

DISBANDING OF THE CONFEDERATE ARMY

GREAT STORY OF FACT
FOR MEMORIAL DAY.

BY IDA M. TARBELL.

Surrender of Lee and the Other Southern Armies—Pathetic Struggles of the Horseless and Provisionless Soldiers to Reach Their Homes and to Locate Their Loved Ones—Kindness of the Union Soldiers to Thousands of Their Late Enemies—Awful Desolation of the South.

FOR a week the army of Northern Virginia had been fighting and retreating on parched corn. 57,000 men pursued by 125,000. They had done their best, but now, on April 9, they were worn "to a frazzle," all but 28,000 of their number had been captured, killed or scattered, and on all sides they were surrounded by the Federals.

It was not their hunger or weariness which occupied their thoughts at this moment, however; it was the dismal fact that off there a little distance their commander, General Lee, was surrendering to General Grant. Had he asked them to cut their way out of the circle which held them, battered and starved as they were, they would have tried to do it, but to submit to surrender—that was harder.

Yet, when, a few days later, the terms of the surrender arranged, the General, grave and pale, rode the length of their lines, they crowded about him as he went, their eyes wet with tears, their voices choked with sobs, struggling to kiss his hands, even to touch his horse—to show in some way that, bitter as their hearts were, there was nothing in them but love and honor for him.

The next day these men who had fought from Bull Run to Petersburg, and won as brilliant victories as history records, marched up, stacked their muskets, signed a printed form of parole not to take arms again against the United States, and that alone in their pockets to face the world with, scattered north and south, east and west.

The news of Lee's surrender spread slowly but steadily through the Confederacy. By the evening of the 10th it had reached a force of 7000 or 8000 men near Christiansburg. At first the officers tried to conceal it from the men, but it could not be hushed.

"Before we had concluded our brief conversation," writes Colonel Duke, one of the staff, "we knew from the hum and stir in the anxious dark-browed crowds nearest us, from excitement which soon grew to tumult, that the terrible tidings had got abroad. That night no man slept. Strange as the declaration may sound now, there was not one of the 6000 or 7000 then gathered at Christiansburg who had entertained the slightest thought that such an event could happen, and doubtless that feeling pervaded the ranks of the Confederacy."

"During all the night officers and men were congregated in groups and crowds discussing the news. Great fires were lighted, every group had its orators, who, succeeding each other, spoke continuously. Every conceivable suggestion was offered. Some advocated a guerrilla warfare; some proposed marching to the trans-Mississippi and thence to Mexico; the more practical and reasonable, of course, proposed that an effort to join General Johnston should immediately be made."

Surrender of the Other Armies.

Spreading southward, the news on the 12th reached Joe Johnston whose army was in North Carolina, facing that of Sherman. Johnston knew only too well what Lee's surrender meant for him, and on the 13th asked Sherman for a suspension of active operations. Two weeks later he surrendered his entire force. The effect of the news was the same on the only other Confederate army east of the Mississippi—that of Dick Taylor, which on May 4 surrendered to General Canby.

The principal Confederate force west of the Mississippi was stationed in Texas. There was no telegraph beyond the boundary line at that date, only one railroad penetrated the state, and the harbors were all blockaded, so that it was late in April before the news came to Texas. There came with it rumors that President Davis and his Cabinet and the armies of Johnston and Taylor were on their way to the trans-Mississippi region, and that there a new stand was to be taken and a new country opened. Over this rumor such hopes were built that there was no thought of surrender. Mass meetings of citizens and soldiers were held all over the state, and resolutions of resistance adopted.

But swift upon the report that Johnston and Taylor had escaped came reports of their surrender. As soon as this news was confirmed in Texas there followed in the army what was long known as the "break-up." It was a widespread and immediate decamping of the soldiers with whatever army property they could get their hands on. Officers awakened in the morning to find that where they had had three companies at night they had one now. In squads, singly or by twos, the soldiers started for home without as much as a word of farewell. It was a complete conviction that the game was up and that they must shift for themselves which had taken hold of the Texas army, and to which only a minority were sufficiently superior to remain until their officers could give them proper discharge papers.

Thus in six weeks an army scattered over a country nearly 2000 miles in length and 1000 in width—an army which had conducted a brave resistance for four years and crumbled into its original units. The great bulk of this army took the first step in their disbandment according to the rules laid down by their victors. It was only a small percentage which refused their compliance and decamped at the word of surrender. The men who left thus unceremoniously were of two classes, those who were sick of the whole business and simply wanted to get home

as quickly as possible, and those who were unwilling to give up fighting. The former was by far the larger class, but both classes contributed to the disorders which followed the surrender of General Lee.

Men Without a Country.

But whether the disbanding soldiers complied with the Federal regulations or not, whether they took to the mountains and bayous or started on the nearest route to their homes, they were in a curious and perplexing position. They were literally men without a country. The government which had enlisted and supported them was dead, its officials were prisoners, its constitution void, its currency worthless. At the outset a dreadful practical question faced them. How were they going to get to their former homes? They had no money. Whatever funds their generals had been able to get hold of had been divided among them, but it was the merest pittance. Johnston, when he saw surrender was inevitable, had secured money to pay his men and officers \$1 apiece. Lee's men had received nothing.

Peniless as they were, nothing but walking or working their way would have been left to the entire Confederate Army if the Federals had not wisely and justly come to their relief. General Grant inaugurated this movement by allowing Lee's men to keep their horses. He also allowed his own quartermasters to turn over to the Confederates whatever horses and mules they could spare. Johnston's army fared a little better, for not only were they given their animals, but it was arranged that those who lived beyond the Mississippi should have transportation by water to some Southern port. The same arrangements were made for Taylor's army.

With the signing of the paroles all organization ceased, and the men were expected to disperse. Those who had horses mounted them, and in twos and threes or half-dozen rode away. Sometimes a body of men, whose homes were far away, were kept together and marched under Federal directions to a convenient point, and a limited amount of transportation furnished to them which would bring them within easier distance of their journey's end. Often and often there were no horses or mules, no transportation, and the men were obliged to shift for themselves, with the result that thousands straggled across country afoot, often for hundreds of miles, trusting to the hospitality of the people for food.

"I am daily touched to the heart," wrote a correspondent of the New York Tribune in May, "by seeing these poor, homeless boys and exhausted men wandering about in threadbare uniforms, with scanty outfit of slender haversack and blanket-roll hung over their shoulders, seeking the nearest route home; they have a careworn and anxious look, a played-out manner."

The worst of the ordeal of these men, who had begun to disband in this hap-

azard way, was not getting home; it was what they found when they got there. The inventory of destruction in the South by the war is appalling. From the Potomac to the Rappahannock the country was cleaned of fences, of trees, of landmarks of every description. At Manassas, a town of 40 or 50 houses before the war, there stood now 40 or 50 chimneys. From the Rappahannock to Richmond all Eastern Virginia was a great and desolate battlefield, its only crop rusty cantons and moldy bread, knapacks and exploded shells, and, thick as the grass in Spring—mine balls. Richmond, after the havoc of a long siege, had been swept by fire.

Across South Carolina, Georgia and Alabama lay the path of devastation wrought by Sherman's Army. In the streets of Charleston the grass was growing. At Columbia, S. C., there was block upon block of dwellings, shops and institutions of which nothing was left but jagged brick walls and slender, melancholy chimneys. Atlanta, Chattanooga, Vicksburg, Nashville had been riddled by shell and turned topsyturvy by hostile occupation. For four years only irregular crops had been put in, and though there was cotton left in the country, there was no way for its owners to secure it or dispose of it. Most of the great manufacturing of the South were destroyed or shut down.

Not only were fully two-thirds of all property destroyed and all industries at a standstill, but those fundamental contrivances by which property is made productive and put into circulation were destroyed. Their labor system was wiped out by the emancipation of the slaves. The railroads were gone, tracks torn up, bridges destroyed, engines and cars worn out. Their ports had been long blockaded and their shipping was destroyed. There was no postal system and their money was useless, except as it could be disposed of to curiosity hunters.

It was through this desolation that the disbanding Confederates made their way to their homes. All of those who lived in the track of the armies were haunted, not only by the fear of finding their homes destroyed, but finding their families scattered. It had been necessary for women and children all over Eastern and Northern Virginia to fly from the country. Sherman had driven the entire population from Atlanta when he left the city for his march to the sea. Not wishing to feed and guard them, as would have been necessary. Everywhere the people had scattered at the coming of the soldiers, hundreds going to Texas, a few to Europe, many to Canada, thousands into the portions of the states outside of the track of battle. The returning soldiers frequently knew little or nothing of where their loved ones had gone, and had no idea of how they would reach them.

Starting Life All Over.

Once back in their homes, the disbanding soldiers were met by the long series of difficult questions incident to the condition of the country, the first and most imperative of which was usually how to get bread for the coming year. As a rule, there was nothing for them to do but take hold of the humblest tasks. Take Richmond, for example. The town was in such condition that business could not be carried on. Its ruins had to be cleared away and the streets rebuilt. Nothing is finer than the way in which the men of the highest breeding and education went to pulling down the



THEIR NATIVE TOWN—"AT COLUMBIA, SOUTH CAROLINA, THERE WAS BLOCK UPON BLOCK OF DWELLINGS, SHOPS AND INSTITUTIONS OF WHICH NOTHING WAS LEFT BUT JAGGED BRICK WALLS AND SLENDER, MELANCHOLY CHIMNEYS."

walls, clearing brick, laying foundations. John S. Wise, in his entertaining volume, "The End of an Era," says of the laborers he found filling the streets of Richmond in the month after the surrender: "Many of them I knew well—men of as good social position as my own; soldiers come home and resolved not to be idle, but to work for an honest living in any way in which they could make it. Sitting in the sun with their trousers jabbing away in awkward fashion at their

new and unaccustomed tasks, covered with dust and blisters they were the same bright, cheerful fellows who had learned to labor in that state of life to which it had pleased God to call them. Just as they had been willing followers, in sunshine and in storm, of their beloved Lee. At night, with their day's wages in their pockets, they would go home, change their clothing, take a bath and associate with their families—not at all ashamed of their labors, but making a joke of their newly discovered method of earning a sustenance."

Many of these people had property, to be sure, but it was impossible for them to realize as it, even if they had wished to sacrifice it, nobody being willing to buy property which might be liable later to confiscation. There were hundreds, too, who owned valuable jewels, plate, pictures or furniture which they would have disposed of if they had been able. One of the most pathetic editorials in the early numbers of the Richmond "Whig" is one headed, "A Pawnbroker Wanted," explaining the need there was of such a dealer in the town.

Dire Straits of Planters.

Perhaps nothing could illustrate better the straits to which the planters were put than the following actual experience related to the writer:

In April, 1865, Lawrence Tallaferra, who for four years had been with Lee's army, returned to his home on the north side of the Rappahannock, perhaps 12 miles from Fredericksburg. He was 25 years of age. When he went into the war his father owned a farm of several hundred acres, with handsome buildings, fine stock and 500 negroes.

Lawrence Tallaferra had always lived the life of a son of a country gentleman. Returning to Fredericksburg penniless, he crossed the river and started across country to his old home. Before he had gone a mile he had lost his way. The country, which he had once known as well as one knows the different halls and rooms of his own house, was like a foreign field to him. The forest had been cleared, and where once there had been a single road there were now 30. The Army of the Potomac of over 100,000 men had occupied this place almost continuously from November, 1862, until May, 1863. They had cut every tree and sapling for miles in every direction, to get fuel to burn, logs for their huts and corduroy for their roads.

When Lawrence Tallaferra attempted to get to his old home, he was in a country of which he knew nothing. His way lost, he could only wander from one new road to another, until at last he came upon an unfamiliar hut. He rapped and an old darky came out. He was one of his father's former slaves, and the man conducted him to his old home. All out-houses and fences had disappeared, as well as the shade trees and shrubbery. There was only the shell of the house. He found his father and sister living there. Two of the old servants had remained, refusing to leave their master.

Upon inquiry, he found that all that was left of the farm property was one old mule and a much-patched harness. A few days after his return, an older brother came back from Lee's army and brought with him a worn-out horse. Then began the struggle for daily bread. The two young men pitched up the harness for the mule and horse, borrowed an old plow and began to prepare the ground for a garden.

They had not been at home many days when they learned that a couple of men were in Fredericksburg buying bones. Now for miles around Fredericksburg the fields were thick with the bones of worn-out mules and horses, which had died during that long period when the country was occupied by Northern and Southern troops. As soon as the Tallaferras discovered that these bones were salable, they borrowed from a friend the remnant of a wagon and started out to pick them up. As the result of two days' work they found they had 200 pounds, which they sold for 2 cents a pound. "I thought my fortune was made when I got that money," said Mr. Tallaferra. From that time on they put in every hour of daylight gathering up bones, while the two old darkies were putting in the garden and preparing the ground for corn.

They carried on the bone business for a month, when they made a new discovery. Quantities of old linen were lying on the fields. This they found was salable, and accordingly they went into the junk business. They were much crippled in their work by the fact that their team was so poor that not more than half a day's work could possibly be gotten out of it.

The Kindness of the Federals.

This had been going on about a month when a great piece of good fortune fell to them. A wing of the Federal Army, marching north passed near their home, and one night the Tallaferras were visited by two Union officers. They had come, they said, to see if old Mr. Tallaferra was living and in good health. It seems that at the time the Union Army had been encamped on and around his plantation the old gentleman had become a great favorite with the officers.

The visitors were invited in, and the Tallaferras did their best to give them a good supper. The men were very much pleased with their entertainment, and when they went home insisted that the boys should go over to the army with their wagon the next day and return their visit. This they did, and when they started to go home, they found that the wagon had been filled with coffee, sugar, bacon, etc. "Enough," said Mr. Tallaferra, "to last six months."

And not only this: one of the officers went to the quartermaster and said, "See here, aren't you turning loose every day a great number of mules which can't keep up with the Army? Haven't you now three or four which you know you will soon have to



MAKING THEIR WAY HOMEWARD—"IN MANY PLACES THE NEWS OF THE SURRENDER HAD NOT BEEN HEARD, AND THE WORN-OUT SOLDIERS MUST NEEDS REHEARSE IT AGAIN."