

Report of the
Committee-

the State and punishment of treason, which the British Parliament, some centuries ago, alleged in justification of similar acts.

Your Committee would not revive the dead issues of the past, but truth and justice require that they shall not evade the responsibilities of the present crisis. This question of proscription involves the consideration of the nature and character of the offence which is thus proposed to be punished. The Reconstruction Committee denounced it as a crime of unmitigated rebellion and treason. In all questions of criminality the motives and purposes of the act fix its legal and moral character.

The same act may be wilful and premeditated murder, or manslaughter, or excusable or justifiable homicide, according to the motive which shall appear to have actuated the party. Are not the persons proposed to be proscribed, and all who acted with them in the great war of secession entitled to be judged by the same elementary rule in the administration of justice.

The question then is, were the people of the States which attempted secession, honest and sincere in their avowal of their belief in the right of secession and of the reasons for its exercise? Be their public documents cotemporaneous with their action, they put themselves on trial before thy country and the world for the truth and sincerity of their avowals. The wager of battle decided against their right of secession. That question was thus finally settled; banished to the realms of speculative abstractions. But in considering the question of damages, is there anything in mitigation; was their action an unpardonable crime, or was it a pardonable mistake.

In addition to their public, solemn cotemporaneous declarations at the time of secession, and before and during the war, the Reconstruction Committee, after the close of the war, summoned before them Alexander H. Stevens, who had been Vice President of the Confederate States. They examined him on oath and report the following questions and answers: