



OPEN LETTERS

The Rise of General Grant.

ON the 24th day of May, 1861, from his humble home at Galena, U. S. Grant, then a private citizen of Illinois engaged with his father in the leather trade, despatched a letter to the adjutant-general of the regular army, offering his services to the government during the impending civil war. Although the good offices of an influential person were volunteered, we are told by Grant in the «Memoirs» that he declined all indorsement for permission to fight for his country. So, without support and probably with but little hope, he sent forward the application which has just been found in the files of the War Department, and of which a facsimile is herewith printed for the first time. Aside from extrinsic reasons, I think the reader will agree with me that this letter is a striking paper, by reason of its trenchant conciseness in setting forth that which the writer with undoubted anxiety wished to make known to the military authorities. But in the eyes of the world, the distinction to which Grant subsequently rose gives to it its chief interest, and a value far beyond the ordinary.

While evidently the composition of a man of firm purpose,—one having complete confidence in himself,—there is yet about this application a modest diffidence which is a true index to a great personality. In directness and precision it is remarkable, like all his writings denoting a well-ordered intellect. I have seen letters of six or eight pages, written by Grant amid the wearing excitement of a gigantic and doubtful campaign, without an erasure or interlineation, yet couched in clear, strong English which it is a pleasure to read. There are a score of such in the War Department archives.

The result of this effort was typical of the attitude of the higher authorities toward Grant throughout the earlier months of his career. The application bore no fruit; it was not even answered by the usual courteous note which says nothing. While others from civil life were made major-generals, brigadiers, and colonels, and at once received high commands, the man who modestly thought he might be competent by reason of his education and past service to command a regiment remained unnoticed. Fortunately for the country, Governor Yates took note of Grant's capacity and merits, and conferred upon him the command of an unruly regiment. Thus, ignored at Washington, the future chief, through the local authorities, got his foot upon the first rung of the ladder.

It is very singular, considering Grant's early appearance upon the stage with an important geographical command, and the further and more dominant fact of his conspicuous successes, that the Union military authorities were so belated in «catching on» to the promising

officer Yates had discovered. It is not at all surprising that the general public, with its eyes admiringly fixed on the star performers at the great military headquarters, should overlook the silent man who did not have the trick of advertising his own performances. The people were wistfully looking for the Napoleon they never doubted was concealed somewhere about, ready to spring forth to the supreme command full-fledged, and put down the rebellion in a single brilliant campaign; and not until after McClellan's signal failure did they reluctantly abandon this hope and begin to look around for practical possibilities.

Grant's first military success, vastly important as it was to the cause, to the administration, and to General Halleck's personal fortunes, received but scant notice in high quarters other than in the form of criticism. Even Mr. Lincoln, always generous, and quick to notice successful officers, made no sign. The spontaneous acclaim which greeted lesser exploits of other generals was never heard in the early days in connection with Grant's achievements, and it is a queer fact that, from first to last, they never aroused any enthusiasm for Grant personally. While there were fugitive manifestations of gratitude, there was no popular and official shouting of the kind that, strangely enough, greeted the comparatively barren action of Murfreesboro', for instance, which Halleck effusively asseverated entitled Rosecrans to the «admiration of the world.»

The capture of Donelson, so timely to check the rising European ardor for intervention, was not heralded as a Grant victory. True, the magnitude and far-reaching effects of the blow were fully appreciated by both government and people, but Grant somehow at the time seemed to be dissociated from it. His glory was largely appropriated by others, or cunningly belittled, and for a time he was even deprived of his command. If for a brief moment there was an incipient outbreak threatening to make a hero of the right man, it was at once chilled into silence by Halleck's equivocal reports to McClellan of «disorders» that prevailed after the Confederate surrender, of «insubordination» on Grant's part—wholly unwarranted, as it afterward transpired, but tending none the less to strengthen some vague stories of Grant's «habits» that now began to be raved about, set afloat nobody knows exactly how. Answering, McClellan—reminding one of Artemus Ward's willingness to sacrifice all his wife's relations to put down the rebellion—telegraphed Halleck not to hesitate to arrest Grant if discipline demanded such an extraordinary proceeding.

In the light of what occurred afterward, and of our present minute knowledge of the characters and careers of these three personages, could one well imagine anything more absurdly grotesque than this: two mere theorists, organizers of dress parades as it were, sitting

Galena, Ill.
May 24th 1861

Col. L. Thomas
Adjt. Gen. U.S.A.
Washington D.C.

Sir:

Having served for fifteen years in the regular Army, including four years at West Point, and feeling it the duty of every one who has been educated at the Government expense to offer their services for the support of that Government, I have the honor, very respectfully, to tender my services, until the close of the war, in such capacity as may be offered. I would say that in view of my present age, and length of service, I feel myself competent to command a Regiment if the President, in his judgement, should see fit to entrust one to me.

Since the first call of the President I have been serving on the Staff of the Governor of this State rendering such aid as I could in the organization of our State Militia, and am still engaged in that capacity. A letter addressed to me at Springfield Ill. will reach me.

I am very respectfully,
Your obt. Svt.
U. S. Grant

in solemn judgment upon the man of action in the very midst of a triumphant campaign? Had either McClellan or Halleck at that day won such a victory as Donelson,—an improbable speculation,—he would instantly have been glorified by resolutions of high civic bodies, and showered with congratulatory telegrams. Grant modestly announced the victory to his immediate superior, and, as we have seen, Halleck did the rest. There were no congratulations for Grant. It is doubtful if subsequently there was not a covert attempt to forestall his promotion.

Again, after Shiloh, the original scandal about Grant's «habits» was revived with variations, supplemented with the more cruel falsehood that he had stolidly permitted his army to be surprised and cut to pieces, and was saved from utter annihilation only by the arrival of Buell. The malignancy with which he was pursued is almost past comprehension. He came near being submerged by the storm. A second time Grant was temporarily deprived of his command, much in the same indirect manner, by the same jealous influence, and probably for the same sinister purpose. I doubt if Colonel McClure's ingenious explanation of Grant's temporary effacement is the complete story of that episode.

Shiloh was the first battle-field of the war where carnage rose to the gruesome dignity of the grand scale, and the nerves of the supersensitive were greatly shaken at the spectacle. The battle was a trial of strength between the two armies at the unexpected invitation of the Confederate commander, in which at the close of the first day he was clearly worsted. Six months later, after McClellan and Pope had familiarized the country with lost or drawn battles and the aspect of rivers of human blood, Shiloh would have been hailed for what it actually was,—a real as well as a technical Union victory,—and no attention whatever paid to the butcher's bill, which was equally large on the other side. Ultimately a better understanding of that battle prevailed, accompanied as a natural sequence by a dawning popular comprehension of Grant's scope of usefulness; there was gradual growth of a quiet, yet firm confidence in him as a commander.

Dealing with all sorts of commanders, and particularly with the bad sort—always most in evidence—that failed to accomplish anything of moment except to bring the government into disrepute with the people, in the natural course of events President Lincoln eventually began to note this one man of a genus distinct from his other generals, who always brought victory and honor instead of defeat and humiliation, who needed no urging to go forward, and who accomplished more with less relative means than any other man in the service; and thus noting, his honest heart was glad. And thenceforward Lincoln stood by Grant through thick and thin—one of the very greatest tributes that could be paid to the worth of any man of that epoch. It may be said that this was easy because Grant was almost uniformly successful; yet there was one short period following Shiloh when the President's powerful support was necessary to save him from obscurity. Even then the President had not come to a full appreciation of Grant's sterling qualities as a commander.

Colonel McClure records that just after Shiloh he went to Washington, at the instance of the sentiment-

lists, to secure Grant's removal from command. After listening in gloomy silence to McClure's earnest representations concerning the Western general's unpopularity, intemperance, and incompetence, which were steadily dragging the administration down to ruin, and every possible appeal for an immediate change, the President straightened himself up and with earnest decision said, «I can't spare this man; *he fights.*» This closed the conference; Colonel McClure perceived that Mr. Lincoln's resolution was unalterable.

Grant never had a personal following in the country at large, like that of McClellan or Rosecrans, by whom their important services were, without question or criticism, accepted at their own valuation and even exaggerated. His battles and victories—some of them equal to the most brilliant in the annals of war—were received by the public either with cold, analytical reserve, or at best in measured terms of praise. Yet, as I have said, it was looking and longing for a military idol. Why, then, it should fight off Grant's fame until the final test, should begrudgingly yield to him its plaudits only at the eleventh hour, goes beyond my comprehension; it is rather a matter of astonishment that he was not fairly overwhelmed with cheap honors and lip-service. This strange, half-hearted manner on the part of the public of tendering its applause for magnificent offerings of victory may have been one of the «mysteries of Grant» of which General Badeau tells us, but it was more probably the result of the systematic attacks made with a purpose to prevent his rise. They were so plausibly and persistently urged as to mislead many honest men; for a time it was generally believed that his successes were the result, perhaps, of mere blundering luck.

General Horace Porter has said that General Grant's «unassuming manner, and absolute loyalty to his superiors and to the work in which he was engaged, inspired loyalty in others, and gained him the devotion of the humblest of his subordinates.» And on his own part, Grant's tenacious loyalty to friendship was so unfeigned and marked a characteristic as to be a positive eccentricity. Herein we have the key to one of the great forces of his character: he was endowed with that singular quality which, without effort, bound to himself with hooks of steel the unhesitating confidence, the unqualified love, of every one who was thrown into intimate personal or official association with him. One and all, those who knew him most thoroughly became his unquestioning adherents. This is a most extraordinary fact in connection with one who, apparently repellent to the world at large, was almost throughout his public career the victim of the malevolent calumny of designing cabals, always decried, misunderstood, and underestimated. Yet he was unobtrusive, avoided personal controversies, and shunned politics; solicited no favors; never annoyed his superiors or the government with importunities or demands of any kind, except for permission to press forward; and interfered with nobody except the enemy. The antithesis developed in these attributes of Grant's personality is so remarkable as to have fixed the attention of abler students of ethnology than myself.

But Grant was not prone to lavish his friendships indiscriminately. He was not lacking in penetration, nor was he a dull student of mankind. The official records,

and especially those made by himself, leave no room for doubt that he had a keen discernment of character, but more especially of those elements that make the good soldier. After he attained to the dignity of exercising his own choice, he seldom erred in the selection of agents to carry on military operations. The rise of Sherman, McPherson, Sheridan, Schofield, Ord, Terry, and of some younger men like James H. Wilson and Emory Upton, aside from their high intrinsic merits, was largely owing to Grant's appreciation. On the other hand, he had but little patience with slow and inefficient officers, and none whatever with worthless ones; and he did not lack the moral nerve to put them aside whenever the necessity occurred or opportunity offered.

The deeper one dives into the official archives, the more his admiration and respect for Grant increases. His own letters and reports are the strongest evidence of a thoroughly honest and upright nature, as well as of his singleness of purpose and his comprehensive ability. There is no posing for effect, no waste of words in fine writing; everything is simple, earnest, and straightforward. His style is admirable; not an undignified line, nor a base or cunning motive, can be detected in all his multitudinous correspondence, public and private. Of course the greater part of the mass was written without expectation or design that it would ever see the light, and hence is all the more valuable and reliable as an index to a character which has been somewhat of a puzzle to superficial observers.

In Vol. XXXI, Part II, of the War Records, at page 402, there is a striking letter bearing upon Grant's personal and military character which, having never been exploited in the public press, may prove interesting to the reader in connection with the foregoing speculations. It has additional value from its authorship and its entirely voluntary character. General Hunter could have no other motive than to write the truth in a confidential communication of this nature. Previous to the battle of Missionary Ridge, Hunter, then temporarily out of employment, but having the personal goodwill of both the President and the Secretary of War, was sent west on a tour of inspection. After visiting Grant at Chattanooga, he reported to Secretary Stanton as follows:

LOUISVILLE, KY., December 14, 1863.

HON. E. M. STANTON,

Secretary of War, Washington.

DEAR SIR: I arrived at Chattanooga a month since, and was received by General Grant with the greatest kindness. He gave me his bed, shared with me his room, gave me to ride his favorite war-horse, read to me his despatches received and sent, accompanied me on my reviews, and I accompanied him on all his excursions and during the three days of battle. In fact, I saw him almost every moment, except when sleeping, of the three weeks I spent in Chattanooga.

I mention these, to you, otherwise very unimportant facts, to show you that I had a first-rate opportunity of judging of the man. He is a hard worker, writes his own despatches and orders, and does his own thinking. He is modest, quiet, never swears, and seldom drinks, as he only took two drinks during the three weeks I was with him. He listens quietly to the opinions of others and then judges promptly for himself; and he is prompt to avail himself in the field of all the errors of his enemy. He is certainly a good judge of men, and has called around him valuable counselors.

Prominent as General Grant is before the country, these remarks of mine may appear trite and uncalled for; but having been ordered to inspect his command, I thought it not improper for me to add my testimony with regard to the commander. I will also add that I am fully convinced the change of com-

manders was not made an hour too soon, and that if it had not been made just when it was we should have been driven from the Valley of the Tennessee, if not from the whole State. . . .

I have the honor to be, very respectfully,

Your most obedient servant,

D. HUNTER, Major-General.

While another general, encamped in middle Tennessee with seventy thousand men,—the largest available army in the West,—was answering the government's eager promptings to move against an inferior enemy with urgent requests for reinforcements, and meanwhile doing nothing, Grant was energetically prosecuting a campaign for the reduction of Vicksburg with a force no more than equal to the enemy he was to overcome, and twenty-five thousand less than Rosecrans's army.

The contrast in the character and attitude of the two chief commanders in the West during the spring and early summer of 1863 must have been an object-lesson to the Washington military authorities, and certainly not to the disadvantage of Grant; for it only served to emphasize, to bring into bolder relief, his high qualifications for the most important and trying duties. He made no requisitions or demands whatever upon the President, not even for time; as soon as opportunity offered, without pressing, he at once took the field with what force he had, depending on conditions and the development of events to denote to the government his necessities as they occurred.

Before the government was fairly aware that the campaign was inaugurated, Grant, confounding the enemy by his well-dissembled movements, had swiftly beaten Pemberton at every point, and had him safely «holed up» in Vicksburg. It was evident that Pemberton must eventually succumb unless he was relieved, and also plain that outside relief was hopeless if Grant was strongly reinforced. It is noteworthy that, while Grant energetically began to concentrate all the available troops in his own department in the trenches before the city, he still made no appeal or representations to Washington; he let the situation speak for itself. During the entire two months' campaign Grant sent to Washington no more than two or three communications. The President found no occasion to bother him with orders, suggestions, or appeals to beat up the enemy; neither did Grant importune the President for reinforcements and munitions. He, nevertheless, got all he needed, and soon had Vicksburg environed with eighty thousand men.

Among the reinforcing troops sent to Vicksburg were two divisions of the Ninth Corps from General Burnside's command in the Department of the Ohio. Upon Pemberton's surrender, Grant notified the President that he would immediately return to Burnside the borrowed troops, of which fact the Secretary of War in turn notified Burnside; but Grant changed his mind, and sent them out with Sherman against General Johnston. After waiting some time, Burnside became very impatient; he finally complained to the President that Grant was not «toting fair,» and was still detaining his troops. Thereupon Mr. Lincoln sent to General Burnside the following reply:

WAR DEPARTMENT, WASHINGTON, D. C., July 27, 1863.

Major-General BURNSIDE, Cincinnati, O.

Let me explain. In General Grant's first despatch after the fall of Vicksburg, he said, among other things, he would send the Ninth Corps to you. Thinking it would be pleasant to you,

I asked the Secretary of War to telegraph you the news. For some reasons, never mentioned to us by General Grant, they have not been sent, though we have seen outside intimations that they took part in the expedition against Jackson. General Grant is a copious worker and fighter, but a very meager writer or telegrapher. No doubt he changed his purpose in regard to the Ninth Corps for some sufficient reason, but has forgotten to notify us of it.

A. LINCOLN.¹

Under the circumstances, and in the light of his experience of the previous two years with army commanders, Mr. Lincoln's characterization of Grant was a panegyric. Some of them had been exactly the reverse—very copious writers and telegraphers, but meager workers and fighters.

These two letters, together with his original tender of service, show the characteristics which were the foundation of Grant's final rise to the supreme command unquestioned, and afterward to an unexampled personal influence. He was no politician; his success was due solely to solid merit. The coy maiden, Fame, was won as Vicksburg was reduced—only after a long siege. When Lee surrendered at Appomattox Grant was only forty-three years old. With a genius for war, in spite of every obstacle, by courage and uncomplaining persistence, from comparative obscurity Grant raised himself to the highest pinnacle of an honorable ambition. His name will stand on the same plane with Lin-

¹ See Hay and Nicolay's "Complete Works of Abraham Lincoln."

coln and Washington. Slow to mature, but at last securely fixed, his fame will survive as long as the records of the period last; and it will grow as the centuries pass, and the power of the nation he served increases, as it must increase, beyond the grandeur of Rome or any other known in history.

Leslie J. Perry.

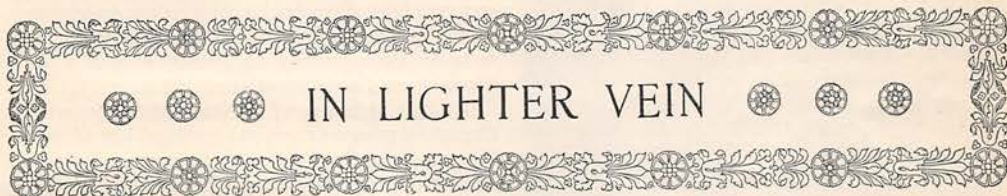
WAR RECORDS OFFICE, Washington.

Tramps and Whipping-posts.

A LETTER from Frankfort, Indiana, expresses dissent from the whipping-post communication printed in this department. The writer, the Rev. Demetrius Tillotson, referring to the law to make vagrancy a crime, says:

«It would be necessary only that employment be found that would enable the individual to secure food and shelter to make such a law practical. The establishment of food and shelter depots patterned after those in General Booth's social scheme, where the individual is compelled to work before he can eat, would be more Christian, less expensive in the end to society, and far more effectual than the whipping-post. No remedy, however, will ever be effectual until the sources of supply are destroyed.

«Eighty per cent. of the tramps in the United States have been produced, either directly or indirectly, through the influence of the saloon; and until this evil is done away with no permanent cure can be expected.»



IN LIGHTER VEIN

The Maxim.

ONE golden drop, from countless roses pressed,
Hands down an Orient garden to the West:
From age to age a proverb thus survives,
The lasting essence of unnumbered lives.

Dora Read Goodale.

To the Hero of a Scientific Romance.

If you wish, go be a pig,
In and out of season;
But don't bore us with a big
Philosophic reason.

Finance at the Lyceum.

YES, sir: down at our lyceum we discussed the finance cause,
An' some needed legislatin' fer revisin' of the laws.
Silas Simpkins spoke fer fi-at (this, o' course, was fore Si died),
An' a little cuss named Taylor 'lowed he'd take the other side
(One o' them Oak Valley Taylors—got a sorter snappy eye).

R.

So the rest of us jest lis'ened, though we mos'ly favored Si;
Fer he use' to talk an' whittle while the seasons went an' came,
An' we knew that he was loaded fer the biggest kind o' game.

Si riz first, an' he orated fer about a half a' hour;
An' I recollec' he stated that the nation had the power
To pervide us all with greenbacks long 's their printin'-press 'ud run;
An' he told about a ratio which he called sixteen to one,
An' some gole-bugs; an' he said he would n't take no gold in his,
Fer he 'lowed a paper dollar was the best one that they is—
(Er a silver)—an' concludin', Si said p'intedly, said he,
«If the banks won't take yer fi-at, you jes' bring it roun' to me.»

Wal, that little Taylor feller had been lis'nin' all the while,
An' he riz when Si had finished, with a sorter knowin' smile,
An' he said that Si was crafty, but he 'lowed that he 'ud vote