

Confederate Veteran.

VOL. XXVI.

NASHVILLE, TENN., FEBRUARY, 1918.

No. 2.

{ S. A. CUNNINGHAM,
FOUNDER.

p. o n e

WHY THE CONFEDERACY FAILED.

"It will be difficult to get the world to understand the odds against which we fought."

So wrote General Lee to General Early after the war. In addition to the numerical odds against which the Southern armies were contending, what of that invisible, intangible opposition which was the real force that caused the downfall of the Confederacy? In his late book, "The Soul of Lee," Dr. Randolph H. McKim brings out certain facts showing the opposition in some of the States to recruiting the Confederate army from their citizenship. He says:

"It has been said that the Confederate States passed the most drastic conscript law on record, which may be true; but it is a mistake to suppose that this law was successfully executed. Thus General Cobb writes in December, 1864, from Macon, Ga., to the Secretary of War: 'I say to you that you will never get the men into the service who ought to be there through the conscript camp. It would require the whole army to enforce the conscript law if the same state of things exists throughout the Confederacy which I know to be the case in Georgia and Alabama and, I may add, Tennessee.'

"The statement is often made that the Confederate conscription embraced all white males between sixteen and sixty years of age. This is an error. The first act, April 16, 1862, embraced men between eighteen and thirty-five years; the second, of September 27, 1862, men between eighteen and forty-five years; the third and last, of February 17, 1864, men between seventeen and fifty. * * *

"One of the difficulties confronting the conscript officers was the opposition of the Governors of some of the States, notably the Governor of Mississippi, the Governor of North Carolina, and the Governor of Georgia. Thus the doctrine of State rights, which was the bedrock of the Southern Confederacy, became a barrier to the effectiveness of the Confederate government. South Carolina passed an exemption law which nullified to a certain extent the conscript laws of the Confederacy, and Governor Vance, of North Carolina, proposed 'to try title with the Confederate government in resisting the claims of the conscript officers to such citizens of North Carolina as he made claim to for the proper administration of the State.'

"The laws of North Carolina,' General Preston, of the

OldMagazineArticles.com

conscription bureau, complains, 'have created large numbers of officers; and the Governor of that State has not only claimed exemption for those officers, but for all persons employed in any form by the State of North Carolina, such as workers in factories, salt makers, etc. * * * This bureau has no power to enforce the Confederate law in opposition to the * * * claims of the State.'

"Governor Brown, of Georgia, forbade the enrollment of 'large bodies of the citizens of Georgia.' * * * General Preston complains in like strain of the action of the Governor of Mississippi.

"There is an important report by General Preston in February, 1865, in which he gives the number of exempts allowed by the conscript bureau in seven States and parts of two States east of the Mississippi as 66,586. He then gives the agricultural details, those for public necessity and government service, contractors and artisans, a total of 21,414, the whole aggregating 87,990 men. In another report, of November, 1864, he gave the number of State officers on the certificates of Governors in nine States as 18,843. This, with the preceding, makes a grand total of 106,833.

"These are exemptions under the Confederate States' laws in seven States and in parts of two States. They do not include the States west of the Mississippi. But in addition to these there were many thousand exemptions under purely State laws. We have no complete record of these last, but in the State of Georgia alone we have a record of 11,031 such exemptions.

"We may also refer to the statement of General Kemper that in December, 1864, 'the returns of the bureau, obviously imperfect and partial, show 28,035 men in the State of Virginia between eighteen and forty-five exempt and detailed for all causes.' The South having an agricultural population, it was necessary when war came to organize manufactories of every kind of equipment for the army."

From all this may be realized the difficulties in the way of properly recruiting the armies of the Confederacy. The losses in men must be met to keep an army at fighting strength. With its States intrenched in their "rights," withholding citizens from necessary military service, what hope was there for the Southern Confederacy? Its ruin was from within as well as from without.

Confederate Veteran.

March, 1918

p. 100

(a reader's response)

The article in the February VETERAN on "Why the Confederacy Failed" was not intended to create the impression that failure came only because of the numerous exemptions, but to show that as one of the reasons why the armies of the Confederacy could not continue their early successes. The exemptions allowed by the government and others insisted upon by some of the States made it impossible to properly recruit the fast-thinning ranks. It has been said that the Confederacy "robbed the cradle and the grave" in this desperate effort, yet there was much complaint over the exemption of so many capable of bearing arms. For instance, Gen. D. H. Hill was very bitter in his denunciation of those who took refuge behind the exemption laws, saying: "Our cities, towns, and villages are full of able-bodied young skulkers, wearing the semblance of men, who have dodged from the battle field under the provisions of the exemption bill. The scorn of the fair sex and the contempt of all honorable men have not been able to drive these cowardly miscreants into the ranks as long as they can fatten upon the miseries of the country and shelter their worthless carcasses from Yankee bullets, for they are insensible to shame."

There were other causes of failure just as potent, any one of which could have caused the downfall of the Confederacy, and the combination was crushing. B. F. Brown, of Augusta, Ga., who served in Company L, 1st Regiment, South Carolina Volunteers, A. N. V., from 1861 to Appomattox, contributes the following:

"The article 'Why the Confederacy Failed' suggests to me to say that the most satisfactory explanation, to my mind, of the failure of the Southern Confederacy is given in the first paragraph of General Lee's farewell address to the Army of Northern Virginia at Appomattox on the 10th of April, 1865, which is as follows: 'After four years of arduous service, marked by unsurpassed courage and fortitude, the Army of Northern Virginia has been compelled to yield to overwhelming numbers and resources.'

"President Lincoln and General Grant believed that with the destruction of the Army of Northern Virginia the Confederacy would fall, and that is what actually happened. General Grant set out to annihilate General Lee's army, and

he did it; but it took eleven months of ceaseless fighting and marching—from the Wilderness to Appomattox—and overwhelming numbers and resources to do it. The paroles of the soldiers surrendered by General Lee required no obligation that they would not take up arms again, from which it would seem that General Grant believed their fighting days were over. I shall quote here the magnificent tribute of William Swinton to the Army of Northern Virginia in his 'Campaigns of the Army of the Potomac': 'Nor can there fail to arise the image of that other army that was the adversary of the Army of the Potomac—and which who can ever forget that once looked upon it?—that array of "tattered uniforms and bright muskets," that body of incomparable infantry, the Army of Northern Virginia, which for four years carried the revolt on its bayonets, opposing a constant front to the mighty concentration of power brought against it, which, receiving terrible blows, did not fail to give the like, and which, vital in all its parts, died only with its annihilation.' "