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Editorial – “Freedom of the Press”

Attempts will no doubt be made to confuse the public mind in view of the recent activity in New York and in this city in suppressing treasonable presses. It will be said that the freedom of the press is a palladium of liberty; that if arbitrary despotism is to destroy the watch-dogs of freedom, we are on the high road to the ruin of the republic, &c., &c.

We wish to put our readers on their guard against the insidious attempts of rebels in disguise. The principle in the case of the grand jury in New York and of Marshall Milward is perfectly plain, and all the sophistry in the world cannot confuse it to right thinking man.

In time of peace, the liberty of speech and of the press are carefully guarded. So is the liberty of the citizen in the shape of *habeas corpus*. Yet Mr. Dickinson, the Senator from New York, rightly said in a recent speech: “In such a time as this, if there were no other way of suppressing treason, I would suspend the *habeas corpus* and the traitor, too.”

In looking at laws, we must look at their reason. When law is supreme and the public peace undisturbed, the liberty of the citizen, the freedom of press and of speech cannot be too carefully guarded. But when the sovereignty of the nation is attacked, the first thing is to protect that; for everything depends upon it, everything centres in it. If the flag be down, there is no protection for life, property religion or anything else. The country is in the hands of rebels and land pirates. The first thing is to save your Government.

Now if newspapers are issuing daily or weekly treason against the supreme authority; if they are encouraging those who are making war against it; if they are doing their utmost to trail our flag in the dust – it is perfectly idle to talk of the freedom of the press in this case. *All the rights of citizens presuppose loyalty; a traitor has no rights.* He is an outlaw in the very nature of the case.

The thanks of every loyal citizen are due to the New York grand jury and to Marshal Milward. These are precisely stern precedents that are needed. Let them be followed up by similar action everywhere. Let every Secession journal be swept from the land.

The case of the *Christian Observer*, for which there may be an attempt to create some sympathy, is a perfectly clear one. Its editor was earnestly remonstrated with by almost every prominent minister of the Church to which he belongs, resident in this city and vicinity, and so anxious were they at one time to be freed from the scandal of the *Observer's* pro-slaveryism, that they offered \$10,000 for the paper, far more than it was worth, but expressive of their desire to be rid of it. Finding the editor incorrigible, they one by one repudiated that journal, and were only of late waiting the regular meeting of their Church Court to take public and combined action against it. The articles and communications became more and more offensive every week. The North sneered at; irritating statements were made and reiterated, until no one that read that paper had the least doubt that the whole bearing was in favor of the rebel government as against the United States. If such papers are allowed to be published, government is a mockery. The fact that the *Observer* was called a religious journal, that it published church news, &c., did not in the least alter the case. Treason is no better for coming in religious garb; it is worse, indeed because more concealed, and, therefore, more dangerous.