

Confederate Veteran.

DECEMBER, 1918

THE CONSTITUTION AND SLAVERY.

BY JAMES CALLAWAY, IN THE MACON TELEGRAPH.

In much of the literature of Northern magazines and newspapers is still seen a disposition to impress the thought that the South fought to perpetuate slavery and that nothing else was behind the war. When we aver that our soldiers drew their swords in what they believed the cause of liberty and State self-government, the reply is that it was slavery only that inspired the fight on our part. This view does a grievous injustice to half a million patriotic soldiers who were animated by as pure a love of liberty as ever throbbed in the bosom of man and who made as splendid exhibition of self-sacrifice as any soldiers who ever fought on any field of battle.

In his book, "A Soldier's Recollections," Dr. Randolph H. McKim, of the Army of Northern Virginia, now rector of the Church of the Epiphany, Washington, D. C., replies to this criticism of Northern friends in the following words:

"If slavery was the corner stone of the Southern Confederacy, what are we to say of the Constitution of the United States? That instrument as originally adopted by the thirteen colonies contained three sections which recognized slavery, Article 1, Sections 2 and 9, and Article 4, Section 9. And whereas the Constitution of the Southern Confederacy prohibited the slave trade, the Constitution of the United States prohibited the abolition of the slave trade for twenty years. And if the men of the South are reproached for denying liberty to three and a half millions of human beings at the same time they professed to be waging a great war for their own liberty, what are we to say of the revolting colonies of 1776 who rebelled against the British crown to achieve their liberty while slavery existed in every one of the thirteen colonies undisturbed?

"Cannot those historians who deny that the South fought for liberty because they held the blacks in bondage see that upon the same principle they must impugn the sincerity of the signers of the Declaration of Independence? We ask the candid historian to answer this question: If the colonists of 1776 were freemen fighting for liberty, though holding the blacks in slavery in every one of the thirteen colonies, why is the title of liberty denied the Southern men of 1861 because they too held the blacks in bondage?

"Slavery was an inheritance which the people of the South received from the fathers, planted in the colonies by the common law of England; and if the States of the North within fifty years after the Revolution abolished the institution, it cannot be claimed that the abolition was dictated by moral consideration, but by differences of soil, of climate, and of industrial interests.

"The sentiment in favor of emancipation was rapidly spreading in the South in the first quarter of the nineteenth century. Wilson acknowledges that there was no avowed advocacy of slavery in Virginia at that time. In the year 1826 there were one hundred and forty-three emancipation societies in the United States, and of these one hundred and three were in the South. The Virginia Legislature, under the advice of Thomas Jefferson, so strong was the sentiment for emancipation, in 1832 came near passing a law for gradual emancipation, and under the growing sentiment would have passed it the next session but for an unfortunate reaction created by the fanatical agitation of the subject by the abolitionists led by William Lloyd Garrison. Garrison and his followers resorted to such violent abuse of the Southern people that the Virginia Legislature postponed action. A Massachusetts

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writer, George Lunt, says: 'Virginia, Kentucky, and Tennessee were engaged in practical movements for gradual emancipation, and this movement was arrested by the violent aggression of the abolitionists.'

"These facts are beyond dispute: (1) That from 1789 to 1837 slavery was almost universally considered in the South as an evil; (2) that public opinion there underwent a revolution on this subject in the decade 1832 to 1842. What produced the fateful change? Not the invention of the cotton gin, as is often asserted, for that took place in 1793. No; but the abolition crusade launched by William Lloyd Garrison January 1, 1831. Its violence and virulence produced the result that such abuse does. It angered the South. It stifled discussion. It checked a movement on its way to gradual emancipation. At Farmington, Mass., Garrison before a great multitude burned the Constitution, declaring it a league with the devil and a covenant with hell. Vile literature was sent out among the negroes of the South advocating insurrection and the torch. It was so incendiary in character that President Jackson in his message to Congress in 1835 called attention to the transmission through the mails 'of inflammatory appeals addressed to the passion of the slaves, in prints, magazines, and various sorts of publications, calculated to stimulate them to insurrection and to produce horrors of a servile race war.'"

So we see that, but for the fanatical movement to accomplish results by violence and coercion, emancipation would probably have come. What a disappointment that would have been, for there was such longing to plunder the eleven Southern States, and they did it, even to the Kaiser's taste!

Dr. McKim says: "Not the Southern people, but the government of Great Britain, must be held responsible for American slavery. The colony of Virginia protested time and again against sending slaves to her shores. In 1760 South Carolina passed an act prohibiting the further importation of slaves, but England rejected the act of the Carolina colony with indignation. Virginia was the first of all the States to prohibit the slave trade, and Georgia was the first to incorporate such a prohibition in her Constitution. Virginia abolished the slave trade thirty years before New England was willing to consent to its abolition."

Dr. McKim continues: "The Southern soldiers were not thinking of their slaves; only a few owned any when they cast their all in the balance. * * * No. It was a fight for the sacred right of self-government. It was a defense of their homes and firesides; they fought to repel invasion and resist a war of subjugation. Not one soldier in ten was interested in slavery. Why, in February, 1861, Mr. Davis wrote to his wife: 'In any case our slave property will be eventually lost.'"

The fact is, the South expected peaceable secession and failed to recognize the "revenue" question involved. "If we let the South go," said Mr. Lincoln, "from whence shall we derive our revenue?"