

**SOME PHASES OF THE CIVIL  
WAR; AN APPRECIATION AND  
CRITICISM OF MR. JAMES  
FORD RHODE'S, VOL. 5**

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Some phases of the civil war; an appreciation and criticism of Mr. James Ford Rhode's, Vol. 5 by Charles Francis Adams

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**CHARLES FRANCIS ADAMS**

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**SOME  
PHASES OF THE CIVIL WAR**

**AN APPRECIATION AND CRITICISM OF  
MR. JAMES FORD RHODES'S  
FIFTH VOLUME**

**BY  
CHARLES FRANCIS ADAMS**

## SOME PHASES OF THE CIVIL WAR.

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THIS volume covers the twenty-one momentous and ever memorable months between December, 1864, and August, 1866. Not a few of those who read the narrative themselves bore a part, subordinate, perhaps, but still a part, in the vast military and naval operations therein described; and, when the war drums ceased to beat and the battle-flags were furled, they were deeply interested in the subsequent political agitation. Passing their own recollections in review, they have thus lived to hearken to the verdict of the historian.

Based on the careful study of a vast mass of material, patiently gathered and judicially considered, Mr. Rhodes's book is literary in tone and calm in spirit,—a thoroughly good piece of up-to-date historical work. The significance of the period dealt with will, moreover, only increase with the lapse of time, and to its history this volume is a contribution of lasting value. If for no other reason, it will so prove from the fact that it is not to such a degree removed from the time of which it treats as to cease to be contemporaneous. He who writes has in this case shared in the intensity of that of which he writes; with his own eyes he has seen many of the actors in the events of which he tells, and his ears have drunk in their own descriptive words. How great an advantage this may prove to one competent to avail himself of it has been shown more recently by Clarendon and Thiers, as in the classic times by Tacitus and Thucydides. What is more, the judgments now rendered by Mr. Rhodes, as to both men and events, based on an exhaustive study of material, are not only cautiously reached but they are expressed in measured terms, quite devoid of either zeal or preconception. Neither a parti-

san nor a theorist, Mr. Rhodes is nothing unless critical. It is, therefore, not unsafe even now to predict that his conclusions will prove in essentials in harmony with the ultimate verdict. Nor is this something to be lightly said; for the events and men of the period of Gettysburg and Emancipation will be studied and weighed not less closely by the historians and historical investigators of the twenty-third century than were those of the Naseby and Commonwealth period by Masson, by Carlyle, by Macaulay and by Gardiner in the century we recently closed.

But, in writing history, especially the narrative of events still to a large extent contemporaneous, much necessarily depends on the point of view. The direction of approach involves, indeed, nothing less than the question of perspective, — the relative proportion of parts. On these, in turn, depend to some extent the conclusions reached.

Mr. Rhodes approaches his subject in a general way. Neither a politician nor a soldier, he is as unskilled in practical diplomacy as he is innocent of any study of international law; nor can he be classed as a publicist. Once, indeed, a man of affairs, he is now a judicially minded general investigator, bringing much hard common-sense to bear, always modestly, on the complex problems of a troubled and eventful period. Now it so chanced that as a participant in the earlier time, and, more recently, through the study of historical material as yet unpublished, I have looked upon the same problems from other points of view. In what I now have to say, therefore, I propose to discuss, in a spirit of criticism wholly friendly, what from those points of view seem to me deficiencies and shortcomings in Mr. Rhodes's treatment. They will prove not inconsiderable. Indeed, they go, in my judgment, to the heart of the mystery.

At the close of his summary of the war, in that chapter devoted to a consideration of the internal affairs of the Confederacy during the struggle, Mr. Rhodes suggests a query which many others have often put to themselves, and over which, first and last, they have pondered much. Tersely stated, it is this: How was it that we succeeded in overcoming the seceded States? A task truly Titanic! — and, looking back now through a vista of more than forty years, one still instinctively asks — How did we ever accomplish it?

Seeking an answer to this far from self-explanatory query, Mr. Rhodes says: "A certain class of facts, if considered alone, can make us wonder how it was possible to subjugate the Confederates. It could not have been accomplished without great political capacity at the head of the Northern government, and a sturdy support of Lincoln by the Northern people."<sup>1</sup> This, I submit, is an inadequate answer to a perplexing question, — a question which goes to the heart of any correct historical treatment of our Great Rebellion, to adopt Clarendon's title. Surely it goes without saying that to overcome a combination of numbers, resources and territory such as that composing the Southern Confederacy implied great political capacity in the overcoming power, and the sturdy popular support of him upon whom the task devolved. As Shakespeare causes Horatio to observe in another connection, "There needs no ghost come from the grave to tell us this." But the question suggested by Mr. Rhodes cannot, I submit, being one of a very perplexing character, satisfactorily be disposed of by generalities. To formulate an answer at once definite and satisfactory, we must, descending to particulars, be more specific.

The usual and altogether conventional explanation given is the immense preponderance of strength and resources — men and material — enjoyed by one of the two contending parties. The census and the statistics of the War Department are then appealed to, and figures are arrayed setting forth the relative population and wealth, — the resources, manufactures and fighting strength of the two sides. As the result of such a showing, a certain amount of astonishment is finally expressed that the Confederacy ever challenged a conflict; and the conclusion reached is that, under all the circumstances, the only real cause for wonder is that such an unequal contest was so long sustained.

But this answer to the question will hardly bear examination. After the event it looks well, — has a plausible aspect; but in 1861 a census had just been taken, and every fact and figure now open to study was then patent. The South knew them, Europe knew them; and yet in the spring of 1861, and from Bull Run in July of that year to Gettysburg and Vicksburg in 1863, no unprejudiced observer anywhere believed

<sup>1</sup> Vol. v. p. 481.



that the subjugation of the Confederacy and the restoration of the old Union were reasonably probable, or, indeed, humanly speaking, a possibility. Mr. Gladstone, a man wise in his generation, and as a contemporaneous observer not unfriendly to the Union side, only expressed the commonly received and apparently justified opinion of all unprejudiced on-lookers, when at Newcastle, in October, 1862, he made his famous declaration in public speech that "Jefferson Davis and other leaders of the South . . . have made a nation. . . . We may anticipate with certainty the success of the Southern States so far as regards their separation from the North. I cannot but believe that that event is as certain as any event yet future and contingent can be." No community, it was argued, numbering eight millions, as homogeneous, organized and combative as the South, inhabiting a region of the character of the Confederacy, ever yet had been overcome in a civil war; and there was no sufficient reason for supposing that the present case would prove an exception to a hitherto universal rule. All this, moreover, was so. Wherefore, then, the exception? How was it that, in the result of our civil war, human experience went for nothing?

Was, then, the unexpected really due to preponderance in force? Confederate authorities have, of late, evinced a strong disposition to insist upon this as the correct and sufficient explanation. Their contention has been discussed here very recently by our associate Colonel Livermore.<sup>1</sup> In order to make out even a *prima facie* showing, the Confederate authorities have assumed, or endeavored to show, that the South never, from Sumter to Appomattox, had over 600,000 men in the aggregate in arms; and these, first and last, were opposed by, as they assert, some 2,800,000 on the part of the Union. Admitting these figures to be correct of both sides, — a large admission, and one which the analysis of Colonel Livermore has effectually disposed of, — it is none the less obvious that a force six hundred thousand strong, made up of fighting material of the most approved character, wholly homogeneous, acting on the defensive, mustered for the protection of the hearthstone, is something not easily overcome. It constitutes in itself a very large army; and one more especially formidable when the minds of those composing it are to the last degree

<sup>1</sup> Proceedings, 2d series, vol. xviii. pp. 432-444.

embittered against an opponent whose courage, as well as capacity, they held in almost unmeasured contempt. Such a force would, under the conditions existing in 1861 and 1862, unquestionably have considered itself, and been pronounced by others, quite adequate for every purpose of Southern defence.

But this estimate of Confederate field force obviously invites criticism of another character. It calls for explanation. The Confederate historians and investigators responsible for it do not seem to realize that, in the very act of advancing it, they cast opprobrium on the community they belong to and profess to honor. If this estimate is sustained, the verdict of the historian of the future cannot be escaped. He will say that if 600,000 men were all the Confederacy, first and last, could get into the field, it is clear that the South went into the struggle in a half-hearted way, and, being in it, showed but a craven soul. No effort of the government, no inducement of pride or patriotism, sufficed to get even a moiety of its arms-bearing men into the fighting line.

Such a showing on the part of the Confederacy, if established, will certainly not compare favorably with the forty years' later record of the Boers in the very similar South African struggle. Accepting the Confederate figures as correct, how do the two cases stand? Territorially the Confederacy covered some 712,000 square miles, — a region considerably (30,000 square miles) larger than the combined European areas of Austro-Hungary, Germany, France and Italy, with Belgium, Holland and Denmark thrown in. This vast space was inhabited by five million people of European descent, with three millions of Africans who could be depended upon to produce food for those of European blood in active service. In the course of the conflict, and before admitting themselves beaten, every white male in the Confederacy between the ages of seventeen and fifty capable of bearing arms was called out. Wherever necessary to preclude evasion of military duty the writ of habeas corpus was suspended, and the labor, property and lives of all in the Confederacy were by legislation of the most drastic character put at the disposal of an energetic executive. The struggle lasted four full years; and during that period the eighth part of a generation grew up, yielding its quota of arms-bearing men. Consequently, under any recognized method of computation, the Confederacy, first and last,

contained within itself some 1,350,000 men capable of doing military duty. This result, also, is in accordance with the figures of the census of 1860.<sup>1</sup> During the war the Confederate army was reinforced by over 125,000 sympathizers<sup>2</sup> from the sister slave States not included in the Confederacy. The upshot of the contention thus is, out of a population of 5,600,000 whites, only 475,000 put in an appearance in response to a many-tongued and often reiterated call to arms, — a trifle in excess of one man to each twelve inhabitants. There were, moreover, more than 500,000 able-bodied negroes well adapted in every respect for all the numerous semi-military services, — such as teamsters, servants, hospital attendants and laborers on fortifications, the call for which always depletes the number present for duty of every army.<sup>3</sup> Yet it is now maintained by Confederate authorities that all the efforts of the Richmond government, backed by every feeling of pride, patriotism, protection of the domestic roof-tree and hate of the enemy, could only induce or compel a comparatively Spartan band to turn out and strike for independence.

<sup>1</sup> The exact number, arithmetically computed on the census returns of 1860, but of course to a certain extent inaccurate and deceptive, was 1,350,500.

<sup>2</sup> An exact statistical statement of the number of sympathizers from Maryland, West Virginia, Kentucky, Tennessee, and Missouri, who, first and last, found their way into the ranks of the Confederate army, is, of course, impossible. It has been asserted that there were 318,424 "Southern men in the Northern army." This large contingent, so far as not imaginary, would naturally have come in greatest part from the "Border States," so called. It would be not unnatural to assume that these States furnished an equal number of recruits to the Confederacy; but such an assumption would, on the basis above given, be manifestly absurd. The War Records contain lists of all military organizations of the Confederate army referred to in that publication. Including regiments, battalions and companies belonging to all branches of the service, regular and provisional, these numbered 279 from the four States, Kentucky, Maryland, Missouri and Tennessee. Included in these were 238 full regiments. If these averaged, from first to last, only 600 each, they included an aggregate of 143,000 men. No less than 122 lesser organizations, battalions, and companies, and all individual enlistments, remain to be allowed for. Colonel Livermore, in view of these facts, writes me under date of October 24, 1905, "I think a larger estimate than 135,000 in the Confederate army from these States might safely be made."

<sup>3</sup> "I propose to substitute slaves for all soldiers employed out of the ranks — on detached service, extra duty, as cooks, engineers, laborers, pioneers, or any kind of work. Such details for this little army amount to more than 10,000 men. Negroes would serve for such purposes, better than soldiers. . . . The plan is simple and quick. It puts soldiers and negroes each in his appropriate place; the one to fight, the other to work. I need not go into particulars." (Gen. J. E. Johnston to Confederate Senator L. T. Wigfall, January 4, 1864. Mrs. D. G. Wright, *A Southern Girl in '61*, pp. 163, 169.)