashe had enjoyed his forays into journalism in 1872 and 1874. His writing had rendered considerable service to the party and there was no better way to continue that service than as a Democratic editor. The Bourbon leader's decision to pursue a career in journalism was a strictly personal matter and produced major complications. For fourteen years he had his ups and downs in a very precarious occupation.

In July, 1879, however, Ashe was filled with optimism. With the encouragement and backing of friends, he decided to purchase the Observer, a Raleigh newspaper that had fallen on hard times. The paper, which had been founded by Peter M. Hale and William L. Saunders, absorbed the Raleigh Sentinel in 1877. Hale and Saunders made up what the noted editor Josephus Daniels considered "perhaps the greatest editorial team in the history of the State."[1] Saunders, an outspoken political activist, was suspected of having been "Emperor of the Ku Klux Klan" in North Carolina, though this was never fully substantiated. He eventually retired as a result of ill health, leaving Hale to edit the paper as the true voice of the Democratic party. With it, however, Hale carried the sole responsibility for a debt of $4,000, the paper being mortgaged for that sum.[2] Though Hale had the state printing

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[1] News and Observer, May 18, 1940.

[2] Instrument Naming T. J. Robinson Trustee, April 22, 1879, Ashe Papers.

contract, which had been granted to the defunct Sentinel earlier, he was still unable to meet his financial obligations, having lost as much as $25,000. On April 21, 1879, with creditors pressing for payment, Hale assigned the Observer to the trusteeship of Thomas J. Robinson, who was instructed to dispose of it within thirty days or the paper would be sold at public auction.[3] Failure to act within the alloted time prompted a public auction on June 17, 1879, but the purchaser refused payment,[4] so the paper was again auctioned off on July 5. At this time, Thomas D. Martin, acting as an agent for Ashe, bought the paper for $7,510, paying $2,000 down in cash. Ashe signed promissory notes for the remaining debt, pledging to continue the paper's publication.[5] This action was taken without the knowledge of William H. Willard, Ashe's father-in-law,[6] while Judge Merrimon co-signed the notes.[7]

On July 8, 1879, Samuel A. Ashe, a name that was to become closely associated with Democratic journalism for the next fifteen years, took over as editor of the paper. His opening message set the tone that the paper was to maintain:

> Having purchased THE OBSERVER and being the sole and exclusive owner of it, I propose to continue its publication

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[3]News and Observer, December 9, 1884; Instrument Naming Robinson Trustee, April 21, 1879, Ashe Papers.

[4]Observer, July 4, 1879.

[5]Instrument of Sale to Samuel A. Ashe, July 14, 1879, Ashe Papers; Observer, July 4, 1879.

[6]W. H. Willard to Thomas J. Jarvis, July 14, 1894, Ashe Papers.

[7]Josephus Daniels, Tar Heel Editor (Chapel Hill, 1939), 434, hereinafter cited as Daniels Tar Heel Editor.

> as a first-class Democratic journal. It will be my object to aid in developing the resources of North Carolina, to better the condition of our people, and to promote the growth of those great and fundamental principles of government on which depends the preservation of our liberties.

Well aware of the enormity of the debt he was assuming, Ashe invoked "the liberal and generous support" of the paper's friends throughout the state.[8] Indeed, he needed their support, for the state printing contract had not come as a part of the purchase from Hale, who went to work for the Raleigh News.[9]

As editor Ashe proved to be an unyielding partisan, almost totally blind to the shortcomings of his own party while acutely sensitive to the failures of the opposition. He took partisanship to such an extreme that it often precluded any political judgments based strictly on the issues. In the same month that he took over the Observer he declared of the upcoming 1880 presidential race:

> . . . we . . . will not care whether the successful candidate for president be for hard money or soft money, so that he be a Democrat, nominated by our party and standing upon our platform. To be sure some of us would like to have the financial plank of that platform one way, and others quite another. Bayard and Ewing may be taken as representatives of these two different opinions within the party, but both are Democrats. . . .[10]

The physical lay-out of this partisan journal was typical for its day. A large sheet with a subscription rate of $6 a year, it consisted of four pages, seven columns to a page, the front page being largely

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[8] Observer, July 8, 1879.

[9] Instrument Naming Robinson Trustee, April 21, 1879, Ashe Papers; News and Observer, May 18, 1940.

[10] Observer, July 26, 1880.

occupied by advertisements. Though the number of advertisements decreased in time until they occupied less than two columns, they never completely disappeared from the front page while Ashe was editor. Often as much as 20 per cent of the copy in a given issue would be devoted to editorializing, while factual news stories were brief and lacked detail. Despite its shortcomings the Observer served the basic needs of the Conservative Democrats in the years that followed. After its consolidation with the News, it became the leading paper in the state.

The official consolidation of these two papers came in September, 1880, prior to the presidential election of that year. The News had been under the joint editorship of Hale, who was still state printer, and Leonidas L. Polk. After a period of six months of financial difficulty, the paper had gone into the hands of W. P. Batchelor, who purchased it for Hale's Weekly.[11] On September 11, after consultations between Ashe and John Gatling of the News Publishing Company, Batchelor permitted a consolidation with the Observer. At the time the agreement was drawn up, Ashe was given "entire control and management," while Polk was transferred to the new paper which was entitled the News and Observer. Gatling and his associates thus came to be in partnership with Ashe, who had possessed majority control of the Observer.[12] All these developments had one very great benefit: Hale, though he still

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[11] News, September 10, 1880.

[12] Samuel A. Ashe to Zebulon B. Vance, November 26, 1883, Vance Papers, Raleigh.

controlled Hale's Weekly, had been involved with two papers of Democratic prominence, both of which, directly or indirectly had come under the tutelage of Sam Ashe. As a result, Ashe was able to secure the state printing contract from the Democratic caucus and was to keep it until 1885. This was an important asset to a paper with a circulation that probably never exceeded 2,000 for the daily and 3,000 for the weekly during the years that Ashe was editor.[13]

When Ashe purchased the Observer in 1879 he was understandably appreciative of the assistance of his good friend Senator Merrimon. As an editor, an intensely partisan Democrat like Ashe could certainly be counted on to uphold the party line, but did he have to adhere to an incumbent? There was some foreboding of what was to come in August, 1879, when the Observer agreed with the Statesville Landmark which said "that the Democratic press of North Carolina is under few obligations to the politicians" and that journalists had often "labored zealously for a mere pittance of recognition." Ashe said that after a convention all party journals should work for the party nominee, but before that the press had independence.[14] The Ashe paper thus made an interesting distinction about the nature of partisan duty before and after official nominations.

Early in 1880 a broadside was circulated throughout the state which was signed "Cato" and which charged Governor Jarvis with voting

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[13] News and Observer, April 2, 1881; Josephus Daniels to Samuel A. Ashe, September 14, 1887, Ashe Papers.

[14] Observer, August 19, 1879.

for the special tax bonds.[15] In May attacks on Jarvis started to appear regularly in the Observer. A letter signed "Cadmus" suggested that Jarvis' war wound was being used for political advantage. It said that his supporters "point with pride to the way he nurses his wounded right arm." Soon letters appeared in the Observer which were signed "Cato." They pointed to the House Journal of 1868-69, pages 94 and 96, as evidence that Jarvis voted for a special tax bond. The correspondent later stated that the governor obtained $1500 from John Pickerell after voting for the bond. "Cato" referred to Pickerell as "a noted lobbyist, dealer in special tax bonds and railroad manipulator." These attacks, combined with the charges that he missed roll call and was insolvent,[16] upset Jarvis greatly.

While the "Cato" letters were assailing the governor, they suggested that a man with a clean record should be the nominee. The Observer led the public to believe that Daniel G. Fowle was such a man.[17] The conclusion is unavoidable; the conservative element of the party, represented by Ashe's paper, was displeased with the Jarvis record.[18]

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[15] Wilfred Buck Yearns (ed.), The Papers of Thomas Jordan Jarvis, 1869-1882 (Raleigh, projected 2 volumes, 1969), I, 249-250, hereinafter cited as Yearns (ed.), Jarvis Papers.

[16] Observer, May 20, 23, 28, 1880.

[17] Observer, February 27, May 13, 28, 1880.

[18] Elgiva D. Watson, "The Election Campaign of Governor Jarvis, 1880: A Study of the Issues," North Carolina Historical Review, XLVIII (Summer, 1971), 276-300. Watson effectively analyzes the "Cato" letters in relation to the overall opposition to Governor Jarvis.

On May 21, Jarvis wrote a note to Ashe requesting the name of the writer of a letter of that date signed "Cato." Ashe responded that he would supply the name "if you propose to take action legal or otherwise." Jarvis responded to this by saying that he was intending to take some sort of action.[19] It appeared that Ashe never supplied the name, but Jarvis had a sneaking suspicion that the editor was behind the charges.

The attacks continued and on May 31, Governor Jarvis made his reply in the News:

> I have been silent under the most unprovoked and malignant misrepresentations of my political record and the most unfeeling sneers at the crippled condition of my helpless right arm.
>
> Taking courage from the silence, my enemies have proceeded to attack my personal integrity, finding a convenient vehicle for both sneers and slanders in a newspaper at the head of whose columns stands the name of the Chairman of the Democratic State Executive Committee. In face of such charges so gravely affecting my personal integrity, and so circulated, I am unwilling to remain silent.

The governor proceeded to meet the charges against him. First, he declared that on one occasion he voted for the issuance of bonds to meet an "actual bonafied obligation" of the state, but that on nine other bonds proposed in the 1868-69 session he did not vote for any "but opposed as best I could" all of them. He said that he was often not present for roll call votes, but that was a "means of fighting the villanies of that Legislature" which was controlled by Radicals. As to the charge of a corrupt bribe, the governor acknowledged a loan of $1500 from Pickerell to meet obligations he had incurred in the

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[19] Yearns (ed.), Jarvis Papers, I, 253.

interest of his brother-in-law, but $1400 of the debt had already been repaid. He admitted to insolvency, but said he was poor "because I devoted so much of my time and so much of the proceeds of my labor to the service of my party and State."[20]

Ashe, upon seeing the message in the News, immediately wrote a note to the governor in which he said no charge of corruption had ever been made and asked him to cite the so-called "slanders" he made reference to. In his reply, Jarvis cited a series of letters that had appeared in the Observer. The governor noted that Ashe seemed unaware of the slanders in his paper and added: "I am glad to know this. In the years of intimate personal acquaintance with you I had learned to greatly esteem you and I was much pained when I saw things in your paper which to me seemed so plainly slanderous."[21] In the June 1 issue of the Observer, Ashe printed his note to the governor and Jarvis' reply and then he answered the proclamation of the day before. Ashe defended the statements of the so-called "Cato" and said that the governor should not be offended by remarks about his arm because the expression "He had lead in his arm" was statewide. Then he proceeded to quote "Cato" and he denied catagorically that the correspondent charged the governor with corruption, but that said writer only gave reasons that might make Jarvis a less than perfect nominee for governor. Ashe said that "the Governor, for purposes of

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[20] News, May 31, 1880.

[21] Yearns (ed.), Jarvis Papers, I, 264-266.

his own, chooses to pervert what is used as an argument of inconvenience into a charge of corruption." The editor further added: "We say that we will have no quarrel with Governor Jarvis, but we can tell him that there is such a word in the dictionary as ingratitude." Ashe closed by saying that the governor wanted to appear as a "martyr," but he claimed the chairman of the Executive Committee was not "hounding" the incumbent.[22]

In truth, Ashe's response hardly seemed to the point and one is inclined to agree with the governor's observation on "Cato's" intimation that Jarvis was bribed: "The adroit way in which it is put by an astute lawyer by questions and innuendo does not relieve it of the character of a 'charge.'".[23] Jarvis thus suggested that the author of the letters had a legal education. In the 1878 Senate campaign some anti-Vance letters appeared which were signed "Cato."[24] In the first issue of Our Living and Our Dead in 1874, with which Stephen D. Pool and Theodore B. Kingsbury were associated, appeared a defense of Braxton Bragg signed "Cato" in Wilmington.[25] Ashe was a known defender of Bragg, but the suggestion that the public attitude toward Bragg would have been better had he been a Virginian rings of Kingsbury. Authorship of the "Cato" letters was denied by both Julian S. Carr and

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[22] Observer, June 1, 1880.

[23] Yearns (ed.), Jarvis Papers, I, 265.

[24] News, January 9, 1879.

[25] Our Living and Our Dead, I (September, 1874), 3; J. Bragg to Samuel A. Ashe, July 30, 1881, Ashe Papers.

Daniel G. Fowle,[26] but one can only assume that Ashe was connected with the anti-Jarvis campaign in some way. Circumstantial evidence seems to point to either Ashe or Kingsbury as the authors.

On June 17, Ashe called the state Democratic Convention to order and it rapidly proceeded to nominate Jarvis for governor and James L. Robinson for lieutenant-governor.[27] On June 18, the very day that Ashe's paper came out with its endorsement of Jarvis and the entire ticket,[28] Ashe was ousted as chairman and was replaced by a more dependable Jarvis man, Octavius Coke. Without so much as a thank you for the services of the former chairman, the News launched into exorbitant praise for the Virginia-born Coke.[29] Many took Ashe's removal quietly, even the conservative stalwart himself remained silent, but his hometown paper, the Wilmington Morning Star, where his good friend Theodore B. Kingsbury worked as an editorial writer, did not remain silent: "Everyone knows that Capt. Ashe was efficient, faithful and able. But he did not shout for Jarvis, so he must walk the plank." The paper intimated that a majority of the state's Democrats may have opposed Jarvis, but they were not organized enough to stop his nomination. The editorialist declared: "It is time a truce was made to political ostracism among Democrats. If the policy of Jarvis and his supporters is to apply the lash or banishment let them

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[26] Observer, June 11, 1880; Greensboro Patriot, June 9, 1880.

[27] News, June 18, 1880.

[28] Observer, June 18, 1880.

[29] News, June 19, 1880.

so state clearly and unmistakably. If we have masters let us know it." Stating that Ashe had "served the party at his own expense for four years," the Star concluded that . . .

> . . . It sees no justice, no propriety, no wisdom, in turning out a tried, faithful, true Democrat, a native North Carolinian without stain, accusation or reproach, in order to honor a comparative stranger, however worthy, even though he were a Lee or a Johnston and a Virginian to boot, who is untried.[30]

The News replied by declaring that it was in fact non-Jarvis men who elected Coke,[31] but this assertion is certainly to be questioned though Jarvis may have urged the action upon them as a step toward party solidarity.

So Samuel A. Ashe fell from grace with a man who later became one of his most determined supporters, who was to be unsparing in his praise of so worthy a party servant as the Bourbon editor. Less than a year after his demise as chairman of the State Executive Committee, he was awarded the high party honor of election as public printer. Ashe was far from finished as the 1880 campaign well proved.

Having laid down his sword in defeat at the end of the Civil War, Ashe was now ready to take up his pen and battle the enemy in the coming campaign. The election of 1880 presented an interesting study in political expediency, for Ashe tried to play both sides of the race question, attempting to stir blacks against their own party while maintaining Democratic support among the whites by instilling fear of

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[30] Morning Star, July 3, 1880.

[31] News, July 3, 1880.

"negro rule." Though he later declared that he "never asked a colored man to vote the Democratic ticket,"[32] his paper did seek to place a divisive wedge between the black Republicans and their white allies. The year had hardly opened when Ashe addressed himself to the Negroes of the state, pointing out that in 1877 Governor Vance had declared "to know only citizens, regardless of their color." The Observer said that the Democrats, unlike their Republican predecessors, had taken a true interest in the welfare of the black race by establishing a Negro Insane Assylum and a Negro Normal School for training black teachers, while a Negro military company had been organized calling itself the Vance Guards.[33]

With the nomination of Jarvis as the Democratic candidate for governor and the subsequent selection of Ralph Buxton by the Republicans, the Observer intensified its attacks on the opposition. Buxton, an honest yet rather ordinary looking individual, canvassed the state for votes in August, 1880. Of Buxton's efforts, Ashe said that he wanted black votes because he, like other Radicals, "looked on negro men as so many cattle, but cattle who can vote." He stated that this was proven by the fact that the northern Radicals referred to the black voters as "bucks."[34] In a further attempt to alienate blacks from the Republican party, his paper pointed out that Republican United States Senator Roscoe Conkling wanted to decrease southern

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[32] News and Observer, January 29, 1885.

[33] Observer, January 22, 1880.

[34] Observer, September 2, 1880.

influence in Congress by basing representation on taxation. Ashe asserted that "he will next say that the negroes ought not to vote at all, because they pay no custom house duties at all."[35] But Ashe found a better target in Moses Bledsoe, a Republican congressional candidate. He said that even as slaves the Negroes had been counted as persons for purposes of taxation, but before the war Bledsoe had condemned such a policy because "it placed slaves in reference to taxation upon an equal footing with white men." Intent on distorting the "ad valorem" taxation question, the editor did not point out that taxation of slaves as persons favored slaveholders. According to the Observer Bledsoe's former position was proof that Bledsoe considered the Negroes as "he would a horse, a cow, or mule," making no distinction between them and "the brute creation, which a man could kill at his own pleasure."[36]

Addressing himself to blacks in a manner he thought might induce them to abandon the Republican cause, Ashe spoke to whites of the danger of "negro rule." He told the whites that Buxton represented "the reckless, ignorant negro voters of North Carolina, who, paying no taxes, are indifferent as to public welfare." His paper asked the people if they wanted a return to Republican policies, which had been characterized by fraudulent "special tax bonds" and a Negro soldiery led by an "outlawed commander,"[37] the reference being to Colonel

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[35] News and Observer, September 28, 1880.

[36] Observer, September 8, 1880.

[37] News and Observer, October 21, 1880.

George W. Kirk. Ashe told the whites that the Republicans had based their party in the South on the Negro vote, but that "that party which is sustained by the whites has the strongest hold on the country."[38] Ashe chose to overlook the large number of white Republicans because, to him at least, it was incomprehensible why any southern white man would be a Republican.

There were of course other issues in the state campaign of particular concern and, as the campaigning intensified, Buxton denounced the Western North Carolina Railroad Bill, which he said had been passed "in the interest of the Democratic Party."[39] In 1879 William J. Best, representing a New York syndicate, had offerred to purchase the Western North Carolina Railroad and thus relieve the state of the costly responsibility of building a road across the mountains.[40] Shortly after this proposal, Ashe came out editorially for it with some reservations about the loss of state control over the project.[41] The public was sharply divided on the issue, but Governor Jarvis, after due consideration and a decision to sell, called a special session of the legislature in March, 1880, to consider the question. A great debate arose, but in April the legislature voted to accept the Best contract.[42]

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[38] Observer, September 2, 1880.

[39] Observer, August 18, 1880.

[40] Connor, Rebuilding an Ancient Commonwealth, II, 373.

[41] Observer, January 11, 1880.

[42] Connor, Rebuilding an Ancient Commonwealth, II, 374. For a recent analysis of the Best contract consult Margaret W. Morris "The Completion of the Western North Carolina Railroad: Politics of Concealment," North Carolina Historical Review, LII (July, 1975), 256-282.

Ashe felt that the contract with Best and his associates was the most agreeable arrangement that could be had at the time. To Buxton's attacks against the action, he made short reply saying that the bill had certainly been in the interest of the Democratic party, but that "the interest of the party and of the State are identical."[43] So, against all the laws of logical discussion, partisanship, as would be expected, triumphed again.

Charging corruption in the Conservative legislature, Buxton said that the outspoken Josiah Turner had been expelled because he desired to set up a committee to investigate Democratic frauds. Ashe had condemned Turner for what he considered his unjustified tirades in the legislature, saying that he worked "to bring about his own expulsion" for political gain.[44] As to Buxton's charges, Ashe said that even the Republican nominee for Secretary of State readily admitted that Turner was expelled from the legislature for refusing to "obey its rules."[45]

In his editorial, "The Supreme Issue," Ashe told the voters what he thought was the real crux of the state campaign. He said the choice which faced the voters was between a continuation of Democratic frugality as opposed to Republican extravagance. He doubtless did not consider the Democratic sellout of state investments an act of extravagance. In a single year, 1869, he pointed out that the

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[43] Observer, August 18, 1880.

[44] Observer, March 30, 1880.

[45] Observer, August 17, 1880

Republican legislature spent $1,000,000 while the Democrats had decreased expenditures each year since 1870. As to the congressional races, he informed his readers that the last year the Democrats controlled the House of Representatives they reduced expenses by $60,000,000.[46]

Viewing the presidential race, Ashe now thought victory was surely within reach of the Democratic party; the election would not be stolen as it had been from "President Tilden" in 1876. Though Ashe personally favored Thomas Bayard of Delaware for the nomination,[47] he nonetheless was pleased with the selection of Winfield S. Hancock. Hancock, a man without political experience, was well respected in the North for his war record and in the South for his friendly disposition towards the southerners while he was military governor of Louisiana.[48] The News and Observer combined attacks on the Republican nominee, James A. Garfield, with lavish praise of the merits of the "peerless" Hancock. Of the probability of winning with Hancock the paper remarked that northern veterans "having followed the superb soldier on many a battlefield, they now will march with him to a grand political victory."[49]

In addition to the political choices that confronted the voters, there were two amendments to the state constitution to be voted on.

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[46] Observer, August 18, 1880.

[47] W. T. Croasdale to Samuel A. Ashe, February 24, 1880, Ashe Papers.

[48] Observer, June 25, 1880.

[49] News and Observer, September 15, 1880.

One provided for state care for deaf mutes, the blind, and the insane, while the other called for repudiation of payment on special tax bonds issued by the Convention of 1868, unless the people consented to such payment in a referendum. Endorsing both these measures, Ashe said that the latter would save the state $18,000,000, that being the sum demanded by holders of the "unconstitutional" bonds.[50]

As was expected the amendments passed with Hancock carrying the state and Jarvis defeating Buxton 121,827 to 115,590.[51] The Democratic party had again triumphed at the state level, but it had failed of a national victory. On November 9, Ashe, in one of his greatest editorials, "Our Refuge and Our Strength," told the people of North Carolina that their hopes rested more upon industrial expansion than political attainment. He said:

> Nothing is to be gained by regrets or repinings for Hancock's defeat. No people or State is better able to meet emergencies . . . we have one of the finest countries in the world. And what nobler employment could enlist the energies of a people than the developing the great resources of our God-favored States, and having it possessed and enjoyed by an enlightened, law-abiding, peaceful people? But with all its varied and splendid capabilities, it is idle to talk of home independence so long as we go to the North for everything from a toothpick to a President. We may plead in vain for a higher type of manhood and womanhood among the masses, so long as we allow the children to grow up in ignorance. We may look in vain for the dawn of an era of enterprise, progress, and development, so long as thousands and millions of money are deposited in banks on four per cent interest, when its judicious investment in manufactures would more than quadruple the rate, and give profitable employment to thousands of idle women and children.

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[50] Observer, April 20, 1880.

[51] News and Observer, December 9, 1880.

> Out of our political defeat we must work out a glorious material and industrial triumph. We must have less politics and more work, fewer stump speakers and more stump pullers, less tinsel and show and boast, and more hard, earnest work. We must make money—it is a power in this practical business age. Teach the boys and girls to work and teach them to be proud of it. Demand a better more liberal system of public education and if need be, demand increased taxation to obtain it. Infuse into the system practical, industrial education, suited to the wants of the masses, and to the demands of this progressive age. Demand all legislative encouragement for manufacturing that may be consistent with true political economy. Encourage, aid, support, and defend our State Department of Agriculture. . . . Work for the material and educational advancement of North Carolina, and not in politics will be found her refuge and her strength.[52]

With these words the son of Tidewater aristocrats became the state's foremost proponent of industrialization, but there was an essential paradox in Ashe's position. While he praised manufacturing and felt that the prewar policy of the South in ignoring it had been "unwise and radically wrong," he was essentially an agrarian at heart who felt that not only was agriculture the "real industry" of the people, but that its productions were "far more important in every respect than those of manufacturers."[53] Going a step further Ashe even declared that as farmers became more intelligent "they will perceive more clearly the real dignity of the calling and will be willing to give it up for no profession known to men."[54] This aside, the fact remains that the News and Observer, under Ashe's editorship, did much to encourage the rapid industrial progress of the state. Giving

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[52] News and Observer, November 9, 1880.

[53] News and Observer, May 11, 1882.

[54] News and Observer, December 5, 1882.

unwavering support to industrial schools,[55] it worked in accord with the North Carolina Press Association of which Ashe was an active member to see the creation of a State Exposition in 1884.[56] It said that such an undertaking would "prove of great value and benefit in presenting to the world a thorough exposition of our industries and of the latent possibilities of our undeveloped natural resources."[57] Ashe had been favorably impressed by and urged North Carolina participation in the Atlanta Exposition in 1881 and the Louisville and Boston Expositions of 1883.[58] With the completion of the State Exposition, he announced that it was "the finest single work ever done in North Carolina."[59] Expositions, however, proved rather ineffectual as a means of attracting capital and labor. The News and Observer did not lend its editorial support to the industrial efforts of whites alone. It praised highly the efforts of the Colored North Carolina Industrial Council to better the conditions of the Negroes by "stimulating them to higher endeavors and grander accomplishments in the various avenues of human activity." Supporting the basic aims of this organization, the paper called on all whites in the state to help in this laudable

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[55] News and Observer, February 11, 1885, November 7, 1886.

[56] Ashe was prominent in the North Carolina Press Association as is evidenced in its records: J. B. Sherill (comp.), Historical Records of the North Carolina Press Association, 1873-1887, 1930; North Carolina Press Association Proceedings, 1884, 13-30.

[57] News and Observer, November 3, 1883.

[58] News and Observer, June 17, September 9, 29, October 25, 28, 1882, October 8, 29, 1881.

[59] News and Observer, December 21, 1884.

purpose.[60] In June, 1885, Ashe was happy to see increased educational expenditures and small scale industry expanding in the state.[61]

Railroads, a concern interrelated with industrial expansion, were always of primary importance to Ashe and his paper. On taking over the Observer in 1879, he said: "Railroads are public corporations and the public are entitled to have them administered with intelligence"; however, the rights of private investors should not be overlooked, and "the easiest way to prevent undue interference with these private rights is to render any interference on the part of the public unnecessary."[62] How this was to be done Ashe did not make clear, but his basic laissez faire attitude came through when he spoke of railroad regulation:

> . . . as to regulating railroads perhaps the less said the better. Laws enough have been passed to put every spike and tie on its best behavior, but we do not hear of any practical results unless it be that the courts have been kept busy and divers choice spirits, whose hearts throb for a consideration--in unison with the people, have pouched sundry comfortable fees. The laws of nature and the laws of trade laugh your ordinary Be it Enacted to scorn.[63]

On the question of a regulatory railroad commission Ashe, while not rejecting the idea, was not enthusiastic for a powerful body. The Conservative editor said he was not given to "radical" action and as his paper made clear:

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[60] News and Observer, August 12, 1886.

[61] News and Observer, June 30, 1885.

[62] Observer, August 30, 1879.

[63] Observer, August 12, 1879.

> We do not think it would be wise to take too rank a hold on this subject; but we should seek to establish a commission on the basis of the fair dealing towards the railroads which we demand and require towards the people.[64]

The paper closed the above editorial comment by emploring caution in regard to government regulation "until it be shown that the mailed hand is necessary." Ashe supported a weak commission similar to the one that had worked in Massachusetts, while lacking power to set a time schedule and requiring the commissioners to call upon the businessmen rather than summon them. Conditions, however, were considerably different in North Carolina. When all efforts to create a commission failed, Ashe's paper commented that it was not due to a "want of warm persistant advocacy on the part of the News and Observer."[65]

It is historically recognized that railroad interests had considerable influence in the state legislature, but Ashe claimed that the Democratic legislators were free agents, serving no special interest. While Josephus Daniels, as editor of the Wilson Advance, was charging that "agents of the railroad companies" were in the legislature, Ashe rejected any such declaration. The News and Observer condemned Daniels, who it said was stirring dissension in party ranks and casting doubt on the integrity of good conservative Democrats.[66] Even on the railroad question, Ashe could not rise above either his unwavering partisanship or his laissez faire outlook, for he himself felt that

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[64] News and Observer, January 16, 1883.

[65] News and Observer, November 20, 1886.

[66] News and Observer, December 11, 1886.

by pursuing their own interests the railroad tycoons could not avoid benefiting the public.[67]

The Tar Heel editor's efforts for industry and railroads, though untiring, were often put forward in the midst of other issues of controversial and immediate concern. One such issue was the question of state-wide prohibition of alcohol. The temperance forces had been gaining ground since 1870, but it was not until 1880 that socially-minded ministers finally threw the official support of both the Baptist and Methodist churches behind the prohibition movement.[68] In January, 1881, a temperance meeting called by Judge E. G. Reade met in Raleigh and, on this occasion Judge Merrimon declared that more money was being wasted on liquor than was being spent on education. Ashe realized that the issue was political dynamite and, while he was a passive opponent of prohibition, his paper remained relatively non-commital, fearing the consequences of agitating the question.[69] With clear political foresight, he seemed to realize the dangers that prohibition could pose for the Democratic party.

Indirectly, however, Ashe himself added to the controversy by his constant attacks on the internal revenue system. Though his assaults were of a strictly political nature, they did give impetus to the prohibitionists, some of whom thought of this as a way to rid themselves of Republican internal revenue agents, whom they thought were

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[67] News and Observer, August 25, 1886.

[68] Daniel Jay Whitener, Prohibition in North Carolina, 1715-1945 (Chapel Hill, 1945), 61, hereinafter cited as Whitener, Prohibition.

[69] News and Observer, January 13, 20, 1881.

buying the votes of moonshiners and using their positions for political gain.[70] Ashe said that revenue agents served in order that they could "cloak crime and practice fraud."[71]

By February the temperance forces were at a peak and the News and Observer estimated that the legislature must have had at least 200,000 persons petition for an anti-liquor law.[72] This flood of petitions persuaded that body to pass a prohibition law which outlawed the use of alcohol by abolishing its production for all purposes except for use as a medicine. The legislature, however, was not sure of its action and therefore provided that the people should vote on the law in August. In April the prohibitionists held a rally in Raleigh, but by this time opposition had already started to crystalize. On June 1, 1881, the state liquor dealers met in the capital and formed the Anti-Prohibition Association. Soon Dr. J. J. Mott, chairman of the state Republican party, came out against prohibition, making it an essentially partisan issue. It was feared that a rejection of prohibition might forebode a future rejection of the Democrats at the polls. When the vote came on August 4, the prohibition forces lost by a vote of 166,325 to 48,370, the mysterious 200,000 petitioners having vanished.[73] Ashe was hopeful that the Democratic party had been little damaged by this defeat for, prior to the vote, many prominent Democrats had come

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[70] News and Observer, January 28, 1881.

[71] News and Observer, April 3, 1881.

[72] News and Observer, February 18, 1881.

[73] News and Observer, April 28, June 3, 1881; Whitener, Prohibition, 71-73.

out against the temperance law. In light of the state vote, the News and Observer announced that prohibition would henceforth be a dead issue,[74] but it is very doubtful that Ashe really believed this.

The mid-term election of 1882 was to prove just how alive the issue was. In April of that year the Republican Executive Committee endorsed the idea of an alliance with the Liberal Anti-Prohibitionist Democrats. Ashe, as would be expected, was highly critical of this action, his paper remarking that "a liberal will at once be recognized as a radical."[75] In May the State Anti-Prohibition Association met and Colonel William Johnson, president of the organization, spoke, calling for a liberal convention to nominate anti-prohibition candidates.[76] The Association professed non-partisanship, but Ashe saying that the planned convention was "a step in the liberal movement," charged that there was collusion between Mott and the Association in an effort to defeat the Democratic ticket and carry the state for the Republicans.[77] In fact, in January the News and Observer had declared that Colonel Johnson and Major Charles Price had called on President Chester A. Arthur declaring themselves as Independents and expressing a desire to displace the Democrats in North Carolina. Johnson denied the charge, but, with the meeting of the Liberal Convention in June, Ashe said that Johnson was clearly a liar or he would not be working against the

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[74] News and Observer, August 7, 1881.

[75] News and Observer, April 9, 1882.

[76] News and Observer, May 7, 1882.

[77] News and Observer, May 4, 1882.

Bourbons. Unable to ignore the defections to the liberal cause, Ashe's paper remarked upon the poor showing of the Independents in the May 1 municipal elections and called on the Liberal Democrats to return to the party as their only hope. Earlier, noting that many of the Liberals denied being in league with the Republicans, the editor recommended that they join the Greenback-Labor party[78] doubtless thinking this would weaken the Republican chances in the upcoming election.

Referring to the Liberal Convention as "Dr. Mott's side show" when it met in June, Ashe said that it was a "Republican body" with as many Negroes as "Liberal Democrats," the approximate composition being 30 Negroes and 120 whites of whom 40 were Democrats.[79] After this convention put forth its nominees, it was a foregone conclusion that the Republicans would endorse the nominations when they gathered in convention in mid-June. Ashe's paper suggested that the Republicans should not waste their time in discussion, but should quickly approve the so-called "Mott ticket" and "spend the day more pleasantly in rambling through the Insane Asylum. . . ."[80]

With public sentiment aroused, Ashe dodged the prohibition issue, which led to the new coalition, and concentrated on personal attacks on Mott and the internal revenue service, while appealing to

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[78] News and Observer, January 17, June 27, May 2, April 29, 1882.

[79] News and Observer, June 8, 1882.

[80] News and Observer, June 14, 1882.

traditional Democratic loyalties. In March, 1882, the News and Observer commenced a merciless assault on Dr. Mott, who, prior to his election as chairman of the Republican party, had been internal revenue collector for the Western District of North Carolina, a position which purportedly gave him the power to appoint 230 revenue agents and disperse funds of $275,000 a year. It was Ashe's contention that Mott had used this power in an unsuccessful attempt to defeat Jarvis in the election of 1880.[81] Strangely enough Ashe did not see civil service reform as a possible solution to the problem, but rather he considered abolition of the internal revenue system as the only viable alternative. While earlier assailing the Republican agents, he spoke of "the great blessing and relief it will be to shake off these mossy-back revenuers, and return to the good old paths of ante-bellum days, when there were no spies or informers in the land, nor charges made against our people for violating the laws of the United States."[82]

Ashe often displayed a sharp and caustic wit when dealing with the issue of internal revenue taxation. On one occasion he remarked that the Associated Press frequently sent out dispatches telling of some great battle between the white Republicans, called revenue officers, and the white Democrats, called moonshiners. Estimating that hundreds of thousands died in these great conflicts, he appealed for peace fearing the extinction of the Republicans would result if the slaughter continued. He said the revenue agents were "that band of martyrs, who,

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[81] News and Observer, March 3, 1881.

[82] News and Observer, November 2, 1881.

like Sparta's sons, are ready to die in the mountain passes in their great battles with rebellious Democrats."[83]

After weeks of campaigning election day arrived and the results gave the Democrats a narrow victory while the Liberals elected Tyre York to Congress from the seventh district, with a black Republican, James E. O'Hara, an opponent of prohibition, taking the second.[84] Ashe professed to believe that these victories and the near-defeat of the Democrats were caused by a lack of money. To remedy this, he suggested that the party raise a minimum of $5,000 before each future campaign.[85] While admitting that the election results were not all that he had hoped for, the editor nonetheless stated that the Liberal defeat "buries out of sight the Mott-mongrel party."[86] In reality, Ashe knew the Liberals were not dead and he feared that they had come so near to victory that their appetites might be whetted for an ultimate triumph in 1884.

Proof that the Liberal threat was far from dead could be found in the following humorous account of an interview between an internal revenue collector and a job applicant which appeared in the News and Observer months after the election. The collector, who in this case was Colonel Isaac Young of the Eastern District, asks: "What is to be done with the pestiferous Bourbon moonshiner?" To which the applicant

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[83] News and Observer, March 27, 1881.

[84] News and Observer, November 24, 1882; Whitener, Prohibition, 78.

[85] News and Observer, November 15, 1882.

[86] News and Observer, November 28, 1882.

replies: "First catch him and then convert him into a Liberal." The Colonel happily says: "You will pass," and proceeds to the next applicant.[87] Thus it is clear why Ashe, not only continued, but in many ways intensified his attacks on the internal revenue system after the election of 1882. He once stated that "taxation is an evil," but, despite his opposition to the tariff, internal revenue taxes were a greater evil than import duties because "the latter can be collected without bringing the people in connection with the officers of the government."[88] Therein lay the crux of the matter: the fact that federal authority was so apparent in the internal revenue form of taxation, and, the fact that the agents were Republicans did not help to improve Ashe's disposition towards the system. Such clear sign of authority was particularly irksome to a man who felt that the Civil War had settled little and to whom the concept of an American nation was little short of heresy.[89] As the election of 1884 neared, Ashe condemned the internal revenue service as "the Right hand of the Republicans" in campaigning, but in 1885, after a Democratic president had come to power, his criticism of the system declined markedly because, as his paper proclaimed, "the internal revenue collectorships are now all held by men of the true political faith."[90]

Another issue of supreme importance in the mind of Ashe was the

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[87] News and Observer, August 4, 1883.

[88] News and Observer, December 12, 1882.

[89] News and Observer, September 25, 1880.

[90] News and Observer, June 21, 1885.

question of the tariff, an issue second only to the internal revenue. Aside from the fact that he opposed the tariff as a Republican measure, his opposition must be viewed in light of the same laissez faire attitude that shaped his position towards railroads. His view was aptly summarized in December, 1882:

> On principle we favor the doctrine that a free people have a right to sell in the dearest market and buy in the cheapest. That is the foundation stone underlying the whole doctrine of that policy which is known as free trade. He who denies the right of the people . . . in this regard would abridge their liberty of action.[91]

Thus Ashe denounced a high protective tariff as an abridgement of liberty which was contrary to free trade. The policy of taxing the public to provide protection for what was supposedly private enterprise was "odious" in a free society. The News and Observer said that the tariff "militates against every interest in the country"[92] and that "however burdensome this protective system is to the South, it is still more burdensome to the non-manufacturing classes of the North."[93] Probably Ashe's most effective argument against the high tariff was his suggestion that its reduction would redound to the benefit of Southern manufacturing, for the region's cheaper products would be a better buy than more expensive northern goods. Though the editor knew this would hurt the protected few, he nonetheless felt that the people would benefit from less expensive and better quality merchandise and, in-

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[91] News and Observer, December 12, 1882.

[92] News and Observer, November 23, 1883.

[92] News and Observer, May 8, 1884.

evitably, a better standard of living.[93] His assaults upon the tariff were never ending and he was extremely disappointed when a Democrat, Grover Cleveland, failed to force a tariff reduction in the early years of his first administration.

Concurrent with Ashe's denunciation of the tariff in the early eighties there arose in Virginia an apparition that struck fear into the hearts of steadfast North Carolina Democrats; the rise of the Readjusters. The Readjusters had taken over the Virginia legislature in 1879 by promising to cease the expensive Conservative policy of funding the state debt to the detriment of the public finances. The leader of this group, William Mahone, a former Democrat who became displeased with Conservative policy, was soon elected senator by the Readjuster legislature. In January, 1880, Ashe expressed confidence that Mahone would not desert his old friends and support the Republicans.[94] But, as a result of Mahone's pronouncements, Ashe was soon rudely awakened to the reality of the situation in Virginia and he became one of the Readjuster's leading critics. Upon entering the Senate in 1881, Mahone allied himself with the Republicans and gave them the single vote they needed to control that body. The News and Observer was scathing in its denunciations of the senator saying "the traitor Mahone gave the Radicals a majority."[95] Comparing the Readjusters to the carpetbaggers, the paper considered the movement as

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[93] News and Observer, November 14, 1882.

[94] Observer, January 7, 1880.

[95] News and Observer, October 13, 1881.

essentially a combination of the Negroes with disreputable white elements.[96] On April 26, 1881, Ashe presented the following observation on the Mahone-Republican alliance:

> . . . a corrupt bargain has been made, the object, purpose and effect of which is to strengthen repudiation, but not by the Bourbons, whose accession to power was formerly regarded with dread because it was expected that they would seek to cripple the government, disarrange the finances and destroy the public credit.[97]

In the Virginia elections of 1881 the Republican party joined ranks with Mahone and, according to Ashe after their victory, had "ranged itself upon the side of repudiation and dishonor."[98] He expressed hope that this situation would not be long lasting. As a member of the state legislature he himself had denounced repudiation, but, when his party reduced the state debt so drastically as to almost constitute an act of repudiation, Ashe meekly acquiesced.

All of the activity in Virginia had a clear impact in North Carolina. When the state Republican party met in June of 1882, it praised Mahone as "the Savior of Virginia."[99] The idea of such an unholy alliance in his own state upset Ashe to no end and when, during the campaign in Virginia in 1883, Mahone announced that in the future the Republicans would carry North Carolina as well as Virginia, he decried such a thing as impossible. However, the '83 campaign in the Old Dominion was characterized by racist Democratic appeals which

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[96] News and Observer, April 29, 1881.

[97] News and Observer, April 26, 1881.

[98] News and Observer, October 22, 1881.

[99] News and Observer, June 15, 1882.

climaxed in the infamous Danville race riot and led to an ultimate Conservative victory. The riot was a strictly partisan struggle in which a large body of white Democrats had dismissed a meeting in a Danville theater when they heard a racial brawl had broken out on the street between a white and black man. By the time the Democrats had arrived on the scene two large mobs were forming, one white and one black. Shooting started and several people were killed and many more were wounded, requiring that authorities be called in to quell the violence. The News and Observer, as would be expected, blamed the riot on the Mahone forces whom it charged had been stirring the Negroes with inflamatory speeches. When the voters went to the polls the Readjusters suffered a crushing defeat, and in January, 1884, the newly-elected Conservative legislature asked Mahone to step down as senator, and thus ended the reign of the Virginia Readjusters.[100] Ashe had often made clear his view that in many cases the Democrats had to resort to questionable expedients in order to restore good government. This was doubtless what he considered the case in Virginia.

With the dawning of 1884, the News and Observer was entering upon a year in which it was prepared to battle a Liberal-Republican coalition and prevent the "Mahoneization" of North Carolina. The sale of the Western North Carolina Railroad to W. J. Best and the subsequent payment of $600,000 by the purchaser, had resulted in the

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[100] News and Observer, June 12, November 6, 8, 1883, January 31, 1884.

suspension of state taxes for the year 1884.[101] This move, which Ashe readily admitted was in the interest of the Democratic party, was of immeasurable value to their cause in the '84 election. Ashe considered the reputed consequences of the year's suspension of taxes on illiteracy and schools as inconsequential.

As was his general policy, Ashe remained aloof from pre-convention endorsements of any of the gubernatorial candidates despite pressure from some.[102] However, insofar as the presidential race was concerned, he broke with his usual policy and in April, 1884 endorsed Thomas Bayard for the Democratic nomination. This was understandable in view of Bayard's well known anti-war speech in 1861. That the editorial position taken by Ashe was that of the state's Democrats is revealed by the vote in the Democratic Convention at Chicago in July. There the North Carolina delegation voted as a block on the first ballot for Bayard, but seeing the tide toward Grover Cleveland of New York the entire delegation switched on the second ballot. Ashe, with supreme confidence, predicted an easy victory for Cleveland in November.[103]

The nomination of James G. Blaine by the Republicans was a god-send as far as Ashe was concerned. A man known to most Southerners as the long-time waver of "the bloody shirt," Blaine could expect to lose readily the South, while at the North the memory of the "Mulligan

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[101] News and Observer, September 24, 1886.

[102] Thomas S. Ashe to Samuel A. Ashe, January 20, 1884, Ashe Papers.

[103] News and Observer, April 8, July 11, 12, 1884. It might be added that Ashe frequently fed the party rank and file with optimistic forecasts of impending Democratic victory.

Letters" cast considerable doubt on his veracity.[104] Even Ashe's old northern friend the well known naval historian Alfred T. Mahan, a Republican, stated that he was shocked at the choice of the Republicans and hoped to see Blaine's defeat.[105]

The state governor's race pitted Alfred M. Scales, one of Ashe's close friends, against a coalition candidate, Tyre York, the Anti-Prohibition congressman from the seventh district. Ashe said that York, a former Democrat whom he knew personally in the legislature of 1870-71, was "a man of contracted notions" who "cared more for making a record . . . than for the good of the state." This "turn coat," formerly an opponent of the internal revenue system according to the editor, had become the property of "the revenue oligarchy."[106] Stumping the state for support, York realized that the prohibition issue was dying and thus appealed to the common bond of poor whites and blacks, saying that in order for him to be defeated their numbers would have to be greatly diminished. The News and Observer, with its usual Caucasian logic, lunged into York declaring that indeed he had a great deal of gall to lump together "poor white folks and negroes," as if the poor whites were to be distinguished from the regular whites.[107] Even had York been able to overcome such an assault it is doubtful it could have brought him victory, for he was hampered by an association with the Blaine ticket.

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[104] News and Observer, August 15, October 21, 1884.

[105] Alfred T. Mahan to Samuel A. Ashe, July 26, 1884, Mahan Papers.

[106] News and Observer, July 10, September 10, 1884.

[107] News and Observer, November 1, 1884.

During the election, as he had before, Ashe appealed editorially for black votes, but he made it clear that there was an absolute color line. In an editorial entitled "A Word With Colored Voters," he acknowledged that the Democrats constituted a white man's party, but that inevitably the whites must rule and, therefore, every "wise" Negro voter should vote the Democratic ticket in order "to have the best government he can get for the State."[108]

As November neared, Ashe continued his attacks on the Republicans and recalled the old issues of internal revenue, tariff, and Radical extravagance. When election day came, the Democrats won a tremendous victory with Scales defeating York by about 20,000 votes and Cleveland easily taking the state and winning the presidency. Ashe was jubilant for "After a long black night of twenty years daybreak has come.... The Democratic sun rises grandly.... The constitution is saved. The Union is preserved."[109] A few months after Cleveland came into office Ashe was rewarded for his services to the party by being appointed postmaster at Raleigh.[110] James I. McRee was officially editor after this, but as Ashe said, he "had a finger in the pie."[111] The Bourbon editor's enemies never acknowledged his departure from the editorial chair and, knowing Ashe's personality, it is easy to see why. Ashe's statement that he kept only "a finger in the pie" was something of a

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[108] News and Observer, February 27, 1884.

[109] News and Observer, November 8, 1884.

[110] Commission as Postmaster signed by President Grover Cleveland, May 26, 1885, Ashe Papers.

[111] News and Observer, September 12, 1886, July 19, 1889.

distortion. He kept unusually close supervision over his paper.

The year 1885 was a turning point in the journalistic career of Samuel Ashe, for it was the year that he lost the state printing contract which, despite his arduous efforts, he was never to regain. While a member of the state legislature in 1871, he was instrumental in drawing up the state printing law, arguing that "the public printing was party patronage and that it ought to be used to sustain the party. That it ought not to be let to the lowest bidder. . . ." When the legislature drafted the law it was expressly for the purpose of preventing competition.[112] It was well understood at the time that the state printing would go to a Democratic party organ located in the state capital at Raleigh. In 1881 Ashe, who frequented the legislative halls to get news, had procured the public printing contract and held it for two terms, a period of four years.[113] Prior to the awarding of the contract, Joseph P. Caldwell, prominent editor of the Statesville Landmark, informed Ashe that he had spoken to a state senator on his behalf.[114] Having thus procured the printing, the News and Observer easily retained it in 1883, but in that same year was confronted with a major financial crisis.

The consolidation of the Observer and the News in 1880 had not given Ashe complete ownership of the News property and management. The owners of the News Publishing Company were informed that they

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[112] News and Observer, January 27, 1885.

[113] News and Observer, January 15, 1885.

[114] Joseph P. Caldwell to Samuel A. Ashe, December 6, 1880, Ashe Papers.

could get $25,000 for the entire News and Observer, but Ashe refused to sell. When they offered to buy or sell their half of the property for $12,500, he demurred, after which they forced the issue by threatening litigation. The paper had a per annum profit of 12 per cent on $25,000 and, though the better part of this arose from the public printing, Ashe was ready to raise a joint stock company of 250 shares at $100 each, while personally taking 125 shares and guaranteeing all purchasers a 6 per cent profit even if he lost the state printing. Ashe informed Senator Zebulon B. Vance that it was his express desire to prevent the paper from falling into the hands of anti-Vance partisans.[115] With letters of encouragement and sympathy from Vance, Scales, and others,[116] he undertook to establish a company, purportedly selling stock to such men as William H. Willard, Rufus Turner, and Julian S. Carr.[117] On February 15 Ashe announced that he had bought out the News Publishing Company with several associates who now effectively controlled three-forths of the company stock.[118] This scheme was, however, only a temporary solution to the problems of the News and Observer that were to bring about Ashe's journalistic demise in 1894.

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[115] Samuel A. Ashe to Zebulon B. Vance, November 26, 1883, Vance Papers, Raleigh.

[116] Zebulon B. Vance to Samuel A. Ashe, November 24, 1883, Alfred M. Scales to Ashe, November 23, 1883, Ashe Papers.

[117] William Henry Willard to Thomas J. Jarvis, July 14, 1894, Ashe Papers; Josephus Daniels, Editor in Politics (Chapel Hill, 1941), 85-86, hereinafter cited as Daniels, Editor in Politics; see also Daniels, Tar Heel Editor, 432.

[118] News and Observer, February 15, 1884.

Having assumed a tremendous debt made the loss of the state printing a more serious blow to Ashe and his paper, for the salary of state printer was almost as great as that of the governor.[119] While the struggle for the state contract was going on in 1885, Richard Battle, one-time Democratic chairman, wrote Ashe:

> I speak the sentiments of our people when I say the Democratic Party will commit a big mistake when they give the public printing to any other than the News and Observer. I do not think our legislature will be so ungrateful as to do you such an injustice.[120]

Ashe considered the printing contract as a sign of Democratic approval of a paper's policy. It would be hard to conceive the disappointment he felt when on January 29, 1885, the Democratic caucus chose to reinstate Peter M. Hale as state printer by a vote of 69 to 34 for Ashe, with 19 going to the Chronicle.[121] In all probability Ashe's defeat was the result of two major factors. First, no firm to date had ever held the printing more than two terms in succession. Secondly, Hale was considered by many to be the more capable printer. The loss of the public printing, however, did not in any way detract from Ashe's support of the Democratic party nor from his efforts to improve the state.

The census returns of 1880 had greatly upset Ashe for they bore bleak witness to the fact that illiteracy in North Carolina was on the increase. Of this shocking revelation he said: "Look at our State

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[119] Daniels, Tar Heel Editor, 344.

[120] Richard Battle to Samuel A. Ashe, January 16, 1885, Ashe Papers.

[121] News and Observer, January 30, 1885.

bowed down in shame and right this wrong. Be just and fear not, you will be sustained."[122] The News and Observer had always been steadfast in its support of President Kemp Battle of the University of North Carolina and was in favor of industrial schools, but now it took greater interest in secondary and elementary education. To solve the problem of illiteracy, Ashe suggested that the state pay teachers a starting salary of at least $500 a year, not an unreasonable figure for the times. He also urged support of the state normal schools and encouraged young men and women to enter teaching as a profession.[123] Ashe said that education was a good investment which would return $5 in taxes on every dollar spent. He declared: "Instead of $500,000, we should spend a round million to educate the children of the State."[124]

The Conservative editor was in quite a quandary over state support of schools, for he favored frugal government, feeling that in taxes the state had "bent the bow about as far as it will go."[125] The Dortch bill, which was put before the state Senate in 1883, solved this problem by providing for "augmenting the school fund in any district by means of a local assessment in that district. This establishes a kind of cooperative business. The State will lay the same tax as now so that each white and each colored district will receive the same as at present; then the white patrons of the white schools and the colored

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[122] News and Observer, November 28, 1882.

[123] News and Observer, May 5, 1882, June 8, 10, 1883.

[124] News and Observer, February 12, 1884.

[125] News and Observer, February 2, 1883.

patrons of the colored schools may, if they please, supplement this fund by an assessment of their own property."[126] Ashe was well aware of the constitutional problem this arrangement could present, but he argued that the bill did not make a distinction as to race, though the results of such a measure were quite apparent. In 1886 the North Carolina Supreme Court struck down the local assessment law as unconstitutional.[127] It was clear that the Dortch plan was not the answer to the state's rising illiteracy.

Another education measure that received the News and Observer's support was the bill introduced in the United States Senate by Henry W. Blair, a New Hampshire Republican. The measure, which was designed to get rid of the surplus produced by the tariff, would have appropriated millions to the states for education based on illiteracy. Ashe realized that such appropriations would be of immense value to the South and he remarked that in a single year North Carolina's school fund would be increased to more than a million dollars. The Bourbon editor agitated constantly for the Blair bill, arguing that it was only right that the money extorted by the tariff should be returned. The fact that the South would get the lion's share of the new funds also influenced his reasoning and inclined him to ignore the true

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[126] News and Observer, February 2, 1883.

[127] Charles L. Coon, "School Support and our North Carolina Courts, 1868-1926," North Carolina Historical Review, III (July, 1926), 399-438. Coon notes that in the case of Riggsbee vs. the Town of Durham the court declared the local assessment law unconstitutional because it was in violation of Section 2, Article IX, of the state constitution which forbade special distinctions based upon race. The local assessment law clearly made such a distinction.

intent of the measure: the relieving of a Republican embarassment as a means of stemming the tide for tariff reform. Ashe's desire to see the passage of the Blair bill was never fulfilled, for the Republicans finally killed the measure in 1888.[128]

Concurrent with the News and Observer's battle for educational improvement through the Blair bill, arose the specter of possible Democratic defeat in the mid-term election of 1886. With the growing strength of the Independents, angry over Conservative inaction on railroad legislation and farm problems, it seemed likely that, with the open support of J. J. Mott, they could seriously hurt the Democrats. To promise tax reductions, attack the tariff, and point to the past year's $750,000 expenditure on education in the state would not be enough to insure victory for the party. Indeed, Ashe even went so far as to propose a national income tax on the wealthy, those with incomes in excess of $4,000 a year.[129] One reason for such expedients was the threat posed by John Nichols, a member of the Knights of Labor and an Independent candidate for Congress in the fourth district. He was not alone, however, for Independent opposition had spread throughout the state.

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[128] News and Observer, March 20, April 13, 1882, January 10, March 10, September 12, 1883, February 12, 20, March 2, 16, 19, 25, April 5, June 1, December 20, 1884; Willard B. Gatewood, Jr., "North Carolina and Federal Aid to Education: Public Reaction to the Blair Bill, 1881-1890," North Carolina Historical Review, XL (Autumn, 1963), 465-488. Gatewood states that the fact that the South would get most of the Blair appropriations was "sufficient reason for many Democratic journals to endorse the measure." C. Vann Woodward, Origins of the New South, 1877-1913 (Baton Rouge, 1951), 63-64, hereinafter cited as Woodward, Origins of the New South.

[129] News and Observer, August 15, 24, September 26, 1886.

Ashe's attitude toward labor had never been exceptionally friendly, though he did make a distinction between the skilled and the unskilled. Being a proponent of laissez faire, he held that "labor will always command what it is worth to the employers."[130] Of the state's impoverished field hands he had once remarked that "they get all they are entitled to receive. They are not skilled laborers, nor are they intelligent, conscientious workers. The planters, after paying them, generally have but little, if any surplus coming from their labor."[131] Prejudice against black labor might in part explain this attitude, but it is little wonder that Ashe, a devout Democratic Bourbon, was greatly distrubed by the possibility of the election of a labor leader to Congress.

One might think that, looking back on the Haymarket Riot in Chicago in May of 1886, Ashe would charge Nichols with having anarchist labor connections, but this is not what he did. Of those persons who were arrested in connection with the riot the News and Observer had said: "If those anarchist rogues escape punishment the cause of justice will suffer seriously, and the whole country will feel the effect of such failure to do what is right."[132] But, rather than using this against Nichols, Ashe chose to use the old stand by issue which had worked so effectively in the past; the race issue. On September 7, 1886, his paper had said the tariff was the real issue and that the

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[130] News and Observer, September 17, 1886.

[131] Observer, January 22, 1880.

[132] News and Observer, August 15, 1886.

color question had been too long agitated. "Give the colored brethren a rest," it implored, "they have been in the forefront of political campaigns so long that they need it."[133] Three days after this appeal the News and Observer launched one of its most militant campaigns of racial slander reporting that Nichols had been chosen postmaster of Raleigh in 1881 to replace ex-Governor Holden who had failed to appoint enough blacks. Upon taking his new office, the postmaster immediately appointed one of his "colored brethren" to work at the delivery window. "There was no need to enquire what was the political cast of the postmaster," the report read, "one had only to get his letters at the delivery window." But that was not the worst of it, Nichols had appointed a black as chief letter carrier with two whites working under him. As the paper put it: "A white republican was not given the superior place, it was conferred on the darkey."[134]

Several days later, having heard the charges made against him, Nichols did not deny them, but rather, before a group of cheering blacks, defended his actions. He asked what was wrong with a Negro working at a delivery window, people acted as if they feared contamination yet "everybody takes his cup of coffee from the hands of a colored person, colored women ride in carriages with the ladies," and "when even the most abandoned colored women of the town enter the stores the clerks bow and scrape and wait on them with all the politeness they show to the finest ladies." The paper retaliated saying that that had nothing

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[133] News and Observer, September 7, 1886.

[134] News and Observer, September 10, 1886.

to do with placing a Negro over white men or with "putting a colored man as clerk at the only place in the post office where he would be thrown in direct contact with people coming in to get their mail."[135]

In October, Ashe had the opportunity to connect Nichols with an event that occurred at the convention of the Knights of Labor in Richmond. His paper assailed the great insult delivered to Governor Fitzhugh Lee when Terence V. Powderly, Grand Master Workman of the Knights of Labor, had himself been introduced by a Negro. "Anglo Saxon blood rebels" against egalitarian racial notions said the News and Observer on October 7. The paper reminded its readers that Nichols was a member of the labor organization, one of whose members it was reported had been seen sitting with a mulatto "whose hands he held." Ashe and McRee, his new editorial associate, launched repeated attacks on the "negrophilists" right up until election day.[136]

On November 2, Nichols won his congressional seat[137] while the Independents captured eight seats in the state House of Representatives and three in the Senate. With a membership in the lower house of 55 Republicans and 57 Democrats, the Independents held the balance of power.[138] Ashe declared that the election proved that there was a

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[135] News and Observer, September 19, 1886.

[136] News and Observer, October 7, 9, 12, 1886.

[137] News and Observer, November 4, 1886. John Nichols himself was far from the innocent victim he seemed, for the labor leader was something of a political opportunist as is made clear by Melton McLaurin, "The Knights of Labor in North Carolina," North Carolina Historical Review, XLIX (Summer, 1972), 298-315.

[138] News and Observer, November 7, 1886.

"new element in politics to be reckoned with, while he blamed the defeat on Democratic overconfidence, defections, the light turn out, the "internal revenue raiders," and the dispute over civil service reform.[139] If the latter was in fact true then Ashe was wrong when he said before the election that civil service reform was "an unimportant issue."[140] In all probability, however, the Tar Heel editor was trying to make excuses for the failure of his party to meet the demands of the voters.

When the new legislature met in January, 1887, Ashe was in for a rude shock, for the Independents united with the Republicans to elect one of their own, John R. Webster, as speaker of the House. Having been critical of Webster during the campaign turned out to have been a real mistake for Ashe because Webster was instrumental in seeing that the Bourbon editor did not get the state printing contract.[141] Ashe's major competitor for the contract was a young and progressive new editor, Josephus Daniels.

In 1887 Ashe commenced his editorial battles with Daniels who was editor of the State Chronicle. As Raleigh's leading editor the venerable Ashe had seen journalists come and go while his stalwart conservative sheet held its somewhat uncertain ground. The State Chronicle had been founded by Walter Hines Page in 1883, and Daniels recalled later "a thrill of pleasure" at its establishment for "the

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[139] News and Observer, November 3, 4, 7, 1886.

[140] News and Observer, June 29, 1886.

[141] News and Observer, January 6, 1887; Daniels, Tar Heel Editor, 348-349.

News and Observer was too conservative and belonged to an older order." Daniels said of Ashe and Page that they were "able men both, the one of the antebellum period, who regretted the South did not win, and the other glad the South was in the Union and hoping that it would become industrially and politically independent." It is little wonder that two such men clashed though "their difference was not serious." After Page's failure to win the state printing contract, he sold the Chronicle and moved to New York. After a brief tenure under the editorship of F. B. Arendell, Daniels purchased the paper and became its editor.[142] As editor of the State Chronicle, Daniels became Ashe's chief competitor and in 1887 the two men confronted each other in the struggle to obtain the state printing contract.

The printing battle aroused the bitterest antagonisms between the two combatants for each fully realized the value of such an asset were his paper to maintain a viable position. The state printer's income supplemented a newspaper's income at a time when financial failures were common. Officially, Ashe claimed that he had no personal stake in the struggle by asserting that the printing was awarded to the News and Observer Company and not to him. The fact that the name of James I. McRee appeared as editor was pointed to as proof, but Daniels discounted all such assertions.

Bids for the state printing contract were submitted in January. Governor Alfred M. Scales, though he took no part in the matter, was

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[142]Daniels, Tar Heel Editor, 94-97.

known to favor Ashe.[143] The campaign soon developed into personalities when, on January 6, the State Chronicle reprinted from the Concord Times an article which said that Ashe was "dictator and head" of the News and Observer and that he did not need the printing because he had "a fat position in the Postmastership of Raleigh."[144] Soon thereafter the Chronicle came under attack from the News and Observer as a "strong prohibition paper" and "an infant" to journalism. Ashe's paper charged that Daniels was largely responsible for independentism because of his criticism of the administration of the Department of Agriculture which implied that the entire state Democratic party was corrupt. It was also asserted that Daniels' criticism of the News and Observer as "the organ" was detrimental to the interests of the party. The editorial added that the next election could not be won "under the leadership of a paper that deems it an odious thing to be a party organ."[145]

Daniels' response was quick and strong. He avowed that his paper was for local option on the prohibition question, though it did favor "a prohibition to greed." His criticism of the Department of Agriculture was, he said, part of "an honest fight for Democratic economy." The attack on the Chronicle for the use of the word "organ" was called "puerile":

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[143] Daniels, Tar Heel Editor, 346.

[144] Concord Times, quoted in State Chronicle (Raleigh), January 6, 1887, hereinafter cited as State Chronicle.

[145] News and Observer, January 19, 1887.

> . . . because we did not bow down to and worship this self-constituted dispenser of pure Democracy, we are not entitled to "party approval." This is a new test of fealty and Capt. Ashe, the head source of all knowledge, alone can give the credentials to entitle one to that approval!

The newspaper added further that the News and Observer's "dictatorial policy has driven good men from the party" and that the paper "has no hold upon the working men" of the state. The editorial closed:

> . . . when a man who lives in a glass house, in which the panes are already cracked, throws a stone at us, we think it our duty to point out how vulnerable he is, and how, without intending it, his policy, by reason of his narrowness, so far as building up and strengthening the party is concerned, has worked damage--and damage only, and damage continually.[146]

Ashe had already alienated the Independents and thus when the caucus voted for state printer he lost rather badly. The vote stood 48 for Daniels, 20 for the News and Observer, and 16 for Peter M. Hale.[147] It would seem that the vote should have settled the issue until the contract was to come up again in 1889, but such was not to be the case.

Ashe was much displeased with the Independent-Republican coalition that controlled the House under the leadership of John R. Webster. He wrote Vance during the printing controversy:

> . . . The Public Printing is . . . in Webster's gift. He has said that he proposes to appoint a democratic committee and let the democratic caucus fix that as heretofore. If he does that, I shall be surprised; but others credit it apparently.
> . . . Maj. Wilson (railroad man) has come down and says "they are to compromise on Daniels." And Daniels says

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[146] State Chronicle, January 20, 1887.

[147] State Chronicle, January 27, 1887.

> "The thing is fixed." I have suspected that the articles that I wrote to prevent the present revival of the lease to the R & DRR /Richmond and Danville Railroad/ for 90 years--(...) could lead to an exertion of all the power of that road against the News & Observer; and I see their hand in several things.[148]

The Vance letter suggested that Ashe saw his impending defeat for the printing contract as a result of pressure by the Richmond and Danville, though it is hard to see how they would have preferred Daniels. In the letter, however, was the link that became the object of dispute between the two Raleigh editors.

On July 14, the State Chronicle charged John Nichols, the Independent congressman from the fourth district, with "nepotism" for appointing his own son to West Point without "competitive examinations."[149] This charge brought a scathing attack from Nichols who suggested that Daniels' father had been a Union man in the war (a Buffalo), while his mother had served as a Republican postal appointee.[150] But the charge that caused Ashe to take notice was Nichols' assertion that Daniels had schemed with John R. Webster to get the state printing contract. Daniels quickly leapt to the occasion and responded in his editorial "NICHOLS--THE TRAITOR TO THE WORKINGMAN," defending his family name and attacking the upstart

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[148]Samuel A. Ashe to Zebulon B. Vance, January 9, 1887, Zebulon B. Vance Papers, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, hereinafter cited as Vance Papers, Chapel Hill.

[149]State Chronicle, July 14, 1887.

[150]Joseph L. Morrison, Josephus Daniels Says . . . (Chapel Hill, 1945),10-11. Morrison finds no evidence to support the charge that Daniels' father deserted his own people to join Union forces as was often asserted, though he was fatally wounded while being transported on a Union ship purportedly for humanitarian purposes, 283-284.

congressman with new vigor.[151] The News and Observer said that it was not concerned with the controversy, but it reminded its readers that Speaker Webster appointed five of the eight members of the printing committee while "the caucus seemed to abandon itself to his dictation." The editorial asserted that "it would be a proper thing for the democrats of the State to agree that hereafter the public printing be let to the lowest bidder" thus wiping out "the 15 per cent unearned bonus" of the state printer.[152] Needless to say this was a complete reversal of Ashe's former stand on the issue.

Daniels was not unaware of Ashe's apparent change of heart. The Chronicle attacked Ashe who "tried to help John Nichols show that we had combined with the Independents in order to secure the Public Printing."[153] It then pointed to the fact that Ashe was one of the drafters of the printing law and noted that in 1885 as state printer he had been eager for the so-called "bonus," but now he had suddenly turned against it because he could not have it. The debate continued for some time and was not resolved finally until 1893.

The big thorn in Ashe's political side in 1887-88 was the Independents or as he called them, the "Bulla Democrats," so termed after the Republican chief clerk of the House. John R. Webster of course was the leader of the "Bulla Democrats," while Richmond Pearson was another man high in their ranks. In early 1887, Ashe gave Vance

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[151] State Chronicle, August 25, 1887.

[152] News and Observer, September 9, 1887.

[153] State Chronicle, September 15, 1887.

his view of the situation:

> Our friends here seem very much divided as to how to act towards these free-lances. My judgment is to lop them off, quickly, sharply, definitely: for in these days of independent tendencies, it seems our salvation depends on making it patent that there is and can be only two parties in North Carolina, and that those who renounce their allegiance to one necessarily goes at once to the other. It will take but a slight defection to put the republicans in power in the State--and I think we are now at a little crisis.[154]

Of course all that a lack of willingness to cooperate did in 1887 was give the opposition control of the state House of Representatives, but in the 1890's there were far more serious consequences.

Early in the legislative session Pearson attempted to have the county government law repealed without success. The Independents, however, were desirous of electoral reform and so he drew up a new county government bill which provided for the direct election of county boards of commissioners. The News and Observer decried any attempt to change the current law and called the existing county government statute "a bulwark of Anglo-Saxon civilization in this State."[155] Thus the Ashe paper raised the alarm though there was never any chance of passage of a new law so long as the Democrats controlled the Senate. Throughout the year it cited the great value the law held for the property holders of the East who otherwise would be under the dominion of propertyless blacks and warned Democrats that its repeal would

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[154]Samuel A. Ashe to Zebulon B. Vance, January 9, 1887, Vance Papers, Chapel Hill.

[155]News and Observer, February 21, 24, 1887.

leave the Negro counties to the mercy of Radical rule and thus constituted "compassion without value."[156]

When the session started Ashe's paper assailed the Independents in the House as "unmanageable" and chided them for their apparent confusion which resulted in a "darkey radical" voting for a Democrat as doorkeeper.[157] By March, however, the hopeless situation of the Independents and their allies was manifestly clear and prompted an editorial to declare that the legislature had "accomplished some legislation of value and has avoided the wild extremes which were not unreasonably apprehended." Most of the accomplishments noted in the editorial were of a negative nature: failure to alter county government, a cut in the funds of the Department of Agriculture (which Ashe had defended against the "vile" attacks of Daniels), the abolition of "free scholarships" at the University, and the defeat of the railroad commission bill (though Ashe had not pronounced against it as yet). On the more positive side, provision was made for a College of Agricultural and Mechanic Arts (a move Ashe favored), a resolution in favor of the Blair bill, the establishment of a Bureau of Labor Statistics (Ashe had called only for a Bureau of Statistics), and a time extension for railroad construction by the Cape Fear and Yadkin Valley Railroad.[158] The News and Observer had strongly supported the railroad on the last

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[156] News and Observer, December 16, 1887.

[157] News and Observer, January 7, 1887.

[158] News and Observer, March 4, 5, 1887.

issue, charging that the state had defaulted on its responsibility for not supplying 600 convicts for construction work on the road to Mt. Airy.[159]

It would appear that Ashe supported the convict lease system, at least insofar as North Carolina was concerned. His paper remarked upon an article on the subject by George W. Cable, the famed southern novelist. Attacking the article, "Convict Lease System in the Southern States," the editorial noted that Cable must have hoped to gain personally by "an exposure of southern inhumanity and southern shortcomings." Noting that the system in Georgia, Tennessee, and South Carolina was different than that in North Carolina, the editor added:

> As a matter of fact the lease system never existed in North Carolina. The state has never abdicated a jot or tittle of her responsibility in regard to her convicts. Whatever evil has come, has come from the state, not from any lessees. The lessees direct where work is to be done; the work is done by the convicts under direction of state overseers.

Cable had taken note of the penitentiary report of 1880 and the death of 158 leased prisoners, eleven of whom he said "were shot down in trying to escape from this heartless butchery." Though the editorial attacked this statement it did not explain any of the deaths.[160]

A situation which presented some problem for Ashe and other hard-line Democrats was increasing disaffection with the Cleveland administration. In June, 1887, Senator Vance issued a statement which was highly critical of the President's monetary and civil service policies.

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[159] News and Observer, January 14, 1887.

[160] News and Observer, May 21, 22, 25, 1887.

True to his position on silver, the senator charged the administration with discriminating against silver and with the retention of Republican appointees. The News and Observer praised Vance's character, but defended Cleveland's fiscal policies, for it said that he, as did Vance, ran on a bimetallic platform and "the President favors it as heartily as Senator Vance or anybody else." The editorial went on to criticize Vance's suggestion that the public debt be paid in silver. Ashe agreed with the senator on the question of civil service reform and condemned the appointment of a Negro as Registrar of the District of Columbia, though that incident was not to be imputed to "the administration as a whole."[161]

On several occasions thereafter Ashe felt called upon to defend the President against charges that he was a "gold bug." A worse case of misguided loyalties it would be hard to imagine. His paper called Cleveland "a worthy successor to Jefferson and Jackson," and said that his "money principles are entirely correct judging by those of Mr. Calhoun."[162] Even as late as 1892 Ashe was publicly proclaiming Cleveland a "bimetallist" though privately he must have known better or had some doubts.[163]

During 1887 the country was in a state of economic distress which many persons blamed on the Democratic administration, although the News and Observer blamed the tariff system. Understandably the coming

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[161] News and Observer, June 16, 1887.

[162] News and Observer, October 20, 1887, February 28, 1888.

[163] News and Observer, July 24, 1892.

year did not look particulary bright for the Democrats. Ashe's paper agitated continually for a tax reduction at the national level as a means of relief, but without success.[164] The situation was none too good and in December the News and Observer even went so far as to draw a clear line of distinction between the "national" Democrats and the home grown variety. As a reminder, the paper pointed out that the state party was only "allied" with the national one while the North Carolina Democratic party "has maintained its former organization, and has asserted year after year its own political doctrines, its hopes, objects and purposes as a distinct political organization. . . . We are primarily organized to maintain Anglo-Saxon dominancy in North Carolina and in every part of it."[165] The implication of such a position was clear: the state's Democrats did not want to be too closely associated with national failures.

The News and Observer embarked on its 1888 campaign with a classic appeal in its editorial "THE QUESTION OF PARAMOUNT IMPORTANCE." The great issue that was so vital was "the continued supremacy of the white man in the public affairs of the State."[166] In line with this appeal the paper recounted to the state's young voters the evils of Reconstruction and the dangers of Radical rule lest they be led astray.[167]

One of the important issues of 1888 was what to do with the surplus

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[164] News and Observer, May 12, March 12, 15, 1887.

[165] News and Observer, December 16, 1887.

[166] News and Observer, January 31, February 4, 1888.

[167] News and Observer, February 17, March 2, 14, 1888.

in the United States Treasury. One solution was the Blair bill for education which Ashe vigorously supported, but another was to use the approximately $120 million to buy up government bonds. The News and Observer felt the latter measure, which would only benefit northern bondholders, to be absolutely unsatisfactory. It editorialized: "For ourselves we are unalterably opposed to buying up bonds at an enormous premium for the sole benefit of a small class of wealthy citizens and so is the large majority of the Democratic party."[168] Of course, the paper noted, some Democrats "who live near Wall Street" might disagree. When the measure passed the News and Observer chided "our Democratic friends in Congress" for not halting the bond bill in debate.[169] The real disappointment came when the Cleveland administration did not veto the measure but proceeded to buy up the bonds. Cleveland, however, further weakened the position of the party by ignoring the economic problems of the country and blaming all ills on the tariff. The News and Observer felt compelled to remind its readers that "a Democratic victory in 1888 is of much more importance to the South than the success of either protection or free trade ideas."[170]

As would be expected Ashe's paper unhesitatingly accepted the renomination of the President as "the man of destiny" and praised the Democratic platform as "conservative, while bold and uncompromising."[171]

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[168] News and Observer, April 7, 1888.

[169] News and Observer, April 10, 1888.

[170] News and Observer, April 18, 1888.

[171] News and Observer, June 5, 9, 1888.

The paper was disappointed, however, in its hope to see Adlai Stevenson, descended of North Carolina stock, nominated for the vice-presidential spot.[172] The Republicans for their part nominated Benjamin Harrison, a little known but far less objectionable man than was James G. Blaine.

Ashe was doubtless pleased with the Democratic nominee for governor, the strongly conservative railroad lawyer Daniel G. Fowle. His enemies accused him of being the Richmond and Danville Railroad candidate. Prior to the state convention it was charged that the News and Observer was simply a Fowle organ and that the numerous letters in support of his candidacy that appeared in the paper were all written in Raleigh. The newspaper responded: "If a majority of the letters favor one rather than another, the logical inference is that the candidate so favored is the favorite one with the public."[173]

As the campaign got underway Spier Whitaker, chairman of the State Democratic Executive Committee, declared that "there is disorganization, indifference and discontent in the Democratic party to an alarming extent."[174] The farmers were particularly unhappy due to their financial plight and the failure of the legislature to create a railroad commission. The reason that caused even greater fear of farmer defections was the failure of Syd Alexander, president of the state Farmers' Alliance, to get the Democratic nomination for governor. Subsequently

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[172] News and Observer, May 29, June 8, 1888.

[173] News and Observer, April 18, 1888.

[174] News and Observer, August 11, 1888.

the Republicans nominated Oliver H. Dockery who laid claim to farm votes as an Allianceman. The News and Observer, however, referred to Dockery as the candidate of the "manufacturing monopolies of the North" and said he and the farmers were "as wide apart as the poles."[175] The paper printed numerous letters from purported Alliancemen saying that Dockery was "no farmer."[176] A real boost came to the Democrats when Leonidas L. Polk, the editor of the Progressive Farmer and a rising Alliance leader, entered the campaign and made a speaking tour of the state for the Democrats. He acted as "a power for Democracy"[177] as he urged Alliance members to vote the Democratic ticket.

During the campaign Ashe's paper took its usual paradoxical position on the race issue to overshadow economic issues and thus maintain an illogical white solidarity. The paper said that Dockery wanted to give the black man "who . . . was no more fit to govern than his heathen brother in the wilds of central Africa" dominion over the whites.[178] It also played up what it called "Dockery's ticket in 1884" when he reportedly voted for Negroes for legislator, coroner, and register of deeds in Richmond County.[179] On November 2 a cartoon appeared on the front page which showed Dockery on the end of a Negro's rope voting their ticket as three Democratic nominees stood by, one a one-legged

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[175] News and Observer, August 17, 1888.

[176] News and Observer, October 12, 1888.

[177] News and Observer, October 30, 1888.

[178] News and Observer, August 1, 1888.

[179] News and Observer, October 9, 1888.

Confederate veteran.[180] Such cartoons appeared frequently and one displayed Radical rule in Eastern North Carolina in which a white woman, in the custody of a black constable, stood before a Negro judge and a predominately black jury. A Negro teacher was shown declaring: "This woman abused me for whipping her child."[181]

While attacking Dockery for being "'hat off' to every darkey he meets," the News and Observer attacked John Nichols, the fourth district Congressman, for "bigotry." He was quoted as denouncing the appointment to the United States House Education Committee of "Romanists who are opposed to education."[182] But the real hypocrisy seemed to raise its head in the assault on Republican Judge Daniel Russell. Russell reportedly referred to the state's uneducated Negro voters as being little better than "savages." The News and Observer was filled with indignation:

> The negroes of North Carolina are not savages. . . . It is a great misstatement to say that they are savages. It is a cruel wrong to them, a terrible injustice. They commit fewer crimes of a savage nature than many races of white men in civilized Europe.[183]

It appeared that Ashe, probably through the pen of McRee, was displaying a certain inconsistency though it may have been good politics to do so.

The election results brought some successes: Nichols was defeated

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[180] News and Observer, November 2, 1888.

[181] News and Observer, October 26, 1888.

[182] News and Observer, October 6, 1888.

[183] News and Observer, August 3, 1888.

by Benjamin H. Bunn for Congress and the Democrats regained control of the state House of Representatives. On the other hand, Furnifold M. Simmons was defeated in the second district by what the News and Observer called the "outrageous bulldozing of negroes who wished to vote for the democratic candidate in Craven,"[184] a highly doubtful proposition. The greatest setbacks were on the national level for Cleveland was defeated and the Democrats lost control of the House. Ashe thought of this as "the revolution" of 1888 and his paper gave what it considered reasons for the defeat. One of the reasons was the overemphasis of the tariff issue by Cleveland. "It was an act of heroism. The result, however, does not indicate that it was the highest political wisdon," said an editorial.[185] A second mistake was the use of the surplus to fund high premiums for the nation's bondholders because it "worked to the detriment of the people and contributed to the defeat of the party." A third cause of defeat was Cleveland's veto of the pension bills, an act which had angered many northern veterans and the Grand Army of the Republic.[186] In truth, however, the voters were unhappy because Cleveland had taken no positive action to stave off further economic decline.

The President's defeat was a personal blow for Ashe, for it meant that he would lose his post as postmaster of Raleigh with its salary of $2500 a year. This was a considerable loss because 1887

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[184] News and Observer, November 11, 1888.

[185] News and Observer, November 9, 1888.

[186] News and Observer, November 14, 1888.

had not been a good year for the News and Observer and in 1888 it had pleaded for subscribers. It urged people not to buy out of state papers which "teach doctrines opposed to their principles, and print matter in the way of news offensive to their tastes."[187] Senator Vance had been much disturbed by intimations that Ashe might be forced to leave journalism:

> I should see you leave the "Observer" with great regret! You have held the balance even between our public men; between our Sections and have made an impartial, discreet and always reliable exponent of democratic principles and policy. I sincerely trust that the Legislature may see its way clear to do what may be properly done for the sustentation of the "News & Observer." I should regard the failure of your paper from any cause as a serious calamity to our party and state. I have relied upon the dignity of its utterances and its sense of fair play more than perhaps you are aware of.[188]

The state results of the 1888 election had given Ashe some hope that he might get the state printing as a reward for his services during the campaign. In January, 1889, rumors were rampant that if Ashe did not get the contract his paper would fold and some insisted that a newspaper that suffered from such "pecuniary embarassment" was not good for the party. Ashe denied that there was to be any change in the management of his paper, but expressed the hope that "the legislature cannot be indifferent to a matter of such interest to the party." The patronage of the News and Observer by the state he felt would rebound to the party's benefit.[189] Ashe's only competitor

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[187] News and Observer, January 6, 1888.

[188] Zebulon B. Vance to Samuel A. Ashe, January 6, 1888, Ashe Papers.

[189] News and Observer, January 11, 1888.

for the position was Josephus Daniels, but, unlike 1887, the struggle did not develop into a public clash of personalities. The fact was that any such display would have done more harm to Ashe than Daniels in the eyes of the legislature. The House was dominated by Alliancemen who already harbored doubts about Ashe's love for the farmers. His paper had not yet come out against the railroad commission though in November it had said:

> The News and Observer has been very conservative in its course towards railroads. We want them in North Carolina. We therefore have not agitated for legislation that is calculated to prevent people from building them.[190]

Ashe had never attacked the Alliance nor its members, but all knew that he was clearly inclined toward the most conservative element of the Democratic party. Thus on January 24, the Democratic caucus gave Ashe and his paper the most serious blow it had ever suffered. It voted by a margin of 98 to 19 for Josephus Daniels to remain printer. This was a slight Ashe found hard to bear. Thomas J. Jarvis, one time adversary, tried to console Ashe: "I hope your failure to get the printing will not take you out of journalism. The party may not need you <u>now</u> when it has a bounty to bestow but it may need you next year when work is to be done."[191] Ashe, however, could not forget the defeat and was probably looking ahead to a real battle in 1891.

The year 1889 thus opened with a crushing defeat, but there were more than enough controversies to occupy the editor when he returned

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[190] <u>News and Observer</u>, November 17, 1888.

[191] Thomas J. Jarvis to Samuel A. Ashe, January 25, 1889, Ashe Papers.

officially to the editorial chair in July.[192] The Bourbon editor felt that he was ready to battle for "the Democracy," but little did he know the turn that battle was to take in the coming years. Farm discontent was on the rise in 1889, but few foresaw the tragic consequences this was to have for the state's leaders--for entrenched Bourbon Democrats.

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[192] News and Observer, July 19, 1889.

CHAPTER V
THE JOURNALIST IN POLITICS, 1889-1894

In 1889 Ashe resumed his full-time editorial pursuits with all his former vigor. He confronted, however, a more pressing political situation than he had in 1879, but he eagerly set himself to the task of bolstering the Democratic party. The party had effectively weathered the storm of "independentism" and Ashe was hopeful that it could withstand any storm no matter how powerful.

One question that confronted the state soon after Ashe's return to the editorial chair of the News and Observer was the removal of Dr. Eugene Grissom as superintendent of the state insane assylum. Grissom had been charged with cruelty, immorality, and misappropriation of funds, but a majority of the Board of Directors had acquitted him. Ashe felt that settled the issue, but Josephus Daniels did not for he demanded the resignation of the entire board. The uproar got so far out of hand that even Ashe had to declare that "the usefulness of Dr. Grissom has been so impaired that he ought to voluntarily retire from control of the Institution."[1] Finally, in August he resigned his post.[2]

Another question which took on importance was the issue of lynching. In 1887 when a Negro man was lynched for allegedly attempting to assault a white girl the News and Observer said it "was very decently and orderly done" and would "meet with the approval of public

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[1] News and Observer, August 3, 1889.

[2] News and Observer, August 25, 1889.

sentiment."[3] This despite the fact that lynching was illegal, though it may well have been McRee who made the remarks for the paper. However, when a mob lynched some prisoners in Morganton in 1889 Governor Fowle issued a proclamation against lynching. Some of the state press rediculed this exercise in futility. Ashe reproached his fellow editors for their criticism, but in October when a man was lynched for allegedly shooting his mother-in-law in Lexington, Ashe had had enough. He declared: "Such a disregard of the law is criminal rather than commendable." He later stated: "One of the causes of lynching is that nobody has even been punished for it. . . . The way to stop lynching is simply to do it;—punish the lynchers, and lynching is stopped."[4] Apparently all this had little effect for no serious action was taken to combat the evil.

The paramount problem that confronted the Bourbon editor in 1889 was the increasing unrest of the farmers. Ashe had always insisted that he was the friend of the farmers and understood their rising discontent. He devoted more and more editorial space to farm problems. In the final analysis, however, he always came back to the classic Redeemer explanation of poor farm prices—the Republican tariff system. Of course, he saw the Republican monetary policies as constituting another problem for the farmers. The News and Observer had vigorously endorsed the Alliance boycott of the jute bagging trust for practicing "extortion" and fixing high prices "to its own inordinate profit and

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[3]News and Observer, May 10, 1887.

[4]News and Observer, October 17, 29, 1889.

the measurable impoverishment of the masses of the people."[5] This support, however, did not redound to Ashe's benefit during the printing struggle. But Ashe was still interested in proving that he had been and still was a sure friend of the farmers. He pointed to the fact that in the early eighties the News and Observer had issued seeds and pamphlets on tobacco in Chatham, Johnston, Moore, and Nash counties to help the farmers.[6] With tables showing the decline in farm values from 1870 to 1890, Ashe noted with pride that he had constantly given "warning of the impoverishment of agriculture in portions of the old States and urged upon the public the lessons taught by these figures." He reasoned that foreign and western produce as well as a 30 per cent depreciation in silver since the "Crime of '73" (the demonitization of silver) was in part responsible for the plight of the southern farmer.[7] What the country needed was more money and the purchase of more silver "to its maximum limit until silver reaches par value."[8]

As late as February, 1889, the News and Observer was still professing its support for a railroad commission. At that time, however, James I. McRee was still officiating as stand-in editor and was followed for a brief tenure by C. T. Grandy.[9] The fact remains, however, that the views of the paper were subject to Ashe's approval and his enemies

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[5] News and Observer, August 3, 1888.

[6] News and Observer, September 13, 1889.

[7] News and Observer, December 6, 1889.

[8] News and Observer, January 11, 1890.

[9] News and Observer, April 28, 1889.

even called him the newspaper's "dictator."

In June the paper said of the Farmers' Alliance:

> . . . THE NEWS AND OBSERVER thoroughly sympathizes with its objects and purposes and would seek to promote and sustain it in the highest state of efficiency. The Alliance virtually is the people of the State of North Carolina.[10]

In truth, however, Ashe was far from total agreement with the Alliance and in January, 1890, declared: "We do not think that a railroad commission bill will accomplish any great result for the farmers of this State. We do not know of any great reason for passing a bill taking control of railroad property out of the hands of the owners."[11] The Progressive Farmer, the state Alliance organ, called this declaration "a double summersault" by a "party boss whip cracker."[12] Ashe claimed that his position had not changed substantially and that he thought the passage of the Interstate Commerce Act satisfied any need for railroad regulation. Besides, he said he was not even editor at the time the paper called for a railroad commission. The Progressive Farmer was astounded at such a claim and said that it would be "laughable news to the people of Raleigh, and most especially to the members of the legislature."[13]

Leonidas L. Polk, recognized spokesman for Alliance forces in the

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[10] News and Observer, June 25, 1889.

[11] News and Observer, January 29, 1890.

[12] Progressive Farmer (Raleigh), February 4, 1890, hereinafter cited as Progressive Farmer.

[13] News and Observer, February 5, 1890; Progressive Farmer, February 11, 1890.

state, was editor of the Progressive Farmer. He had been briefly associated with Ashe on the staff of the News and Observer in 1880 and 1881. When Polk left the paper, Ashe had written of him: "During the close intercourse which we have enjoyed with him we have found him admirable in all those traits of character which commend a gentleman to the friendship and esteem of his associates."[14] In August, 1888, when Polk was re-elected president of the Inter-State Farmers Association, the paper said of him: "Col. Polk is a born presiding officer, . . . and one of the most progressive men in the South."[15]

The fear that the Alliance might enter the political arena and effectively challenge the Redeemers after their twenty years in power greatly disturbed Ashe. In October, 1889, Polk received a tremendous reception at Henry Grady's Atlanta Exposition and, commenting upon Polk's speech, Ashe said that it appeared the farm leader wanted "to convert the 'Farmers' Alliance' into a political organization." Such a move would be "suicidal" asserted the Bourbon editor.[16] It was not long before Ashe was berating what he called "Progressive Journalism." "We never have known exactly in what that consists," he said, but suggested it might mean "turning a daily into a weekly issue," or using old press dispatches. Ashe, however, was certain of one thing: the News and Observer would, as it had in the past, survive all such papers.[17]

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[14] News and Observer, February 6, 1881.

[15] News and Observer, August 23, 1888.

[16] News and Observer, October 29, 1889.

[17] News and Observer, November 6, 1889.

All the while the editor attempted to prove himself the friend of the farmer by claiming that many of Polk's points were things the News and Observer had said earlier. The Durham Daily Globe responded to such claims by chiding Ashe who it said was always attempting "to show that HE was the champion of the farmer in politics." It added that "young progressive men of the State, must supplant moss-back fogyism in politics as well as farming, in manufactures, in education, in business, and if you please, in journalism. . . ."[18] Ashe took this as a threat to established Bourbonism and jumped to the defensive by saying that a farmer takeover of the Democratic party would "be destructive of the fundamental principle on which party organization is based." He decried it as dangerous "for the Alliance as a secret body to take charge of the Democratic party," and proceed to nominate candidates in "its secret sessions."[19]

Many Tar Heels expected an editorial struggle in January, 1890, and in that month they saw a preview of the future. On January 21, the resolutions of the Pitt County Alliance appeared in the Progressive Farmer and said in part: "Resolved, That we demand that our representatives in the next General Assembly use their utmost endeavors to abolish or offer a reform in the present public school system."[20] The next day the News and Observer commented: "It is stated that the Pitt

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[18] Daily Globe (Durham), quoted in Progressive Farmer, November 5, 1889.

[19] News and Observer, November 10, 1889.

[20] Progressive Farmer, January 21, 1890.

County Alliance has pronounced against the public schools."[21] Though this was not what the Alliance had intended, it is not an altogether unreasonable interpretation of the wording of the resolution. A. E. Moye, a Pitt County Alliance leader, immediately wrote a letter of protest to Ashe and on January 26 the editor took note of Moye's denial of the newspaper report.[22] The letter, however, was sent back to Moye informing him that certain parts were "disrespectful" and that if these were deleted the letter would be printed in full. This was not satisfactory to Moye who had his entire letter printed in the Eastern Reflector at Greenville. It said in part:

> You boast of your great love for the people of North Carolina and would intimate that the members of the Alliance do not love their State. . . .
> We say to you sir, treat us fairly and justly, judge us not harshly. . . .
> I intend to put the News & Observer in its true light, for anyone who reads it carefully will see that its line of argument and the trend of thought that it parades is not in sympathy with the Alliance movement.[23]

Ashe's immediate response was to request that the Reflector publish his letter to Moye. Then on February 8, he explained that he had not printed the Moye letter because it was "disrespectful" while Moye "complains that we are not favorable to the farmers and have no good words for them. Mr. Moye is in error in that." The editor went on to say that his antagonist wanted to make the Alliance "a secret political

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[21] News and Observer, January 22, 1890.

[22] News and Observer, January 26, 1890.

[23] Eastern Reflector (Greenville), February 5, 1890, hereinafter cited as Eastern Reflector.

party."[24] Moye replied: "We do not consider Capt. Ashe the Democratic party, nor do we regard him as Dictator. We have been dictated to long enough. . . ." He added that the cry of disloyalty to the party was "the stock and trade of the News and Observer."[25] The dispute continued for some time though its intensity subsided. In response to an inquiry by Elias Carr, president of the state Alliance, Ashe said he felt he had given Moye fair opportunity for the publication of his letter and added that it was rumored that the man wanted to put him in a bad light because "he hated Sam Ashe like the devil!"[26]

At the same time the News and Observer became involved in a debate with the Progressive Farmer over the utterances of Benjamin Terrell, an Alliance lecturer, who reportedly said: "We shall say to our Congressman, 'We own you. Do as we tell you or you don't go back.' That's the way the moneyed power have dictated to them. Its our turn now."[27] The controversy over Terrell resulted in sweeping charges by "Old Fogy," D. H. Rittenhouse, Polk's secretary, against the Democratic leadership. Ashe leapt to the defense of the state's Bourbon leaders and asked Rittenhouse to give the names of those who were being dictated to by the money power. When Rittenhouse admitted he had no specifics, Ashe proclaimed that he had bested his opponent and this proved that there

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[24] News and Observer, February 7, 8, 1890.

[25] Eastern Reflector, February 12, 1890.

[26] Samuel A. Ashe to Elias Carr, June 16, 1890, Elias Carr Papers, East Carolina Manuscript Collection, East Carolina University, Greenville.

[27] News and Observer, January 10, 1890.

was no substance to Rittenhouse's arguments.[28]

These controversies so upset Thomas J. Jarvis that he wrote Ashe a letter of advice:

> I have observed, with regret, a tendency among your enemies to put you in an attitude of hostility to the Alliance and I fear you have not been as watchful of their purposes as was prudent. I know quite well and so does every well informed man that you are the stead-fast friend of the farmer but there are men who, for their own selfish purposes, would be glad to make it appear otherwise and they will do so if they can. I regret that the occasion has arisen to draw you into a discussion with any of the Alliance people because it gives these men the opportunity to say that you are hostile to the farmers and your discusssion with the Alliance people, the Alliance men being farmers, gives color, in the minds of those who do not think for themselves, to the charge. Would it not be well for you to be more cautious. . . ?
> . . . We had better keep in with the Alliance people because they are the bone and sinew of the party and we cannot afford to split with them.[29]

Jarvis told Ashe that it might be necessary for some of the party regulars "to take back seats for a while," but that would be far better than Republican rule.

Jarvis' letter had some effect, for Ashe did break off his debate with Moye and declared that he felt the Alliance would do no harm to the Democratic party through "its deliberate action."[30] This of course left his debate open ended, for it could later be asserted that the Alliance leadership was not the Alliance. Indeed, Ashe was clever

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[28] News and Observer, January 29, 1890; Progressive Farmer, January 28, February 11, 1890.

[29] Thomas J. Jarvis to Samuel A. Ashe, February 14, 1890, Ashe Papers.

[30] News and Observer, February 22, 1890.

enough to realize the folly of attacking the Alliance, but attacking its leadership was a different matter.

The period of relative calm which followed these early disagreements was misleading, for the Alliance was pushing for a sub-treasury bill that would have established a system of government warehouses for farm produce. Senator Vance was persuaded by the Alliance to introduce the measure in Congress and many felt he would surely champion the bill. Editorially, Ashe questioned the "immense out lay" needed to carry out the sub-treasury plan but did not immediately oppose the idea.[31] He was among the first editors, however, to point out that Senator Vance's introduction of the bill was no indication of his support.

Prior to taking a clear position on the bill Ashe said of the Alliance: "The order at the South has no cause to agitate, for the public men of the Southern States have always been the advocates of such industrial measures as concern the welfare of the agricultural communities."[32] In March, after criticizing the sub-treasury measure as "not the government's province," an interference with "the regular and orderly course of trade," and as an unsound policy providing for "farmers to go into speculation," he changed course and ended by saying of the farmers: ". . . they stretch out their hands and say help us or we sink. We shall not deny them our help on the line they

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[31] News and Observer, March 11, 15, 1890.

[32] News and Observer, March 16, 1890.

propose."[33] The important thing in this pronouncement was that Ashe later used it as a defense of a circular sent out by the News and Observer which indicated support for the sub-treasury.

On May 18, Vance wrote a letter to Eugene C. Beddingfield, secretary of the state Alliance, in which he explained his position on key points in the Alliance platform. Vance favored free coinage of silver, prohibition of alien ownership of land, and the issue of fractional paper currency. He opposed the abolition of national banks, the prohibition of dealings in agricultural futures, and government control of railroads. He said of the sub-treasury bill:

> I am in favor not of this particular bill (for it is crude and imperfect) but of the principles of the bill, provided it be not established that it is unconstitutional.... Whether it be constitutional or not I am not now prepared to say. It is a great departure in our financial policy and will require careful and elaborate examination....[34]

This letter was not made public, but doubtless caused some stir in the Alliance camp and may have added momentum to the movement to expedite pledges from the state's Democratic nominees for office. In June the Alliance started demanding pledges of candidates for office. Ashe denounced the pledges as "words put in the mouth of the farmers of North Carolina" and "a slur on our good name" because it suggested that the public men of the state would not honor their spoken word alone.[35] Ashe also launched another battle with D. H. Rittenhouse for

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[33] News and Observer, March 20, 1890.

[34] Clement Dowd, Life of Zebulon B. Vance (Charlotte, 1897), 282-283.

[35] News and Observer, June 20, 22, 1890.

denouncing southern race policies as doing "more to retard the South than all else."[36]

The situation was such that Vance decided to publish a letter he wrote to Elias Carr. He wrote Ashe on June 29 and asked that he publish the letter to Carr and inform him of his opinion on the issue of publication.[37] On July 1 the letter appeared and contained the senator's declaration:

> My own position remains the same. I can not support this bill in its present shape.... I cannot gain my consent to vote for the sub-Treasury bill which provides for the loaning of money to the people by the government, and which, in my opinion is without constitutional authority.[38]

James L. Ramsey, an editorial manager of the Progressive Farmer, replied sharply to the Vance letter: "The farmers of North Carolina pay Senator Vance. It is his business to work for them whether the measures are constitutional or not.... We can't afford to pay men $8,000 per annum and then allow them to put up their brains against the entire State."[39] Many papers in the state took this as a Polk attack on the beloved senator and started flailing Polk. Ashe though he denounced the attack as "ruthless and uncalled for" clearly said that Polk could not be its author for he was in Kansas.[40] A letter written by Ashe to Senator Vance revealed that he thought the trouble

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[36] Progressive Farmer, quoted in News and Observer, May 8, 1890.

[37] Zebulon B. Vance to Samuel A. Ashe, June 29, 1890, Ashe Papers.

[38] News and Observer, July 1, 1890.

[39] Progressive Farmer, July 8, 1890.

[40] News and Observer, July 9, 1890.

over the sub-treasury would die down. He took the first Progressive Farmer article as the probable extent of the criticism:

> You will wish to know what the Alliance men are saying about your letter--About Robeson County, where the South Carolina influence is great, they are saying Carthage delenda est--and the article in the Progressive Farmer is in that line.
>
> /As to the opposition/. . . by firm but gentle and moderate treatment, it will be confined to localities. If however the worst shall come to the worse--the Democratic Party will declare for Vance for Senator, and make that the supreme issue in the State.
>
> I trust there will be no occasion for that--and the News & Observer will preserve a conciliatory course, subject always to suggestion from yourself in a matter so interesting to yourself--as well as so important to the Democratic Party.[41]

On July 15, the Progressive Farmer launched its strongest attack to date and declared that "Senator Vance is an enemy to the people."[42] This was the worst which Ashe had projected as a possibility. The News and Observer, as did other Bourbon papers in the state, denounced the attacks on Vance by the Progressive Farmer and the Alliance organs in no uncertain terms:

> Their attacks on this illustrious North Carolinian are flimsy, shallow and founded only in ill nature. They hoped that he would champion their bill and he doubtless would like to have accomodated them, but he found that he could not and said so. In their disappointment they assail him for insincerity. That is ridiculous.[43]

The question was now what did Colonel Polk intend to do? When he returned to North Carolina, he gave a speech to a large crowd in

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[41]Samuel A. Ashe to Zebulon B. Vance, July 8, 1890, Vance Papers, Chapel Hill.

[42]Progressive Farmer, July 15, 1890.

[43]News and Observer, July 15, 1890.

Greensboro. The Greensboro Patriot immediately jumped on his words and, without printing Polk's oration, it misrepresented his speech as an attack on Vance: "His assault, by innuendo and insinuation on Vance, tickled his Republican hearers almost to death." The editorial reported that a member of the audience said: "It was demagogical to a high degree; an incendiary appeal to class prejudice; and, try to hide it as he might, a bid for the farmers vote to succeed Senator Vance."[44] Many papers in the state reprinted the editorial and launched vicious attacks on Polk, but Ashe printed the editorial without comment, doubtless awaiting advice from Vance. In the meantime Colonel Polk denied the allegations of the Greensboro report.[45] Ashe, however. questioned Polk's assertion that he was a "warm admirer" of the senator.[46]

Polk was under pressure from many quarters and on September 2 he came out for the first time clearly against Vance. Polk declared war "between the plutocrats and the people" and added that he was in full agreement with Ramsey's editorials. He said that he had heard rumors on June 19 that Senator Vance had written a letter against the sub-treasury bill and, upon speaking with the senator, was told that "there is not a syllable of truth in it."[47] The Progressive Farmer also published Vance's letter to Beddingfield in May. Ashe, on Vance's suggestion, had attempted to get the letter for publication in July,

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[44]Greensboro Patriot, quoted in News and Observer, July 26, 1890.

[45]News and Observer, July 29, 1890.

[46]News and Observer, July 31, 1890.

[47]Progressive Farmer, September 2, 1890.

but Beddingfield had refused in hopes that Senator Vance would change his views,[48] a futile hope in view of the bombshell of July 1. Contrary to Polk's claims, the letter clearly proved that Vance's position on the sub-treasury was always doubtful and that the Alliance knew about his doubts well before July 1, 1890.

All that transpired was bad enough in Ashe's eyes, but Polk went a step further. The News and Observer had reprinted an article from a northern paper which asserted that Charles W. Macune, the organizer of the Alliance movement, was a Republican who was intent on leading the Alliance into GOP hands. Polk said that the reprint represented "but one of the thousand, base, mean and contemptible falsehoods which are being industriously circulated by such enemies of the Alliance as the News & Observer."[49] That was too much! Ashe launched his most violent attack to date on Polk:

> It is not the people. It is not the Alliance. It is not any number of Alliancemen. It is only Col. Polk. That's all. It matters not what Col. Polk's purpose and object is--it is very plain that he is bent on mischief and is intent on creating a new disturbance. He has set his head to stir up strife. . . .
>
> He proposes to accomplish his designs by sowing seeds of suspicion, by appealing to prejudice and by inflaming the passions of the people. That he can do harm goes without saying. He has already done harm in North Carolina. As a disturber of the peace, he has certainly achieved some success. We believe he has failed in former undertakings. He was a failure as a soldier. He was a failure as a farmer. He was a failure as Commissioner of Agriculture, and when the legislative examining committee came to examine into matters connected with his office, if we recollect aright,

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[48] Zebulon B. Vance to Samuel A. Ashe, July 10, 1890; Eugene C. Beddingfield to Samuel A. Ashe, July 11, 1890, Ashe Papers.

[49] Progressive Farmer, September 2, 1890.

> he locked up his desk, left his office and resigned. . . .
> He went into journalism, and was a failure at that. His next venture was in connection with a medicine, Polk's Dyptheria [sic] Cure, and he failed at that. . . . The people of North Carolina are a right thinking people. They are honest in their hearts, upright in their purposes, and follow no leader blindly as a flock of sheep. . . .
> We believe the people will turn a deaf ear to Col. Polk's entreaties in this matter. It seems to us he must fail. As he has failed in all his other undertakings, he will fail in this. He was born to failure as his lot and inheritance in life, and it will be so to the end. The good people will not let him have his will in this matter.[50]

To Ashe it seemed clear that Polk was seeking to turn people against the News and Observer because it acted "as a strong instrumentality to preserve the harmony and unity and integrity of the Democratic party."[51]

At this stage the Democratic leadership decided things were getting out of hand and Edward Chambers Smith, chairman of the State Democratic Executive Committee, paid a call on Colonel Polk and Captain Ashe in an effort to restore peace before the election. Ashe made a peace overture, but did not credit Polk's sincerity and so informed Senator Vance:

> He [Polk] was told that his expression that you "had told him there was not a syllable of truth in it &c," appeared to raise an issue of veracity and that the effect would be adverse to him; for the people would take your word first. Polk said that he had not intended such a thing. He further declared that he had always been for you for the Senate; but that he had been vilely attacked and he proposed to defend himself.
> —I think in all such statements Polk is now pervaracating; for on his arrival here last Thursday or Friday, he was blurry about what he proposed to do; and Buck Jones came to see me and told me that Polk was hot—was going to raise an issue of veracity with you, and was going to

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[50] News and Observer, September 2, 4, 1890.

[51] News and Observer, September 3, 1890.

> pitch into the N & O, &c just as he did. Therefore I wrote the short article Sunday morning proclaiming peace and good will and all that sort of thing.
> ---I mention the above not to irritate you against Polk, but to put you on your guard that he pervaracates.
> My judgment is that he is disappointed at the smallness of his following. . . .
> He has cut his own throat. . . . A gentleman here says that he gathered from what Polk told him that he was not a free agent in the matter, but that the articles were forced upon him at Washington and he was under constraint.
> I have thought it likely that the noiser /sic/ action of the farmers in S.C. and Ga. and Alabama has led to Polk's trying to keep the Alliance in his own state up to their lead---. . . . But whatever the cause, he is willing to breed mischief at the sacrifice of every principle of manhood.[52]

On September 8, Ashe wrote Senator Matt Ransom and informed him that Chairman Smith said Polk was prepared to stop the controversy. Ashe wrote: "In this matter, I am nothing---the party is everything." And he hopefully concluded: "My own judgment is that as soon as he says enough, the entire Dem. press should talk about the Force Bill . . . and make no further reference to Polk."[53] In this hope he was somewhat disappointed, even though Ashe insisted that the Force Bill, Henry Cabot Lodge's hopeless measure for federal control of southern elections, was "the great political issue before the people."[54]

On September 9, Polk launched his strongest attack on Ashe in an editorial entitled "ASHE, INGALLS & CO." in which he credited Ashe

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[52]Samuel A. Ashe to Zebulon B. Vance, September 6, 1890, Vance Papers, Chapel Hill.

[53]Samuel A. Ashe to Matt W. Ransom, September 8, 1890, Matt W. Ransom Papers, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, hereinafter cited as Ransom Papers.

[54]News and Observer, September 20, 1890.

with supplying information for the use of the notorious Republican politician and editor, John J. Ingalls of Kansas. As the Progressive Farmer put it: "This is a magnificent team! They trot beautifully, in double harness, along certain lines." It said that Ashe was a bonafide subscriber to the "Ingalls Slander Bureau" who was intent on ascribing corruption to Polk's administration of the Department of Agriculture. It further quoted an Observer statement of June 6, 1880, which had been highly laudatory of the retiring Commissioner Polk.[55] Well aware of the urgings of Smith that he practice restraint in his replies to Polk, Ashe responded in a conciliatory vein. Disclaiming any knowledge of the "Ingalls Slander Bureau," he said that his criticism of Polk "was not intended to raise a question as to the accuracy of his accounts. We did not mean that. We did not say that." He said of the 1880 editorial regarding Polk's performance as Commissioner of Agriculture: "The judgment of the State is of more value on that head than the effusive utterances of a newspaper friend."[56]

Chairman Smith was pleased with the more moderate tone Ashe had taken and told Senator Ransom:

> As you will see from the Tuesday morning edition of Capt. Ashe's paper, the editorial in reply to Col. Polk is very moderate. That is followed this morning by a very sensible article appealing to the people to stand by the Democratic Party. You can see that he is tempering his articles, and giving every indication of the desire to say nothing further of Col. P. It will be productive of good.
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> . . .

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[55] Progressive Farmer, September 9, 1890.

[56] News and Observer, September 9, 1890.

> I think that the matter will quietly die down, and the present indications are that our trouble is at an end. However, you can't tell with any degree of certainty. Polk is erratic, and he may adopt some other tactics. We will be prepared for him though, when he does it. It will not be so hard to crush him, as you suggest.[57]

At least Ransom appeared to have few illusions of Polk's weakness while Smith and others had many.

The immediate danger, however, had passed and the Progressive Farmer was left to lame protests about the pledges of support the Vance forces had obtained from candidates for the legislature. The election results in November, 1890, constituted the most impressive landslide the Democrats had obtained since before the Civil War. Disaffection with the Republican failures to solve the nation's economic woes and the decline of agriculture led to considerable Democratic gains in Congress. The heavy burden of the McKinley Tariff had been a central issue of the campaign. Smith thanked Ashe profusely for his help and said that it was his "bold and fearless" attitude that "contributed greatly to the success which has been achieved."[58]

During the campaign there had been confusion surrounding the Georgia Senate race where John B. Gordon, the old guard candidate, confronted two opponents, Thomas N. Norwood and Patrick Calhoun. Polk doubtless favored Norwood, but efforts were made to connect him with Calhoun, a railroad lawyer who supported the sub-treasury plan.

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[57]Edward Chambers Smith to Matt W. Ransom, September 10, 1890, Ransom Papers.

[58]Edward Chambers Smith to Samuel A. Ashe, November 7, 1890, Ashe Papers.

Ashe had played up this issue despite Polk's belated disclaimers. After the legislature voted to return Gordon to the Senate, Ashe gloated over what he hoped would be the undoing of Polk, but he was disappointed. In a letter he told Vance that "everybody here is feeling good over Gordon's triumph. I am still more pleased at the predicament Macune and Polk are in at Calhoun's defeat." Ashe had hoped that the Georgia debacle would weaken their efforts in North Carolina, but this did not appear the case. He warned Vance that something was afoot and that the legislature might ask for a pledge to support the sub-treasury before it tendered him a Senate seat. It appeared to Ashe that efforts were underway to get the legislature to go back on its pledges to Senator Vance. Ashe asked the senator what was to be done.[59]

Vance wrote Ashe and told him that he had no plan "to counter the machinations of Polk," but asked that he put the question to the Progressive Farmer as to whether it would condone legislators going against their pledges.[60] The News and Observer put the question and the farmer's paper replied: "If any man pledged to vote for Senator Vance, and violates his pledge, he will show himself unworthy of any man's confidence."[61] Reading this Vance wrote Ashe:

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[59]Samuel A. Ashe to Zebulon B. Vance /November 26, 1890?/, Vance Papers, Chapel Hill.

[60]Zebulon B. Vance to Samuel A. Ashe, November 28, 1890, Ashe Papers.

[61]Progressive Farmer, December 9, 1890.

> I hope you will commend the answer of the P. Farmer to your question about pledges to candidates--treating it as settling the question, producing harmony &c &c. We think here it was most important & if supported by the Alliance people is an end to the wraggling.[62]

Ashe informed Vance that he was satisfied with the reply to the question "unless it takes the phase about which I formerly wrote you, to wit--a tender of the nomination coupled with a pledge to vote for the 'sub-treasury' &c."[63] This was in fact the case, but when Vance balked at such instruction by the legislature a settlement was reached whereby he pledged to support "honorable means" to secure Alliance reforms.[64] But Ashe was jubilant and optimistic about the future in December, 1890: ". . . I am extremely glad to see the change of heart of the P. Farmer. If it is as deep and thorough as I hope, it puts a stop to the anticipated trouble in this State, and removes apprehension of a party disruption."[65] At the time, however, Baylus Cade had temporarily become editor of the farm paper and he was a more conservative man than Polk and one more to Ashe's liking.

Thus in January, 1891, the Bourbon editor emerged straight from a battle that he felt he had clearly won. The truth is that with

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[62]Zebulon B. Vance to Samuel A. Ashe, December 10, 1890, Ashe Papers.

[63]Samuel A. Ashe to Zebulon B. Vance, December 13, 1890, Vance Papers, Chapel Hill.

[64]Stuart Noblin, Leonidas LaFayette Polk, Agrarian Crusader (Chapel Hill, 1949), 251, hereinafter cited as Noblin, Polk. Noblin devotes considerable analysis to the Polk-Ashe controversy, but he lacked many of the more recently available manuscript sources. He also gives the impression there was slight connection between the Polk-Ashe and Polk-Vance struggle.

[65]Samuel A. Ashe to Zebulon B. Vance, December 13, 1890, Vance Papers, Chapel Hill.

the subject of the struggle being Zebulon B. Vance it would have taken a rather inept editor to have lost. This is not to detract from Ashe's vigor and sense of self-sacrifice as a defender of the party. He did in 1890 force an admission by D. H. Rittenhouse that he could not substantiate his sweeping charges against the state's leaders. Even James L. Ramsey appologized for calling Vance "an enemy to the people." It seemed to Ashe that the wounded and beaten Polk had retreated in disgrace into his Washington abode, despite the Alliance control of the state legislature. But Ashe was not deceived, he knew there was still fight left in his adversary though it was his hope that there was little chance of its reemergence.

January, 1891, however was to see the struggle for the public printing contract take a decidedly nasty turn. Ashe offered to do the printing as a discount of 15 per cent, but his opposition to the railroad commission did not put him in a favorable light with the Alliance legislature. On January 13 a caucus for supporters of the commission had expelled a correspondent from the News and Observer as an enemy of their efforts. This unprecedented action by the caucus aroused considerable controversy and was denounced by Ashe as an infringement on freedom of the press, but Daniels' State Chronicle came to the defense of the legislature.[66] Now Ashe rolled out his big guns and declared that in 1887 "Mr. Daniels bartered away at least Democratic consistency when he made that arrangement with the Independents." The arrangement, according to the captain, involved opening the

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[66] State Chronicle, January 17, 1891.

columns of the Chronicle to Independents in exchange for the printing contract. To add insult to injury, Ashe asserted that Daniels then went into combination with Polk "by which they worked in couples to defame THE NEWS AND OBSERVER." His paper further said that Daniels' so-called $3,000 bonus should go towards an old soldiers home: "The old soldiers--the wounded old veterans--have rendered service to the State and their condition appeals for aid. Mr. Daniels was too young to have rendered similar services. The two are in the scale! Will the donation be to the one or to the other?"[67] Daniels said that the News and Observer was writing of matters "of which it knows nothing."[68]

Polk responded to Ashe's charges with indignation and said they were "without the slightest foundation in truth." He added that if Captain Ashe could not get a single vote in a Democratic caucus "that is the misfortune of Capt. Ashe, and not the fault of the Progressive Farmer or its editor."[69] By the time that message was received Ashe had staged his major move: he had started the circulation of a petition to have the 15 per cent "bonus" of the state printer abolished.[70] Daniels was furious: "The right of petition is too sacred to be made the vehicle to vent the spleen and envy of any man."[71] John Nichols,

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[67] News and Observer, January 20, 22, 1891.

[68] State Chronicle, January 25, 1891.

[69] State Chronicle, February 3, 1891.

[70] News and Observer, February 1, 1891.

[71] State Chronicle, February 1, 1891.

the former Independent congressman and no friend of Ashe, wrote the latter a letter wishing him victory "over the little, mangy, lying Buffalo Calf,"[72] a clear reference to the suspected Union sympathy of Daniels' father in the war.

In an editorial entitled "THE ANIMUS OF CAPT. ASHE'S TIRADE," Daniels charged Ashe with poor newspaper management and said of him:

> . . . the Democratic party of North Carolina would today be dead if it had not repudiated his leadership and the policy of his paper. . . .
>
> Take the campaign of 1890. He was an impediment in the way of the party's success, and by his monopolistic, corporation and proscriptive views came near working serious injury to the party. . . .
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> . . .
>
> The News and Observer, true to its love for corporations and its hostility to the people, flies in their face and opposes the establishment of a Railroad commission. . . .
>
> . . .
>
> The people have as much right to an organ such as the STATE CHRONICLE, as the corporations have to an organ such as the News & Observer.[73]

Daniels even went so far as to say that there were only four hundred people in the state who even cared what Ashe thought. In later years he remembered that "Ashe was always free" and not subject to corporate control.[74]

At the time the stalwart captain was enraged and Daniels later recounted that the offended editor became physically hostile: "Captain Ashe and his two nephews rushed out of the alley adjoining the News

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[72] John Nichols to Samuel A. Ashe, February 5, 1891, Ashe Papers.

[73] State Chronicle, February 3, 1891.

[74] Daniels, Tar Heel Editor, 434.

and Observer and attacked me. He struck at me, but did not touch me and we clinched. Senator Payne, of Lincoln County, was with me and separated us." Some time later a friend informed Daniels that a telegram had been sent to the Associated Press stating that Ashe had "cowhided" him. Daniels immediately dispatched a denial and the next morning confronted Ashe as he entered the State Capitol and told him that he "would not submit to the lying report." This further angered the Bourbon editor and said Daniels: "We clinched and we both fell on the stone floor in the Capitol. . .," but a legislator happened by and separated them while castigating them both.[75]

This struggle, however, amounted to nought for Daniels was easily reinstated as printer. In 1893 Ashe rallied his forces for a final battle and the caucus knocked out the bonus.[76] The printing committee proposed to save the state money by dividing the work between E. M. Uzzell and Edwards & Broughton; but the caucus, much to Ashe's chagrin, threw out the suggestion and reappointed Daniels as printer.[77] This turned out to have been Ashe's last chance at the state contract and despite a filibuster by his small hard core support he lost the opportunity.[78]

The real highlight of 1891 was the second round in the Ashe-Polk confrontation. The editor had long been denouncing the plans for a

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[75]Daniels, Tar Heel Editor, 352.

[76]News and Observer, February 11, 1893.

[77]State Chronicle, February 17, 1893.

[78]Daniels, Tar Heel Editor, 353.

third party and when one was organized in May he said: "We know Col. Polk from the crown of his head to the soles of his feet.... He will seek neither to be left by the train nor to get on board."[79] Ashe insisted that Polk's continued agitation of the sub-treasury question would produce only discord.[80] The News and Observer of course flaunted what it considered its great victory over "Polkism" in 1890, but the real controversy did not start until an article from the Milwaukee Sentinel reported that the agrarian leader had stated that the progress of the Alliance in the South was in the face of shotguns held by Democratic leaders. This provided an opportunity for another assault upon the Alliance president, for Ashe did not credit Polk's denial, nor would he print letters of witnesses who refuted the Milwaukee report, though Ashe refused on the grounds that the Progresive Farmer had not printed his communications.[81]

This dispute reached such intensity that it was rumored that there would be a duel between Polk and Ashe, thus settling the question on the field of honor. The sensational story of the impending duel appeared in newspapers across the nation. One Ashe correspondent wrote: "I cannot believe that the Earnest Christian Gentleman I believe you to be can by any possibility acknowledge the code duello."[82] Letters

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[79] News and Observer, May 22, 1891.

[80] News and Observer, July 10, 1891.

[81] News and Observer, June 19, 27, 1891; Progressive Farmer, June 30, 1891.

[82] Benjamin S. Pardee to Samuel A. Ashe, August 2, 1891, Ashe Papers.

to Polk were in a similar vain. One Alliance lecturer even said in a telegram to the Alliance president: "It is a Wall Street plot to ruin us."[83] Of course there was never any chance of a duel between the two men, but the editorial battle intensified.

The News and Observer stated that its purpose was to unfrock Polk's "hypocrisy" and reveal "his third party movement."[84] The Progressive Farmer called for the publication of a letter refuting the Milwaukee report. Ashe declared: "Doubtless Polk would like to pose as a martyr. . . . There is not enough sincerity in his nature to make any kind of a martyr. . . ."[85] Polk's paper countered by charging the News and Observer with being an anti-Alliance organ and calling for the publication of the letter of a reporter which disproved the Milwaukee Sentinel's assertions. Polk wrote James W. Denmark, his son-in-law and business manager of the Progressive Farmer: "Tell Ramsey to laugh at the rantings of the N. & O. & ridicule him. . . I want Ashe's anti-Vance record. But ridicule is the weapon to use on that sheet. He is mad because we demanded the publication of the Flannery letter. Keep calling for it."[86] Polk, in a rather ineffectual manner, tried to use Ashe's known favoritism to Merrimon in the 1870's Senate

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[83] J. L. Gilbert to Leonidas L. Polk, August 26, 1891, Leonidas L. Polk Papers, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, hereinafter cited as Polk Papers.

[84] News and Observer, August 19, 20, 1891.

[85] News and Observer, August 20, 1891.

[86] Leonidas L. Polk to James W. Denmark, August 21, 1891, Polk Papers.

contests as a weapon against the Bourbon editor. Ashe, however, had built up such a reputation as Senator Vance's champion in 1890 that it came to nought.

The Progressive Farmer still charged its Bourbon contemporary with collusion with the Republicans in a conspiracy to defame Colonel Polk. It said that Ashe "monkeyed with Republican papers in the Northwest to damage Col. Polk and the Alliance."[87] Ashe answered by declaring that if anyone charged the Colonel with cowardice in the war then the Progressive Farmer would doubtless take that as a reflection on Lee's Army. Polk's paper countered that the Bourbon journal was "afraid to attack the Alliance and contents itself by misrepresenting President Polk." Simulataneously the paper mentioned the existence of a circular the News and Observer had issued the previous summer for the benefit of ingratiating itself to its weekly rural subscribers.[88]

On September 1, the farm journal printed what it called its "Advocate-the-Sub-Treasury-circular-gun" which was designed to rout the enemy who was "merely a scab on an old sore." The 1890 Ashe circular read:

THE NEWS AND OBSERVER

The Old Reliable--Always True and Faithful

Advocates the Sub-Treasury bill. Advocates unlimited coinage of silver and the issue of $500,000,000 more paper money.

Advocates distributing $100,000,000 of the money now in the Treasury to the States on the basis of their

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[87] Progressive Farmer, August 18, 1891.

[88] News and Observer, August 18, 1891; Progressive Farmer, August 25, 1891.

agricultural products to relieve agricultural depression.

Advocates repealing the national bank law, and allowing State banks to issue notes. Advocates the repeal of the internal revenue system and a tariff for revenue only.

Favors the Farmers' Alliance; seeks to promote its objects and advocates the protection of the freemen of North Carolina against imposition from any quarter.

Advocates that the white men of North Carolina shall all stand together and work for the prosperity of all classes and conditions of men.

We print a large eight-page paper. Price $1.25. In clubs at $1.

S. A. ASHE
Raleigh, N.C.
Ed. News and Observer[89]

This circular designed to gain subscribers for the farmer oriented weekly edition of the paper was reprinted continually in the Progressive Farmer. Ashe simply quoted his remark about the farmers and their sub-treasury plan in March, 1890: "We shall not deny them our help on the line they propose." The Progressive Farmer, however, knew it had Ashe in a spot and it frequently had a portrayal of "Uncle Zeke Bilkins," a fictional farmer, who would call the devil to get into contact with Captain Ashe, and would proceed to ask him about the circular and other matters.[90]

Unfortunately, Ashe did not see the humor in the homespun pronouncements of "Uncle Zeke." His assaults on Polk increased in bitterness:

> The designs of no demagogue were ever more transparent than his. . . .

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[89] Progressive Farmer, September 1, 1891.

[90] Progressive Farmer, August 25, 1891.

> So far as Polk is concerned, we care nothing about what he writes or says in his paper. . . . /He is/ a coward and a hypocrit. These are strong words, and we would not apply them to any good man.[91]

Polk decided to take the offensive at the meeting of the state Alliance at Morehead City where he called on Alliancemen to subscribe only to papers favorable to their cause. This was a direct attempt to undercut the News and Observer and, said Ashe, a Polk design for "muzzling the press."[92]

Ashe now prepared for another offensive blow at his opponent by providing a forum for critics of Polk's war record which was surrounded by mystery and court martial. Charges that Polk had displayed cowardice in battle were hurled forth. Polk was able to produce evidence that he had been honorably acquitted in the war and Ashe quickly changed the subject: "It is a far more pertinent inquiry as to what Col. Polk is now doing than what he did during the war."[93]

The Ashe-Polk struggle aroused considerable attention and Ashe by his steadfast intransigence became the champion of the Bourbon Democrats. As one wrote him: "The way you are dealing with 'Hon. L. L. Polk' is meeting with the admiration and approval of all the best people of this section."[94] This treatment and the nomination of Cleveland by the Democrats in 1892 drove Polk into the camp of the Populist party. For Ashe it was a singular triumph and led Theodore B.

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[91] News and Observer, September 29, 30, 1891.

[92] News and Observer, September 30, 1891.

[93] News and Observer, October 17, 1891.

[94] Leonidas J. Moore to Samuel A. Ashe, October 6, 1891, Ashe Papers.

Kingsbury to later say: "In his controversy with Colonel Polk he bore himself with a force, a vigor, a consecration to the right that gave him a great triumph." Someone even suggested that a monument be constructed to the editor for driving Polk from the party.[95] In later years Ashe made no secret that such was the consummation of his desire which was "to make it intolerable for Colonel Polk to remain in the party wearing the garb of a Democrat. . . ."[96]

Ashe of course gained a rather notorious reputation among Alliancemen, one of whom referred to him as "the ass that is eternally braying demagogue," and added that "the odium of leaving [the Democratic party] would be upon those who drove us out."[97] Ashe himself received an angry note which said that he was "using your newspaper to slur and insult the Alliance man."[98] The Progressive Farmer and Polk's friends were never ceasing in their condemnations of the editor.

Ashe saw the Alliance, which was seeking to unite farmers on economic issues rather than on race, as a threat to Anglo-Saxon civilization. Yet he could never attack the powerful Alliance and was thus forced to seek a means of alienating the membership of the order from the leadership. One Progressive Farmer editorial said:

> The life of the Asheites since "de war" has depended on radicalism and the negro. Each succeeding campaign brought us a fresh dose of each. We have been purged

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[95] Ashe, Biographical History, I, 73.

[96] Ashe, History of North Carolina, II, 1199.

[97] W. F. Kornegay to Leonidas L. Polk, April 11, 15, 1892, Polk Papers.

[98] "Pine Tar" to Samuel A. Ashe, August 28, 1891, Ashe Papers.

> with this homogenious compound until the bare mention of it makes us feel like vomiting.[99]

The truth of the statement is hard to deny and it is clear that it is doubly valid in Ashe's case. The Bourbon editor wanted to insure the continued ascendency of the Redeemers, and he doubtless hoped that his attacks on Polk would solicit a reaction among the farmers that would break the back of the Alliance as a "political organization."

Early in 1892 Polk, as president of the National Farmers' Alliance and Industrial Union, went to the St. Louis convention of the Alliance. He wrote his son-in-law: "I do not believe that any power on earth can prevent independent political action."[100] Though Polk did not immediately pronounce himself a third party man, Ashe wrote an editorial entitled "FAREWELL, COL. POLK" in which he said he was not deceived and added: ". . . his going off into the third party will add strength to that movement here in North Carolina, and give it a vitality it would not otherwise possess. But the movement is without solid basis. . . . The new movement will end in nothing."[101] As the movement gained momentum the editor observed third party gatherings throughout the state and commented: "Radicals, darkeys and deserters from the Democratic party are all mixed up in these meetings in one heterogeneous mixture."[102]

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[99] Progressive Farmer, September 29, 1891.

[100] Leonidas L. Polk to James W. Denmark, February 8, 1892, Polk Papers.

[101] News and Observer, February 28, 1892.

[102] News and Observer, April 1, 1892.

Polk remained unclear on his position and Ashe was hopeful that his vacillation would destroy the movement, but the organization proceeded. "Down with the demagogues," cried Ashe as he sounded the alarm and called on all Democrats to stand fast.[103]

In May the Progressive Farmer came out in favor of farmer participation in the Democratic party, and Ashe commented that "the greater dangers are probably past," but he told his fellow Bourbons to beware the example of South Carolina where "the People's Party, mounting high on a rising tide of communistic sentiment," had gained influence.[104] A few days later he expressed the hope that the "undemocratic" Tillmanites would be excluded from the Democratic convention in Chicago.[105]

The blow which ultimately alienated the Populists was the nomination of Grover Cleveland for the presidency. In March Ashe had told Ransom:

> Not withstanding Cleveland's position in regard to silver, you would be surprised at the strength he retains among the country people. I am agreeably disappointed at the fact that he holds his ground so well because it indicates that a large number of the people are not making the silver matter the paramount issue.
>
> A smaller number are irreconsilables on that--and many very respectable people are so carried away by projects for relief, in this desparate financial condition, that they are absolutely unreasonable.
>
> That element is aggressive--and the tramp over the State which /Harry/ Skinner and /Marion/ Butler are making tends to fix them in their notions and to inflame them.[106]

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[103] News and Observer, June 3, 1892.

[104] News and Observer, May 18, 1892.

[105] News and Observer, May 26, 1892.

[106] Samuel A. Ashe to Matt W. Ransom, March 17, 1892, Ransom Papers.

Ashe, who considered himself a bimetallist, expressed serious doubts about the Bland Bill which would have drastically increased the silver in circulation. He took a classic Redeemer line of reasoning, fearing a loss of northern votes:

> It seems to me that the time has come for us to get the silver matter to a point. What is to be gained by denouncing the present Silver Act? It has largely increased the currency on the silver basis. It has utilized silver and given relief to a degree of the people.
>
> . . .
>
> Unless we offer a better measure it is dangerous to assail the present law. That matter should be understood. What is suited for the New York latitude may be disastrous at the South and West. Assailing that law probably gave us the fatal stab in Ohio. It is not necessary to assail every act of your opponent.
>
> . . .
>
> The Bland bill as a party measure puts in jeopardy New York and the East and offers nothing in compensating elsewhere. Besides it is rejected by a large number of the thinking men as being a dangerous measure. Senator /David B./ Hill /of New York/ struck the correct note when he said that the melting pot should furnish the ratio. . . . It is the only sensible course.[107]

Ashe expressed a fear of an absolute ratio of gold to silver because of "the daily fluctuation of silver value" and said a plan would have to be devised that was "safe to the business interests of the country," such as merely extending the existing law and issuing notes payable in gold or silver. The editor felt that the Bland Bill would be hazardous due to the already "immense amount of silver being issued." Ashe and the Democrats were safe however, for silver did not loom big in the campaign because Cleveland chose to emphasize the tariff.

Ashe praised the Democratic presidential nominee as "the grandest man of his generation" and, after the nomination, proclaimed that "there

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[107]Samuel A. Ashe to Matt W. Ransom, March 17, 1892, Ransom Papers.

were now no anti-Cleveland Democrats."[108] The steadfast Bourbon editor, however, admitted that there was a strong third party threat that would call for "the greatest contest ever fought in North Carolina."[109]

In the gubernatorial race, Ashe's paper became a forum for the supporters of Thomas M. Holt, the successor to Governor Fowle, who had died in office. Holt though involved in farming was best known in the eyes of the Alliance as a textile manufacturer. The News and Observer noted that Holt was the only "non-Alliance Democrat" seeking the Democratic nomination for governor.[110] The Alliance, however, emerged strong at the convention and pushed for the nomination of Elias Carr, president of the North Carolina Alliance. Alliance strength forced the Bourbons into an eventual compromise and the nomination of Carr.[111] The State Chronicle, under the new management of one of Ashe's former associates, Thomas R. Jernigan, had been the chief Holt organ in the state. After Carr's nomination Ashe remarked that he may "have been more satisfied at other nominations," but "taking the whole ticket, it is a magnificent one."[112] Ashe, ever loyal to the party, gladly embraced Carr over a Republican or Populist.

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[108] News and Observer, June 23, 28, 1892.

[109] News and Observer, June 23, 1892.

[110] News and Observer, March 27, 1892.

[111] News and Observer, May 19, 1892.

[112] News and Observer, May 20, 1892.

The big blow to the hopes of the People's Party was the sudden death of Colonel Polk in June, after intermittent illness. His death prior to the Populist party's nomination of a presidential candidate particularly hurt the party's chances in the South. Most expected that Polk would have been the nominee, but now the party had to turn to James B. Weaver, a former Union general. Ashe said of his fallen foe: "He was gifted with many personal qualities that lent charm to his individuality" while "his sudden death . . . cut short a career that had reached a national importance. . . ."[113] Ashe, however, was disappointed in his hope that the movement in the state would die. He wrote Senator Ransom in July:

> I had hoped that Col. Polk's death would prove an irreparable loss to the third party in this State and that its threatened organization would not be accomplished. But the matter is in progress, and you will regret to learn that the defection has assumed alarming proportions; . . . all our congressmen are in peril except /Syd/ Alexander. Whether Elias Carr will be voted for is yet in doubt—but the probability is that he will not by a considerable number. Whether he will be elected or not will thus depend on the action of the Republicans. If they coalesce with the third party, he will be in great danger of defeat.
>
> . . .
>
> It is almost incredible that the condition should be as it is:—that men heretofore the most resolute Democrats should sever their connexion with the party, and large masses should go over bodily to a faction that offers no possible advantage though rich in impossible promises. It is indeed disheartening to contemplate probable results—but personally I have the satisfaction of feeling that whatever evil is in store for us, I have no cause to reproach myself.[114]

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[113] News and Observer, June 12, 1892.

[114] Samuel A. Ashe to Matt W. Ransom, July 17, 1892, Ransom Papers.

That last remark was certainly a rationalization, for Ashe must have realized that he and men of his ilk were in large degree responsible for the situation.

Luckily for the Bourbons the North Carolina Populists did not fuse with the Republicans in the campaign of 1892. The election became a three-way race between Elias Carr, the Democrat, David M. Furches, the Republican, and Wyatt P. Exum, the Populist. S. Otho Wilson became chairman of the State Executive Committee of the People's Party. On the national level, Cleveland was paired against Harrison on the Republican ticket and Weaver as the Populist. Ashe referred to the "Weaverites" as "hirelings to elect Harrison" by taking votes from Cleveland.[115]

The conservative editor pursued the Republicans with his usual vigor, but he turned his heavy artillery on the Populists. He played up the traditional issues, like the McKinley Tariff, but he also warned the voters against being "duped by wily demagogues."[116] Ashe denounced the speeches of the Populist Marion Butler who already was considered a proponent of fusion: "He has no judgment. The Radical leaders have just played with him. Duped, deceived, unhorsed, he now leads a forlorn hope, without a handful of followers at his back."[117] Speaking of the billions in the nation's banks and the Populist position on the question the editor said: "These demented Weaverites who

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[115] News and Observer, August 11, 1892.

[116] News and Observer, August 9, 1892.

[117] News and Observer, September 8, 1892.

oppose banks would deprive the people of this additional amount of circulating medium."[118] The News and Observer spoke of Weaver as "an intense abolitionist and Southern hater."[119]

The real political coup came late in the campaign when Furnifold M. Simmons, chairman of the Democratic Executive Committee, crafty politician that he was, "exposed" a massive "conspiracy" which threatened free government in the state. Simmons managed to obtain letters from two state politicos, M. L. Reed of Asheville and J. S. Bell of Bell Cross, which showed "the existence in this State of an unlawful and dangerous secret political society." Comparing this so-called "Gideon's Band" to the Union League and the Mafia, Simmons published the two letters which established S. Otho Wilson of the Populist Party as the leader of the order. This authoritarian order which was supposed to have exercized great power over the Alliance was designed to infiltrate the government and gain political power. Chairman Simmons intimated that the whole third party movement, which had constituted such a mystery to loyal Democrats, was thus explained.[120]

Wilson's response to the charges was quick in coming: "If there is in North Carolina a secret political society known as the 'Gideon's Band,' or any other name, or if there has been a political society, which controls, or has tried to control, the people, or policy of any political party, other than the councils of the party itself, I am in

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[118] News and Observer, September 6, 1892.

[119] News and Observer, September 23, 1892.

[120] News and Observer, October 20, 1892.

ignorance of its existence." Simmons reply to this was that Wilson's statement "contains the strongest proof of the charge he therein essays to answer."[121]

The issue of the "Gideonites" descended from the ridiculous to the ludicrous in a matter of days with the press printing "The Oath of the Gideonites" which "proved" that they swore fealty to their leaders and if they violated the oath they had to surrender themselves "to the just vengeance of the members of this order." Ashe declared that he had suspected as much all along: "We have seen the secret order pass from its primary purpose to control the Alliance to that of controlling the politics of North Carolina."[122] In one issue Ashe even printed "The Gideon Alphabet," better known as the "Aaron Burr Alphabet," which consisted of a childish system of dots and angles.[123]

Ashe of course agitated that Wilson be tried for his supposed crimes against the state. After the election Wilson was in fact brought before Wake Superior Court for violating state laws against secret political orders. Wilson protested his innocence, but decided not to contest and a plea of "nolo contendre" was entered. Ashe interpreted this as guilt. Disgruntled, Wilson tried to have the plea withdrawn to make way for a court battle to clear his name, but the judge would not allow it on advice from the prosecutor. Ashe said the

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[121] News and Observer, October 23, 1892.

[122] News and Observer, October 28, 1892.

[123] News and Observer, November 1, 1892.

entire thing was a political trick.[124] It doubtless was, though it was not Wilson who instigated the trickery. Wilson had to pay court costs because of the incident, but he remained active in the Populist cause.

The November election results returned Cleveland to the White House and, in the biggest sweep of any party since the war, the Democrats captured both houses of Congress. At the state level, Elias Carr was elected governor and the Democrats maintained their hold on the legislature, but the victory was misleading. The Populist vote of 47,840 combined with the Republican vote of 94,684 was greater than the Democratic total of 135,519.[125] Many Bourbons, however, engaged in self-deception and Alfred M. Waddell, sometime congressman and political leader from Wilmington, even wrote Ashe a laudatory letter in which he credited the editor with insuring that "the Third Party and the Republican Party are gone . . . for the next quarter of a century."[126] Even Ashe seemed to alternate between wishful thinking and reality:

> The new administration will be hailed with the greatest pleasure because of the great triumph over Polkism and Old Fogyism and Butlerism. In particular will the NEWS AND OBSERVER rejoice as it is the end of the fight in which we can say, without immodesty, that this paper bore its full part.[127]

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[124] News and Observer, March 31, 1893.

[125] Noblin, Polk, 294.

[126] Alfred M. Waddell to Samuel A. Ashe, December 12, 1892, Ashe Papers.

[127] News and Observer, January 15, 1893.

Then again, after tabulating the Democratic vote, he admitted that "the party [was] not equal in numbers to the combined force of its opponents."[128]

Ashe entered upon the year 1893 worried but hopeful. Unfortunately his wife died in August, 1892, leaving him with several small children, though the help of his sister alleviated many problems. Mrs. Ashe had been but 43 and was the only child of William H. Willard. Her death "cut short a life of unvarying love and affection and of unremiting tenderness and devotion." She was buried in the cemetary of Ashe's beloved Christ Church.[129] Ashe was destined to remain a widower and never remarried.

With the Democratic victory at their backs, the Bourbons wanted to break the power of the Alliance which had formed the core of the People's party that almost brought their defeat. To this desire Ashe was a party and on February 19 he said of the Alliance charter:

> Of the Alliance itself, we knew but little, it being a secret organization, but under the charter it was virtually converted into a political machine, and the charter ought to be repealed. . . .[130]

The legislature eventually repealed the old charter and devised a new one which seriously impaired the order's standing by taking away the business privileges of the organization. Ashe felt the entire Populist movement should be curtailed for it was "socialistic" and designed "to

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[128] News and Observer, January 29, 1893.

[129] News and Observer, August 14, 16, 1892.

[130] News and Observer, February 19, 1893.

prune men of much of their individuality and to enlarge the paternal functions of government."[131]

The prominent issue of 1893 turned out to be the economy. In April the gold reserve dropped below $100 million and it seemed to Cleveland that the government was headed for insolvency and the panic gripped the country as banks and businesses collapsed, particularly in the South and West. Agriculture, already suffering from depressed prices, was hard hit by the national panic. The acute economic situation demanded relief. The public clamored for action. Prior to this Ashe defended Cleveland as a "bimetallist" and strongly disparaged any declarations to the contrary.[132] By June, however, even a hard liner like Ashe could scarcely doubt the President's position nor that of his ultraconservative Secretary of the Treasury, John G. Carlisle of Kentucky, a deserter from the silverites. In May it was rumored that the President was planning to call a special session of Congress at which he would call for repeal of the Sherman Silver Purchase Act. Ashe leapt to the defense of the act and said that the President was misguided.[133] Ashe, who had prided himself as something of a financial expert in the state legislature, said the solution to the economic crisis was "more currency" to meet the economic needs of the country and he further advocated that the administration stop payment of gold to foreigners and forget about "the Rothschilds in Europe." He also

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[131] News and Observer, March 25, 1893.

[132] News and Observer, March 12, 1893.

[133] News and Observer, May 7, 1893.

launched into "money stringency" as the cause of the panic and said the New York bankers were merely searching for an excuse to blame silver for their difficulties.[134]

On June 8, Ashe embarked on his strongest thrust against Cleveland's monetary ideas and revealed considerable insight into the nation's problems. Cleveland had declared that the purchase of idle silver bullion with gold was a mistake for it drew from the nation's reserves which resulted in other nations eagerly seizing American gold to enrich themselves at the expense of the United States. The President, said Ashe, "misinterprets the signs of the situation and attributes visible facts to wrong causes. . . ." He added that "the gold movement is because money is worth more at London than at New York." The way to solve this problem was "to refuse to pay out gold for export" and to ignore the "jaundiced ideas" of the anti-silverites.[135] In speaking of New York banks, Ashe was succinct about what he considered a major problem with U.S. currency:

> One of the defects of our mone/y/ system is that it has no elasticity. . . . Had there been a practical way open to these banks to increase the circulation and thus supply the vacancy made by the country banks, there would have been no contraction of their loans, and no interference with business in that city and no consequent disturbance throughout the country.[136]

Ashe suggested the repeal of the tax on state banks as a first step toward expansion of the currency. He was certain of one thing: Con-

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[134] News and Observer, June 6, 7, 1893.

[135] News and Observer, June 8, 1893.

[136] News and Observer, June 11, 1893.

traction of the currency was the last thing the country needed and if a repeal of the Sherman Act was all the Democratic Congress could do then it was better to do nothing.

Senator Vance reproached Cleveland and Carlisle's monetary ideas in firm language. He wrote Ashe:

> I cannot refrain from letting you know how greatly I approve and commend your course and editorials on the Silver question. Some of our papers seem to be giving in to Carlisle's views to my great disgust.
> . . . /We are/ living and acting a lie and practicing fraud on the people by professing to use a bimetallic currency but in fact using only one.
> . . . The idea that the Sherman law causes gold to leave the country is assinine. Carlisle told me himself that the chief vehicle drawing gold from the Treasury was greenbacks.
> The trouble is Silver has never had a fair treatment by any Secretary, Republicans or Democrats, and as the President has invited the people to investigate this question, the Press which favors Silver ought to show these things plainly, no matter who it may hurt.[137]

Ashe replied to Vance:

> I have, indeed, sought to remain consistent and preach the true doctrine; but the end of all that, apparently, is near, and silver as a money metal, (except as a sort of token currency) seems to have had its day. There is indeed a faint hope that the tide against it may turn; but that hope does not appear sufficiently found/ed/ to justify an expectation.
> The bimetallists of this country have made a strong fight--but the other side have carried the day. I believe their success will entail great evil on the people of the world. So far as this country is concerned, . . . the country is in a better condition to make the contest for gold than any foreign power. Our vast resources are in our favor, and Europe will be distressed before we are.[138]

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[137]Zebulon B. Vance to Samuel A. Ashe, June 28, 1893, Ashe Papers.

[138]Samuel A. Ashe to Zebulon B. Vance, July 1, 1893, Vance Papers, Raleigh.

The war of words raged and in August, when the special session of Congress met, Cleveland called for "the prompt repeal" of the Sherman Act. Ashe's paper, which had recently undergone consolidation with the State Chronicle and was now the News-Observer-Chronicle, said of the President's speech: "We cannot commend either the substance of it or the argument."[139] There ensued a tremendous legislative battle which saw a breach in party ranks as Democrats challenged one another on the floors of Congress. This greatly shocked and disturbed Ashe. After a bitter and drawn out struggle the Sherman Silver Purchase Act was repealed and Ashe remarked unhappily that to hope for economic recovery as a result was to "lean on a broken reed."[140] Ashe now turned to the tariff and attacks on "McKinleyism," but by the end of the year he had to admit that the economic panic and the fight over silver had done great damage to the party: ". . . the seeds of danger had been thickly sown and we reaped a harvest of evil."[141]

Early in 1894 it became clear to all that the divisions of the party caused by the panic and its aftermath on the national level were reflected at the state level. The Populists were already notably strong and Ashe was constantly jumping to the defense of county government, party solidarity, and white man's rule. One key target was Marion Butler, Populist editor of the Caucasian, who was constantly maligning the election law of 1889, a measure that had been designed to insure

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[139] News-Observer-Chronicle, August 9, 1893.

[140] News-Observer-Chronicle, November 2, 1893.

[141] News-Observer-Chronicle, December 31, 1893.

stricter Bourbon control of elections and thus weaken independent political action. Ashe had supported the measure in view of the losses of 1886 and he now defended it by stating that the law as it stood was only "amended in regard to registration so as to secure . . . the identification of the voters." The Bourbon editor suggested that third party opposition to the law was an effort to avoid having themselves identified by a law that was only designed "to protect against fraud."[142] The Populists of course were not placated by such partisan reasoning. When Richmond Pearson also denounced the law, Ashe drew a quick connection between the Populists and the Republicans.[143] A joining of forces did in fact later come about largely on the issue of electoral procedures.

In January Ashe said:

> There are two ways to help the Populists in North Carolina: one is to advocate their organization and their distinctive policies, and the other is to make the Democratic party so offensive to the Democratic people as to force them to abandon it, whereby many may be led to connect themselves with the Marion Butler crowd.[144]

Doubtless Ashe did not realize how correct he was, but his own unyielding position is revealed by his declaration in reply to Butler who called on him to renounce support for the unpopular Cleveland: "We have never opposed or denounced a Democratic administration, and never expect to do so."[145]

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[142] News-Observer-Chronicle, February 14, 1894.

[143] News-Observer-Chronicle, March 7, 1894.

[144] News-Observer-Chronicle, January 30, 1894.

[145] News-Observer-Chronicle, June 8, 1894.

Briefly in 1894 Ashe became occupied with a dispute between Furnifold M. Simmons and Senator Vance. After the 1892 election it had been suggested by some that Simmons be rewarded for his services by appointment to an internal revenue collectorship. Ashe had endorsed this idea and when Simmons was nominated his appointment was unexplicably delayed and Ashe wrote Vance that "his rejection would add greatly to the unhappy condition the party is now in in this State."[146] The rumor circulated that Senator Vance was opposed to the Simmons appointment. Ashe found that hard to believe, but on February 8 a letter appeared in the Asheville Citizen which caused a stir. In it the senator said he opposed the Simmons appointment because the party chairman came to Washington and interfered with some planned Vance appointments and assumed an "insulting and defiant tone."[147] Simmons responded that he had only answered questions in regard to certain possible appointments and said: "I had a perfect right to do what I did."[148] Vance it seemed was intent on holding up the Simmons selection, but the ailing senator died on April 14 and in May Simmons was appointed to a collectorship. Ashe had editorially called for his appointment and had called the former chairman "a capable and efficient man."[149]

On the whole, however, the year was characterized by one disaster

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[146] Samuel A. Ashe to Zebulon B. Vance, October 2, 1893, Vance Papers, Chapel Hill.

[147] Asheville Citizen, February 8, 1894, in News-Observer-Chronicle, February 9, 1894.

[148] News-Observer-Chronicle, February 11, 1894.

[149] News-Observer-Chronicle, May 12, 1894.

after another on the national and state level. The administration announced the first gold bond issue to be directed by the Secretary of the Treasury. Ashe was not pleased but made a modest proposal: "Let him sell his bonds for gold, and at the same time announce that he will pay out silver in redemption of the coin notes in his discretion."[150] Of course neither Carlisle or Cleveland would follow that advice. Ashe had seen further hope in the Bland seniorage bill and wrote the President urging him to sign the bill because the people would see "a declination to utilize the silver bullion on hand as in itself a discrimination against silver, and as being a variance from the spirit of the principles announced at Chicago as constituting the Democratic faith."[151] Cleveland's reaction was an immediate veto. Then came the failure of real tariff reform with the passage of the Wilson bill. When it was proposed Ashe said that it would overthrow "the incubus of McKinleyism,"[152] but the final version was so watered down as to be insignificant. So Ashe saw a year marked by numerous failures on the national level coupled by rising discontent in North Carolina.

While troops converged on Chicago to put down strikes and the famed Coxey's Army of unemployed marched on Washington, the Populists and Republicans negotiated fusion in North Carolina. Prior to fusion the Democrats still hoped to stem the tide of discontent. Senator

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[150] News-Observer-Chronicle, January 27, 1894.

[151] Samuel A. Ashe to Grover Cleveland, March 24, 1894 (copy of original), Ashe Papers.

[152] News-Observer-Chronicle, March 10, 1894.

Ransom, obviously hoping to allay fear among the Redeemers, said:

> I cannot predict exactly how many majority the Democrats will have in the Legislature or how many Congressional districts we will carry, but I have no hesitation in saying that the Democratic majority will be ample. . . .[153]

Ashe viewed both the potential adversaries with equal contempt:

> The high tariff on the one side and the fiat money on the other; laws to favor class interests, and schemes to carry the government off into enterprises that should be left to the management of private citizens[/.] The Democratic party rejects them all.[154]

When by the latter part of July it was clear to all that fusion was coming, Ashe wrote: ". . . it is none of our funeral. We propose to beat the twain whether they set separately or in unison."[155]

One of the state's most astute political observers was Senator Jarvis, who had succeeded Vance in the Senate, and he was fearful of defeat. In 1892 when many were saying the danger had passed, he told Ashe that it was not so. He stressed the necessity of obtaining Negro votes.[156] In August, 1894, he wrote to Ashe imploring him to see that additional school expenditures were promised in the state party platform as a means of attracting the needed black votes to stop the Fusionists.[157]

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[153] News-Observer-Chronicle, June 15, 1894.

[154] News-Observer-Chronicle, March 27, 1894.

[155] News-Observer-Chronicle, July 18, 1894.

[156] Thomas J. Jarvis to Samuel A. Ashe, September 26, 1892, Ashe Papers.

[157] Thomas J. Jarvis to Samuel A. Ashe, August 2, 1894, Ashe Papers.

Thus the storm clouds were gathering ominously on the horizon when Ashe faced a great tragedy—the loss of his paper. Due to persistent financial distress he was forced to sell to Josephus Daniels. Ashe's foray into journalism had been a long and precarious one. He had been an editor for fourteen years and it was hard for him to give up the profession of journalism, but his circumstances had never been financially sound.

In 1887 Daniels had proposed a consolidation of the State Chronicle and the News and Observer and the formation of a joint stock company of $40,000. The News and Observer would represent $20,000 and Daniels would put in his paper and $8,000 in cash. The advantages of such a consolidation, said Daniels, were clear; increased circulation, more advertising patronage, and increased funds for improvements. One thing Ashe doubtless considered a drawback to this plan was that Daniels proposed to be editor and "control the policy of the new paper."[158] In 1888 Daniels upped his cash offer to $11,000 without results.[159]

In the spring of 1890 Major Rufus S. Tucker, a stockholder in the News and Observer Company, put forward another proposition for the consolidation of the two Raleigh papers. The two editors apparently met, but Daniels insisted that the State Chronicle, a weekly, be considered equal to the News and Observer daily. Ashe declared that

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[158]Josephus Daniels to Samuel A. Ashe, September 14, 1887, Ashe Papers.

[159]Josephus Daniels to Samuel A. Ashe, December 21, 1888, Ashe Papers.

that was "not a fair proposition" and the plan fell through. He later said: ". . . we opened to Mr. Daniels an excellent opportunity if he had chosen to accept it."[160]

Ashe, however, still faced chronic financial troubles. In 1891 Daniels discounted the feasibility of combination due to the dated equipment at the News and Observer office, but soon thereafter Augustus S. Merrimon came to see him and asked if he wanted to buy the Ashe paper. Daniels responded positively and Merrimon told him that he had signed a note so Ashe could obtain the paper originally: "I was glad to aid him, but I am now getting along in years and my chief duty is to my own family. I have asked Captain Ashe to relieve me of the liability. He has not done so. I would not press the point, but Captain Ashe's father-in-law, Mr. Willard, is a rich man and I think he ought to take my place on the note. In fact I have so informed Captain Ashe and have told him that I must be relieved of the obligation at once." Daniels obtained a pledge of financial support from Julian S. Carr and said he would be willing to take up the note at face value if the paper were sold.[161]

Merrimon informed Ashe that the paper would have to be sold if arrangements were not made. Ashe was quite certain it was hopeless and wrote Senator Ransom about a possible appointment to the Interstate

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[160] Daniels, Tar Heel Editor, 432; News and Observer, February 6. 1891.

[161] Daniels, Tar Heel Editor, 434. Merrimon wrote some letters to Ashe asking him to make arrangements: Augustus S. Merrimon to Samuel A. Ashe, February 10, March 1, 1892, Ashe Papers.

Commerce Commission but got a negative response.[162] He was so convinced of impending disaster that he applied for positions with several northern papers and wrote Ransom:

> There is no probability of any arrangement being made to retain me in the News & Observ. Perhaps the paper may be consolidated with Mr. Daniels and Mr. Jernigan retained with him. It has been a most miserable business. If the paper were of any importance Nationally perhaps some of our Northern friends might take some stock in it and tide over the difficulty; but it is not of sufficient interest to others to be an object of concern.[163]

Despite Ashe's gloomy outlook, Willard arranged to put up the necessary money and temporarily the paper was saved.[164]

Late in 1892, however, Ashe was in hot financial waters again and sent out a circular for support. A stockholders meeting was called for November 19 in Raleigh to discuss the issue.[165] It seems probable that further consideration of consolidation with the State Chronicle was taken up at this time. The Chronicle had been purchased from Daniels in 1892 by Thomas R. Jernigan, a former associate of Ashe. Thomas M. Holt backed the venture and the paper had supported him for governor, but, according to Daniels, after failing of the nomination he was no longer interested in the burden of a paper that was losing money and so he forced its consolidation with the News and Observer.[166]

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[162]Matt W. Ransom to Samuel A. Ashe, December 8, 1891, Ashe Papers.

[163]Samuel A. Ashe to Matt W. Ransom, December 9, 1891, Ransom Papers.

[164]Daniels, Tar Heel Editor, 435; Samuel A. Ashe to Matt W. Ransom, March 4, 1892, Ransom Papers.

[165]W. R. Tucker to Samuel A. Ashe, November 18, 1892, Ashe Papers.

[166]Daniels, Tar Heel Editor, 489-490, 493.

Through consolidation Holt hoped to recoup some of his losses even though both papers were heavily mortgaged. Ashe immediately issued a circular on July 14, 1893, shortly after the consolidation, in which he proposed a $40,000 stock company. He said: ". . . the field being clear, and all conflicting interests being out of the way, and the prospect being that the paper will pay reasonable profits, I feel at liberty to ask gentlemen to take stock and to become pecuniarily interested."[167] The new name of the paper was the News-Observer-Chronicle, the longest name in the history of state journalism. The truth is that for Ashe to proclaim good prospects as the nation was starting on the road to depression required extreme rationalization. Only a few days after sending out the circular Ashe was in need of another $5,000 note to sustain his paper. Thomas Holt informed the editor that the paper needed "a good man, who understands the business department," but added that he would sign a note if William H. Willard and Julian S. Carr were willing.[168] Once again Willard came to the rescue.

By mid-1894 all hope was lost, but Thomas J. Jarvis, desirous of saving Ashe's journalistic career, wrote Willard informing him of the "great loss to the party" that would result from Ashe's leaving the paper.[169] Willard responded indignantly, saying he had already invested $15,000 in the paper:

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[167]Circular, July 14, 1893, Ashe Papers.

[168]Thomas M. Holt to Samuel A. Ashe, July 21, 1893, Ashe Papers.

[169]Thomas J. Jarvis to William H. Willard, July 13, 1894, Ashe Papers.

> This has been done for the sole benefit of Mr. Ashe, and so far as I now know is a total loss to me, and is far more than I can leave if I were to die tomorrow to each of my nine grandchildren. With these facts before you I will leave it for you to say whether or not I should rob these children of their proportion of my estate to help build up the Democratic party of North Carolina, which has done so little towards sustaining Mr. Ashe & the News & Observer.[170]

Willard added that Ashe's turning from law to journalism had been "a great disappointment" to everyone. He said that a prominent lawyer told him that "if Mr. Ashe had remained in his profession he would have been on the supreme court bench. . . ."

On June 29 the News-Observer-Chronicle announced that it was to be sold and had passed to the receivership of William C. Holman upon the application of R. F. Morris and Son Manufacturing Company, a business controlled by Willard. The terms of the sale were to be one-third down and the remainder in six and twelve months.[171] Ashe informed his readers that constant efforts and appeals to provide against a new debt and pay the paper bill had failed. He concluded:

> Freed from the incubus of debt--the result of heavy fights for the Democratic party and in part the result of competition that is now happily past, the paper should become very valuable property. We so consider it; and if we had any means the intended sale would not be made.[172]

The panic of 1893 had dealt the death blow to Ashe's journalistic career. On July 17 the News-Observer-Chronicle was purchased by J. N.

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[170] William H. Willard to Thomas J. Jarvis, July 14, 1894, Ashe Papers.

[171] Daniels, Editor in Politics, 87.

[172] News-Observer-Chronicle, June 29, 1894.

Holding, acting as agent for Daniels, for $6,810. Daniels' role in the purchase was not revealed until later for he feared the interference of either the Southern Railroad or the Duke Tobacco Trust, both of which had come under his criticism.[173] On August 11, 1894, Samuel A. Ashe said his last farewell and stepped down from the chair of journalism. It is regretable that he left journalism at a time when the money issue was becoming so pronounced, for as Jarvis told him: "You know more about this great question than any other editor in the State. . . ."[174]

Ashe faced a serious situation for he had no means of support, though insurance offered some relief. He had several offers to reenter journalism, but he was not disposed to reenter a field that had been marked by his conspicious economic failure. In July Ashe was seriously considering an attempt for a United States Senate seat. His old friend John C. Winder wrote: "Why should you not offer for the Senate? They owe you something."[175] Ashe later found out that Jarvis was not happy in the Senate and might step down for the senator wrote Ashe: "The truth is, Sam, the Senate is not an easy place for me. . . . It would be no crop to me personally to quit."[176] Probably taking this as a cue Ashe wrote potential supporters: "I propose . . . to offer my-

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[173]Daniels, Editor in Politics, 86-87.

[174]Thomas J. Jarvis to Samuel A. Ashe, July 7, 1894, Ashe Papers.

[175]John C. Winder to Samuel A. Ashe, July 26, 1894, Ashe Papers.

[176]Thomas J. Jarvis to Samuel A. Ashe, August 2, 1894, Ashe Papers.

self for the seat in the Senate made vacant by Senator Vance."[177] The editor got some favorable response from conservative legislators, but he was grasping for straws because it was increasingly clear that the Fusionist combination of the Republicans and the Populists might capture the legislature.

Ashe was shattered in November when he saw what was, in part at least, the culmination of his own work. The Fusionists captured the legislature despite the numerous electoral restrictions designed by the Reedemers to prevent such an occurrence. Ashe never acknowledged any responsibility for what happened and always insisted upon his own foresight in warning against the third party threat. In 1938 his death bed utterance about the Alliance was: "Its fusion with the people's party and subsequently with the Republicans brought about the result which the Democrats had feared, and endeavored to avoid—a Republican victory with its attendent evils."[178]

The truth is that Ashe and men like him were so uncompromising that they insured the ultimate defeat of their party in 1894. Ashe doubtless felt that what many would call stubbornness was in fact a display of great moral courage. Ashe was a Redeemer determined to protect and preserve the power of the Bourbons who had held sway for twenty years. Polk was a threat to their interests. Ashe, however,

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[177]Samuel A. Ashe to William S. Atkinson, August 17, 1894, Ashe Papers.

[178]Samuel A. Ashe (dictated to Sarah W. Ashe) to Stuart Noblin, August 6, 1938, Stuart Noblin Papers, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, hereinafter cited as Noblin Papers.

did not attack Polk for personal gain or in order to increase his own standing among the Bourbons. Indeed, prudence would seem to have dictated some other course for he brought the wrath of the powerful North Carolina Farmers' Alliance down upon his head. He would have probably agreed with an admirer who said: "You are so conservative and have suffered so much injustice for your conservatism. . . ."[179]

The fact that Ashe was unable to get financial backing from the party to maintain his paper despite his devotion to the Bourbon cause proves more than his own lack of business acumen. One would think that some wealthy Bourbons would have leapt to the aid of their great defender. The editor in fact had often to depend on the generosity of Willard, a hard line gold bug who was in total disagreement with Ashe's financial views. Ashe, however, was totally independent of Willard's philosophical or economic inclinations. The Bourbon editor's sister said of him: ". . . my brother, from the first followed the dictates of his judgment in the conduct of his paper---often to his own detriment."[180]

As an editor Ashe had clear ideas about the role of the journalist. As he once said: ". . . before the press arose as an institution in society there was no public opinion." The press, he said, from its earliest conception "brought education and enlightenment to the people" and "its chiefest glory /is/ that it has reformed society, by enlighten-

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[179]George Howard to Samuel A. Ashe, April 3, 1894, Ashe Papers.

[180]Samuel A. Ashe (dictated to Sarah W. Ashe) to Stuart Noblin, August 6, 1938, Noblin Papers. Miss Ashe makes this comment in the postscript.

ing man. . . ." "Truth," he declared, "should be its object. . . " and it should never "abandon the high purpose to reform abuses, cure evils, and lift manhood. . . ."[181] It must be remembered that Ashe had his own ideas about what reform was; for him reform and retrenchment were mutually inclusive. In view of this there is no reason to doubt his sincerity when in his last days the former editor said:

> The News & Observer represented all classes of the people and sought to benefit them all, and as our people were largely agricultural it advocated every measure which seemed beneficial to the farmer. As railroads and factories were also beneficial to the State, and necessary to its welfare, it sought also to encourage them.[182]

Ashe considered his principles as absolutes and with stubborn determination never abandoned them. When he left journalism his life became less controversial and he devoted much of his later years to historical research and writing. Decades later, commenting on Ashe's departure from journalism, his great antagonist Josephus Daniels said:

> In the years to come, with the apple of discord removed, we both forgot the hard things and became good friends. . . and I with other friends favored the resolution which passed in 1939 to erect a statue to this gallant soldier and patriotic historian in Capitol Square. He wore worthily the honored name of Ashe, which has been distinguished from the earliest history of the State. He loved North Carolina and in a long life gave it his deep devotion as Confederate soldier, legislator, editor, public official, and historian.[183]

Ashe in his own day was a symbol of the unyielding attitude of extreme Southern Bourbonism. He was always proud of being called a

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[181] News and Observer ?, 1890, "Ashe Scrapbook," Chapel Hill.

[182] Samuel A. Ashe (dictated to Sarah W. Ashe) to Stuart Noblin, August 6, 1938, Noblin Papers.

[183] Daniels, Tar Heel Editor, 353-354.

"Bourbon." For him the term had a clear meaning; one which was later obscured. For the stalwart editor it simply meant a conservative southern Democrat with due respect for the South's agrarian past, but it also encompassed the ideas of the "New South"[184] as put forward by Henry Grady, a man Ashe admired. Therein lay the root of Bourbonism's gread paradox: It proclaimed the virtues of the agrarian South and the cause it fought for in the Civil War, but it looked to progress in strictly materialistic, industrial terms. So it was with Ashe in 1894 when he left journalism and reached a low point in his life. In those days he must have thought the summit of his career was long past, but he had years to live and still further contributions to make to the state.

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[184]For a further exposé on Ashe's "New South" outlook as well as that of other Raleigh leaders consult Sarah McCulloh Lemmon, "Raleigh--An Example of the 'New South'?" North Carolina Historical Review XLIII (July, 1966), 261-285.

CHAPTER VI
CONCLUSION

When one analyzes the influences upon Samuel A. Ashe's life and asks what made him the type of man he was, the Civil War stands out as the monumental force that moulded his character. The war altered the foundations of southern society and set men adrift from their old agrarian moorings. Although Ashe as did thousands of ex-Confederates reflected often about the prewar days and the quietude of rural life, it should be remembered that this was largely symptomatic of the romanticism which made the antebellum past seem more brilliant than it ever was in reality. The Redeemers were often adept at muttering empty platitudes about the virtues of that past era, while aligning themselves with the business interests of the Northeast. This is not to say that they were hypocritical, since they longed for what they thought was the prime characteristic of the prewar America--the national leadership role of the South. In the industrial age, they saw the implementation of capitalist enterprise as the only way ever to regain a leadership role for their region. For the time being they were willing to play second fiddle to their industrial superiors. They did not envision such a role as permanent, however, and in this Ashe was no exception.

That Ashe, a man of aristocratic and agrarian roots, should find himself uncomfortably aligned with business was understandable. The plantations of the Tidewater had proven themselves inferior to the factories of New England in a most vital way: They had failed as a basis for a war economy. Northern factories had been able to supply

and arm their troops. The fact that, as a result of defeat, the southern Redeemers came to grasp for any and all industry with such determination should constitute no shock. They were agrarians not yet experienced as captains of industry and they perceived industrialization in a simplistic manner, but they were sure that it had been the well-known and crafty Yankee entrepreneur who had ultimately crowned the North with victory. Thus Ashe and the Bourbons thought: We need industry and any industry is better than none. We need railroads to facilitate industry and railroads, at any price, are better than none.

In his Origins of the New South, C. Vann Woodward emphasized the influence of continued Whiggery upon the postwar Democratic party. Many old-line Whigs, former members of a pro-business party, who could not stomach going over to the Republican conquerers rushed to the Democrats who conveniently changed their name to Conservatives in order to allay old antagonisms. Of this movement Woodward said:

> The fact was that instead of assuming the submissive role suggested by a change of name, Whiggery often took the dominant position--along with the bulk of desirable offices. A North Carolina editor who described himself as one of the "unterrified Democracy" boasted that "the Democratic nominees for Governor since the war had been Worth, a Whig; Ashe, a Whig; Merrimon, a Whig; Vance, a Whig; and Jarvis, who was too young before the war to have had much political leaning one way or another." The Democrats of the First North Carolina District had in that period nominated five men for Congress, "every one of them former Whigs," and the state supreme court was "composed of three sterling Democrats, all former Whigs." By 1884 it appeared that "the Democrats of today admire Henry Clay just as much as the men of Whig traditions."[1]

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[1]Woodward, Origins of the New South, 1-2.

It was no mere coincidence that the "North Carolina editor" referred to in the above excerpt was Samuel A. Ashe. Ashe, of course, was never a Whig; but, after the war, he was most intimately associated with former Whigs. Both his law partners, Thomas Fuller and Augustus S. Merrimon were one time Whigs. Many other state leaders that Ashe knew well were former adherents to the party of Henry Clay: Thomas S. Ashe, Alfred M. Scales, Zebulon B. Vance, and Matt W. Ransom to name a few. The Whig outlook thus came to influence Ashe and made his attitude toward business markedly more favorable.

Though this was true, Ashe knew that too obvious a degree of alliance with business was politically unhealthy in an agrarian region. He as a good Bourbon, therefore, had to rally the masses by the cry of "negro rule" and the constant recitation of the evils of Reconstruction which, though grossly exaggerated, were quite evil enough to maintain some degree of white solidarity. When Ashe was an old man his sister remarked: "He is proudest now that he was among the young men who came back from the war and took the state out of Reconstruction and set it on the road to prosperity."[2] Whether Ashe was so instrumental in setting the state on the road to prosperity as he later thought may well be debated, but that the period was for him somewhat of an individual triumph cannot be denied. He rose from poverty to become a legislator and an able lawyer. Reconstruction established in him a more powerful and partisan mode of thought and led to his fight for redemption. Once Democratic victory was achieved, Ashe felt that the

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[2]Quoted in a Letter to the Editor, Raleigh Times, July 2, 1965.

party's ascendency had to be maintained. The supposed superiority of the white race had to be preserved. Therein lay another Ashe characteristic common to all Bourbons--the belief in the natural superiority of Anglo-Saxon civilization. This belief was accentuated by the fact that many southerners felt the enfranchisement of the Negro was the Republican way of punishing the region for its defense of that very form of civilization. Ashe, though he could never admit it, was a social Darwinist of the first order and he felt that it was dictated by the laws of nature that the "strong" should rule; the "strong" being the Anglo-Saxon race. To deny such a law of nature, as he felt was the ultimate goal of the Radicals, was to defy God.

From this point, Ashe's philosophy went a step further: What if Anglo-Saxon superiority were "threatened" by the possible triumph of the "inferior" race, the Negroes? It did not matter if the Negroes went into alliance with whites and elected predominantly white representatives who were Republicans, for the fact could not be concealed that this was domination by an inferior race. Thus Ashe reasoned that not only were the whites involved "traitors" and "low types;" but that questionable means might be imperative to prevent the triumph of the "mongrel" combination. The rule of expediency in defense of Anglo-Saxon civilization was characteristic of the Redeemers and Ashe was a perfect example of how this philosophy was full of contradictions. The Bourbons often tried to display themselves as the "true" friends of the blacks, yet at the same time they would call the ignorant white populace to the polls to defeat "African barbarism." At other times the Redeemers, by whatever means necessary, would attempt to round up

Negro votes in order to defeat the worst elements of the white population. To prevent any alliance between the poorer whites and the blacks on economic grounds was a prime aim of the Redeemers and their task was made easier by the fact that the poor whites tended to be strongly racist. It is often argued that the race question was a mere issue of convenience by which the Bourbons continued in power. There is some truth in this argument, but it cannot be denied that Ashe really felt that the Bourbons represented Anglo-Saxon civilization. Surely he would not have thought that the "lesser elements" of the white population represented civilization. Anglo-Saxon civilization could be adequately represented and maintained only by the upper crust--the Redeemers.

The Bourbon editor who emerged in 1879 was the product of a long series of factors: a secessionist father, a military education, a war, Reconstruction, and North Carolina redemption. When one considers those factors which contributed to Ashe's character and recognizes the extreme partisanship which characterized American politics in the later nineteenth century, his fanatical devotion to the Democratic party is more easily comprehended. For Ashe devotion to duty, a military virtue, was a powerful catalyst which called forth great efforts for the sake of the party. Ashe frequently alluded to the fact that issues were secondary to the triumph of the party. The editor, however, at times seemed mystified when others did not display the same degree of partisan loyalty that he was able to muster. From experience he should have known that the masses needed more than empty oratory to remain loyal to a party. They needed action. The people were not prepared

to await that golden future, projected by the apostles of the "New South" creed, when the region would be the embodiment of progress and modernity. They were absorbed in the sufferings of day to day life with its low wages and poor farm prices. Thus the farmers organized to better themselves.

Ashe always tried to display his love of the farmers; but his love for them was of the romantic, paternalistic type that a Wall Street tycoon feels for rural America as he laments the hectic world of business finance and yearns for simplicity. When Ashe looked at the farmer his mind doubtless wandered back to those happy antebellum days on his father's plantation, but practical solutions to farm problems if they involved the government were hardly to his liking. Ashe would say he did have practical solutions that proved he was a steadfast ally of the farmer: repeal of the internal revenue system, tariff reduction, the institution of a graduated income tax, and the expansion of the currency by increasing the silver in circulation. However, when one examines these items it becomes clear that to support such positions—positions typical of Redeemers—was evidence that one was a southerner and the fact that such measures might help the farmer was largely coincidental.

From Ashe's perspective the Farmers' Alliance threatened Redeemer rule and "white man's government," for it concentrated on solutions to joint economic ills of black and white to the ultimate detriment of racial solidarity. He also considered the farmers' efforts to get the the government to assist them by affirmative action as "class legislation." That the vast majority of North Carolina's population were farmers did

not detract, in Ashe's eyes, from the fact that government action on their behalf was class action. This non-interference, laissez faire attitude was not inconsistent with the Bourbon editor's overall philosophy in regard to business enterprise; but, it might be added, that freedom from restraint was always more advantageous to business than to the farmers. The farmers were forced to accept depressed market prices as individuals, whereas the corporations and railroads were not so hampered by the law of supply and demand. Ashe would say that the actions of a single corporation were as nothing in the market place and this was doubtless true; but the activities of pools, trusts, and combines were of a different order. The unorganized farmers were at the mercy of the "money interests" and as individuals they could hardly confront the rising monopolies on equal terms. Ashe knew this, but his answer was for the farmers to work within the Democratic party as co-partners with their financial adversaries. He seemingly insisted on an equal role for the state's businessmen who constituted less than 5 per cent of the population with the state's farmers, more than 80 per cent of the voters. It must have also come to his mind that, whereas practically all businessmen were of Anglo-Saxon stock, a sizeable minority of the agrarians were Negroes. These Negroes combined with the "less intelligent" white elements were a positive threat to the maintenance of Bourbon rule.

The fact is that the Farmers' Alliance was a real threat from the Redeemer point of view. No one denies that it was antagonistic to the entrenched power of Bourbonism and for such an element as had held power in the state for twenty years to submit meekly to the demands

of agrarian crusaders was to threaten their standing with the real powers of the Northeast. The Redeemers knew that the nation's agrarians were in decline and probably foresaw that inevitable day when their last vestiges of power would be swept away by urban industry. They were not willing to clamber on board what they thought was a sinking ship, though their own ship was full of holes and about to sink. Seeing power rapidly escaping, they were all that more determined to hold on to what little they had left. Populist ideas were progressive, but the Populists themselves represented a declining agricultural class. The agrarians were willing to compromise for a share of the power they so badly wanted. It should be no shock that the Redeemers were unwilling to compromise in what they saw as their own destruction. They were bound to lose either way and they chose to go fighting in the southern tradition. There were of course those, like Thomas J. Jarvis, who urged a course of moderation and conciliation toward the Alliance. Jarvis felt that the old hands might be forced to take a back seat for a while. Ashe, as did many Bourbons, was afraid that the back seat might become indefinite and lead ultimately to the casting aside of the powers that be. In a struggle between good and evil a compromise must necessarily lead to the defeat of good. To Ashe the evil was the "socialistic" tendencies of the farmers movement and the good was the tradition of Bourbon rule which had cast down the "paternalistic" interference characterized by Reconstruction governments. Ashe, as did Jefferson, believed that the best government was the least government. That such a philosophy was untenable in the altered circumstances of the late nineteenth century is clear to us now; but to a man like Ashe who so

often looked to the past for guides such a philosophy of government seemed the embodiment of wisdom.

Ultimately Ashe knew that the conflict of interest between the Redeemers and the Farmers' Alliance was bound to emerge. He knew, however, that such a conflict had to be as far as possible divorced from the implication that the Alliance membership was under attack. Polk, by his denunciation of Senator Vance, provided the necessary focus for the struggle. Unfortunately for the Alliance president circumstances forced him to select the most admirable of North Carolina's Bourbon leaders as his target. Vance was not merely a man but an institution. Thousands of loyal Alliancemen marched to the polls in November, 1890, and voted for other Alliancemen who had pledged themselves to vote for Vance for the Senate. This occurred in spite of Polk's pronouncements. The Alliance legislators were loyal to their pledges, but would public opinion have allowed them to be otherwise? Was not "Our Zeb" as near the hearts of the rank and file as Polk? Such sentiments, the emotional attachment of the masses, defy logical historical analysis, but they were nonetheless present in 1890.

Ashe's role in the battle with Polk was certainly a very significant one, but in the first phase of the struggle the Bourbon editor clearly had the advantage. The News and Observer was not merely the voice of its editor, but was the voice of two decades of entrenched power in the state. That this battle took such a bitter turn reflects both the tenor of journalism of the times and the intensity of the clash between the Redeemers and the farmers movement. Such differences resulted in the departure of Polk and others from the party. In this

sense Ashe achieved his immediate objective, though the long term results were not those he envisioned. Though Polk's leaving the Democratic party must be considered in the light of many factors, it is not unreasonable to say that Ashe and what he represented loomed large in the ultimate action. Ashe, of course, with a certain lack of modesty was not loath to assert that he was the major factor that drove Polk to the Populists. He, however, felt that he was only "unmasking" the farm leader's true proclivity. Long after the struggle, Ashe asserted that in its midst Senator Ransom in a personal conversation had discoursed to him about the importance of courage.[3] Thus one gets a clear idea of how Ashe viewed his part in the struggle. Ashe's conflict with Polk constituted his greatest journalistic triumph and his greatest tragedy. The victory, which seemed so real, turned out to be an illusion and the Bourbon editor's intransigence contributed to the Fusionist victory of 1894.

Did Ashe not comprehend the trend? Did he not know the end of the road he was taking? It is safe to say that he did know this: That people might desert the Democratic party, but in the end as in the past they would return, though to a chastened party. They returned in 1898 and rallied around an old and more pronounced battle cry of "White Supremacy." Ashe would say that that was his vindication. He was not one to regret his past actions. But, in the bigger picture, it would seem that Ashe was bound to lose, for he represented a mode of thought that was already fading in 1894; a mode of thought that was

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[3]Ashe, Biographical History, I, 429.

to remain in the southern character, albeit in weakened form, for decades. With him, however, the memory of the past was fresh and strong and it loomed high--the memory of "The War."

Walter Hines Page, who knew Ashe and with whom the stalwart Bourbon editor had rather bad relations, said of the Confederate survivors of the Civil War:

> . . . many of the men who survived that unnatural war unwittingly did us a greater hurt than the war itself. It gave every one of them the intensest experience of his life, and ever afterwards he referred every other experience to this. Thus it stopped the thought of most of them as an earthquake stops a clock. The fierce blow of battle paralyzed the mind. Their speech was in a vocabulary of war; their loyalties were loyalties, not to living ideas or duties, but to old commanders and to distorted traditions. They were dead men, most of them, moving among the living as ghosts, and, yet as ghosts in a play, they held the stage.[4]

Ashe was the type of man Page was thinking of, but his judgment is too harsh. The Bourbon editor did display a powerful political vitality, conservative though it was. Whenever Ashe could get beyond his blatant partisanship he showed foresight: as in the case of the repudiation question, the silver debate, and currency questions in general. Unfortunately, Ashe's vision was often blurred by judgments of what was politically expedient. His partisanship was often a handicap.

It is true that the war was the greatest event in Ashe's life and he did judge much by it. It was at the base of much of his politics. Yet Ashe, because of it, became a champion of industrialization. If it had not been for the war he, like his father, would have been an

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[4]Walter Hines Page, The Southerner, A Novel Being an Autobiography of Nicholas Worth (New York, 1909), 46.

aristocratic lawyer-planter and would have passed his days an agrarian to the core with, perhaps, a business sideline. Thus in the broad philosophical sense the war may have retarded Ashe, but it also made him aware of the world. He came to feel, as a result of that conflict, that industrial progress was the be all and end all of the South's future. He did adopt certain aspects of the big business credo, but even in that he never completely yielded, for he still opposed the tariff and supported a graduated income tax. He did what he did because he thought it was best for North Carolina. Ashe was independent in his own way, for he would allow no one to dictate to him. His independence, however, was more an adjunct of his personality than a characteristic of his politics. His road always led back to Bourbonism.

Ashe was a Bourbon, a term he was proud to use, and he did not shrink from its implications. Ashe would not have altered his life or his actions for the sake of a better judgment in the eyes of history. In this sense maybe he had learned nothing and forgotten nothing, but Ashe would have asserted that right is worth fighting for even when one loses. Ashe never doubted that he was right. He displayed many Redeemer traits, but all were aware of his own powerful personality which was strongly moulded by engrained traditional precepts: the importance of the dignity of the family name, and devotion to the state. Courage and loyalty were among his favorite words and he pursued his ends with passionate recklessness and stubborn determination. His whole being was permeated with the idea of southern righteousness and to fight, even when he knew his cause was lost, was sublime. There

was even a certain virtue in defeat if one went down in a blaze of glory. Ashe often faced defeats but, as he always asserted about his actions at the end of the Civil War, he never surrendered.

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