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“WE MUST CONQUER”: SEPTEMBER 1864

James R. Gilmore: Our Visit to Richmond

September 1864

Gilmore published this account of the trip he had made to Richmond in July with James F. Jaquess in *The Atlantic Monthly* under his pen name Edmund Kirke.

WHY WE WENT THERE.

WHY my companion, the Rev. Dr. Jaquess, Colonel of the Seventy-Third Regiment of Illinois Volunteers, recently went to Richmond, and the circumstances attending his previous visit within the Rebel lines,—when he wore his uniform, and mixed openly with scores of leading Confederates,—I shall shortly make known to the public in a volume called “Down in Tennessee.” It may now, however, be asked why I, a “civil” individual, and not in the pay of Government, became his travelling-companion, and, at a time when all the world was rushing North to the mountains and the watering-places, journeyed South for a conference with the arch-Rebel, in the hot and dangerous latitude of Virginia.

Did it never occur to you, reader, when you have undertaken to account for some of the simplest of your own actions, how many good reasons have arisen in your mind, every one of which has justified you in concluding that you were of “sound and disposing understanding”? So, now, in looking inward for the why and the wherefore which I know will be demanded of me at the threshold of this article, I find half a dozen reasons for my visit to Richmond, any one of which ought to prove that I am a sensible man, altogether too sensible to go on so long a journey, in the heat of midsummer, for the mere pleasure of the thing. Some of these reasons I will enumerate.

First: Very many honest people at the North sincerely believe that the revolted States will return to the Union, if assured of protection to their peculiar institution. The Government having

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declared that no State shall be readmitted which has not first abolished Slavery, these people hold it responsible for the continuance of the war. It is, therefore, important to know whether the Rebel States will or will not return, if allowed to retain Slavery. Mr. Jefferson Davis could, undoubtedly, answer that question; and that may have been a reason why I went to see him.

Second: On the second of July last, C. C. Clay, of Alabama, J. P. Holcombe, of Virginia, and G. N. Sanders, of nowhere in particular, appeared at Niagara Falls, and publicly announced that they were there to confer with the Democratic leaders in reference to the Chicago nomination. Very soon thereafter, a few friends of the Administration received intimations from those gentlemen that they were Commissioners from the Rebel Government, with authority to negotiate preliminaries of peace on something like the following basis, namely: A restoration of the Union as it was; all negroes actually freed by the war to be declared free, and all negroes not actually freed by the war to be declared slaves.

These overtures were not considered sincere. They seemed concocted to embarrass the Government, to throw upon it the odium of continuing the war, and thus to secure the triumph of the peace-traitors at the November election. The scheme, if well managed, threatened to be dangerous, by uniting the Peace-men, the Copperheads, and such of the Republicans as love peace better than principle, in one opposition, willing to make a peace that would be inconsistent with the safety and dignity of the country. It was, therefore, important to discover—what was then in doubt—whether the Rebel envoys really had, or had not, any official authority.

Within fifteen days of the appearance of these "Peace Commissioners," Jefferson Davis had said to an eminent Secession divine, who, late in June, came through the Union lines by the Maryland back-door, that he would make peace on no other terms than a recognition of Southern Independence. (He might, however, agree to two governments, bound together by a league offensive and defensive,—for all external purposes *one*, for all internal purposes *two*; but he would agree to nothing better.)

There was reason to consider this information trustworthy, and to believe Mr Davis (who was supposed to be a clear-minded man) altogether ignorant of the doings of his Niagara

satellites. If this were true, and were proven to be true,—if the *great* Rebel should reiterate this declaration in the presence of a trustworthy witness, at the very time when the *small* Rebels were opening their Quaker guns on the country,—would not the Niagara negotiators be stripped of their false colors, and their low schemes be exposed to the scorn of all honest men, North and South?

I may have thought so; and that may have been another reason why I went to Richmond.

Third: I had been acquainted with Colonel Jaquess's peace-movements from their inception. Early in June last he wrote me from a battle-field in Georgia, announcing his intention of again visiting the Rebels, and asking an interview with me at a designated place. We met, and went to Washington together. Arriving there, I became aware that obstacles were in the way of his further progress. Those obstacles could be removed by my accompanying him; and that, to those who know the man and his "mission," which is to preach peace on earth and good-will among men, would seem a very good reason why I went to Richmond.

Fourth,—and this to very many may appear as potent as any of the preceding reasons,—I had in my boyhood a strange fancy for church-belfries and liberty-poles. This fancy led me, in school-vacations, to perch my small self for hours on the cross-beams in the old belfry, and to climb to the very top of the tall pole which still surmounts the little village-green. In my youth, this feeling was simply a spirit of adventure; but as I grew older it deepened into a reverence for what those old bells said, and a love for the principle of which that old liberty-pole is now only a crumbling symbol.

Had not events shown that Jeff. Davis had never seen that old liberty-pole, and never heard the chimes which still ring out from that old belfry? Who knew, in these days when every wood-sawyer has a "mission," but *I* had a "mission," and it was to tell the Rebel President that Northern liberty-poles still stand for Freedom, and that Northern church-bells still peal out, "Liberty throughout the land, to *all* the inhabitants thereof"?

If that *was* my mission, will anybody blame me for fanning Mr. Davis with a "blast" of cool Northern "wind" in this hot weather?

But enough of mystification. The straightforward reader wants a straightforward reason, and he shall have it.

We went to Richmond because we hoped to pave the way for negotiations that would result in peace.

If we should succeed, the consciousness of having served the country would, we thought, pay our expenses. If we should fail, but return safely, we might still serve the country by making public the cause of our failure. If we should fail, and *not* return safely, but be shot or hanged as spies,—as we might be, for we could have no protection from our Government, and no safe-conduct from the Rebels,—two lives would be added to the thousands already sacrificed to this Rebellion, but they would as effectually serve the country as if lost on the battle-field.

These are the reasons, and the only reasons, why we went to Richmond.

HOW WE WENT THERE.

WE went there in an ambulance, and we went together,—the Colonel and I; and though two men were never more unlike, we worked together like two brothers, or like two halves of a pair of shears. That we got *in* was owing, perhaps, to me; that we got *out* was due altogether to him; and a man more cool, more brave, more self-reliant, and more self-devoted than that quiet “Western parson” it never was my fortune to encounter.

When the far-away Boston bells were sounding nine, on the morning of Saturday, the sixteenth of July, we took our glorious Massachusetts General by the hand, and said to him,—

“Good bye. If you do not see us within ten days, you will know we have ‘gone up.’”

“If I do not see you within that time,” he replied, “I’ll demand you; and if they don’t produce you, body and soul, I’ll take two for one,—better men than you are,—and hang them higher than Haman. My hand on that. Good bye.”

At three o’clock on the afternoon of the same day, mounted on two raw-boned relics of Sheridan’s great raid, and armed with a letter to Jeff. Davis, a white cambric handkerchief tied to a short stick, and an honest face,—this last was the Colonel’s,—we rode up to the Rebel lines. A ragged,

yellow-faced boy, with a carbine in one hand, and another white handkerchief tied to another short stick in the other, came out to meet us.

“Can you tell us, my man, where to find Judge Ould, the Exchange Commissioner?”

“Yas. Him and t’ other ’Change officers is over ter the plantation beyont Miss Grover’s. Ye ’ll know it by its hevin’ nary door nur winder [the mansion, he meant]. They ’s all busted in. Foller the bridle-path through the timber, and keep your rag a-flyin’, fur our boys is thicker ’n huckelberries in them woods, and they mought pop ye, ef they did n’t seed it.”

Thanking him, we turned our horses into the “timber,” and, galloping rapidly on, soon came in sight of the deserted plantation. Lolling on the grass, in the shade of the windowless mansion, we found the Confederate officials. They rose as we approached; and one of us said to the Judge,—a courteous, middle-aged gentleman, in a Panama hat, and a suit of spotless white drillings,—

“We are late, but it ’s your fault. Your people fired at us down the river, and we had to turn back and come overland.”

“You don’t suppose they saw your flag?”

“No. It was hidden by the trees; but a shot came uncomfortably near us. It struck the water, and ricocheted not three yards off. A little nearer, and it would have shortened me by a head, and the Colonel by two feet.”

“That would have been a sad thing for you; but a miss, you know, is as good as a mile,” said the Judge, evidently enjoying the “joke.”

“We hear Grant was in the boat that followed yours, and was struck while at dinner,” remarked Captain Hatch, the Judge’s Adjutant,—a gentleman, and about the best-looking man in the Confederacy.

“Indeed! Do you believe it?”

“I don’t know, of course”; and his looks asked for an answer. We gave none, for all such information is contraband. We might have told him that Grant, Butler, and Foster examined their position from Mrs. Grover’s house,—about four hundred yards distant,—two hours after the Rebel cannon-ball danced a break-down on the Lieutenant-General’s dinner-table.

We were then introduced to the other officials,—Major

Henniken of the War Department, a young man formerly of New York, but now scorning the imputation of being a Yankee, and Mr. Charles Javins, of the Provost-Guard of Richmond. This latter individual was our shadow in Dixie. He was of medium height, stoutly built, with a short, thick neck, and arms and shoulders denoting great strength. He looked a natural-born jailer, and much such a character as a timid man would not care to encounter, except at long range of a rifle warranted to fire twenty shots a minute, and to hit every time.

To give us a *moonlight view* of the Richmond fortifications, the Judge proposed to start after sundown; and as it wanted some hours of that time, we seated ourselves on the ground, and entered into conversation. The treatment of our prisoners, the *status* of black troops, and non-combatants, and all the questions which have led to the suspension of exchanges, had been good-naturedly discussed, when the Captain, looking up from one of the Northern papers we had brought him, said,—

“Do you know, it mortifies me that you don’t hate us as we hate you? You kill us as Agassiz kills a fly,—because you love us.”

“Of course we do. The North is being crucified for love of the South.”

“If you love us so, why don’t you let us go?” asked the Judge, rather curtly.

“For that very reason,—because we love you. If we let you go, with slavery, and your notions of ‘empire,’ you ’d run straight to barbarism and the Devil.”

“We ’d take the risk of that. But let me tell you, if you are going to Mr. Davis with any such ideas, you might as well turn back at once. He can make peace on no other basis than Independence. Recognition must be the beginning, middle, and ending of all negotiations. Our people will accept peace on no other terms.”

“I think you are wrong there,” said the Colonel. “When I was here a year ago, I met many of your leading men, and they all assured me they wanted peace and reunion, even at the sacrifice of slavery. Within a week, a man you venerate and love has met me at Baltimore, and besought me to come here, and offer Mr. Davis peace on such conditions.”

“That may be. Some of our old men, who are weak in the knees, may want peace on any terms; but the Southern people will not have it without Independence. Mr. Davis knows them,

and you will find he will insist upon that. Concede that, and we 'll not quarrel about minor matters."

"We 'll not quarrel at all. But it 's sundown, and time we were 'on to Richmond."

"That 's the 'Tribune' cry," said the Captain, rising; "and I hurrah for the 'Tribune,' for it 's honest, and—I want my supper."

We all laughed, and the Judge ordered the horses. As we were about to start, I said to him,—

"You 've forgotten our parole."

"Oh, never mind that. We 'll attend to that at Richmond."

Stepping into his carriage, and unfurling the flag of truce, he then led the way, by a "short cut," across the corn-field which divided the mansion from the high-road. We followed in an ambulance drawn by a pair of mules, our shadow—Mr. Javins—sitting between us and the twilight, and Jack, a "likely darky," almost the sole survivor of his master's twelve hundred slaves, ("De ress all stole, Massa,—stole by you Yankees,") occupying the front-seat, and with a stout whip "working our passage" to Richmond.

Much that was amusing and interesting occurred during our three-hours' journey, but regard for our word forbids my relating it. Suffice it to say, we saw the "frowning fortifications," we "flanked" the "invincible army," and, at ten o'clock that night, planted our flag (against a lamp-post) in the very heart of the hostile city. As we alighted at the doorway of the Spotswood Hotel, the Judge said to the Colonel,—

"Button your outside-coat up closely. Your uniform must not be seen here."

The Colonel did as he was bidden; and, without stopping to register our names at the office, we followed the Judge and the Captain up to No. 60. It was a large, square room in the fourth story, with an unswept, ragged carpet, and bare, white walls, smeared with soot and tobacco-juice. Several chairs, a marble-top table, and a pine wash-stand and clothes-press straggled about the floor, and in the corners were three beds, garnished with tattered pillow-cases, and covered with white counterpanes, grown gray with longing for soapsuds and a wash-tub. The plainer and humbler of these beds was designed for the burly Mr. Javins; the others had been made ready for the extraordinary envoys (not envoys extraordinary) who, in defiance of all precedent and the "law of nations," had just then "taken Richmond."

A single gas-jet was burning over the mantel-piece, and above it I saw a "writing on the wall" which implied that Jane Jackson had run up a washing-score of fifty dollars!

I was congratulating myself on not having to pay that woman's laundry-bills, when the Judge said,—

"You want supper. What shall we order?"

"A slice of hot corn-bread would make *me* the happiest man in Richmond."

The Captain thereupon left the room, and shortly returning, remarked,—

"The landlord swears you 're from Georgia. He says none but a Georgian would call for corn-bread at this time of night."

On that hint we acted, and when our sooty attendant came in with the supper-things, we discussed Georgia mines, Georgia banks, and Georgia mosquitoes, in a way that showed we had been bitten by all of them. In half an hour it was noised all about the hotel that the two gentlemen the Confederacy was taking such excellent care of were from Georgia.

The meal ended, and a quiet smoke over, our entertainers rose to go. As the Judge bade us good-night, he said to us,—

"In the morning you had better address a note to Mr. Benjamin, asking the interview with the President. I will call at ten o'clock, and take it to him."

"Very well. But will Mr. Davis see us on Sunday?"

"Oh, that will make no difference."

WHAT WE DID THERE.

THE next morning, after breakfast, which we took in our room with Mr. Javins, we indited a note—of which the following is a copy—to the Confederate Secretary of State.

"Spotswood House, Richmond, Va.

"July 17th, 1864.

"Hon. J. P. Benjamin,

"Secretary of State, etc.

"DEAR SIR,—The undersigned respectfully solicit an interview with President Davis.

"They visit Richmond only as private citizens, and have no official character or authority; but they are acquainted with the views of the United States Government, and with the

sentiments of the Northern people relative to an adjustment of the differences existing between the North and the South, and earnestly hope that a free interchange of views between President Davis and themselves may open the way to such *official* negotiations as will result in restoring PEACE to the two sections of our distracted country.

“They, therefore, ask an interview with the President, and awaiting your reply, are

“Truly and respectfully yours.”

This was signed by both of us; and when the Judge called, as he had appointed, we sent it—together with a commendatory letter I had received, on setting out, from a near relative of Mr. Davis—to the Rebel Secretary. In half an hour Judge Ould returned, saying,—“Mr. Benjamin sends you his compliments, and will be happy to see you at the State Department.”

We found the Secretary—a short, plump, oily little man in black, with a keen black eye, a Jew face, a yellow skin, curly black hair, closely trimmed black whiskers, and a ponderous gold watch-chain—in the northwest room of the “United States” Custom-House. Over the door of this room were the words, “State Department,” and round its walls were hung a few maps and battle-plans. In one corner was a tier of shelves filled with books,—among which I noticed Headley’s “History,” Lossing’s “Pictorial,” Parton’s “Butler,” Greeley’s “American Conflict,” a complete set of the “Rebellion Record,” and a dozen numbers and several bound volumes of the “Atlantic Monthly,”—and in the centre of the apartment was a black-walnut table, covered with green cloth, and filled with a multitude of “state-papers.” At this table sat the Secretary. He rose as we entered, and, as Judge Ould introduced us, took our hands, and said,—

“I am glad, very glad, to meet you, Gentlemen. I have read your note, and”—bowing to me—“the open letter you bring from ———. Your errand commands my respect and sympathy. Pray be seated.”

As we took the proffered seats, the Colonel, drawing off his “duster,” and displaying his uniform, said,—

“We thank you for this cordial reception, Mr. Benjamin. We trust you will be as glad to hear us as you are to see us.”

“No doubt I shall be, for you come to talk of peace. Peace is what we all want.”

“It is, indeed; and for that reason we are here to see Mr. Davis. Can we see him, Sir?”

“Do you bring any overtures to him from your Government?”

“No, Sir. We bring no overtures and have no authority from our Government. We state that in our note. We would be glad, however, to know what terms will be acceptable to Mr. Davis. If they at all harmonize with Mr. Lincoln’s views, we will report them to him, and so open the door for official negotiations.”

“Are you acquainted with Mr. Lincoln’s views?”

“One of us is, fully.”

“Did Mr. Lincoln, *in any way*, authorize you to come here?”

“No, Sir. We came with his pass, but not by his request. We say, distinctly, we have no official, or unofficial, authority. We come as men and Christians, not as diplomatists, hoping, in a frank talk with Mr. Davis, to discover some way by which this war may be stopped.”

“Well, Gentlemen, I will repeat what you say to the President, and if he follows my advice,—and I think he will,—he will meet you. He will be at church this afternoon; so, suppose you call here at nine this evening. If anything should occur in the mean time to prevent his seeing you, I will let you know through Judge Ould.”

Throughout this interview the manner of the Secretary was cordial; but with this cordiality was a strange constraint and diffidence, almost amounting to timidity, which struck both my companion and myself. Contrasting his manner with the quiet dignity of the Colonel, I almost fancied our positions reversed,—that, instead of our being in his power, the Secretary was in ours, and momentarily expecting to hear some unwelcome sentence from our lips. There is something, after all, in moral power. Mr. Benjamin does not possess it, nor is he a great man. He has a keen, shrewd, ready intellect, but not the *stamina* to originate, or even to execute, any great good or great wickedness.

After a day spent in our room, conversing with the Judge, or watching the passers-by in the street,—I should like to tell

who they were and how they looked, but such information is just now contraband,—we called again, at nine o'clock, at the State Department.

Mr. Benjamin occupied his previous seat at the table, and at his right sat a spare, thin-featured man, with iron-gray hair and beard, and a clear, gray eye full of life and vigor. He had a broad, massive forehead, and a mouth and chin denoting great energy and strength of will. His face was emaciated, and much wrinkled, but his features were good, especially his eyes,—though one of them bore a scar, apparently made by some sharp instrument. He wore a suit of grayish-brown, evidently of foreign manufacture, and, as he rose, I saw that he was about five feet ten inches high, with a slight stoop in the shoulders. His manners were simple, easy, and quite fascinating; and he threw an indescribable charm into his voice, as he extended his hand, and said to us,—

“I am glad to see you, Gentlemen. You are very welcome to Richmond.”

And this was the man who was President of the United States under Franklin Pierce, and who is now the heart, soul, and brains of the Southern Confederacy!

His manner put me entirely at my ease,—the Colonel would be at his, if he stood before Cæsar,—and I replied,—

“We thank you, Mr. Davis. It is not often you meet men of our clothes, and our principles, in Richmond.”

“Not often,—not so often as I could wish; and I trust your coming may lead to a more frequent and a more friendly intercourse between the North and the South.”

“We sincerely hope it may.”

“Mr. Benjamin tells me you have asked to see me, to”——

And he paused, as if desiring we should finish the sentence. The Colonel replied,—

“Yes, Sir. We have asked this interview in the hope that you may suggest some way by which this war can be stopped. Our people want peace,—your people do, and your Congress has recently said that *you* do. We have come to ask how it can be brought about.”

“In a very simple way. Withdraw your armies from our territory, and peace will come of itself. We do not seek to subjugate you. We are not waging an offensive war, except so far as it is

offensive-defensive,—that is, so far as we are forced to invade you to prevent your invading us. Let us alone, and peace will come at once.”

“But we cannot let you alone so long as you repudiate the Union. That is the one thing the Northern people will not surrender.”

“I know. You would deny to us what you exact for yourselves,—the right of self-government.”

“No, Sir,” I remarked. “We would deny you no natural right. But we think Union essential to peace; and, Mr. Davis, *could* two people, with the same language, separated by only an imaginary line, live at peace with each other? Would not disputes constantly arise, and cause almost constant war between them?”

“Undoubtedly,—with this generation. You have sown such bitterness at the South, you have put such an ocean of blood between the two sections, that I despair of seeing any harmony in my time. Our children may forget this war, but *we* cannot.”

“I think the bitterness you speak of, Sir,” said the Colonel, “does not really exist. *We* meet and talk here as friends; our soldiers meet and fraternize with each other; and I feel sure, that, if the Union were restored, a more friendly feeling would arise between us than has ever existed. The war has made us know and respect each other better than before. This is the view of very many Southern men; I have had it from many of them,—your leading citizens.”

“They are mistaken,” replied Mr. Davis. “They do not understand Southern sentiment. How can we feel anything but bitterness towards men who deny us our rights? If you enter my house and drive me out of it, am I not your natural enemy?”

“You put the case too strongly. But we cannot fight forever; the war must end at some time; we must finally agree upon something; can we not agree now, and stop this frightful carnage? We are both Christian men, Mr. Davis. Can *you*, as a Christian man, leave untried any means that may lead to peace?”

“No, I cannot. I desire peace as much as you do. I deplore bloodshed as much as you do; but I feel that not one drop of the blood shed in this war is on *my* hands,—I can look up to my God and say this. I tried all in my power to avert this war.

I saw it coming, and for twelve years I worked night and day to prevent it, but I could not. The North was mad and blind; it would not let us govern ourselves; and so the war came, and now it must go on till the last man of this generation falls in his tracks, and his children seize his musket and fight his battle, *unless you acknowledge our right to self-government*. We are not fighting for slavery. We are fighting for Independence,—and that, or extermination, we *will* have.”

“And there are, at least, four and a half millions of us left; so you see you have a work before you,” said Mr. Benjamin, with a decided sneer.

“We have no wish to exterminate you,” answered the Colonel. “I believe what I have said,—that there is no bitterness between the Northern and Southern *people*. The North, I know, loves the South. When peace comes, it will pour money and means into your hands to repair the waste caused by the war; and it would now welcome you back, and forgive you all the loss and bloodshed you have caused. But we *must* crush your armies, and exterminate your Government. And is not that already nearly done? You are wholly without money, and at the end of your resources. Grant has shut you up in Richmond. Sherman is before Atlanta. Had you not, then, better accept honorable terms while you can retain your prestige, and save the pride of the Southern people?”

Mr. Davis smiled.

“I respect your earnestness, Colonel, but you do not seem to understand the situation. We are not exactly shut up in Richmond. If your papers tell the truth, it is your capital that is in danger, not ours. Some weeks ago, Grant crossed the Rappahannock to whip Lee, and take Richmond. Lee drove him in the first battle, and then Grant executed what your people call a ‘brilliant flank-movement,’ and fought Lee again. Lee drove him a second time, and then Grant made another ‘flank-movement’; and so they kept on,—Lee whipping, and Grant flanking,—until Grant got where he is now. And what is the net result? Grant has lost seventy-five or eighty thousand men,—*more than Lee had at the outset*,—and is no nearer taking Richmond than at first; and Lee, whose front has never been broken, holds him completely in check, and has men enough to spare to invade Maryland, and threaten Washing-

ton! Sherman, to be sure, *is* before Atlanta; but suppose he is, and suppose he takes it? You know, that, the farther he goes from his base of supplies, the weaker he grows, and the more disastrous defeat will be to him. And defeat *may* come. So, in a military view, I should certainly say our position was better than yours.

“As to money: we are richer than you are. You smile; but admit that our paper is worth nothing,—it answers as a circulating-medium; and we hold it all ourselves. If every dollar of it were lost, we should, as we have no foreign debt, be none the poorer. But it *is* worth something; it has the solid basis of a large cotton-crop, while yours rests on nothing, and you owe all the world. As to resources: we do not lack for arms or ammunition, and we have still a wide territory from which to gather supplies. So, you see, we are not in extremities. But if we were,—if we were without money, without food, without weapons,—if our whole country were devastated, and our armies crushed and disbanded,—could we, without giving up our manhood, give up our right to govern ourselves? Would *you* not rather die, and feel yourself a man, than live, and be subject to a foreign power?”

“From your stand-point there is force in what you say,” replied the Colonel. “But we did not come here to argue with you, Mr. Davis. We came, hoping to find some honorable way to peace; and I am grieved to hear you say what you do. When I have seen your young men dying on the battle-field, and your old men, women, and children starving in their homes, I have felt I could risk my life to save them. For that reason I am here; and I am grieved, grieved, that there is no hope.”

“I know your motives, Colonel Jaquess, and I honor you for them; but what can I do more than I am doing? I would give my poor life, gladly, if it would bring peace and good-will to the two countries; but it would not. It is with your own people you should labor. It is they who desolate our homes, burn our wheat-fields, break the wheels of wagons carrying away our women and children, and destroy supplies meant for our sick and wounded. At your door lies all the misery and the crime of this war,—and it is a fearful, fearful account.”

“Not all of it, Mr. Davis. I admit a fearful account, but it is not *all* at our door. The passions of both sides are aroused.

Unarmed men are hanged, prisoners are shot down in cold blood, by yourselves. Elements of barbarism are entering the war on both sides, that should make us—you and me, as Christian men—shudder to think of. In God's name, then, let us stop it. Let us do something, concede something, to bring about peace. You cannot expect, with only four and a half millions, as Mr. Benjamin says you have, to hold out forever against twenty millions."

Again Mr. Davis smiled.

"Do you suppose there are twenty millions at the North determined to crush us?"

"I do,—to crush your *government*. A small number of our people, a very small number, are your friends,—Secessionists. The rest differ about measures and candidates, but are united in the determination to sustain the Union. Whoever is elected in November, he *must be* committed to a vigorous prosecution of the war."

Mr. Davis still looking incredulous, I remarked,—

"It is so, Sir. Whoever tells you otherwise deceives you. I think I know Northern sentiment, and I assure you it is so. You know we have a system of lyceum-lecturing in our large towns. At the close of these lectures, it is the custom of the people to come upon the platform and talk with the lecturer. This gives him an excellent opportunity of learning public sentiment. Last winter I lectured before nearly a hundred of such associations, all over the North,—from Dubuque to Bangor,—and I took pains to ascertain the feeling of the people. I found a unanimous determination to crush the Rebellion and save the Union at every sacrifice. The majority are in favor of Mr. Lincoln, and nearly all of those opposed to him are opposed to him because they think he does not fight you with enough vigor. The radical Republicans, who go for slave-suffrage and thorough confiscation, are those who will defeat him, if he is defeated. But if he is defeated before the people, the House will elect a worse man,—I mean, worse for you. It is more radical than he is,—you can see that from Mr. Ashley's Reconstruction Bill,—and the people are more radical than the House. Mr. Lincoln, I know, is about to call out five hundred thousand more men, and I can't see how you *can* resist much longer; but if you do, you will only deepen the radical feeling

of the Northern people. They will now give you fair, honorable, *generous* terms; but let them suffer much more, let there be a dead man in every house, as there is now in every village, and they will give you *no* terms,—they will insist on hanging every Rebel south of — Pardon my terms. I mean no offence.”

“You give no offence,” he replied, smiling very pleasantly. “I would n’t have you pick your words. This is a frank, free talk, and I like you the better for saying what you think. Go on.”

“I was merely going to say, that, let the Northern people once really feel the war,—they do not feel it yet,—and they will insist on hanging every one of your leaders.”

“Well, admitting all you say, I can’t see how it affects our position. There are some things worse than hanging or extermination. We reckon giving up the right of self-government one of those things.”

“By self-government you mean disunion,—Southern Independence?”

“Yes.”

“And slavery, you say, is no longer an element in the contest.”

“No, it is not, it never was an *essential* element. It was only a means of bringing other conflicting elements to an earlier culmination. It fired the musket which was already capped and loaded. There are essential differences between the North and the South that will, however this war may end, make them two nations.”

“You ask me to say what I think. Will you allow me to say that I know the South pretty well, and never observed those differences?”

“Then you have not used your eyes. My sight is poorer than yours, but I have seen them for years.”

The laugh was upon me, and Mr. Benjamin enjoyed it.

“Well, Sir, be that as it may, if I understand you, the dispute between your government and ours is narrowed down to this: Union or Disunion.”

“Yes; or to put it in other words: Independence or Subjugation.”

“Then the two governments are irreconcilably apart. They have no alternative but to fight it out. But it is not so with the people. They are tired of fighting, and want peace; and as they

bear all the burden and suffering of the war, is it not right they should have peace, and have it on such terms as they like?"

"I don't understand you. Be a little more explicit."

"Well, suppose the two governments should agree to something like this: To go to the people with two propositions: say, Peace, with Disunion and Southern Independence, as your proposition,—and Peace, with Union, Emancipation, No Confiscation, and Universal Amnesty, as ours. Let the citizens of all the United States (as they existed before the war) vote 'Yes,' or 'No,' on these two propositions, at a special election within sixty days. If a majority votes Disunion, our government to be bound by it, and to let you go in peace. If a majority votes Union, yours to be bound by it, and to stay in peace. The two governments can contract in this way, and the people, though constitutionally unable to decide on peace or war, can elect which of the two propositions shall govern their rulers. Let Lee and Grant, meanwhile, agree to an armistice. This would sheathe the sword; and if once sheathed, it would never again be drawn by this generation."

"The plan is altogether impracticable. If the South were only one State, it might work; but as it is, if one Southern State objected to emancipation, it would nullify the whole thing; for you are aware the people of Virginia cannot vote slavery out of South Carolina, nor the people of South Carolina vote it out of Virginia."

"But three-fourths of the States can amend the Constitution. Let it be done in that way,—in any way, so that it be done by the people. I am not a statesman or a politician, and I do not know just how such a plan could be carried out; but you get the idea,—that the PEOPLE shall decide the question."

"That the *majority* shall decide it, you mean. We seceded to rid ourselves of the rule of the majority, and this would subject us to it again."

"But the majority must rule finally, either with bullets or ballots."

"I am not so sure of that. Neither current events nor history shows that the majority rules, or ever did rule. The contrary, I think, is true. Why, Sir, the man who should go before the Southern people with such a proposition, with *any* proposition which implied that the North was to have a voice in determin-

ing the domestic relations of the South, could not live here a day. He would be hanged to the first tree, without judge or jury."

"Allow me to doubt that. I think it more likely he would be hanged, if he let the Southern people know the majority could n't rule," I replied, smiling.

"I have no fear of that," rejoined Mr. Davis, also smiling most good-humoredly. "I give you leave to proclaim it from every house-top in the South."

"But, seriously, Sir, you let the majority rule in a single State; why not let it rule in the whole country?"

"Because the States are independent and sovereign. The country is not. It is only a confederation of States; or rather it *was*: it is now *two* confederations."

"Then we are not a *people*,—we are only a political partnership?"

"That is all."

"Your very name, Sir, '*United States*,' implies that," said Mr. Benjamin. "But, tell me, are the terms you have named—Emancipation, No Confiscation, and Universal Amnesty—the terms which Mr. Lincoln authorized you to offer us?"

"No, Sir, Mr. Lincoln did not authorize me to offer you any terms. But I *think* both he and the Northern people, for the sake of peace, would assent to some such conditions."

"They are *very* generous," replied Mr. Davis, for the first time during the interview showing some angry feeling. "But Amnesty, Sir, applies to criminals. We have committed no crime. Confiscation is of no account, unless you can enforce it. And Emancipation! You have already emancipated nearly two millions of our slaves,—and if you will take care of them, you may emancipate the rest. I had a few when the war began. I was of some use to them; they never were of any to me. Against their will you 'emancipated' them; and you may 'emancipate' every negro in the Confederacy, but *we will be free!* We will govern ourselves. We *will* do it, if we have to see every Southern plantation sacked, and every Southern city in flames."

"I see, Mr. Davis, it is useless to continue this conversation," I replied; "and you will pardon us, if we have seemed to press our views with too much pertinacity. We love the old flag, and that must be our apology for intruding upon you at all."

"You have not intruded upon me," he replied, resuming his usual manner. "I am glad to have met you, both. I once loved the old flag as well as you do; I would have died for it; but now it is to me only the emblem of oppression."

"I hope the day may never come, Mr. Davis, when *I* say that," said the Colonel.

A half-hour's conversation on other topics—not of public interest—ensued, and then we rose to go. As we did so, the Rebel President gave me his hand, and, bidding me a kindly good-bye, expressed the hope of seeing me again in Richmond in happier times,—when peace should have returned; but with the Colonel his parting was particularly cordial. Taking his hand in both of his, he said to him,—

"Colonel, I respect your character and your motives, and I wish you well,—I wish you every good I can wish you consistently with the interests of the Confederacy."

The quiet, straightforward bearing and magnificent moral courage of our "fighting parson" had evidently impressed Mr. Davis very favorably.

As we were leaving the room, he added,—

"Say to Mr. Lincoln from me, that I shall at any time be pleased to receive proposals for peace on the basis of our Independence. It will be useless to approach me with any other."

When we went out, Mr. Benjamin called Judge Ould, who had been waiting during the whole interview—two hours—at the other end of the hall, and we passed down the stairway together. As I put my arm within that of the Judge, he said to me,—

"Well, what is the result?"

"Nothing but war,—war to the knife."

"Ephraim is joined to his idols,—let him alone," added the Colonel, solemnly.

I should like to relate the incidents of the next day, when we visited Castle Thunder, Libby Prison, and the hospitals occupied by our wounded; but the limits of a magazine-article will not permit. I can only say that at sundown we passed out of the Rebel lines, and at ten o'clock that night stretched our tired limbs on the "downy" cots in General Butler's tent, thankful, devoutly thankful, that we were once again under the folds of the old flag.

Thus ended our visit to Richmond. I have endeavored to sketch it faithfully. The conversation with Mr. Davis I took down shortly after entering the Union lines, and I have tried to report his exact language, extenuating nothing, and coloring nothing that he said. Some of his sentences, as I read them over, appear stilted and high-flown, but they did not sound so when uttered. As listened to, they seemed the simple, natural language of his thought. He spoke deliberately, apparently weighing every word, and knowing well that all he said would be given to the public.

He is a man of peculiar ability. Our interview with him explained to me why, with no money and no commerce, with nearly every one of their important cities in our hands, and with an army greatly inferior in numbers and equipment to ours, the Rebels have held out so long. It is because of the sagacity, energy, and indomitable will of Jefferson Davis. Without him the Rebellion would crumble to pieces in a day; with him it may continue to be, even in disaster, a power that will tax the whole energy and resources of the nation.

The Southern masses want peace. Many of the Southern leaders want it,—both my companion and I, by correspondence and intercourse with them, know this; but there can be no peace so long as Mr. Davis controls the South. Ignoring slavery, he himself states the issue,—the only issue with him,—Union, or Disunion. That is it. We must conquer, or be conquered. We can negotiate only with the bayonet. We can have peace and union only by putting forth all our strength, crushing the Southern armies, and overthrowing the Southern government.