



Lincoln Lore

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A CONFEDERATE IN THE NORTH

C. Vann Woodward's recent essay in the *New York Times Book Review* on Henry Adams as a historian reminds us that some American historians who wrote in the nineteenth century are underrated today. It is ironic that historians often treat their predecessors in the field with disdainful contempt even as they warn against patronising attitudes toward other people, soldiers, statesmen, intellectuals, even common people, who happen to have lived and died in the past. Besides Henry Adams, one might well point to Francis Parkman and George Bancroft and to John G. Nicolay and John Hay as historical writers of lasting merit from Lincoln's century.

Although not of the same caliber as the men mentioned above, a consistently underrated nineteenth-century historian was Edward A. Pollard, editor of the *Richmond Daily Examiner* and author of the earliest histories of the Confederate States of America. This skilled and opinionated journalist wrote contemporary history, documenting the rise and fall of the Confederacy within months of the occurrence of the events, and he did so with verve and with a gift for memorable phrases. It was Pollard who coined the phrase "The Lost Cause," and he did so not long after the cause was lost.

Readers more familiar with the history of America's Civil War as told from the standpoint of persons who lived north of the Mason-Dixon Line can get a spicy taste of Pollard's talents by looking at his brief, lively *Observations in the North: Eight Months in Prison and on Parole*, published in Richmond in 1865. Pollard was captured in 1864 trying to run the blockade on the ship *Greyhound*, and after a brief stay in prison in Boston paroled to Brooklyn. This gave the Confederate journalist and historian a rare first-hand glimpse behind the enemy's lines, and he took advantage of it to write this pungent little memoir.

An example of Pollard's considerable writing ability occurs on the very first page, when he sets the scene for the events which follow with a nice eye for vivid details:

"Running the Blockade" to Europe is a pleasant thought to one in Richmond: the imagination of an adventure at the end of which are golden visions and that beatitude which may be summed up in "plenty to wear and to eat." The first stage of the adventure brings one to

Wilmington; and here he already finds in the luxurious cabins of the blockade-runners the creature-comforts to which he had long been a stranger in the Confederate capital, and has a fore-taste of some of the sweets of his adventure.

Oranges, which, if they existed in Richmond, would be ticketed in some Jew's window at twenty dollars apiece; pineapples, with their forgotten fragrance; wine and liquors, of which we have only the poisoned imitations in Richmond; and an array of cut and stained glass-ware that would have put to blush the stock of all the hotels in the Confederacy (I had been eating and drinking out of tin at the Wilmington hotel,) were set out with a bewildering profusion in the cabin of the "Greyhound," when I called to make my respects to Captain "Henry" and conclude my arrangements for passage out to Bermuda. What a splendid fellow he was: a graceful dash of manner, which yet beamed with intelligence, an exuberant hospitality, a kindness that when it did a grateful thing so gracefully waived all expressions of obligation. He had been all over

the world; was familiar with the great capitals of Europe; bore the marks of a wound obtained in the campaign of Stonewall Jackson; and as to his name and nationality — why, passengers on blockade-runners are not expected to be inquisitive of these circumstances, and must beware of impertinent curiosity.

"Want to get out on the Greyhound? Why, certainly; shall be very glad to have you;" and the Captain blew his piratical silver whistle, and his clerk had soon noted my height, colour of my eyes, &c., for the Confederate officer, who was to come aboard next morning to muster crew and passengers, and see that no conscripts made an unticketed exit from Wilmington.

Antisemitism frequently crept into Confederate explanations of inflation and scarcity.

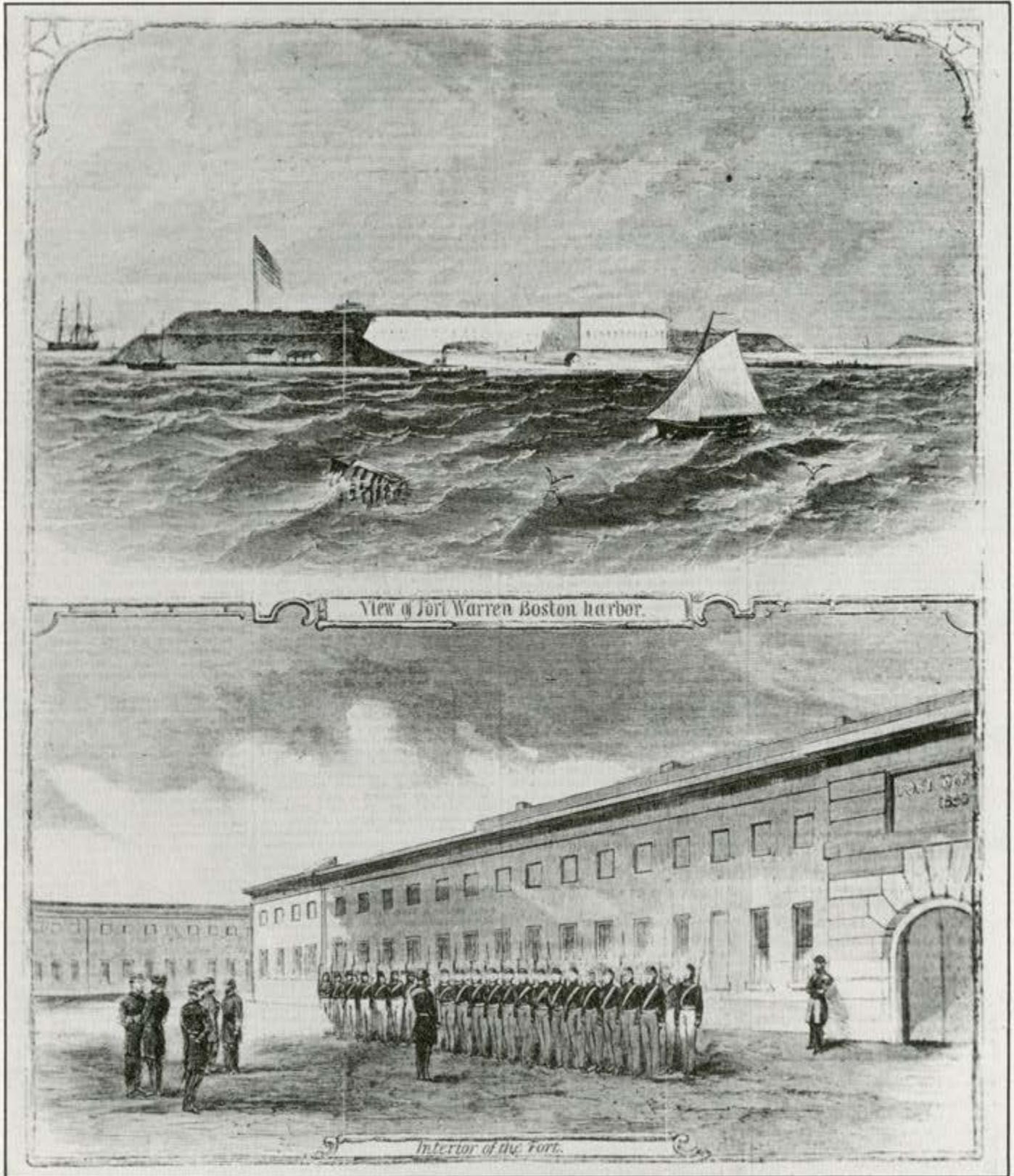
The voyage started well enough:

At last we are off. The moon is down; the steward has had orders to kill the geese and shut up the dog; the captain has put on a suit of dark clothes; every light is extinguished, every word spoken in a whisper, and



Courtesy Virginia State Library, Richmond

FIGURE 1. Edward A. Pollard.



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FIGURE 2. Woodcut from *Harper's Weekly*, December 7, 1861.

the turn of the propeller of the Greyhound sounds like the beat of a human heart. There is an excitement in these circumstances. The low, white gray vessel glides furtively through the water, and you catch the whispered commands of the captain: "Stead-ey," and then the more intense and energetic whisper: "Black smoke, by G-; cut off your smoke." Every eye is strained into the shadows of the night. But how utterly useless did all this precaution and

vigilance appear on the Greyhound; for after two hours of suspense we were out of the blockade lines, and had seen nothing but the caps of the waves. A blockade for blockheads, surely, I thought, as I composed myself to sleep, dismissing entirely from my mind all terrors of the Yankee. But the next day a Union cruiser captured the slow and inappropriately named *Greyhound* with ease.

Taken prisoner by the well-dressed and mannerly Union

naval officers, Pollard quickly began a correspondence with the British minister in Washington, Lord Lyons, to gain his release on the grounds that the vessel was British and that passengers were therefore protected by the British flag. The interesting correspondence on the legalities of blockade was reprinted in Pollard's *Observations*, but it failed to keep the Confederate newspaperman out of prison. He went to Fort Warren in Boston harbor which, along with Fort Lafayette in New York harbor, was a Federal military prison which held large numbers of blockade-runners throughout the Civil War. There he encountered the usual strange mixture of "prisoners of state," as they were called by Union authorities:

As the Greyhound worked her way through the green and picturesque archipelago of Boston harbour, the pilot did me the kindness of pointing out Fort Warren as my probable abode for some future months, and confidentially spitting in my ear the advice to "holler for the Union." He had also found occasion to essay some advice to "Jane," a negro woman, one of those tidy, respectable family servants, redolent of "Old Virginia," who had been captured on her way to join her mistress, the wife of a Confederate agent in Bermuda. Jane's response was not complimentary; for the experience of the Yankee, which that respectable coloured female had obtained from the amount of swearing and swilling on the Greyhound, had induced her to assert, with melancholy gravity, that "she had not seen a Christian since she left Petersburg."

After being allowed to stay in a Boston hotel by marshals fearing intervention by Lord Lyons, Pollard was returned to Fort Warren. He found the customary prisoners of controversial status, Confederate cavalymen deemed regular soldiers or rangers by the South but irregular guerrillas by the North, and he saw Confederate officers under stern sentences of Union military commissions for recruiting in western Virginia, territory claimed by both governments. Pollard's *Observations* included the obligatory atrocity charges, comparing the starvation diet and deliberately grim living quarters of a Northern casemate with the supposedly clean and rather cheery atmosphere of Richmond's notorious Libby Prison, depicted by Pollard as a pleasant sort of dormitory of men playing cribbage and dominoes surrounded by shelves of "sugar-cured hams, jars of pickles and delicacies long since forgotten in the homes of Richmond."

While in his more forbidding "bastille," Pollard had plenty of time (and opportunity, it should be noted) to read the newspapers and talk about politics. His own views were quite conservative:

We had quite a discussion in our mess to-day. One of the company remarked that in South Carolina a mechanic was not respected as he should be. I took occasion to advance some peculiar opinions of my own: That the democracy at the North was an utterly false one, being an insolent assertion of equality, a sort of "d-n you, I am as good as you are," which placed two classes in society in an exasperated and bitter contest that was constantly going on in Yankeedom beneath the outward semblance of its social laws; that this insolent democracy was especially the product of free schools, that educated the population just to the point of irreverence and egotism; that in the South there was to be found the most perfect democracy in the world; that there was a voluntary and tacit acknowledgment of distinctions in Southern society (hence the conservatism of this part of America), and that, this difference once implied, the intercourse between the different classes was unrestricted and genial, with a pleasant admission of equality in all respects where equality was to be properly admitted. These propositions might be expanded into illustration and argument enough to make a book. But surely any one who knows anything of the South must have observed the easy and pleasant intercourse between its social classes, in which the humblest is treated with polite respect, so much in contrast to those insulting assumptions on the one hand and browbeating on the other, which make up Yankee society. Where a laboring man would, in the North, be stopped at the door



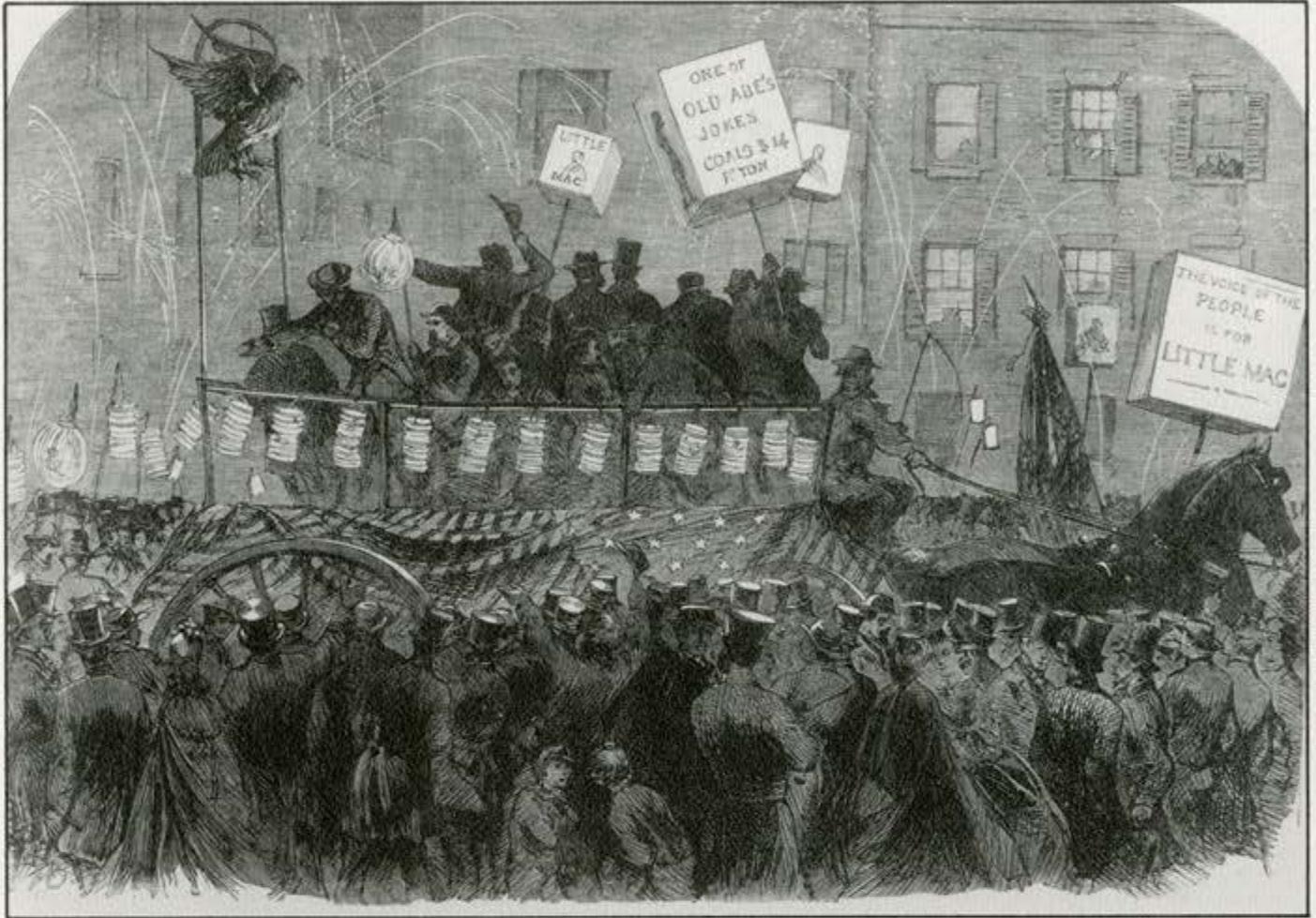
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FIGURE 3. Jefferson Davis and his wife Varina in a photograph taken in Canada after the war. By about the time this photograph was taken, Union authorities were considering allowing Pollard to use the captured Confederate archives to write a life of Jefferson Davis on the grounds that Pollard hated Davis and was sure to do his reputation harm. Pollard's denunciations of Davis during the war were so strong as to be called "almost irrational" by Confederate historian Emory M. Thomas.

of the rich by a servant, and held at arm's length in any intercourse the patron might find necessary with him, in the South, he could at least get a kind reception — certainly, would be treated with much more real respect than by the aristocratic Yankee with whom he contests the claim of equality and fraternity.

In fact, free public schools seem always to have received bitter denunciation from Pollard. Later in his *Observations* he contrasted, "on the one side, the North — its false and phosphorescent civilization — showy free schools, the nests of every social pestilence — material gauds — a society rotten with insolent agrarianism called "democracy;" on the other side, the South — its virtuous simplicity — the extraordinary intelligence of a people educated, not so much by books, as by free institutions and by a peculiarly free interchange of mind between all classes of society — a popular innocence of mad reforms, 'isms,' morbid appetites, unnatural vices, and other products of New England free schools — and, most conspicuous of all, a true and noble democracy; of which it may be said that, though the white labouring man of the South defers to those who are his superiors (not indeed in rights, but in the various particulars of society), no one more quickly or effectually than he resents the insult or contumely of power."

Although he was a thorough-going and doctrinaire Confederate, Pollard was no partisan of the Confederate government and, in fact, was one of the bitterest detractors of Jefferson Davis. Being an inmate of a Northern prison gave the Richmond editor a keen interest in exchanges and other policies affecting the lives of prisoners of war:



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FIGURE 4. "Some days before the election," Pollard said of the presidential campaign he observed first-hand in 1864, "New York was incandescent with revolution; processions flaunted banners and paste-board through the streets, mottoed with what was, in the Washington definition, downright 'treason;' the hotels and bar-rooms were choked with 'secesh,' vociferous, defiant, and generally half drunk." After election day, Pollard admitted, all this sort of sentiment vanished.

There is one question here constantly on the lips, or in the meditations of the prisoners. It is, "Have we a Government?" We do not hear of any thing done by the Richmond authorities in behalf of tens of thousands of Confederate prisoners, and we are left starkly and desperately to the contingencies of the future.

We know very well that it is not the fault of our Government that an exchange of prisoners is not made. Such an exchange has been estopped by the choice and action of the Yankees; and in doing so, this vile and sinister people have effected one of the most barbarous penalties of war — captivity. Such a penalty is opposed to the spirit and humanity of the age; in civilized war, the only object of taking prisoners is to exchange them, certainly not to condemn them to the savage horrors of captivity.

But, then, although our government is acquitted of the non-execution of the cartel, and this brutal infraction of civilized usage, why does it not manifest what concern it can for its prisoners, in some substantial acts of retaliation for the intolerable and terrible atrocities attendant on their imprisonment. This is where the question pinches. It is, with respect to outrages upon its prisoners that the Confederate Government has most abundant occasion and opportunity for retaliation; and it is with respect to this that it has done less to satisfy justice and vindicate the rights of belligerent.

There is a pitiable page of sophistry and weakness in the

records of this war. It is the history of Jefferson Davis' policy of retaliation. While that history has afforded no instance of a single substantial act of retribution, it is replete with *pretences* of such, designed to conciliate the popular demand for retaliation, and to impose upon the world an appearance of spirit.

Blaming Jefferson Davis for an inadequate policy of retaliation was Pollard's peculiar twist on a commonly heard Confederate complaint. There were numerous calls for a "black flag" policy — or something approximating it — in the Confederacy during the Civil War. Charles C. Jones, Jr., of Savannah, wrote his father on March 18, 1862: "Did you observe what the wretches did at New Bern, North Carolina? I want no black flag raised upon a staff, but I wish to see it carried in the breast of every good and true man armed in behalf of our country and of the homes we love. And every Lincolnite found in enmity upon our shores should be put to the sword as an outlaw, outside the pale of civilization and of humanity." Jones wrote this letter to his father, a prominent Presbyterian minister in Georgia, and the Reverend C. C. Jones wrote to his son, after hearing news of the "execrable" Emancipation Proclamation, "The war has become, for the perpetration of every brutal crime ... and our government would be justifiable in putting every prisoner taken to instantaneous death, unless the war be wholly altered in its character and the proclamation withdrawn."

(To be continued)