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# South Carolina Historical Magazine

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**"THE PUBLIC BUSINESS IS OURS":  
EDWARD MCCRADY, JR. AND CONSERVATIVE  
THOUGHT IN POST-CIVIL WAR SOUTH CAROLINA,  
1865-1900**

CHARLES J. HOLDEN\*

ON NOVEMBER 2, 1903, THE *CHARLESTON NEWS AND COURIER* paid tribute to "One of Carolina's Greatest Sons," General Edward McCrady, Jr., who had passed away the previous day. The obituary featured reviews of McCrady's active career in the Confederate army, his leadership in post-war Confederate veteran activities, as well as his political work helping to reestablish "home rule" in South Carolina in 1876 and representing Charleston in the state House of Representatives through the 1880s.<sup>1</sup> From 1865 until his death, McCrady relished and prospered from his reputation as an old soldier, but also as a staunch conservative. Postwar conservatives like Edward McCrady, Jr. have not received the scholarly attention given their antebellum predecessors.<sup>2</sup> That South Carolina remained a conservative state following the war will startle very few. But while it is widely understood that the state's leaders were still conservative following the war, theirs remains a conservatism assumed more than explained.

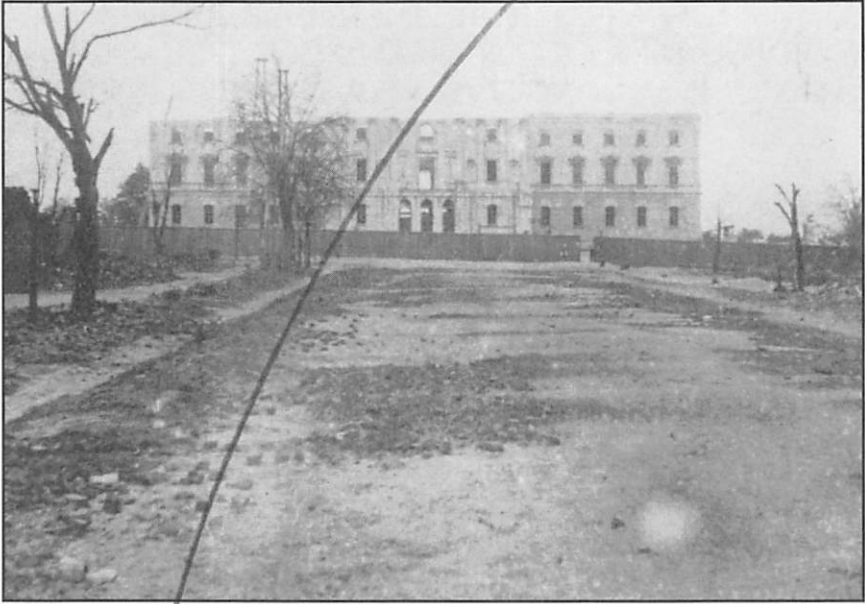
Scholars often overlook the philosophical underpinnings of South Carolina's return to conservative rule. State political studies view the "restoration" of 1876 to 1890 in terms of the traditional elite's effective use of *noblesse oblige* as a bare-knuckled strategy to divide and conquer the expanded, biracial democracy created by the 1868 constitution.<sup>3</sup> Don H. Doyle sees the continued economic prominence of the traditional elite in the Lowcountry as a result of a consciously isolating outlook that emphasized "genealogy, manners, cultural refinement, old homes, and a shared, precious

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<sup>1</sup>Charleston *News and Courier*, November 2, 1903.

<sup>2</sup>Clinton Rossiter in *Conservatism in America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, second edition, 1982) and Russell Kirk in *The Conservative Mind: From Burke to Eliot* (Washington, D.C.: Regnery Publishing, Inc., seventh revised edition, 1994), as leading scholars of conservative thought in the United States, both leave Southern conservatism dead on the fields of 1865, reemerging with the Agrarians in the 1930s. Richard Weaver's, *The Southern Tradition at Bay: A History of Postbellum Thought*, George Core and M. E. Bradford, eds. (New Rochelle, New York: Arlington House, 1968) is a notable exception.

<sup>3</sup>See William J. Cooper, Jr., *The Conservative Regime: South Carolina, 1877-1890* (Louisiana State University Press: Baton Rouge, 1968); George B. Tindall, *South Carolina Negroes, 1877-1900* (University of South Carolina Press: Columbia, 1952).



**A Richard Wearn photograph of the unfinished New State Capitol as viewed from Main Street shortly after the Civil War. The New State Capitol remained unfinished until early in the twentieth century. Courtesy of the South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina.**

neighbor, the old capitol, dingy and forbidding.”<sup>68</sup> Although the destruction of Columbia left the building itself essentially unscathed, fire ravaged the capitol grounds, destroying the old State House and much of the construction materials. The devastation of the war left the state without the resources to complete Niernsee’s New State Capitol and, although used by the legislature from the late 1860s on, it remained unfinished until early in the twentieth century.

<sup>68</sup>Fenwick Y. Hedley, *Marching Through Georgia* (Chicago: Donahue, Henneberry & Co., 1890), 365-366.



Edward McCrady, Jr. (1833-1903). McCrady was a political conservative who helped to reestablish "home rule" in 1876 and represented Charleston in the state House of Representatives from 1880-1890. From the collections of the South Carolina Historical Society.

past as the basis of honor and authority within the community."<sup>4</sup> The Lowcountry elite was thereby able to preserve their economic place within the state while they warded off the unseemly traits of the "New" South. William J. Cooper, Jr. has summarized the conservative mission during these years as an effort to establish a state "controlled by native whites" and bolstered by an educational system that "inculcated the values and ideals of the past."<sup>5</sup> The "Bourbons" trumpeted very specific values from the Old South and a very exclusive group of "native whites" to justify their control. The traditional elite continued to hold fast to an identifiable, socially conservative philosophy from the antebellum era that in turn served as the basis for their ventures into the tempest that was postwar South Carolina.

Edward McCrady, Jr.'s thoughts and career provide form and content to this conservative philosophy for the postwar years. He exemplifies the often-overlooked fact that those former Confederates leading the fight against the state's "Black Republicans" in the 1870s, and governing the state until the 1890s, stood on a traditionally conservative foundation of beliefs in hierarchy and fundamental human inequality, and against majoritarian rule.<sup>6</sup> Theirs was a world view that simultaneously believed in white rule over black and elite rule over all. Postwar conservatives articulated this philosophy through open appeals to a South Carolina tradition of elite rule and by frequent denunciations of the democratic impulses sweeping the nation, from which they sought to spare the state. The Southern conservative belief in a hierarchical society remained politically powerful until the 1890s when the regime was toppled by the anti-aristocratic forces of Benjamin R. Tillman.

The roots of McCrady's postwar outlook reach back to the social conservatism of the antebellum years. Beginning in the 1830s, Southern intellectuals pressed by the rising threats of industrialism and abolitionism wove earlier strands of proslavery thought into a complex ideology. The Old South conservative ideology was a vision of material and social progress opposed to the spread of bourgeois values in the northern states and western Europe.<sup>7</sup> Antebellum Southern writers posited a paternalistic

<sup>4</sup>Don H. Doyle, *New Men, New Cities, New South: Atlanta, Nashville, Charleston, Mobile, 1860-1910* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 117.

<sup>5</sup>Cooper, *The Conservative Regime: South Carolina, 1877-1890*, 207.

<sup>6</sup>Conservatives like McCrady offered few if any apologies for having once owned slaves. In contrast to the Old South belief that slavery was essential for an orderly society, postwar conservatives saw slavery, as the *News and Courier* explained in 1879, as no longer "a live issue." *Charleston News and Courier*, January 4, 1879.

<sup>7</sup>See Eugene Genovese, *The World the Slaveholders Made: Two Essays in Interpretation* (Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 1988 edition); Roll, Jordan, Roll: *The World the Slaves Made* (New York: Pantheon, 1975); and *The Slaveholders'*

slave society based on Christian duty, mutual responsibility, and shared rewards within "natural" racial and gender hierarchies. Old South conservatives insisted on states' rights or local rule to guard against both the instability and the centralizing tendencies of bourgeois democracies. Their belief in local rule located political power in a local elite. The wisdom and character of "gentlemen" rulers would hold the slave South above the passion and partisanship of American democracy.

As a McCrady, Edward, Jr. belonged to just this type of prominent local family that Southern conservatives believed should rule, and from his earliest days he absorbed the conservative ideals as they emanated from its philosophical capitol. Born in Charleston in 1833, McCrady graduated from the College of Charleston in 1853. He was admitted to the bar in 1855 where he joined his prominent father, Edward McCrady, Sr. The family owned land and slaves outside the city, reporting at least fifteen slaves for the 1860 census.<sup>8</sup> His city of birth, his family's position within society, and his education all served as rich sources of antebellum Southern conservatism. When the Civil War broke out, McCrady joined the First South Carolina Volunteers under General Maxcy Gregg. He saw extensive action from 1861 to 1863, rising to lieutenant colonel by 1863. Wounded at Second Manassas and again at Fredericksburg, he served out the war in command of an instructional camp in Madison, Florida.<sup>9</sup>

Following the war, McCrady returned to Charleston where he resumed practicing law with his father. Long hours of study and work consumed his days and aggravated head and back wounds from the war, but his efforts garnered early success. Within the first year McCrady had a house on Meeting Street and south of Broad Street—an important geographical distinction among Charleston's elite. After the war the McCrady family reestablished its prominent position in Charleston. While Edward McCrady, father and son, practiced law, in-law Thomas Bacot regained possession of family land from the Freedman's Bureau, although it was "very much injured as a place of residence." Despite the dire conditions of postwar Charleston, brother John McCrady was made a full professor at the College of Charleston. Cousin William Henry Trescot moved to Washington, D.C.

*Dilemma: Freedom and Progress in Southern Conservative Thought, 1820-1860* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1992). See also Drew Gilpin Faust, *A Sacred Circle: The Dilemma of the Intellectual in the Old South, 1840-1860* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1986).

<sup>8</sup>Slave Inhabitants in Christ Church, reel no. 4, 9. South Carolina Census, 1860, Slave Schedules, Census Records, Charleston County Library, Charleston, South Carolina.

<sup>9</sup>Charleston News and Courier, November 2, 1903; Dumas Malone, ed., *Dictionary of American Biography* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1933), Vol. XII, 1-2.

to serve as "the agent of the state."<sup>10</sup> As the McCradys reorganized themselves socially and economically, the political situation of the late 1860s and early 1870s continued to dismay and outrage most white South Carolinians.

Prior to the ratification of the 15th Amendment, the state constitution of 1868 created an African American political majority in South Carolina that was rare among the former Confederate states. Black suffrage provided a source of constant controversy among postwar South Carolinians. In 1870 a "press conference" of South Carolina's newspapers urged all citizens to recognize the right of suffrage, "irrespective of color." The announcement also encouraged the organization of a movement for those "opposed to Radicalism [i.e., Republican party rule] and in favor of good and honest government." In a series of articles, McCrady argued that criticizing Republican party rule while accepting black suffrage was dangerously inconsistent.<sup>11</sup>

McCrady viewed the state constitution's adherence to the principles of simple majority rule as deluded—especially when, as he believed, the same majority consisted of members of an inferior "race." As a conservative, McCrady believed in white superiority and limited access to levers of government. He could not help but see black suffrage as a partisan evil that grew out of the expansion of democracy in the 1868 constitution. Therefore, one could not accept black suffrage and still hope to reject partisan politics. He instead cited a member of that most Yankee of families, Charles Francis Adams, Sr., who counseled patience and "persistence in well-doing" during the South's difficult times after the war.<sup>12</sup> McCrady advocated the withdrawal

<sup>10</sup>McCrady supplied these details of life in Charleston immediately following the war in a letter to his cousin Edward McCrady L'Engle. See Edward McCrady, Jr. to Edward McCrady L'Engle, March 28, 1866, Edward McCrady L'Engle Papers, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, North Carolina (hereafter SHC).

<sup>11</sup>"A Review of the Resolutions of the Press Conference," (Charleston: Walker, Evans, and Cogswell, 1870). McCrady's articles were then published as a pamphlet with the press conference resolutions enumerated across from the first page.

<sup>12</sup>McCrady's invocation of an Adams, the first family of Northern conservatism, may suggest a coming together of Northern and Southern conservatism in the postwar years. It is difficult, however, to make that assertion. As Clinton Rossiter has persuasively argued, American conservatism underwent a sea change of definition during these years. Northern conservatives of the Andrew Carnegie and John D. Rockefeller variety, writes Rossiter, "were intensely conservative about inherited institutions and arrangements like family, church, school, property, and the class system." Yet, he continues, "they apparently assumed that their adventures in finance and industrial expansion would leave the good old ways untouched." When the "good old ways" were not left untouched and when labor unrest and



of South Carolina's conservatives from the political activities of the state. The answer lay "not in seeking office and meddling with the politics of our conquerors. Let education, agriculture, mechanics, and commerce be our only politics."<sup>13</sup> Having previously summarized the situation to cousin Edward McCrady L'Engle, McCrady concluded, "I think we have but one thing to do and that is to do nothing."<sup>14</sup> William Gilmore Simms, the influential writer from antebellum days, concurred. "Let us hold ourselves aloof," Simms wrote McCrady, "touch not, handle not, taste not anything in common with our invaders; keep up communion among ourselves . . . in all the ancient circles."<sup>15</sup>

Charleston's conservatives did not confuse their message of separation with an attitude of continued surrender. Thomas M. Hanckel, writing in 1867, believed that the qualities engendered by slaveowning would enable the traditional elite to survive these difficult years. Since the war, Hanckel wrote, they had, "exhibited a kindly sympathy with their former dependents, an intelligent submission to necessity, an obedience to law and a regard for social order, combined with a firm self-respect, which have merited, we think, the approbation of all men."<sup>16</sup> These attributes, he continued, harkening back to the days of slavery, were

the result of the habit of self-control, the daily sense of responsibility, the patient encounter with necessary evils, the carefulness for the welfare of their laborers, and the frequent interchange of acts of kindness, to all with which they were compelled by their Anglo-Saxon education, by the spirit of liberty and Christianity within them by the very necessities of their anomalous institution, and by its practical administration in the presence of Christendom."<sup>17</sup>

political radicalism flourished after 1876, Northern conservatives retreated into the intensely individualistic, social Darwinist outlook of William Graham Sumner. While consistently racist and elitist, few Southern conservatives, here to their credit, ever adopted social Darwinism as their guide to social values. Rossiter, *Conservatism in America*, 143.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., 12-13.

<sup>14</sup>Edward McCrady, Jr. to Edward McCrady L'Engle, December 19, 1866, Edward McCrady L'Engle Papers, SHC.

<sup>15</sup>Mary Simms Oliphant, Alfred Taylor Odell, T.C. Duncan Eaves, eds., *The Letters of William Gilmore Simms* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1956), Vol. V, 306.

<sup>16</sup>"Sermons by The Right Reverend Stephen Elliott, D.D., Late Bishop of Georgia. With A Memoir, by Thomas M. Hanckel, Esq.," (New York: Pott and Amery, 1867), xv-xvi.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid., xvi.

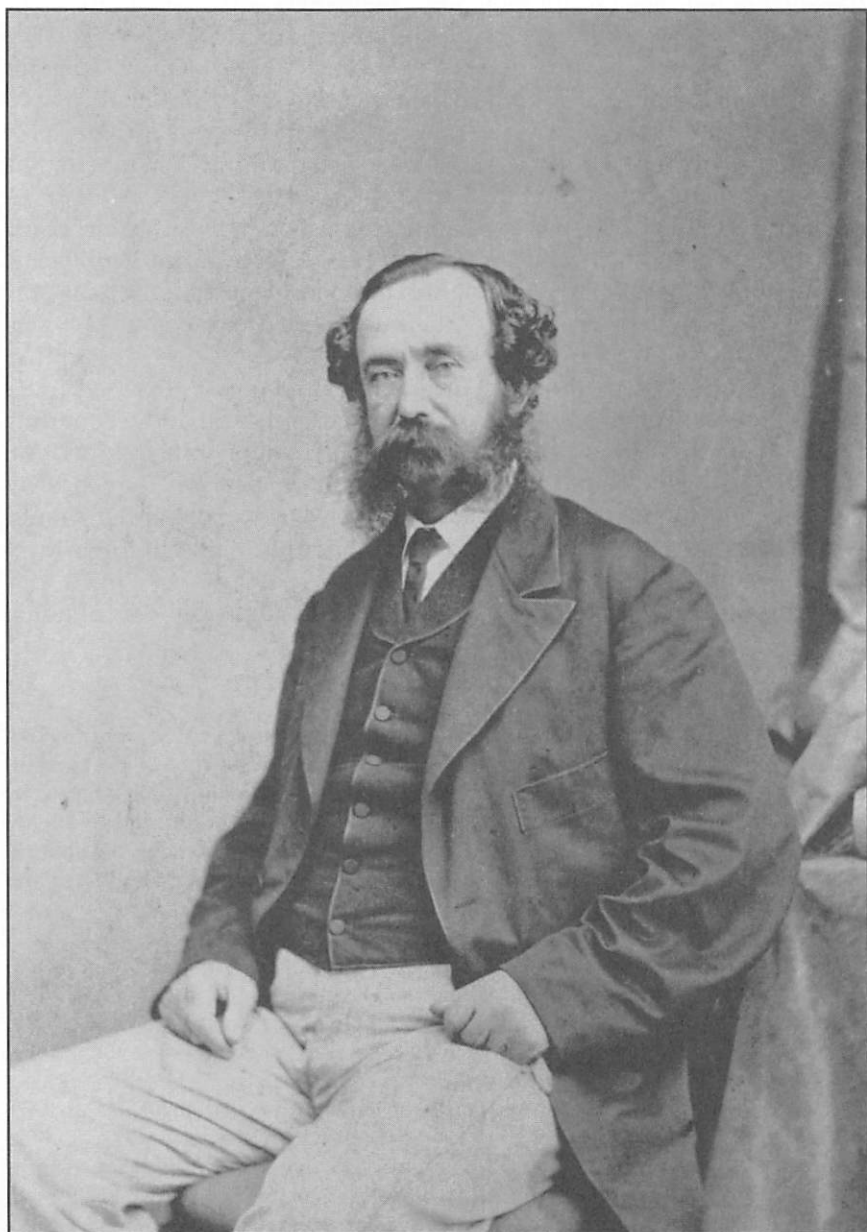
At the same time, however, Hanckel sounded a note of warning. "The time is not far distant," he predicted, when "the true children of God's Church, and the whole brotherhood of Christian men" would be called to unite against "the assaults of an infidel philosophy and a material humanitarianism." Hanckel reminded his readers that "the people of the South have always been ardently attached to the great principles of constitutional liberty, social order, and conservative law" and would remain so through their present trials. "Fortuna non mutat genus," Hanckel thundered in the end. Fortune did not change the "genus" of the conservative elite.<sup>18</sup>

Thomas Hanckel employed Old South values to justify a prominent place for the traditional elite in the postwar South. Edward McCrady's advice of withdrawal from politics might have appealed emotionally, but it was poor strategy for elite white South Carolinians who knew intimately the connections between political, social, and economic power. As Northern interest in Reconstruction waned in the mid-1870s, conservatives reasserted themselves into the bitter, bloody political contests of the state. In the bruising campaign to overthrow the Reconstruction regime, elements of traditional conservatism reemerged. The effort succeeded in 1876 with the election as governor of Wade Hampton, a former Confederate general and one of the Old South's largest slaveholders.<sup>19</sup>

On the heels of victory, McCrady and others envisioned a new conservative regime featuring limited political participation through race and class discrimination and maintained, if necessary, by violence against

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., xxi. Charleston conservative Benjamin Huger Rutledge noted at an 1875 memorial service for the Confederate dead, "The antecedents of a people are the seeds of their after development." Benjamin H. Rutledge, "Memorial Day, May 10th, 1875," 4.

<sup>19</sup>Despite his previous intentions to shun political activity, McCrady reentered the fight with a flourish in 1876. He played a key role in the local "rifle clubs" that intimidated Charleston's African American majority under the guise of enforcing social order. When Reconstruction governor Daniel Chamberlain attempted to disband the rifle clubs, McCrady wrote that "we have determined to stand by our arms." Their weaponry included several field artillery pieces that McCrady was prepared to "run off" to Florida to keep from "falling into the hands of the enemy." His defiance knew its limits, however. "Of course if the U.S. Govt[.] interferes," he explained, they would "not be so foolish" as to challenge federal soldiers. Chamberlain did not disband the rifle clubs and Hampton carried the election. Edward McCrady, Jr. to Edward McCrady L'Engle, October 11, 1876, Edward McCrady L'Engle Papers, SHC.



South Carolina Governor Wade Hampton (1818-1902). Hampton's election in 1876 marked the end of Reconstruction in South Carolina and sparked a resurgence of political conservatism in the state that would last until the 1890s. From the collections of the South Carolina Historical Society.

dissent.<sup>20</sup> Fraud, violence, intimidation, "all these good, bad and indifferent," McCrady wrote, were used to regain political control. "For what?" he then asked, "To leave it as we found it?"<sup>21</sup> Setting the conservative tone for constitutional reform, Theodore G. Barker, another Charlestonian, placed the traditionally anti-democratic views of South Carolina's ruling elite within growing national doubts about majoritarian rule. Addressing the Washington Artillery Club in 1876, Barker observed that Americans "without regard to section or State," were beginning to question "how far an unchecked and aggressive spirit of Democracy, as expressed, for instance, in universal suffrage or in the cry of the divine right of the mere majority, is the boon now . . ." <sup>22</sup> The modern era lacked "the unexampled conservatism, which pervaded the political and social life of the last century; a conservatism which led the people to choose as their natural and proper representatives as Washington, Hamilton, and Madison." Barker held that the Founding Fathers' conservatism was one that wisely surrounded "the new political machinery . . . with the wisest safeguards that political wisdom has ever invented; not to perpetuate their own power, but to protect the people, whom they had successfully led, and who were ready almost to crown them for their work."<sup>23</sup>

Too much democracy tore away at the "safeguards" surrounding

<sup>20</sup>Aware of the formidable political presence African Americans represented, McCrady concluded that as the constitution still read, whites would have to resort to violence or engage in fraud to keep black voters from the polls. "By all means let us hazard violence," McCrady proclaimed, "rather than resort to fraud. Violence will not degrade us, as fraud will." Edward McCrady, Jr., "Articles on Political Parties, and Their Relation to Each Other, in the State," (Charleston: News and Courier Book and Job Presses, 1878).

<sup>21</sup>Edward McCrady, "The Registration of Electors," n.p., 12.

<sup>22</sup>"Address of Theo. G. Barker before the Washington Artillery Club on their Anniversary, 22 February, 1876, at Hibernian Hall, Charleston, S.C.," (Charleston: Lucas & Richardson, 1876), 5.

<sup>23</sup>*Ibid.*, 7. The strong conservative themes Barker found in the story of national independence—a story of "natural and proper representatives" chosen to "protect the people"—resonated among McCrady's friends in the mid-1870s. In an 1876 address to the South Carolina Historical Society, of which McCrady was a devoted member, the historian William J. Rivers worried that the "republican form of government . . . has come to mean . . . nothing else than a numerical majority, with suffrage by every man without regard to race, color, previous condition of servitude, property, or education." Rivers added, "And so cheap and indiscriminate has become this right of citizenship that even women are claiming participation in it." See "Address delivered before the South Carolina Historical Society on their Twenty-First Anniversary, May 19, 1876, by William J. Rivers," (Charleston, S.C.: The News and Courier Job Presses, 1876), 18.

government and, Barker could have added, jeopardized the elite's ability to maintain their control over a changing South Carolina society. Freedom and democratization politicized the former slave and stirred, with good reason, the deep insecurities of poorer whites. The unsettling postwar years also sparked the traditional animus towards poorer whites on behalf of the postwar elite as they warily observed that intense poverty and widespread illiteracy were not limited to African Americans. Traditional fears of an uneducated electorate with unobstructed access to the political process flourished after 1876.<sup>24</sup> "Constitutional limitations become irksome when they obstruct the will of a majority," wrote John Julius Pringle Smith in 1877. And when respect for those limitations ceased in a simple democracy, he continued, "then that will becomes a 'vulgar tyranny' . . ."<sup>25</sup> It was against this, Smith claimed, that the leaders of "restoration" acted, and he lauded them as those who "alone have the right to dictate how South Carolina shall be governed."<sup>26</sup>

As South Carolina began to introduce heavy manufacturing in the late 1870s, new economic insecurities compounded social and political uncertainties that already crossed race and class lines. The changing economy did not effect a fundamental transformation in the conservative view on social order, however. Conservative South Carolinians like McCrady proved quite capable of adjusting their critical sights to focus on the newly-industrializing society. Textile mill owners and their Charleston backers frequently perceived an exasperating combination of ignorance and stubbornness among white workers. The willingness of mill operatives to uproot their families in search of higher wages, for instance, indicated to the owners a lack of discipline needed in the new industrial regime.<sup>27</sup> When the Charleston Manufacturing Company closed its doors in 1887, the *News and Courier* cited the "insufficiency and inefficiency of [white] labor" as one of the main causes of failure.<sup>28</sup> Edward McCrady, Jr. also grafted his conservative social views onto the changing economic order. After 1876, McCrady, now a major shareholder in a mining venture, began to question

<sup>24</sup>Christopher G. Memminger, who served as the Secretary of the Treasury for the Confederacy, once expressed this conservative fear of poor whites in a democratic system by saying simply, "and every one of these men would have a vote." Quoted in David Carlton's *Mill and Town in South Carolina, 1880-1920*, 88.

<sup>25</sup>"Address Delivered Before the South Carolina Historical Society on their Twenty-Second Anniversary, May 25, 1877, by J.J. Pringle Smith, Esq., a member." (Charleston: Lucas and Richardson, 1879), 34.

<sup>26</sup>*Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>27</sup>Carlton, *Mill and Town in South Carolina, 1880-1920*, especially chapters 3 and 4.

<sup>28</sup>Charleston *News and Courier*, December 16, 1887.

openly the place of poor, uneducated whites in the body politic.<sup>29</sup>

In 1878 McCrady proclaimed that the most honest way to achieve good government was by establishing suffrage qualifications through literacy requirements. These standards, he boldly insisted, should be "applicable alike to black and white" and would "elevate the standard of citizenship of all so as to insure an intelligent participation."<sup>30</sup> As a state congressman representing Charleston, McCrady in 1880 introduced legislation that both supported his elite perspective and that reflected his conservative upbringing. His "eight box" law stipulated that a voter be able to read the names of the candidates and offices in order to place the correct ballot in the corresponding ballot box.<sup>31</sup>

Proposal of the bill prompted the concerned reaction that thousands of illiterate white South Carolinians would be disfranchised. The *News and Courier*, normally a staunch conservative organ, worried openly: "We doubt that half the white voters in the State would be able to place all eight ballots in the proper boxes."<sup>32</sup> A letter written to the paper revealed a brewing threat from below. The author of the letter, signed "B.", wrote that "it is too often that a certain class of leaders are indignant when their views are opposed." This writer continued in ominous terms:

To require a man, a free man, a white man, one who followed (contrary to his better convictions) his leaders in the late war and fought the whole four years' term, with all its sacrifices, to be compelled to pay for the privilege of voting will be the crushing straw that broke the camel's back. . . . If you pass the bill as introduced it will act as a cleaver that will divide the Democratic party in South Carolina to the four winds and then if Mahoneism steps in and usurps the power I guess you will understand who was to blame.<sup>33</sup>

<sup>29</sup>McCrady's personal papers indicate that during these years he was the largest stockholder in an iron mining venture called the Valley River Mining Company in Cherokee County, North Carolina. In the Edward McCrady, Jr. Papers, Legal Papers, South Carolina Historical Society, Charleston, South Carolina (hereafter SCHS).

<sup>30</sup>McCrady, "The Registration of Electors," 5.

<sup>31</sup>For a good account of the various legislative efforts to reconfigure the South Carolina polity, including McCrady's "eight box" law, see George Brown Tindall's "The Campaign for the Disfranchisement of Negroes in South Carolina," *Journal of Southern History* 15 (May 1949), 212-234.

<sup>32</sup>Charleston *News and Courier*, December 6, 1881.

<sup>33</sup>Charleston *News and Courier*, December 9, 1881. "Mahoneism" is a reference to the briefly successful, anti-elite, biracial political movement of General William

Nevertheless, McCrady held firm: "if the public good requires, we must not shrink from the enforcement of the rule even on their account." Cries of white disfranchisement prompted him to respond: "we care not if it does. . . . To them, too, we say the schools are open."<sup>34</sup>

William Porcher Miles and Thomas Hanckel agreed with McCrady that a literate electorate offered the political stability that, in their eyes, the South Carolina democracy lacked. Miles, president of the re-organized South Carolina College, observed that, "If Republican government, based upon universal suffrage, be not destined, after proving a farce, to become a tragedy, the whole people must be educated." Miles made clear that his fellow conservatives "do not wish to see the colored man deprived of the right of suffrage because he is a colored man." Rather, Miles echoed McCrady's view: "I speak for myself and many, at least, of the best men of the State, who are conservative enough to believe, and bold enough to avow, that universal, unqualified suffrage is an evil when exercised by the entire adult population of any race or any color."<sup>35</sup> Hanckel, an alumnus of South Carolina College from the antebellum days, saw the literacy requirements as both a source of stability for the state and as an opportunity for the already educated, conservative elite. Arguing that "society is organized by ideas, and governments are ruled by thought," Hanckel implored his fellow South Carolina College alumni, "We must control the one if we hope to possess and direct the other." He added, "let me teach your people and I will soon write their statutes. Let me govern your scholars and I will soon govern your State."<sup>36</sup> Edward McCrady, Jr. meanwhile softened the tone from his 1879 writing and instead employed an effective Lost Cause appeal. The disfranchisement of some whites may occur, he wrote, "however much we might regret the necessity." But, added former Confederate Colonel McCrady, surely this was not too much to ask of a people who sacrificed 12,000 men in the recent war; "brave men," he was sure, who "would submit even to this sacrifice, if necessary for the good of

Mahone in Virginia in the mid-1870s. Conservative Charlestonians were not quick to forgive Mahone for his postwar political efforts. In 1885 the *News and Courier* ran Mahone's obituary under the title "Would He Had Died in Battle."

<sup>34</sup>McCrady, "Registration of Electors," 11.

<sup>35</sup>"Universal Education. How to Purify the Ballot-Box. Address Before the Winyaw Indigo Society, on their 28th Anniversary, at Georgetown, S.C., May 15th, 1882. By Hon. Wm. Porcher Miles, L.L.D., President of The South Carolina College." (Charleston: The News and Courier Book Presses, 1882), 1, 6.

<sup>36</sup>"Alumni Association. Address Delivered in the Hall of the House of Representatives Before the Alumni of the University of South Carolina by Thomas M. Hanckel, One of the Alumni, December 6th, 1882." (Charleston: The News and Courier Book Presses, 1882), 9-10.

the State for which they freely offered their very lives."<sup>37</sup>

For men like McCrady, Miles, and Hanckel, the regulation of the franchise fit within the traditional conservative view of the delicate balance needed between rights and duties. The constitution, McCrady pointed out, guaranteed the right to property, but also maintained a right to impose taxes on property. The constitution guaranteed liberty, but imposed in its wisdom laws that restrained liberty from becoming license. There was nothing wrong, in their view, with a political body, charged with the constitutional duty to protect the vote, imposing sensible conditions on its usage.<sup>38</sup>

During the antebellum years, the conservatives' simultaneous beliefs in white rule over black South Carolinians and in elite rule over all were held together by the institution of slavery. In a free South Carolina, however, the twin pillars of race and class rule stood on an inherently unstable foundation. Older notions of one's place frequently failed to address a changing economy and a new constitutional order. Black South Carolinians were not slaves. With the rise of the textile mills, poor whites were not bound to a life of tenantry. Postwar conservatives, therefore, were constantly being forced to affix their beliefs in hierarchy onto an increasingly fluid and unstable society.

Assessing the state's political situation in 1880, McCrady's thoughts revealed the shifting foundations underneath the postwar hierarchies of race and class. He first noted that white South Carolinians "have not only to study and to practice how to govern ourselves, but how to do so with an inferior race forced upon us as our equals." South Carolina's black population meanwhile continued to receive educational support from Northern missionary groups who McCrady believed were "lavishing upon the negro means of education which are wanting to the whites." He worried lest "the negroes of the South . . . should at least for the while, be better educated than the masses of the whites."<sup>39</sup> If present trends continued and enough black voters met the educational qualification to vote, whites would again face "black rule." McCrady never questioned his belief in whites' innate intellectual superiority. But he also did not relish having to endure too much confusion on the matter. Under the "eight-box" bill, African American voters had only to become "better educated" than poor whites and evidence this was happening clearly unsettled McCrady. Literacy qualifications

<sup>37</sup>"The Necessity of Education as the Basis of Our Political System. An Address Delivered Before the Euphemian Society of Erskine College, Due West, S.C., by Edward McCrady, Jr., of Charleston, S.C., June 28, 1880." (Charleston: Walker, Evans, and Cogswell, 1880), 14.

<sup>38</sup>*Ibid.*, 10.

<sup>39</sup>*Ibid.*



satisfied his conservative desire to check the unwieldy forces of mass democracy. The prospect of massive white disfranchisement and the rise of qualified, black political control undermined in a very public way the pervasive belief in white supremacy. Moreover, as "B.'s" letter to the *News and Courier* quoted above made perfectly clear, it threatened McCrady's and the conservative regime's political standing within South Carolina. This dilemma often confounded postwar conservatives.<sup>40</sup>

McCrady's writings show that the conservative beliefs in hierarchy were still quite intact, even if it was not always clear where in the postwar world the dividing lines within society would, or even could, be drawn. As the reaction to his "eight box" bill demonstrated, not all white South Carolinians shared McCrady's conservative vision for the state or his enthusiasm for the traditional elites' ability to rule. By the late 1880s, conservative politicians like McCrady found themselves again up against a full-scale political challenge from below.

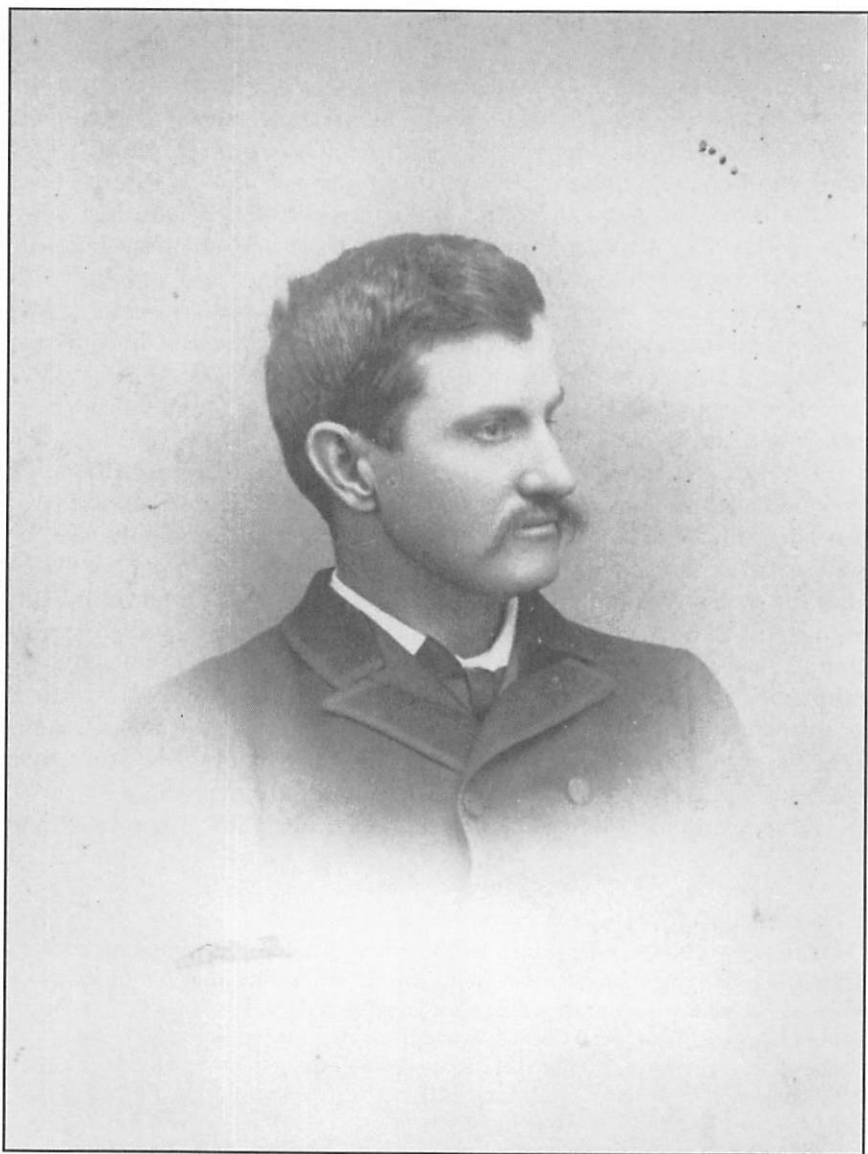
The rise of "Pitchfork" Ben Tillman has been well-examined in the work of skilled historians such as Francis B. Simkins and William J. Cooper, Jr.<sup>41</sup> Ben Tillman rose to the head of a Democratic party faction that while not made up exclusively of poor farmers—Tillman himself was not poor—was certainly in its tone and rhetoric anti-aristocratic. The state's traditional ruling elite, Tillman sneered, "intend in the future, as in the past, to get all they can, and keep all they get."<sup>42</sup> Initially motivated by falling cotton prices early in the decade, Tillman and his followers by the late 1880s had moved on to engage the traditional conservatives in a high-stakes debate over a wide range of issues including the educational system of the state, race relations, and the future of democracy in South Carolina.

Tillman and his followers, while self-consciously not aligned with the

<sup>40</sup>In 1889 H.R. Ravenel wrote to McCrady that the desire among African Americans for education was "in many places exceeding that of the illiterate whites." Ravenel's conservative desire for an educated electorate, however, in turn calmed his racist anxieties: "perhaps when the negroes have learned enough to escape the suppressing effect [of the literacy requirements], they will have become more conservative voters." H.R. Ravenel to Edward McCrady, Jr., September 18, 1889, Edward McCrady, Jr. Papers, SCHS.

<sup>41</sup>Cooper, Jr., *The Conservative Regime: South Carolina, 1877-1900*; Francis B. Simkins, *Pitchfork Ben Tillman: South Carolinian* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1944). William Watts Ball, the longtime, and very conservative, editor of the *Charleston News and Courier* also examined the postwar years in an essay entitled "An Episode in South Carolina Politics." William Watts Ball Papers, Rare Book, Manuscript, and Special Collections Library, Duke University, Durham, North Carolina.

<sup>42</sup>*Charleston News and Courier*, January 23, 1890.



"Pitchfork" Benjamin R. Tillman (1847-1918), ca. 1890, about the time that he was elected Governor of South Carolina. Tillman was a Democrat who drew much of his support from the state's small farmers through his anti-aristocratic rhetoric. At the time of Tillman's election, South Carolina's Democratic Party was closely associated with the Populist Party, both of which advocated a mass democracy that conservatives like McCrady opposed. Illustration courtesy of the South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina.

Populist party, reflected some of the concerns that bound Populists in the South and Midwest, as well as the labor movement in the North. Together these movements drove the United States toward mass democracy. All shared the view that they suffered economic difficulties through little fault of their own. Populists, Tillmanites, and industrial workers grew frustrated by an economy and a system of government that seemed run by and for the ruling elite—whether they were industrialists of the North or “Charleston’s rich politicians” in South Carolina.<sup>43</sup> Notwithstanding the gospel of *laissez-faire* of the late 1800s, workers and farmers understood the intimate connection between the power of the state and their economic well-being. They, too, had been taught the glories of representative government and they were, after all, citizens. Their determination to have government work for their behalf and through their vote was at once logical and forceful.

In 1890, the Farmers Association, the official name for the Tillman movement, published the “Shell Manifesto,” a full-scale assault on South Carolina’s ruling elite. Contrasting sharply with the conservative paeans to rule by an elite few and for “the general good,” the Farmers’ Association planned to work through the Democratic party towards a “recognition of the needs and rights of the masses.” They claimed credit as “Inch by Inch and step by step true Democracy—the rule of the people—has won its way” and correctly identified the state’s traditional rulers—“those who have been and are still governing our State”—as the “enemies of true Jeffersonian democracy.”<sup>44</sup>

The openness with which conservatives like McCrady expressed their view of society and their disdain for mass democracy fueled Tillman’s fire. In an 1887 commencement address to The Citadel, McCrady, in a thinly-veiled caricature of Tillman and followers, lambasted the modern politician as “one who has no faith in doctrine, no zeal for any cause; who sneers . . . at those who are anxious to preserve . . .”<sup>45</sup> McCrady used the conservative bastion before him, The Citadel, where hierarchy would be clearly understood, to hammer home the political responsibilities of the elite: “The State had no right to select you . . . for your own individual advantage. It must act with a single eye and purpose to the general good—the good of all.” For the select few at the Citadel, the state “has educated you that you should be the better citizens.” The wording here was clearly no accident; as members of the traditional ruling elite, the graduates would not be simply

<sup>43</sup>Ibid.

<sup>44</sup>Ibid.

<sup>45</sup>“Address Delivered to the South Carolina Military Academy, at the Annual Commencement, German Military Hall, Charleston, S.C., July 27th, 1887. By Gen’l Edward McCrady.” (Charleston, S.C.: Walker, Evans, & Cogswell Co., 1887), 4.

better citizens, but “the better citizens.” Concluding grandly, McCrady proclaimed that “under our system of government, the public business is ours—just as much ours as our own personal and private affairs.”<sup>46</sup>

In 1890 Ben Tillman, the man who once called The Citadel “that military dude factory,” decided that the farmers of the state needed more than just a Tillman movement, they needed Tillman as governor. The letters McCrady received during this campaign reflect the jolt South Carolina’s conservatives experienced at Tillman’s aggressiveness. Their shock showed again the conservative refusal to come to grips with the new style of popular politics and with the depth of this persistent and intensely personal protest from within white South Carolina. The response of a Columbia lawyer to Tillman’s attack on General Hampton, in Hampton’s presence, summed up the conservative disbelief and then rage: “In the very presence of Hampton, I have heard this man strike with poisoned tongue at the vitals of our civilization. It is incumbent upon us to take this man by the throat and choke him until his lips are livid and until he retracts his infamous insinuations.”<sup>47</sup> As the Tillman campaign gathered momentum throughout the summer of 1890, Senator Matthew C. Butler, acknowledging the imminent defeat of conservative candidate Alexander Cheves Haskell, wrote to McCrady with aristocratic, anti-democratic disdain: “office seekers have climbed on the backs of the farmers, the most gullible element in all communities, to ride into office and from present appearances they will succeed.”<sup>48</sup> Tillman won the election handily.

With the Tillman forces entrenched in the state house after 1890, the members of the old conservative regime filed one bitter report after another lamenting their rough treatment within this new democracy. When Wade Hampton was replaced as United States Senator, he dejectedly wrote to Matthew C. Butler, “I am hurt that the old soldiers turned against me, for I did not expect that at their hands.”<sup>49</sup> McCrady’s cousin, William Henry Trescot, complained after nearly a decade of Tillmanite pyrotechnics and subsequent victories, “I confess I am looking in intent wonder at the condition of the State. What and where is the Conservative party in the State?”<sup>50</sup> McCrady shared fully the conservatives’ frustration. When his

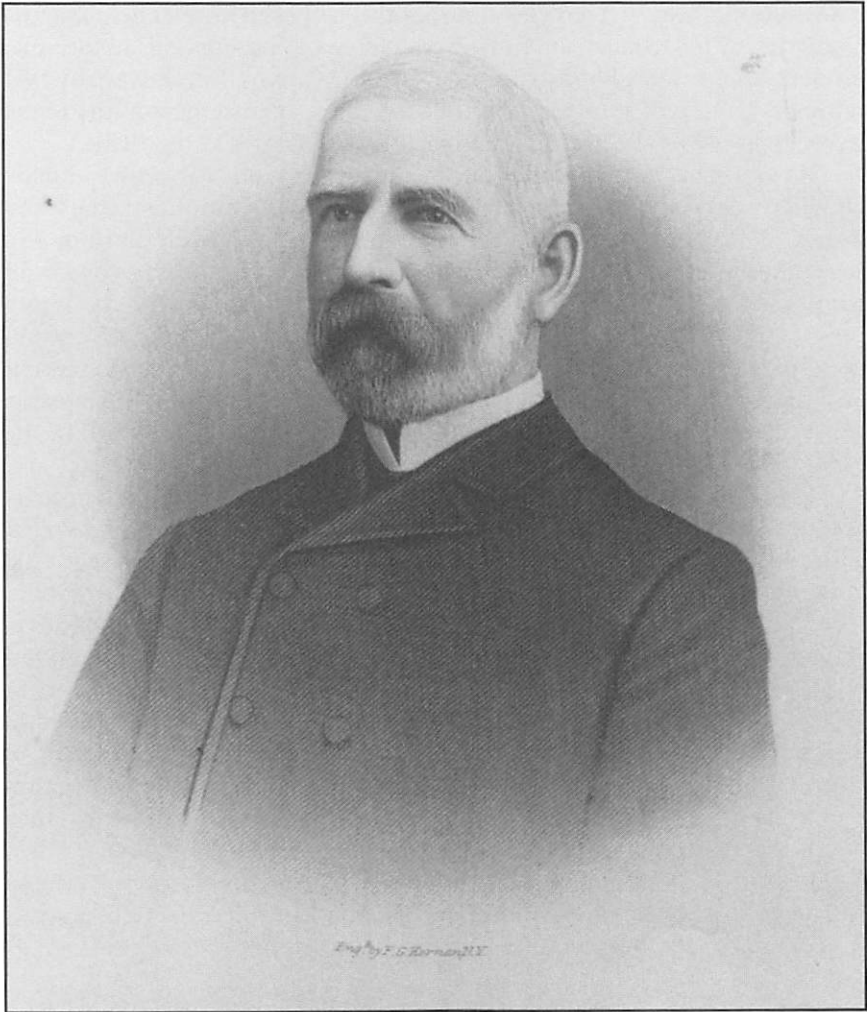
<sup>46</sup>Ibid., 5-6.

<sup>47</sup>Quoted in Simkins’ *Pitchfork Ben Tillman: South Carolinian*, 159.

<sup>48</sup>Matthew C. Butler to Edward McCrady, Jr., July 23, 1890, Edward McCrady, Jr. Papers, SCHS.

<sup>49</sup>Wade C. Hampton to Matthew C. Butler, December 13, 1890, Matthew C. Butler Papers, South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina, Columbia, South Carolina.

<sup>50</sup>William Henry Trescot to Edward McCrady, Jr., September 7, 1897, Edward McCrady Papers, SCHS.



**Edward McCrady, Jr. during his later years. From the collections of the South Carolina Historical Society.**

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niece Louisa Rebecca Barnwell wrote in 1899 asking for advice in studying the constitution, McCrady growled in reply, "If you want to know the constitution of the U.S. at present you need not hear lectures. It can be written in one word 'force.'" Conservatives like McCrady likened the political defeats of the 1890s to the military defeat of 1865. "It was 'force' in our war," he continued, "against the most solemn engagements any people ever entered into . . . and its going to be force against all patience of

constitutional law."<sup>51</sup> The prevailing Southern view of the war held that the Confederacy fell to superior Yankee resources and population. In the new, modern democracy South Carolina's conservatives learned again that numbers mattered. John C. Calhoun's warnings against the tyranny of the majority appeared fully realized to men like McCrady in the 1890s.

What, then, became of the state's conservatism as the century ended? Or where, as Trescot asked, was conservatism in South Carolina as the 1900s began? Political defeat forced the traditional conservative philosophy to seek new outlets for its values and principles. McCrady and Trescot would have been well-advised, had they lived, to examine closely the rising progressive movement in South Carolina. With familiar emphases on good governance, racial hierarchy (now maintained through disfranchisement and segregation), and rule by a new professional class "best" in society, conservative values found a new home in the "progressive" spirit of the early 1900s.

The persistence of the conservative tradition in South Carolina from its antebellum days to the Progressive era resembles what the Italian sociologist Vilfredo Pareto observed of those in power. Pareto believed that "the governing elite is always in a state of slow and continuous transformation. It flows like a river, never being today what it was yesterday." A conservative, slaveholding planter of 1850 would not have easily comprehended segregation or the existence of black South Carolinians as free laborers in 1900. But he would have empathized, for example, with the progressives' desire at least, as the self-defined "best" in society, to assert control over an "unruly" millhand class through child labor laws and compulsory education requirements. Finally, Pareto notes that violent storms sometimes produce floods that disrupt and alter, usually only slightly, the flow of the river. But before long the river, or in this case South Carolina's conservative tradition, "resumes its slow transformation. The flood has subsided, the river is again flowing normally in its wonted bed."<sup>52</sup>

<sup>51</sup>Louisa Rebecca Barnwell to Edward McCrady, Jr., October 9, 1899, Edward McCrady, Jr. Papers, SCHS.

<sup>52</sup>Vilfredo Pareto, *The Mind and Society: A Treatise on General Sociology* (Harcourt, Bruce, and Company, Inc.: New York, 1935), Vol. III, 1431.