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JEFF. DAVIS' BOOK.

A PLEA FOR THE RIGHT OF SECESSION.

THE REASONS FOR SECESSION—THE IRREPRESSIBLE CONFLICT—MR. DAVIS' NARROWNESS AND BLINDNESS—STATE SOVEREIGNTY—LIKES AND DISLIKES—WHAT THE BOOK IS.

From the Philadelphia Times.

Among the many books which have been written on the war of the rebellion Mr. Jefferson Davis' "The Rise and fall of the Confederate Government" holds a very important place.—It is a question not only whether the books thus far published on the war are of any real value, but whether they are not a positive misfortune. They are all, without exception, from the cheap editions of the lives of minor generals to Badeau, Horace Greeley, Sherman Johnston and Davis himself, controversial. They are the arguments left by those who were engaged in the war in behalf of their own claims to fame or justice. Badeau is Grant asking for a favorable verdict on his his campaign from the Rappahannock to the James and Sherman seeks the judgment that the credit of conceiving, as well as executing, the "March to the Sea" belongs to him. The public men and soldiers on the other side are also seeking their vindication. It is a struggle for a niche in history, the difficulty being that a good many of the actors are contending for the same niche. Of course sharp and bitter controversies arise from these struggles, and in these controversies the truth of history is very likely to be clouded, at least for the time. They probably increase the inability of this generation to attain a frame of mind absolutely essential to the doing of justice. No fair-minded man in the North will say that he is prepared to be perfectly just to the South or to look upon secession as anything less than a crime. There is no disposition to even discuss the differences between the two sections patiently. The war is too near us. In the best of us its pasions are not dead, but smouldering. We cannot read the argument of the enemy without a stirring of the blood, a quickening of the pulse, a little revival of the hate of battle. Generations who have lived through a war, who have been blasted by its hot breath, who have been maimed and decimated by its cruelties, can never be entirely just to their enemies. Forgiveness may be granted, kindness may be shown, but the two old enemies can never discuss together which side in the war was right. The result of the war settles that question forever so far as the parties engaged are concerned. To begin again the discussion is to renew the war. Upon that question of the conduct of the war neither side can be just to the other.—It is in the construction of men to think that they have never erred in shooting to death the enemies of their country; and it is better that it is so. The literature of the rebellion undoubtedly keeps active the passions and jealousies of the war, but it will be a valuable aid to the real historian of some future generation when he comes to write the true story of secession and its war.

II

Mr. Davis' book is, on the whole, a worthy and it certainly is an important contribution to the controversy. If it does nothing more it settles forever its writer's place in history. It is a revelation of the strength and weakness of Mr. Davis, and though there is a well-formed and definitely-conceived opinion of the ex-president of the Confederacy it is chiefly an erroneous one. In the South there are men who weigh Mr. Davis justly, but there are neither his friends nor his enemies and their judgment is not accepted as correct, so that Mr. Davis was very likely to go down to posterity the object of undue adoration by those who took the Southern view of his character and capacity and of undue detestation by those who had inherited or acquired the Northern view. His book will correct this. Those who read it fairly, recollecting all the time that Mr. Davis is a truthful man and that all he says of things he must have personally known about is to be taken without question, will realize that Mr. Davis is not a hateful criminal, delighting in murder for the satisfaction of his own ambition, nor is he the great and wise statesman to whose shrine pilgrimages will be made hereafter. He reveals himself as a dignified, determined, consistent man, narrow, vain, dictatorial, not far-seeing, not broad enough to do justice to an enemy, hating opposition and throwing over friendships at the first sign of antagonism. Those who know Mr. Davis know that he has painted himself acurately. It may be that he is not so cold and unsympathetic as he generally appears. There are passages in his book which indicate that he felt the sincerest and tenderest friendship for many of those with whom he was associated. He evidently loved Albert Sidney Johnston very strongly, and he defended him long and vigorously against the outcries of the people of Tennessee, who thought him an incompetent soldier because he retreated from the State when Grant had made his position untenable by the capture of Forts Henry and Donelson. He calls him the "Great pillar of the Southern Confederacy," and says that when Johnston first arrived in Richmond he expressed the wish that he had the power, by resigning, to transfer to him the Presidency of the Confederate States.

III.

Mr. Davis, however, is a strong man, if he is not a great man. Moreover, he is not a bad man, although he must be held responsible for much misery, for many desolated homes, for the ruin of thousands of families and vast regions of the part of the country which he loves so well, for the sudden putting out of many promising lives. This is one of the penalties he must pay for his prominence in the struggle. He shows clearly by his book that he did not desire that prominence. It will be nothing but flagrant injustice to longer insist that Mr. Davis sought through secession to gratify his personal ambition. It is evident that he did not desire disunion although he believed in the power of the States to dissolve their connection with the Federal Government whenever they saw fit. He held, like so many other Southerners, and Northerners for that matter, that his first allegiance was due to his State, and he still holds that under the Constitution secession is a right reserved to the States, although he admits that war has demonstrated that it is impracticable to enforce the right. Mr. Davis believes that Mississippi and the other seceding States did right in attempting to go out of the Union; that their cause was just and their wrongs were almost intolerable; but he was slower in recomomending the exercise of the right than others, and much slower than was agreeable to the leading men of his own State. He says he was behind the opinion of his own people, and what he says is abundently confirmed. It must be taken as sure hereafter, then, that Jefferson Davis was not the arch-traitor he has been depicted as being; that he did not plot to overthrow the Union in order that he might reign over a fragment of the country; that he would have preferred that the Union should have remained intact and whole provided the South could have had its way, so that Southern slave-owners could have taken their human property into any part of the public domain. He probably foresaw that this could not be, that fate was against him; that it was useless for him and his people to go on fighting against time; but he knew that the South was not ready for war, and he was one of the few men in that section of the country who realized that the North would fight before permitting the South to go. Of course, with this light, it is evident that Mr. Davis sought to influence his State not to pass an ordinance of secession. He denies also that there were any intrigues or cabals among Southern Congressmen to bring about secession and says that such statements are "a travesty upon history." Whether or no Mr. Davis is right on this point matters little. The Southern Senators from most of the Southern States did, in fact, adopt resolutions reccommending secession. Mr. Davis was present at this meeting, which was held on the evening of the fifth of January, 1861. He had evidently then come to look upon secession as inevitable and as the proper course to pursue. The events of two months had changed his mind and he was no longer opposing the movement as ill-timed. He was afraid of what was to come from a Republican President and Congress. It is probably true, as Mr. Davis evidently thinks, that the Southern politicians who brought about secession had mainly in view the emphasizing of the sovereignty of the States and exercising no influence as members of the Federal Government.

Mr. Davis also establishes the fact that he did not desire to be President of the Southern Confederacy. When Mississippi went out he went with her. That State, in his view, was then a nation, and he accepted the command of her army. Mr. Davis desired military and not civic employment. Although his book abounds with evidence of his incapacity to command he conceived him self especially fitted for the leadership of armies and for the conduct of war. He was fitted for legislative work, his place in the United States Senate had been very congenial to him and he disliked of all things the duties and annoyances of the Presidency. He refused to permit his name to go before the Democratic Convention of 1860. When, therfore, the Southern States seceded Mr. Davis' ambition was to command in the field, and he was no doubt seriously disappointed when the news came to him at his Mississippi home that he had been chosen President of the provisional government of the Confederacy.

IV.

Much of Mr. Davis' book and that which will stand as the important part—the part in which is contained what the world will want to know about him and the movement of which he became the leader—is devoted to a discussion of the right of secession. Mr. Davis justifies secession on the ground that each State is sovereign. It is a mistake to dismiss his argument because it is familiar. Mr. Davis adds nothing whatever to the discussion of that much-mooted question, it is true, but he puts the case for the South clearly and well. His book may be accepted as a strong presentation of the argument for State sovereignty. It is such a presentation as the South will need when the history of the rebellion comes to be properly written. If the States were sovereign they undoubtedly had the right to vindicate their sovereignty and to meet infringements of the Constitution, or compact, as they called it, by withdrawing from the Union. It is useless, of course worse than useless, to argue now in favor of the right of secession. The soldiers of the Union settled that as a practical question, and we cannot patiently listen to a man who rises now to argue with words and in cold type a question he was beaten at when he argued it with bullets and bayonets. The people have settled that controversy forever. There exists no right of secession, and consequently the States are not soverein in any respect. No power can be sovereign which can be legally restrained or which cannot legally withdraw from a confederation when its rights are thought to be infringed. It is the idlest nonsense in the world to call the individual States sovereign when they cannot legally vindicate their sovereignty. Under the Constitution the States continue to have rights, and they exercise those rights. If, however, the Federal Government shall infringe upon them no State can exercise the right of sovereignty and refuse obedience to the United States. It must seek its remedy not through its own power, but through the Federal laws. It must obtain redress from the Supreme Court of the Federal Government or through a change in the character of the Federal Congress. There is a power above the States, according to the unquestionable determination of the war, which may infringe upon the rights of the States without being subject to restraint or opposition except through its own machinery. So long as the adjudication of the war stands there is an authority over the States, and no sovereign can be the subject of any authority. The adjudication of the war, like the adjudication of courts, dates back to the origin of the constitution, and determines that the right of secession never existed. Mr. Davis cannot change the fact, but he has prepared a brief which presents his argument so well that it cannot help but modify the feeling of posterity towards those who engaged in the secession movement. It sounds now very much like a voice from out the past, like a ghost rising from its grave to gibber to us of a dead doctrine. But there will come a time when men will want to know the ground and excuse for secession and Mr. Davis' book will answer them. The war decided that his case was unsound, but it cannot be fairly and truthfully said that he had no argument to sustain him. The future will say probably that his argument convinced him and his people and that the Southern States had some other reason than natural depravity for going out of the Union. It was a bad reason, but they at least thought it was good. It is one of Mr. Davis' limitations that he cannot understand how thoroughly he has been beaten. He does not realize that he might as well argue a question under the old Constitution of the confederation as to insist upon the right of secession at this late day. It shows his narrowness, his inability to take a larger view of a subject than that which is bounded by a statute. He believes that there is still ground for dispute in favor of State sovereignty: that the decision against him and his people was a revolution, and, as he says in the closing chapter of his book: "When the cause was lost, what cause was it? Not that of the South only, but the cause of constitutional government, of the supremacy of law, of the natural rights of man." He sees in the rejection of the methods of enforcing and defending personal rights in which he believes the overthrow of the rights themselves. Therein he is both wrong and weak.

V.

One of the surest signs of lack of breadth and of the non-possession of some of the most important of the qualities of greatness is to be found in Mr. Davis' discussion of the causes of secession. There is no doubt that he long foresaw that a conflict between the two sections was inevitable. As has been already stated he was one of the first to recognize the fact that attempted secession would mean war. On his progress from Washington to his home in Mississippi to take command of the army of the State he found very little belief in the coming on of war and, according to his own narrative, left a good deal of foreboding behind him because of his prophecies of the conflict that would be brought on by the attempt of the States to go out of the Union. Mr. Davis knew that there was an irrepressible conflict, although the chides Mr. Seward for having used that expression, mainly because Mr. Seward understood the true reason for the existence of the conflict. Strangely—and those who do not admit Mr. Davis' honesty would say perversely—the man who was large enough to be put forward by the South as the chief representative of its cause was not large enough to understand the reason for the divergence between the sections—a reason understood by almost all the rest of the world. Mr. Davis ascribes the desire of the South for separation from the Union to the "systematic and persistent struggle to deprive the Southern States of equality in the Union." Mr. Davis cannot see or understand the difference between the civilizations of the North and South as the two sections were before the war. He recognizes in the hostility of the free community to slavery a commercial enterprise. He seems to possessed of the idea that the North simply desired freedom in the Territories in order that it might overbalance the South in the Federal Government. He complains that tariff laws were passed to keep the North wealthy and the South poor. He does not see how inconsistent he is here. He fails to understand that if the North desired tariff laws alone they would have resisted any addition to the States from the common agricultural territory of the Northwest. The blindness of a man of so much foresight, the weakness of a man of so much strength, is wonderful. He complains that the North was prosperous and that the peculiar civilization of the South kept her from competing with her advancing neighbor, and yet he does not see the war of civilizations which made the conflict irrepressible and the war inevitable. Mr. Davis thinks slavery ought not to have been the cause of dissension. The voice carries us further and further back into the dim past. The figure rises up amin the midst of almost forgotten dogmas. Even at this late day the President of the Confederacy does not see that a free and a slave civilization cannot live together under one one government. There can be no bitterer hatred than that engendered by different civilizations. Mr. Davis ought to consult the map of Europe. He might find a reason for the feeling between the North and the South if he should recall the stories of the Moor and the Jew, the Jew and the Christian, the Turk and the Russian and of men of the same blood representing the civilization of Protestantism and the civilization of Catholicism. There is nothing to be gained by seeking through the statute books, by reviving the Kansas-Nebraska bill or the Missouri compromise, to find the reason for the conflict which ended so unhappily in war. The reason existed in the hates and contempts of two civilizations. It was a question whether the free or the slave States should go down. The reasons Mr. Davis gives for secession are but incidents in the struggle between the two civilizations. It seems idle now, and it will probably always seem idle, to talk about statutes and constitutions in the face of the deep-seated cause of the struggle. Even if Mr. Davis' constitutional propositions are admitted—and of course they never will be by the men who fought on the side of the North—there can be nothing gained by shutting the eyes to the real cause which will produce war inevitably and among any people. The people of the North will not listen to the charge that the war was unconstitutional and waged in an unconstitutional way. They do not believe it, and they did not think about that when the fight was going on. They thought only of keeping together men who ought to live under the same government and with the same institutions.

VI

Mr. Davis recurs again and again to the constitutional questions involved in the war. The call of the president for troops, the blockade, the retention of forts in the States which had gone out—in fact, almost all the acts necessary to the carrying on of the war by the United States were unconstitutional. It was inconstitutional to march troops through Maryland against the remonstrances of the Governor, or to arrest the members of the Legislature in order to prevent the passage of an act of secesssion, or to interfere with slavery in any way. In fact, Mr. Davis apparently held that slaves escaping from the Confederacy into the Union lines should have been returned under the fugitive slave law. He charges Mr. Seward with bad faith because he attempted to garrison and revictual Fort Sumter. He criticizes strongly and severely the manner in which the Federal Government restored the governments of the States, and at every point in the progress of his story he stops to review the unconstitutional methods employed by his enemies and to complain of the manner in which the South was fought and subjugated. It is not to be understood that there is anything undignified about the complaints. Mr. Davis believed there should have been no war under the Constitution, and though he knew war would come he went through the form of seeking a peaceable arrangement with Mr. Lincoln. He failed in this, and his own prophecies of war were verified; but he never ceased to argue against every step taken as illegal and unconstitutional. There is only one passage in his book which seems to throw doubt upon his own sincerity in this connection. He criticies the Southern naval officers for not running their ships into Southern ports instead of honorably surrendering them to the government which had entrusted them with them before resigning their commissions. Mr. Davis insists that as the vessels were the common property of the United States the South had a right to its proportion of them. He fails to point out under what clause of the Constitution there is provision made for a distribution of the public property by States which have left the Union. It must be borne in mind that under Mr. Davis' theory the seceded States had simply gone out of the Union. The Union still remained, composed of the States that adhered to the Constitution. The title to property remained, of course, in the Union, and Mr. Davis would have done himself a service if, while he was condemnig Mr. Lincoln and the North, he had pointed out how these Southern naval officers could have constitutionally delivered the ships of the United States to the seceded States. Although Mr. Davis says that the navy belonged to the States he knows well enough that it is to the Congress of the United States that the power is given "to provide and maintain a navy." It must be understood, however, that Mr. Davis is a very earnest and persistent man. He believes in the right of peaceable secession and he still believes in it, although he admits in the conclusion of his work that it is impractical. He says:

"In asserting the right of secession, it has not been my wish to incite to its exercise. I recognize the fact that the war showed it to be impracticable, but this did not prove it to be wrong; and now that it may not be again attempted, and that the Union may promote the general welfare, it is needful that the truth should be known, so that crimination and recrimination may forever cease, and then, on the basis of fraternity and faithful regard for the rights of the States, there may be written on the arch of the Union, Esto perpetua."

This indicates Mr. Davis' purpose, a purpose which is the controlling and principal feature of his book, to which he returns again and again, and to which the military narrative and his criticisms of Confederate officers are subordinate. He has written a defense of secession, and he has, without adding anything to the arguments so often heard in Congress and on the stump, stated his defense very ably.

VII

Mr. Davis, in his dignified way, hates every one opposed to him. He sees very little good in a political enemy. He hated Douglass for his "squarter sovereignty" doctrine and he hated all the leaders of what he continues to call the "so-called Republican party." He sometimes goes so far as to call the objects of his most bitter hates, like Messrs. Seward and Stanton, "crafty" and "venomous." It is unnecessary, however, to go into Mr. Davis' likes and dislikes so far as the leaders of the Union were concerned. He found occasion to distrust and dislike officers on his own side, especially General Joseph E. Johnston. Perhaps the true history of that enmity will never be written, but Mr. Davis displays in many times in the course of his book.—Johnston, for example, did not move quickly enough from Winchester to join Beauregard at Manassas before the battle of Bull Run. Johnston misrepresented him on the subject of pursuing the Union troops into Washington after that battle. He was timid and vacillating in his campaign behind Vicksburg to such on extent that Grant was enable to capture the city and compel the surrender of Pemberton. He would never give the government his plans. On the Peninsula he had determined, just before the battle of Fair Oaks, to abandan Richmond and Virginia. He neglected to take Port Hudson when he was ordered. Instead of fighting Sherman he kept falling back, whereas he had the advantage of the Federal general in position at Dalton, at Resaca, at Altoona and at Kenesaw. Most of these complaints have been settled in favor of General Johnston, and Sherman has borne testimony to the character of that officer's retreat to Atlanta, on account of which he was relieved by General Hood. Mr. Davis repeats his complaint that Johnston disobeyed positive orders in surrendering to Sherman.—The orders were that Johnston should retire with the calvary and some light artillery, that the infantry should be disbanded and that a rendezuous should be appointed. Johnston, however, surrendered and has sufficiently answered the criticims of his chief, who seemed to have a stomach for fighting even up to the time of his capture, in the statement, which is undoubtedly the fact, that the war was over when Lee surrendered. A good deal of misunderstanding seems to exist as to what Mr. Davis states about his share in the battle of Bull Run and his position about the pursuit of the Union troops to Washington. Mr. Davis nowhere claims to have taken an active part in the battle. His narrative, on the contrary, shows that he arrived on the field after the fighting was over.—He did order, on the night of July 21, immediate pursuit, but apparently yielded to the advice of his generals and did not persist. It is evident, however, that he did not prevent pursuit, and it is surprising how there can be any blame attached to Johnston, whose wisdom in not taking the offensive was recognized by Mr. Davis at the time.

VIII.

Mr. Davis does not add anything of value to the military history of the war. His accounts of the battles fought are often meagre and always unsatisfactory, while his suggestions of movements show that it was well for the Confederacy that he was not actively in command. His statement that he disapproved of Hood's campaign into Tennessee is a very curious one. If there is any fact of the war supposed to be thoroughly and accurately understood it is that Mr. Davis approved of and urged the campaign into Tennessee and to the Ohio. He proclaimed the plan openly in speeches to the people and the troops, and there is evidently a case of misunderstanding somewhere. He shows that Beauregard was not unjustly dismissed, but that he left his army because of ill-health and without leave. Of our generals he has not much to say, except to chronicle their constant defeats, which he does so persistently and in the account of every battle that the wonder is why it was that Lee and not Grant surrendered. He evidently thought well of McClellan because of the latter's desire to have private property protected. He dismissed Floyd with contempt. For Lee he had a cold respect, but he loved Sidney Johnson and admired "Stonewall" Jackson and Hood. He points out that Grant made a mistake in not taking the route to Richmond by the James, which McClellan had pointed out; but he fails entirely to understand the object of Grant's campaign, which was Lee's army and not Richmond. He puts Grant's losses from the Wilderness to Cold Harbor at 100,000, or twice as many men as Lee is alleged to have had. His account of the preparations made for the struggle by the South is very interesting. Starting without arms or ammunition, without a single powder mill, without even a cap machine, they armed themselves and manufactured ammunition under the greatest difficulties. It was the same with the navy, to which Mr. Davis devoted much attention and to which he naturally looked as the chief reliance of the Confederacy in securing recognition from foreign powers by raising the blockade. Mr. Davis thinks that his government was treated very badly by foreign powers, especially by England, and the finding of the Geneva Commission does not seem to have satisfied him that the English authorities did a friendly act to the Confederacy in permitting the escape of the Alabama.

IX.

As we have said, Mr. Davis was averse to final surrender. Notwithstanding the defeats of his armies, the "march to the sea," the poverty and distress of his people, he wanted to fight on. He insisted on transfering the war to the Southwest, an idea which General Johnston has shown to be absurd. He thought he could get Lee's army as far as Danville, then attack Sherman and then Grant, drive them from the State and restore the Confederate Government. All sorts of chimerical notions filled his head. He refused to recognize that he was defeated. His generals were wiser than he and saved further destruction of life and property. Mr. Davis says that General Lee was anxious to leave Richmond in December before the evacuation, and took the ground that a partisan warfare might be continued in the mountains of Virginia for twenty years. This is not contradicted except by General Mahone, and Mr. Davis' word is much better evidence than General Mahone's, and until some other proof is furnished it must be taken for granted that General Lee coincided with Mr. Davis.

The book is launched for good or ill. It cannot do the writer any good in this generation or the next or for many to come. It is dignified and argumentative, but it is full of the hates of the war. The memory of the conflict is always with him; the surge of the war is always about him; the din of battle is always in his ears. He still argues that the lost cause was virtuous. He has no other object in life now than to vindicate the part he played in setting back the peaceful progress of his country, in destroying thousands of lives, in wasting millions of wealth, in filling the land with bitterness and mourning. His work in the world is done. It was finished with the fall of the Confederate Government. He sits a lonely and stranded man, with no part to play in the affairs of his country. He remains the remains the representative of the cause to which he dedicated his life. His book will revive bitterness and hate, and will be seized upon as a blessing by small politicians who live and thrive on malignity. Nevertheless, Mr. Davis does a justice to himself in leaving his defense for posterity to read. He could not alter facts, but he could explain his motives, and he has.

A LOVE STORY.

A level-headed young woman in Montreal found her way out of a dilemma the other day, and the example ought to be of profit to the young and fair elsewhere. She had aroused an uncontrollable passion in the breast of a young lawyear, whom, however, she did not care to wed. He grew gloomy and morose, took a trip to Europe, returned to Montreal, fell into lax ways and was going generally to the dogs. Meeting the young woman on the street one day she resumed the old acquaintance with warmth. Encouraged by the smilling reception the young man suggested a drive. This being refused he proposed a walk instead. To this the lady consented. They walked far, he telling the story of his trip, to which she listened with interest. Finally arriving in the limits of Mount Royal Park, where there was no possibility of interference, the lover drew a pistol, grimly informing the astonished girl that unless she consented to go at once with him to a minister and get married he would blow her brains out and then his own. She seems to have been quite equal to the emergency. Assenting to visit the minister they set out at once and on arriving the clever girl placed herself under the minister's protection and the lover retired, embittered and vowing destruction upon himself for trusting a woman's word even at the altar.

Observations of Rev. Gabe Tucker.

You may notch it on de palin's as a mighty resky plan,
To make your judgment by de clo'es dat kivers up a man;
For I hardly needs to tell you how you often come e'cross
A fifty-dollar saddle on a twenty-dollar hoss.
An', wukin' in de low-groun's, you diskiver as you go,
Dat de finest shuck may hide de meanes' nubbin a in row!
I think a man has got a migoty slender chance for heben
Dat holds on to his piety but one day out ob seben;
Dat talks about de sinners wid a heap o'solemn chat
An nebber drops a nickel in de missionary hat;
Dat's foremost in de meetin'-house for raisin' all de chunes,
But lays aside his 'ligion wid his Sunday pantaloons!
I nebber judge o' people dat I meets along de way
By de places whar dey come fum an' de houses whar dey stay;
For de bantam chickens awful fond o' roostin' pretty high,
An' de turkey-buzzard sails above de eagle in de sky;
Dey ketches little minners in de middle of the sea,
An' you finds de smalles' possum up de bigges' kind o' tree!

J. A. Macon, in Scribner.

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