

**LINCOLN AND STANTON: A STUDY OF
THE WAR ADMINISTRATION OF 1861 AND
1862, WITH SPECIAL CONSIDERATION OF
SOME RECENT STATEMENTS OF GEN.
GEO. B. MCCLELLAN**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649408894

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Cover @ 2017

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BY

WM. D. KELLEY, M. C.

NEW YORK & LONDON
G. P. PUTNAM'S SONS
The Knickerbocker Press
1885

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WM. D. KELLEY
1884

Press of
G. P. PUTNAM'S SONS
New York

LINCOLN AND STANTON.

PART I.

ABRAHAM LINCOLN and Edwin M. Stanton are dead. No member of Mr. Lincoln's Cabinet during the Peninsular campaign is now living. The Hon. Benjamin F. Wade and Andrew Johnson, then U. S. Senators and members of the Joint Committee on the Conduct of the War, are voiceless as these their illustrious colabors.

Emboldened by the ravages death has made during nearly a quarter of a century, George B. McClellan avails himself of the pages of the *Century* to present his explanation of the failure of the Army of the Potomac, while under his command. The initial article, which appeared in the May number, is an unjustifiable assault upon the memories of Lincoln and Stanton, and but for this fact would not deserve notice, as it can have no historic value. As to the details of the Peninsular campaign it furnishes no allegation of fact with which the author's reports, memoranda, and correspondence have not made the country familiar. The statements by which he attempts to make good his assaults upon the memory of the illustrious dead are sustained solely by his word, and would vanish before a freshman's applications of the primary

canons of criticism. He offers no summary of results achieved by the army under his command, and the few positive assertions upon which he ventures conflict with each other. He speaks of beliefs and impressions as to malign influences which rendered it impossible for him to execute his oft abandoned intentions, and in this connection, says: "The more serious difficulties of my position began with Mr. Stanton's accession to the War Office * * * The impatience of the Executive immediately became extreme, and I can attribute it only to the influence of the new Secretary, who did many things to break up the free and confidential intercourse that had heretofore existed between the President and myself * * * The positive order of the President, *probably issued under the pressure of the Secretary of War*, forced me to undertake the opening of the railroad."

This is such stuff as dreams are made of. It serves, however, to illustrate the confusion into which the author's morbid imagination led him when in pursuit of an evil genius upon whom to devolve the consequences of his failures.

Again, he says: "In July, 1861, after having secured solidly for the Union that part of West Virginia north of the Kanawha and west of the mountains, I was suddenly called to Washington on the day succeeding the first battle of Bull Run."

From this paragraph readers will conclude that the writer was called to Washington to assume command of the armies, because he had "secured solidly for the Union" that portion of Western Virginia of which he gives the boundaries. This was not the case. The forces under his command in West Virginia had achieved victories for which the President and loyal people were

grateful though they were not of a decisive character, and much fighting was yet to be done before the territory referred to should be secured to the Union. In intimating that his advancement was due to so doubtful and meretricious a claim General McClellan does injustice to himself. His summons to Washington was due to influences much more complimentary to him. His call was a tribute to his pre-eminent skill as an organizer, and his capacity as an engineer.

Lieut.-General Scott recognized these qualities in McClellan, and impressed his sense of their value upon the President as reasons why he should be brought to Washington at a time when immense bodies of fresh troops were to be received, for whom camps were to be selected, and for whose training and practice, as well as a measure of defence to the city, fortifications were to be located, planned, and constructed. It was in view of this combination of facts that Scott recommended the organization of a district to be known as the Division of the Potomac, which should embrace the troops in and around Washington, and that McClellan should be brought to the capital to organize and command this new and important division.

Though General McClellan knew that his advancement had been promoted by the Lieutenant-General, he entered upon his new duties with a studied course of insubordination. By his contumelious treatment of that venerable soldier he had, by the 9th of August, a period of less than a fortnight, reduced him to a condition in which the preferable alternative was to ask the President to allow him to be placed on the officers' retired list. The letter in which he made this request bore date August 9, 1861. As further efforts at direct communication with his sub-

ordinate were incompatible with self-respect, it was addressed to the Secretary of War, and said: "I received yesterday, from Major-General McClellan, a letter of that date, to which I design this as my only reply."¹

President Lincoln could not consent to the retirement of Scott under such circumstances without an effort, on his part, to save the old soldier's feelings. The effort was, however, not destined to succeed, for, while they were yet together, the General received a fresh indignity from his aspiring subordinate, and, in a letter addressed to the Secretary on the 12th, insisting upon his request to be retired, he said:

"On the 10th inst. I was kindly requested, by the President, to withdraw my letter to you of the 9th, in reply to one I had received from Major-General McClellan of the day before; the President, at the same time, showing me a letter to him from General McClellan, in which, at the instance of the President, he offered to withdraw the original letter on which I had animadverted. * * * It would be as idle for me, as it would be against the dignity of my years, to be filing daily complaints against an ambitious junior who * * * has unquestionably very high qualifications for military command."²

The President could not refuse to grant Scott's request when thus repeated and enforced. The order of retirement was made, and McClellan found himself without a military superior other than the President, whom the Constitution named as Commander-in-Chief of the Armies and Navies of the United States, and brief time served to show that restraints imposed or duties demanded by the President were as irksome and irritating to him as had been the consciousness of Scott's superior rank.

¹ "Official Records, War of the Rebellion," Vol. XI., Part III., p. 4.

² *Ibid.*, pp. 5 and 6.

He soon permitted himself to be recognized as the head of the party of inaction, and to be surrounded by the leaders of the reactionary political faction of the North. To avoid misinterpretation and misrepresentation, I pause to say that I allude to no Democrat who believed, as Jackson had done, that the Union was a blessing worth preserving, when I refer to the leaders of the reactionary force of that day. They were Northern pro-slavery disunionists who preferred the destruction of the Union to the destruction of slavery, of whom Clement L. Vallandigham was a brilliant type. They sought the advantages of union and organization, and established secret orders—such as the “Knights of the Golden Circle”; and when addressing meetings of illiterate men in opposition to the enforcement of the draft, to the suspension of the habeas corpus, to the enlistment of colored troops in the army, or to any other vital measures, not infrequently spoke of President Lincoln as a “Mulatto Buffoon.” In their familiar parlance, those who supported the administration in its efforts to save the country, were characterized as “Black Republican Disunionists” and “Nigger Lovers,” and, if they wore the national uniform, as “Lincoln’s Hirelings.”

But for the instant, earnest, and persistent co-operation of national Democrats, the government could not, I believe, have crushed the rebellion and restored the Union. Dix and Stanton were Democrats who had served till the close of Buchanan’s administration in his Cabinet; Morton, of Indiana, and Tod and Brough, of Ohio, who were distinguished for courage and energy among the illustrious group of war governors, had been life-long Democrats, and I might add the names of hundreds of Democrats of State or national reputation who