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By J. A. SELBY.

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General Lee's Views.

From the New York Herald of the 29th ult., we extract the following interesting account of an interview between Gen. Robert E. Lee and a Mr. Thomas M. Cook, the special correspondent of the Herald:

In order, if possible, to get some clear light for the solution of the new complications growing out of the murder of President Lincoln, I yesterday sought and obtained an interview with that distinguished soldier and leader of the rebel army, Gen. Robert E. Lee, and was permitted to draw out his views on the very important question suggested. It is proper to say that my reception was every thing that could be expected from a gentleman who has always been considered a type of the once famous chivalry, and I had almost said, nobility of Virginia. Pen and ink sketches of Gen. Lee have been so numerous made of late by newspaper writers, that any attempt at this time by me in that direction, would be a work of supererogation. I may simply say, that the firm step, the clear voice, the bright, beaming countenance, the quick intelligence, the upright form, and the active manner of the General, very strongly belie the portraits of him which are so common. All the vigor, animation and ability of ripe manhood are prominently conspicuous in his bearing. His venerable white hair and beard simply inspire respect for the mature ideas and deliberate expressions that come from this conspicuous rebel leader, but in no wise convey an impression of decay or old age.

It was certainly embarrassing to me, on introducing the object of my visit, to say that I intended to lay his political views before the public, as his military career had already been. His reply—"I am a paroled prisoner"—at once appealed to my sympathy. A frank, generous man, how far may I properly question him without touching upon his views of honor in reference to his parole? But when he added, "I have never been a politician, and know but little of political leaders—I am a soldier!"—felt easier. I assured him that I had no desire to offend his sensibility, or tempt him to violate any presumable obligation under his parole; but that, being prominently identified with the rebellion, his views on the questions arising out of that rebellion would be of great interest at the present moment, and doubtless of great importance and influence in the settlement of the troubles agitating the country, and with this view only I called upon him. He replied, that the prominence he held was unsought by himself and distasteful to him. That he preferred retirement and seclusion. But was ready to make any sacrifices or perform any honorable act that would lend to the restoration of peace and tranquility to the country.

The General's attention was directed to his written and spoken determination to draw his sword in defence only of his native State, and the inquiry was raised as to what he considered the defence of Virginia, and what degree of deliberation he had given to that expression. He stated that, as a firm and honest believer in the doctrine of State rights, he had considered his allegiance due primarily to the State in which he was born, and where he had always resided. And, although he was not an advocate of secession at

the outset, when Virginia seceded he honestly believed it his duty to abide her fortune. He opposed secession to the last, foreseeing the ruin it was sure to entail. But when the State withdrew from the Union he had no recourse, in his views of honor and patriotism, but to abide her fortunes. He went with her, intending to remain merely a private citizen.

When he resigned his commission in the United States army, he had no intention of taking up arms in any other service antagonistic to the United States. His State, however, called for him, and, entertaining the fixed principles he did of State sovereignty, he had no alternative but to accept the service to which he was called. When he made use of the declarations that have been so extensively quoted of late, he had accepted only a commission from Virginia. Subsequently, when Virginia attached herself to the Southern Confederacy, the same political impressions impelled him to follow her, and when he accepted service under the rebel Government, he did so on the principle that he was defending his native State. And yet, by the act of accepting such service, he was bound in honor to serve in any part of the Confederacy where he might be called, without reference to State lines; and the reconciliation with his former avowal, if any were necessary, were found in the fact that Virginia, standing or falling with the other Southern States, in defending them all he was defending the one to which he considered his allegiance primarily due.

As to the effect of his surrender, he was free to say it was a severe blow to the South, but not a crushing blow. It was of military, not political significance. I asked, was not that surrender a virtual surrender of the doctrine of State rights? By no means, the General replied. When the South shall be wholly subdued there will then undeniably be a surrender of that doctrine. But the surrender of a single army is simply a military necessity. The army of Northern Virginia was surrendered because further resistance on its part would only entail a useless sacrifice of life. But that army was merely a part of the force of the South. When the South shall be forced to surrender all its forces and return to the Union, it undisputably, by that act, surrenders its favorite doctrine of secession. That principle will then be settled by military power.

On the question of State sovereignty the General contends that there exists a legitimate *casus belli*. In the convention that formed the organic law of the land, the question of defining the relative powers of the States, and their relation to the General Government, was raised, but after much discussion was dropped and left unsettled. It has remained so unsettled until the present time. This war is destined to set it at rest. It was unfortunate that it was not settled at the outset; but as it was not settled then, and had to be settled at some time, the war raised on this issue cannot be considered treason. If the South is forced to submission in this contest, it of course can only be looked upon as the triumph of Federal power over State rights, and the forced annihilation of the latter.

With reference to the war in the abstract, the General declared it as his honest belief that peace was practicable two years ago, and has been practicable from that time to the present day, whenever the General Government should see fit to seek it, giving any reasonable chance for the country to escape the consequences which the exasperated North seemed determined to impose. The South has, during this time, been ready and anxious for peace. They have been looking for some word or expression of compromise or conciliation from the North, upon which they might base a return to the Union. They were not prepared, nor are they yet, to come and beg for terms; but were ready to

accept any fair and honorable terms, their own political views being considered. The question of slavery did not lay in the way at all. The best men of the South have long been anxious to do away with this institution, and were quite willing to-day to see it abolished.

They consider slavery forever dead. But with them, in relation to this subject, the question has ever been, "What will you do with the freed people?" That is the serious question to-day, and one that cannot be winked at. It must be met practically and treated intelligently. The negroes must be disposed of, and if their disposition can be marked out, the matter of freeing them is at once settled. But unless some humane course is adopted, based on wisdom and Christian principles you do a gross wrong and injustice to the whole negro race, in setting them free. And it is only this consideration that has led the wisdom, intelligence and Christianity of the South to support and defend the institution up to this time.

The conversation then turned into other channels, and finally touched upon the prospect for peace. And here a very noticeable form of expression was used by the General. In speaking of the probable course of the Administration towards the South, the General remarked that "if we do so and so. I immediately called his attention to the expression, and sought an explanation of the sense in which he used the pronoun 'we,' but obtained none other than a marked repetition of it. It was noticeable throughout the entire interview that in no single instance did he speak of the Southern Confederacy, nor of the Yankees nor the rebels. He frequently alluded to the country, and expressed most earnestly his solicitude for its restoration to peace and tranquility, cautiously avoiding any expression that would imply the possibility of its disintegration.

Throughout all the conversation, he manifested an earnest desire that such counsels should prevail and such policies be pursued as would conduce to an immediate peace, implying in his remarks that peace was now at our option. But he was particular to say that, should arbitrary or vindictive or revengeful policies be adopted, the end was not yet. There yet remained a great deal of vitality and strength, which harsh measures on our part would call into action; and that the South could protract the struggle for an indefinite period. We might, it was true, destroy all that remained of the country East of the Mississippi river by a lavish expenditure of men and means; but then we would be required to fight on the other side of that river, and, after subduing them there, we would be compelled to follow them into Mexico, and thus the struggle would be prolonged until the whole country would be impoverished and ruined. And this we would be compelled to do if extermination, confiscation, and general annihilation and destruction are to be our policy. For if a people are to be destroyed, they will sell their lives as dearly as possible.

The assassination of the President was then spoken of. The General considered this event in itself one of the most deplorable that could have occurred. As a crime it was unexampled and beyond execration. It was a crime that no good man could approve from any conceivable motive. Undoubtedly the effort would be made to fasten the responsibility of it upon the South; but from his intimate acquaintance with the leading men of the South, he was confident there was not one of them who would sanction or approve it.

The scheme was wholly unknown in the South, before its execution, and would never have received the slightest encouragement had it been known; but, on the contrary, the most severe

execration. I called the General's attention, at this point, to a notice, that had been printed in the Northern papers, purporting to have been taken from a paper published in the interior South, proposing, for the sum of one million dollars, to undertake the assassination of the President and his Cabinet. The General affirmed that he had never seen nor heard of such a proposition, nor did he believe it had ever been printed in the South; though if it had, it had been permitted merely as the whim of some crazy person that could possibly amount to nothing. Such a crime was an anomaly in the history of our country, and we had yet to learn that it was possible of either earnest conception or actual execution.

It was a most singular and remarkable expression to escape the lips of such a man as General Lee, that "the South was never half in earnest in this war." I cannot attempt to translate this remark or elucidate it. Its utterance conveyed to me the impression that the South was most heartily sick of war, and anxious to get back into the Union and to peace. The General added that they went off after political leaders in a moment of passion and under the excitement of fancied wrongs, honestly believing that they were entering a struggle for an inalienable right and a fundamental principle of their political creed. A man should not be judged harshly for contending for that which he honestly believes to be right. Such was the position of the vast majority of the people now. And now that they are defeated, they consider that they have lost everything that is worth contending for in the Government. They have sacrificed home, friends, property, health, all on this issue. Men do not make such sacrifices for nothing. They have made the sacrifice from honest convictions.

And now that they have lost in the issue they feel that they have no interest left in this country. It is the opinion of Gen. Lee that unless moderation and liberality be exercised towards them, the country will lose its best people. Already, he says, they are seeking to expatriate themselves, and numerous schemes are started to go to Mexico, Brazil, Canada, France or elsewhere. He is called upon frequently to discountenance and suppress such undertakings. The country needs these young men. They are its bone and sinew, its intelligence and enterprise, its hope for the future, and wisdom demands that no effort be spared to keep them in the country and pacify them.

It was a most noticeable feature of the conversation, that Gen. Lee, strange as may appear, talked throughout as a citizen of the United States. He seemed to plant himself on the national platform, and take his observations from that standpoint. He answered calmly and deliberately, earnestly but with no show of interest, other or different from what might be expected from an honest believer in his peculiar opinions.

The conversation, which had been greatly protracted, so much so that I became uneasy for fear of trespassing on time that I had no right to claim, terminated with some allusions to the terms of peace. Here there was, perhaps naturally and properly, more reticence than on any other topic. But it was plain from what transpired that the only question in the way of immediate peace was the treatment to be accorded the vanquished. Everything else, by implication, seems to be surrendered. Slavery, States rights, the doctrine of secession, and whatever else of political policy may be involved in the strife, is abandoned, the only barrier to an immediate and universal suspension of hostilities and return to the Union, being the treatment the national authorities may promise those who have been resisting its power and paramount authority.

It is proper to say that this was not so stated by Gen. Lee, but is simply an inference from the conversation that took place on that topic. On the contrary, the General seemed very cautious in regard to terms. In order to get at his views, if possible, I suggested the conservative sentiment of the North, which proposed a general amnesty to all soldiers and military officers, but that the political leaders of the South be held to a strict accountability. Would that be just? he asked. "What has Mr. Davis done more than any other Southerner, that he should be punished? It is true he has occupied a prominent position as the agent of a whole people, but that made him no more nor less a rebel than the rest. His acts were the acts of the whole people and the acts of the whole people were his acts. He was not accountable for the commencement of the struggle. On the contrary, he was one of the last to give in his adherence to the secession movement, having strenuously opposed it from the outset, and prayed its ruinous consequences in his speeches and by his writings. Why, therefore, should he suffer more than others?" Of course it was not my province to discuss these questions, and as this illustration disclosed the bent of the General's mind, it was all that I desired to know.

In taking leave of the General I took occasion to say that he was greatly respected by a large body of good and true men at the North, and that as a soldier he was universally admired, and that it was earnestly hoped that he would yet lead an army of United States troops in the enforcement of the Monroe doctrine. He thanked me for the expression of Northern sentiment towards himself, but as for more fighting, he felt that he was getting too old; his only desire now being to be permitted to retire to private life and end his days in seclusion. It was, I thought, an evidence of painful sadness at heart that prompted the added expression, that he would have been pleased had his life been taken in any of the numerous battle fields on which he had fought during this war.

While talking on the subject of the abolition of slavery, I remarked that it had lately been charged in some of the newspapers of the North that the Custis slaves, some two hundred in number, had been left in Gen. Lee's custody for emancipation. The General said this was a mistake. As executor of the will he was required to emancipate these slaves at a certain time. That time had not arrived when the war broke out. It did arrive one or two years afterwards. At that time he could not get to the courts of the county in which Arlington is located, to take out the emancipation papers as prescribed by law. But he did take out papers from the Supreme Court of the State in this city, liberating them all, and they are so recorded in the records of that court. He sent word of their freedom to the negroes at Arlington, and the necessary papers were sent to those at the White House, and to all others that could be reached, and they were all thus liberated, together with a number who were either the General's or Mrs. Lee's private property.

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