

The last Confederate surrender.

By Lt. Gen. Richard Taylor.

[The following is one of a series of “chapters of unwritten history” now being published in the Philadelphia *Weekly Times*. Our readers will thank us for republishing this paper of our distinguished soldier.]

To write an impartial and unprejudiced account of exciting contemporary events has always been a difficult task. More especially is this true of civil strife, which, like all “family jars,” evolves a peculiar flavor of bitterness. But slight sketches of minor incidents, by actors and eye-witnesses, may prove of service to the future writer, who undertakes the more ambitious and severe duty of historian. The following “memoir pour servir” has this object:

In the summer of 1864, after the close of the Red river campaign, I was ordered to cross the Mississippi and report my arrival on the east bank by telegraph to Richmond. All the fortified posts on the river were held by the Federals, and the intermediate portions of the stream closely guarded by gunboats to impede and, as far as possible, prevent passage. This delayed the transmission of the order above-mentioned until August, when I crossed at a point just above the mouth of the Red river. On a dark night, in a small canoe, with horses swimming alongside, I got over without attracting the attention of a gunboat anchored a short distance below. Woodville, Wilkinson county, Mississippi, was the nearest place in telegraphic communication with Richmond. Here, in reply to a dispatch to Richmond, I was directed to assume command of the Department of Alabama, Mississippi, etc., with headquarters at Meridian, Mississippi, and informed that President Davis would, at an early day, meet me at Montgomery, Alabama. The military situation was as follows: Sherman occupied Atlanta, Hood lying some distance to the southwest; Farragut had forced the defences of Mobile bay, capturing Fort Morgan, etc., and the Federals held Pensacola, but had made no movement into the interior.

The closing scenes.

Major-General Maury commanded the Confederate forces garrisoning Mobile and adjacent works, with Commodore Farrand, Confederate Navy, in charge of several armed vessels. Small bodies of troops were stationed at different points through the department, and Major-General Forrest, with his division of cavalry, was in northeast Mississippi. Directing this latter officer to move his command across the Tennessee river, and use every effort to interrupt Sherman's communications south of Nashville, I proceeded to Mobile to inspect the fortifications; thence to Montgomery, to meet President Davis. The interview extended over many hours, and the military situation was freely discussed. Our next meeting [156] was at Fortress Monroe, where, during his confinement, I obtained permission to visit him. The closing scenes of the great drama succeeded each other with startling rapidity. Sherman marched, unopposed, to the sea. Hood was driven from Nashville across the Tennessee, and asked to be relieved. Assigned to this duty I met him near Tupelo, North Mississippi, and witnessed the melancholy spectacle presented by a retreating army. Guns, small arms and accoutrements lost,

men without shoes or blankets, and this in a winter of unusual severity for that latitude. Making every effort to re-equip this force, I suggested to General Lee, then commanding all the armies of the Confederacy, that it should be moved to the Carolinas, to interpose between Sherman's advance and his (Lee's) lines of supply, and, in the last necessity, of retreat. The suggestion was adopted, and this force so moved. General Wilson, with a well appointed and ably led command of Federal cavalry, moved rapidly through North Alabama, seized Selma, and turning east to Montgomery, continued into Georgia.

General Canby, commanding the Union armies in the Southwest, advanced up the Eastern shore of Mobile bay, and invested Spanish fort and Blakely, important Confederate works in that quarter. After repulsing an assault, General Maury, in accordance with instructions, withdrew his garrisons in the night to Mobile, and then evacuated the city, falling back to Meridian, on the line of the Mobile and Ohio railway. General Forrest was drawn in to the same point, and the little army, less than eight thousand of all arms, held in readiness to discharge such duties as the waning fortunes of the "cause" and the honor of its arms might demand.

Soldierly courtesy.

Intelligence of Lee's surrender reached us. Staff officers from Johnston and Sherman came across the country to inform Canby and myself of their "convention." Whereupon, an interview was arranged between us to determine a course of action, and a place selected ten miles north of Mobile, near the railway. Accompanied by a staff officer, Colonel William M. Levy (now a member of Congress from Louisiana), and making use of a "hand car," I reached the appointed spot, and found General Canby with a large escort, and many staff and other officers. Among these I recognized some old friends, notably General Canby himself and Admiral James Palmer. All extended cordial greetings. A few moments of private conversation with Canby led to the establishment of a truce, to await further intelligence from the North. Forty-eight hours notice was to be given by the party desiring to terminate the truce. We then joined the throng of officers, and although every one present felt a deep conviction that the last hour of the sad struggle approached, no allusion was made to it. Subjects, awakening memories of the past, when all were sons of a loved, united country, were, as by the natural selection of good breeding, chosen. A bountiful luncheon was soon spread, and I was invited [157] to partake of patis, champagne-frappe, and other "delights," which to me had long been as lost arts. As we took our seats at table, a military band in attendance commenced playing Hail Columbia. Excusing himself, General Canby walked to the door. The music ceased for a moment, and then the strain of "Dixie" was heard. Old Froissart records no gentler act of "courtesie." Warmly thanking General Canby for his delicate consideration, I asked for Hail Columbia, and proposed we should unite in the hope that our Columbia would soon be, once more, a happy land. This and other kindred sentiments were duly honored in "frappe," and after much pleasant intercourse, the party separated.

The surrender.

The succeeding hours were filled with a grave responsibility,—which could not be evaded or shared. Circumstances had appointed me to watch the dying agonies of a cause that had fixed the attention of the world. To my camp, as the last refuge in the storm, came many members of the Confederate Congress. These gentlemen were urged to go at once to their respective homes, and, by precept and example, teach the people to submit to the inevitable, obey the laws, and resume the peaceful occupations on which society depends. This advice was followed, and with excellent effect on public tranquility.

General Canby dispatched that his government disavowed the Johnston-Sherman convention, and it would be his duty to resume hostilities. Almost at the same instant came the news of Johnston's surrender. There was no room for hesitancy. Folly and madness combined would not have justified an attempt to prolong a hopeless contest.

General Canby was informed that I desired to meet him for the purpose of negotiating a *surrender* of my forces, and that Commodore Farrand, commanding the armed vessels in the Alabama river, desired to meet Rear Admiral Thatcher for a similar purpose. Citronville, some forty miles north of Mobile, was the appointed place, and there in the early days of May, 1865, the great war virtually ended.

After this, no hostile gun was fired, and the authority of the United States was supreme in the land. Conditions of surrender were speedily determined, and of a character to soothe the pride of the vanquished; officers to retain side-arms, troops to turn in arms and equipments to their own ordnance officers, so of the quartermaster and commissary stores; the Confederate cotton agent for Alabama and Mississippi to settle his accounts with the Treasury Agent of the United States; muster rolls to be prepared, etc.; transportation to be provided for the men. All this under my control and supervision. Here a curious incident may be mentioned. At an early period of the war, when Colonel Sidney Johnston retired to the south of Tennessee river, Isham G. Harris, Governor of Tennessee, accompanied him, taking, at the same time, the coin [158] from the vaults of the State Bank of Tennessee, at Nashville. This coin, in the immediate charge of a bonded officer of the bank, had occasioned much solicitude to the Governor in his many wanderings. He appealed to me to assist in the restoration of the coin to the bank. At my request, General Canby detailed an officer and escort, and the money reached the bank intact. This is the Governor Harris recently elected United States Senator by his State.

After the War.

The condition of the people of Alabama and Mississippi was at this time deplorable. The waste of war had stripped large areas of the necessaries of life. In view of this, I suggested to General Canby that his troops, sent to the interior, should be limited to the number required for the preservation of order, and be stationed at points where supplies were more abundant. That trade would soon be established between soldiers and people — furnishing the latter with currency, of which they were destitute — and friendly relations promoted. These suggestions were adopted, and a day or two thereafter, at Meridian, a note was received from General Canby, inclosing copies of orders to Generals Granger and Steele, commanding army corps, by which it

appeared these officers were directed to call on me for and conform to advice relative to movements of their troops. Strange, indeed, must such confidence appear to statesmen of the “bloody-shirt” persuasion. In due time, Federal staff-officers reached my camp. The men were paroled and sent home. Public property was turned over and receipted for, and this as orderly and quietly as in time of peace between officers of the same service.

What years of discord, bitterness, injustice and loss would not our country have been spared had the wounds of war healed “by first intention” under the tender ministrations of the hands that fought the battles! But the task was allotted to ambitious partisans, most of whom had not heard the sound of a gun. As of old, the Lion and the Bear fight openly and sturdily — the stealthy Fox carries off the prize.