

SWEARING ALLEGIANCE: KENTUCKY, MAY 1863

*George Richard Browder:
Diary, May 17–26, 1863*

Union troops occupied Logan County, Kentucky, in February 1862 and held it for the remainder of the war. A Methodist preacher and slave-owning farmer, George Richard Browder lived in the southern part of the county less than ten miles from the Tennessee border. Although he sympathized with the secessionist cause and believed the war to be the result of “the mad schemes of an abolition fanaticism,” Browder did not join the Confederate army. “I am positively a *peace man*,” he wrote in his diary in March 1863.

May 15—Papers to day report Genl Vandorn & T. J. Jackson both dead—federal loss at Fredericksburg immense—say 20,000 killed & wounded. Lo the horrors of the war still crowd upon us. There is now a military order requiring all male citizens 21 years old & upward to report at Russellville & take the oath or be arrested & sent beyond the federal lines to remain until the close of the war under penalty of being shot if they return! This is a cruel & merciless order of Brig Genl Shackleford—a Cumberland Presbyterian Bro. & may give him trouble to enforce it. Who ever takes this oath under such duress is not acting of his own free will & accord. I do not know what I shall do. I am willing to do right & submit to the lawful authorities—but military men have no just right to control peaceable citizens.

May 17—There is much excitement in the country & hundreds are flocking in to take the oath of allegiance—grumbling as they go & yet swearing that they “do it of their own free will, without any mental reservation whatever.” I do not see how I can conscientiously swear that I do “of my own free will” what if left to myself I should not do—& yet I must or be banished from my home & my property confiscated. Ought a Christian man to swear against his conscience to avoid suffering any

more than to obtain any desired good? Is the duress sufficient to force a man so to swear or is the injunction of scripture "submit to the powers that be" a law of conscience requiring obedience to the civil or military power right or wrong! I confess that I am in some trouble about it & do not know what to do, but suppose I must submit to what I cannot avoid considering that the action is not mine—just as if I should compel my son or servant to break the sabbath, against his will. *I* should be the sabbath breaker & not he. If I were compelled to lose my hand or my head, I should of my free will give my hand to save my head—but of my *free* will would lose neither. My Hogan neighbors, arrested some weeks ago accused of harboring guerillas have been released on oath & bond. As good a man as Thos Gilbert is put under 5000 bond—accused of disloyalty! Almeda, daughter of K. C. Mason—deceased—arrested for writing to her brother in rebel army has been detained for a week or more in Russellville & now sent on to Genl Burnside for further orders. Some are wearing ball & chain & many crowded up in Russellville courthouse—charged with aiding rebellion. Oh Russellville! Little did thy people think of such scenes when they shouted & rejoiced over the entering forces of Buckner from camps Boone & Burnett a year ago last September.

The federal loss at Fredericksburg is now estimated at 30,000 & rebel loss, papers say not less—& rebels claim 50,000 stands of arms & immense supplies, clothing &c. Jackson Miss is reported captured by feds—& other federal successes. These are times of peril & trial such as I never expected to witness. C. L. Vallandigham the great statesman and orator of Ohio is condemned to close confinement in Fort Lafayette during the war for publicly denouncing the policy of the administration & warning the people that they were in danger of a military despotism. In Ky a man was arrested—taken to Louisville & imprisoned by military for speaking disrespectfully of the President! but was released. Spies & detectives are roaming the country in disguise listening for some disloyal utterance to report—& seeking by stratagem to get men to avow Southern sympathies that they may arrest them & require oath & bond—consequently men are suspicious of their servants, neighbors, & even kindred blood if they disagree in politics. Confidence is

withheld—& general mistrust prevails. The papers boast of raiders burning houses—haystacks—& carrying off booty & negroes, as if they had done virtuous acts & rebels do likewise—except burning houses & taking negroes. Swearing—drunkenness & thriftless indolence are vastly increasing in the land. Altogether the picture is a gloomy one. This summer must witness an immensity of suffering—blood & death.

May 22—Went to Keysburg—was halted by some little boys on stick horses & carrying switch sabres. They said they were Morgans cavalry & would require me to go to the school house & take the oath! Even the children are full of war manoeuvres. I had a small audience, preached on Pauls prayer—Eph 3.14–21. Felt sad about the state of the country & the oath we are bound to take.

May 24—This is the great gathering day at Pleasant Grove—where all the young folks are apt to collect & dress out. It is vulgarly called “Showday.” At 4—the negroes had a fine time & I preached a short sermon—Rev 14.13.

May 25—I dined with my father & others at Uncle Dicks where Lizzie was gone when I got home. We decided to go to Russellville tomorrow to comply with “order No. 18” compelling us under penalty of banishment to go to Russellville & take the oath of Allegiance—& to aid in putting down rebellion. If there be any evil in this oath let it be upon those who impose it upon us. It is not our act when forced upon us.

May 26—Bro Alexander & I went to town and took the oath & as for me I shall give no one an opportunity to convict me of violating it. The dictates of humanity I cannot disregard. I never did & will not now encourage the rebellion but as a Christian I must be humane even if I have to feed an enemy when hungry. Most of my old friends in town seemed very glad to see me & treated me most cordially.

For several days past the papers have been rejoicing over great Federal victories & the capture of great numbers of prisoners & cannon & military stores & it is believed that Vicksburg has fallen or must fall & also the greater part of the rebel

army. If this is true, it is a severe blow to the rebellion & they have probably lost more at Vicksburg than they gained at Fredericksburg. I feel like withdrawing my thoughts from all public matters & trying more to be an humble Christian & get safely out of this wicked world.