

JOSEPH E. JOHNSTON.

A General whose Supreme Capacity was Constantly Kept Established by the Blunders of His Government and His Subordinates.—His Career the Most Remarkable Anomaly in Military Annals.

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The military career of General Joseph E. Johnston, in the Confederate service, presents features so extraordinary as to be well worthy of a critical and dispassionate review. This officer was one of the two men that took the foremost lead in the active operations of the great civil war on the southern side, the other being General Robert E. Lee. Both were continuously identified with the important movements and decisive events of the struggle. Both stood the admitted leaders of the Confederate armies, the authors of Confederate strategy, and the executive spirits of Confederate warfare. Both were Virginians, both men of distinguished service and reputation before the war, both individuals of lofty personal character, but they were in the qualities of their genius and the details of their service, fame and career, during the bloody contest, strikingly unlike.

The death of Lee has left his illustrious colleague the most famous and brilliant leader of the South. Like Lee, Johnston was an hereditary soldier and statesman. His family, for generations, had been connected in illustrious capacity with Virginia history. The two names rang in the annals of the State with clarion fame, illuminating its soldierhood, diplomacy and statesmanship. They were names representing virtue, courage, capacity and patriotism. And the two descendants of a noble lineage have preserved the stainless manhood of their ancestral character.

THE ANOMALY OF JOHNSTON'S CAREER.

In summing up Johnston's career in the late war it is not an exaggeration to say that it perhaps presents the most remarkable anomaly of military annals. From the beginning to the end he was distrusted and depreciated by the Confederate authorities; yet he held from first to last the confidence and admiration of armies and people. And every effort of the several made to retire him to obscurity but strengthened him in popular esteem, and resulted in calling him to new exaltation of power, new display of genius and increase of fame. It seemed impossible to dispense with him. The public outcry for his installation in responsible leadership was irresistible. His genius was openly decried, and his administration condemned by his superiors, yet it was utterly in vain so far as the public confidence was concerned. The people stubbornly believed in him, and the soldiers clamored for his Generalship, and fought under it with an unshakable trust and a loving enthusiasm. And while he labored under a continuous censure from the Confederate rulers he enjoyed a constant triumph of praise from the masses of the people. It certainly presents a strange incident of the war, this incongruity of Johnston's connection with the struggle.

JOHNSTON'S ANTE-WAR RECORD.

It is only necessary to make the brief statement that General Johnston, before the war, won distinction in the old army, and was the ranking officer of the old West Point graduates that

came to the South. He had been distinguished in the Florida war and in Mexico. He had an acknowledged reputation for soldierly heroism and military genius. He was a Brigadier General when the war commenced and Quartermaster General of the United States. He was commissioned in the Confederate service as one of the five Generals created, the others being Samuel Cooper, Albert Sidney Johnston, Robert E. Lee, and G. P. T. Beauregard. General Joseph E. Johnston, was placed third in rank. The *esprit* of the soldier places high value upon the right rank in military promotion. The true Knight, imbued with the spirit of chivalry, and educated in the code of the warrior, is jealous of military privilege, and tenacious of the tenure of an honorable and legitimate seniority of commission. General Johnston, under the inspiration of this natural spirit of the self-respecting soldier, addressed a letter to Mr. Davis respectfully representing the injustice of ignoring his previous rank in the assignments of Confederate commissions. In his narrative of mil-

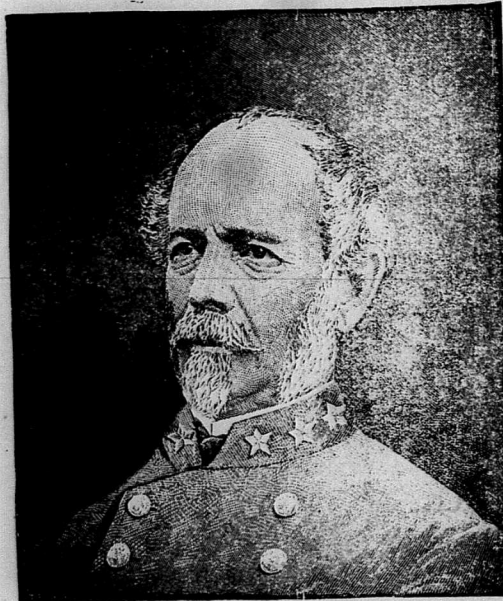
itary operations General Johnston states that it was understood that this letter was the beginning of the implacable opposition that Mr. Davis persistently showed to him.

JOHNSTON THE MASTER MIND OF THE SOUTH.

In passing judgment upon General Johnston's extraordinary record as a Confederate General, one must estimate what he counseled that was not followed as well as what he did. In nothing was Johnston more remarkable than in his grasp of the great strategic questions of the war and his prevision of results. In every leading movement with which he was connected he mapped out unerringly the proper plan of operations, and in every case he was strikingly confirmed, though in several instances his opinion was dissented from at the start to be signally vindicated afterward. The fact is, that Johnston, so far as a comprehension of the line of military conduct proper to be pursued was concerned, was unquestionably the master mind of the South. And this great fact will be established in the following pages.

MANASSAS.

General Johnston at the beginning



GEN. JOSEPH E. JOHNSTON.

Johnston's military sagacity.

It has been a much mooted point, hotly discussed, whether the Confederate army should and could have followed up the victory by an immediate attempt upon Washington. Much irrelevant censure has been freely administered by various parties about this matter, and the controversy over it has been a very angry one. Johnston, in his narrative, coolly takes the whole responsibility. The truth is, as he well states, that, without ammunition, provisions and transportation, the movement was absolutely impracticable, while the impassable Potomac river, interposing its broad current, rendered the attempt simply impossible.

ANOTHER TRIUMPH OF JOHNSTON'S JUDGMENT.

Johnston predicted that the next movement of the Federal forces would be a formidable one, in large numbers, direct upon Richmond. Mr. Davis offered him command in Western Virginia, but he declined, desiring to conduct the operations at this point. In various instances he evinced the unerring military perception that marked his genius. The Administration not only concentrated large supplies at the front, but established a meat factory

there. Johnston protested against this policy, urging that the position must be given up, and the accumulation of supplies at this important point would but embarrass operations and result in the loss of the supplies, all of which happened precisely as he predicted.

Johnston had a crowning vindication of his superlative soldiery acumen in this campaign. With his accustomed breadth of grasp and insight into the situation, he urged upon the Administration a gathering of all the available Confederate troops in Virginia, the Carolinas and Georgia in a grand army before Richmond, as the proper plan of operations. Mr. Davis was for making the peninsula the arena of conflict. A council of war was held. General Johnston said emphatically that the peninsula campaign was impracticable, and it was better to do immediately what must be speedily and inevitably done,—give up Yorktown and transfer the contest to the front of Richmond. He was overruled. Even the wise Lee was against him. But Johnston's triumph of judgment came swiftly and inexorably. The result followed precisely as Johnston said it would. The peninsula was untenable. Yorktown had to be given up. The troops had to retire from the peninsula and gather before Richmond. The battle of Seven Pines was fought when Johnston would have punished the enemy badly but for his being wounded and disabled in the very hour of success. Lee succeeded him. Johnston's policy of concentration of troops before Richmond was fully adopted, and in the masterly execution of this policy, which he at first opposed, and which Johnston alone had the prescience and wisdom to discover, and urge, Lee won his brightest fame, while Johnston had the glory of seeing his condemned ideas vindicated to the letter, and his rejected suggestions recognized as the true necessity of the situation.

JOHNSTON AGAIN VINDICATED BY A FAILURE.

Johnston was wounded in the battle of Seven Pines, on the 3d of May, 1862. He returned to active service November, 1862. During his whole career he seemed fated to the evil fortune of being wounded. In the Florida war of 1836, he was struck upon the head by a ball. In the Mexican war he was shot by three balls before Cerro Gordo, and again at Chapultepec. General Scott said of him that he was "a great soldier, but has an unfortunate knack of getting himself shot in nearly every engagement." His rare personal intrepidity always led him to too free exposure of his life.

General Johnston was ordered to the West to command three departments. This was an unwieldy impracticable sort of Grand Department, not homogeneous at all. It included Bragg's army in Middle Tennessee, Pemberton's army in Mississippi and Maury's army in Alabama, with a supervision over the Trans-Mississippi Department, under Smith and Holmes.

Johnston, in this command, as in every other, evinced the keen accuracy of his military comprehension, and illustrated that remarkable fatality of his, of having his judgment thwarted by others, with the result of its signal vindication. Everywhere that he commanded he seemed destined to supreme verification of his genius by the blunders of others. He counseled unity of operations and concentration of forces in the Mississippi Valley. His wise vision took in the true needs of that large field of conflict.

It will not be in the purview of this criticism of a career to go into the details of this disastrous campaign. Every movement Johnston proposed was

thwarted. The transfer of Holmes' army to the Trans-Mississippi Department, where it was needed, was denied. Assistance ample to Bragg, in Middle Tennessee, was denied. Pemberton, commanding directly at Vicksburg, took the responsibility of violating Johnston's orders, the result being the calamitous defeat at Baker's Creek, and Pemberton's retreat into Vicksburg. Johnston here gave a striking evidence of the astonishing correctness of his strategic judgment. He ordered Pemberton not to be cooped up in Vicksburg, as he could not successfully stand siege there, and the place must ultimately surrender. The result is historic. Vicksburg was attempted to be held, and it fell, the Confederacy was split, and Johnston's genius was conspicuously, but most mournfully vindicated by the blundering failure of others. It is, indeed, a curious fatality that kept up the anomalous experience of this gifted commander that the disasters of the cause from the blunders of his subordinates, instead of the successes achievable by the enforcement of his counsel, kept his supreme capacity established.

A FAMOUS CONTROVERSY.

One of the results of this calamitous campaign was a controversy between Mr. Davis and General Johnston that is a very extraordinary one. Mr. Davis attacked General Johnston's management very severely. Johnston replied with cool, respectful and unimpassioned temper, and it must be admitted, unanswerably. Congress called for the correspondence, but Johnston's reply was not furnished. But the condemnation put upon Johnston by the Administration not only fell absolutely still-born, but actually elevated Johnston higher with Congress, army and the people. Johnston's defense of himself is as superb a piece of controversialism as was ever penned, and the reader arises from its perusal with wonder at the dignity and impersonality with which Johnston conducted an issue so personal, and so important to his fame.

JOHNSTON'S CELEBRATED RETREAT.

I now come to the movement that must be regarded as the crowning glory of Johnston's career,—his famous retreat through North Georgia in the spring of 1864. Johnston's appointment to the command of Bragg's army, after the attempt to saddle public displeasure upon him for the fall of Vicksburg, by the Confederate authorities, was a flattering triumph of his genius and a tribute to his popularity. Bragg was the favorite of Mr. Davis, and Johnston his special distrust. It was indeed a powerful pressure of public sentiment that led to the displacement of Bragg and the endowment of Johnston with command at so important a point.

Johnston took the army, demoralized by the disastrous defeat of Missionary Ridge, disorganized and discouraged, and sadly deficient in *esprit*, discipline and equipment. On the 27th of December, 1863, he assumed the leadership. The campaign began the 5th of May, 1864. In the intervening months, Johnston had, with unsurpassed power of organization, brought up the army to the highest point of efficiency, as was practically shown in the fearful strain of the ensuing campaign, with a force twice its size.

Johnston had 40,000 infantry and 4,000 cavalry the 1st of May. At the end of the seventy-four days' continuous fighting he turned over to his successor 41,000 infantry and 10,000 cavalry. Sherman's army consisted at the start of 99,000 men, including 15,000 cavalry, or more than double John-

ston's army. This fact speaks eloquently alike for the sturdy resistance of Johnston and the heroic intrepidity of Sherman.

It is to be doubted if there was ever in military annals a more consummately conducted campaign. It was a game of chess between masters. It was a joust-at-arms of unexampled skill between two warriors who exhibited each the highest art of warfare. Both were wary, adroit, sagacious strategists, and both were bold, fiery fighters. Johnston's policy was to preserve his precious army at the sacrifice of territory, draw Sherman away from his base of supplies, and give battle only where he had chance of success, and where defeat to Sherman would be most disastrous.

The writer was with Johnston during a large portion of the retreat, commanding cavalry and participating in the actions until wounded. He therefore knows practically the management of the campaign by Johnston. It was a faultless demonstration of soldierly genius. The fighting was continuous. Johnston fought under shelter of entrenchments, preserving life to the utmost extent, administering all the punishment possible, and when flanked, leisurely falling back without the loss of a gun or caisson or wheel-spoke; his army intact, deliberate and as orderly as on dress parade. There were no surprises, no discomfures, no disorders. The men were troubled at giving up their homes to the enemy, but their confidence in Johnston never abated.

AN OPPORTUNITY LOST FOREVER.

At Cassville, Johnston determined to give battle. It was a very strong position for us. The men were burning to fight. The writer remembers well the afternoon of the 19th of May, reading Johnston's ringing battle order,—a model of terse, fiery rhetoric,—to his brigade in the falling twilight, in an old field environed by solemn woods. The men called for a speech, and in common with others, the writer made a few words of appeal from the stump. I have never seen men more earnest than ours were. And they would have fought with determined courage. Johnston afterwards traveled with the writer in the fall of 1864, from Macon to Charlotte, and said that the battle was renounced by him at the earnest entreaty of Generals Hood and Polk, two of his corps commanders, who said they could not hold their positions; while General Hardee, the other corps commander, who had the weakest place in the line, declared his ability to maintain his ground. It was the loss of the chance of the campaign, and General Johnston said he so regarded it, and had always regretted that he did not give battle then. He apprehended, however, that Hood and Polk would not fight with zeal if they did it in fear of defeat, so he yielded to them. The army was discouraged at not fighting this battle, but soon recovered.

JOHNSTON PUT OUT.

On the 17th of July, after Johnston and his army had crossed the Chattahoochee, and he was making vigorous preparations for the determined defense of Atlanta, he was sitting in his tent talking with General Mansfield Lovell, when a package of letters was brought to him. He opened a letter, read it, and then with a quiet unconcern and a pleasant smile, handed it to General Lovell, saying unconcernedly, "What do you think of that?"

It was an order from the War Department relieving him of command of the army, and appointing General Hood in his place. Stunned at the order, General Lovell begged him to

make no obedience to it until an effort could be made to get it reversed. Johnston declined to make any effort. General Lovell, however, got the corps commanders together, Generals Hardee, Stewart and Hood, and they petitioned the War Department not to make the change, protesting against it, and deputizing General Hood himself, as a matter of courtesy, to send the protest. General Hood sent a dispatch, but it was worded in such a way as to carry no force and exert no effect. The Department declined to withdraw the order, and Johnston retired to privacy.

A VALUABLE FACT.

In this connection, it is said upon the authority of two gentlemen closely connected with Mr. Davis, one of them alleged to be General A. R. Lawton, Quartermaster General of the Confederacy, and the other, Gilmer, that he was opposed to removing General Johnston, and reluctantly yielded to the advice of his Cabinet advisers. The account goes that at the meeting, when it was determined, Mr. Davis walked up and down the room with his hands behind him in deep anxiety, saying with earnest emphasis, and with a most troubled manner, that he doubted the propriety of it. The report which I give, I have every reason to believe true, and it is the more important because it conflicts with the generally credited opinion, and puts Mr. Davis in a different light.

It is certain, however, that Johnston's removal was the beginning of the end. It was the turning point of the war, Sherman gave a long breath of relief. It is a high tribute to Johnston that his able and enterprising foe so valued him. In a few days Hood, throwing completely over the cautious Fabian strategy of Johnston, committed an error that the most ordinary soldier would have avoided, viz: threw his little army against Sherman's double force, strongly entrenched, and met with a bloody repulse from a third of Sherman's force. A little later Atlanta fell. Then Hood started on that ill-fated expedition into Tennessee, and by Christmas of 1864 our heroic army was annihilated. Surely there was never a swifter dissolution of a noble army under a purposeless lead of incapacity. And General Johnston, in pursuance of that grim and malignant destiny of his, saw his own soldierly sagacity proven in the overwhelming disaster that followed on the reversal of his policy. It seemed as if a strange fortune never tired of signaling his capacity by the incompetency or mistake of others.

JOHNSTON REINSTATED.

Johnston, from his privacy in Macon, wrote to a friend that Sherman's march to the sea was the movement that ought to be made. And it was, and from Savannah to Columbia, and then in rapid, remorseless progress on Lee's rear was Sherman advancing, when again the clamor of the people called out Johnston, in the dying agonies of the Southern Confederacy, to take command. It was too late. It was a tardy recollection of the illustrious soldier. Lee was given the conduct of all the Confederate operations, and he ordered Johnston to confront Sherman. But the struggle was drawing to a close. Johnston organized a small army, and a flash or two of his brilliant strategy illuminated the closing scenes with a flickering, fitful splendor. Lee surrendered. Johnston promptly recognizing that the end had come, negotiated those terms of surrender that embodied the spirit of true statesmanship and peace, and which do such honor to Sherman. Time has brought the public mind to the per-

ception of the masterly wisdom of those terms, and the impolicy of their rejection.

AFTER THE WAR.

Since the surrender, General Johnston has preserved in civil avocations the exalted esteem accorded to him as a great soldier. He looks a little, but not a great deal, older than he did during the war. His small, but erect figure, carries the same stately dignity; the intellectual face, with its flashing eyes, lofty forehead and apparent power, bears the same striking expression; his manner of blended suavity and decision is as marked as attractive. I have thought that Johnston was the most impressive soldier I have ever seen. I remember at Dalton, at a review of the army, when he was surrounded by a hundred of the most distinguished looking officers of the army, a stranger to him unerringly singled out the commander of the army. On horseback he had a peculiarly martial appearance.

HIS GENTLE SIDE.

With all his strong courage and intellectuality, General Johnston is as tender as a woman. This has been strikingly shown in his beautiful devotion to his invalid wife.* This lady is the daughter of Hon. Louis McLane, of Delaware, Representative, United States Senator, Minister to England, Jackson's Secretary of the Treasury and State, and finally President of the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad. The relationship of this couple, the distinguished soldier and the daughter of a no less distinguished statesman, is an exquisite picture of married harmony, illustrating alike the chivalric nature of the one and the clinging gentleness of the other.

*Since this article was written, General Johnston's wife has died. This sweet, gentle ornament to her sex has left, not only her husband bereaved, but the world poorer by her departure.—EDITOR KENNESAW GAZETTE.

In the beautiful poem by Miss Naomi Hays, (now Mrs. W. E. Moore), which was written while General Cleburne's body was lying in Columbia, Tenn., and which was buried with his remains, there occurred in our issue of June 15, in Judge Mangum's article, an error in the second stanza. We reprint the entire poem as corrected. It is a beautiful tribute to one of the greatest heroes of the time.

"Fare-thee-well, departed chieftain,
Erin's land sends forth a wail;
And oh! my country sad laments thee
Passed so soon thro' death's dark vale.

"Blow, ye breezes, softly o'er him,
Fan his brow with gentlest breath;
Disturb ye not the peaceful slumber;
Cleburne sleeps the sleep of death!

"Rest thee, Cleburne, tears of sadness
Flow from hearts thou'st nobly won;
Memory ne'er will cease to cherish
Deeds of glory thou hast done.

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