

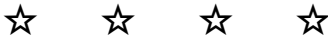
# A REBEL'S RECOLLECTIONS

by

George Cary Eggleston

Author of "A Man of Honor"

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by George Cary Eggleston

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George Lang Eggleston



## DEDICATION



I wish to dedicate this book to my brother, EDWARD EGGLESTON; and even if there were no motives of affection impelling me thereto, I should still feel bound to inscribe his name upon this page, as an act of justice, in order that those critics who confounded me with him, when I put forth a little novel a year ago, may have no chance to hold him responsible for my political as they did for my literary sins.



## PREFACE



Lunching one day with Oliver Johnson, the best “original abolitionist” I ever knew, I submitted to him the question I was debating with myself, namely, whether I might write this little volume of reminiscences without fear of offending excellent people, or, still worse, reanimating prejudices that happily were dying. His reply was, “Write, by all means. Prejudice is the first-born of ignorance, and it never outlives its father. The only thing necessary now to the final burial of the animosity existing between the sections is that the North and the South shall learn to know and understand each other. Anything which contributes to this hastens the day of peace and harmony and brotherly love which every good man longs for.”

Upon this hint I have written, and if the reading of these pages shall serve, in never so small a degree, to strengthen the kindly feelings which have grown up of late between the foemen of ten years ago, I shall think my labor well expended.

I have written chiefly of the things I saw for myself, and yet this is in no sense the story of my personal ad-

ventures. I never wore a star on my collar, and every reader of military novels knows that adventures worth writing about never befall a soldier below the rank of major.

G.C.E.  
October, 1874



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# CHAPTER ONE

## The Mustering



That was an admirable idea of De Quincey's, formally to postulate any startling theory upon which he desired to build an argument or a story, and to insist that his readers should regard the postulate as proved, on pain of losing altogether what he had to say. The plan is a very convenient one, saving a deal of argument, and establishing in the outset a very desirable relation of mastery and subordination between writer and reader. Indeed, but for some such device I should never be able to get on at all with these sketches, fully to understand which, the reader must make of himself, for the time at least, a Confederate. He must put himself in the place of the Southerners and look at some things through their eyes, if he would understand those things and their results at all; and as it is no part of my purpose to write a defense of the Southern view of any question, it will save a good deal of explanation on my part, and weariness on the part of the reader, if I follow De Quincey's example and do a little postulating to begin with. I shall make no attempt whatever to

prove my postulates, but any one interested in these pages will find it to his advantage to accept them, one and all, as proved, pending the reading of what is to follow. After that he may relapse as speedily as he pleases into his own opinions. Here are the postulates:

1. The Southerners honestly believed in the right of secession, not merely as a revolutionary, but as a constitutional right. They not only held that whenever any people finds the government under which it is living oppressive and subversive of the ends for which it was instituted, it is both the right and the duty of that people to throw off the government and establish a new one in its stead; but they believed also that every State in the Union held the reserved right, under the constitution, to withdraw peaceably from the Union at pleasure.

2. They believed that every man's allegiance was due to his State only, and that it was only by virtue of the State's continuance in the Union that any allegiance was due to the general government at all; wherefore the withdrawal of a State from the Union would of itself absolve all the citizens of that State from whatever obligations they were under to maintain and respect the Federal constitution. In other words, patriotism, as the South understood it, meant devotion to one's State, and only a secondary and consequential devotion to the Union, existing as a result of the State's action in making itself a part of the Union, and terminable at any time by the State's withdrawal.

3. They were as truly and purely patriotic in their secession and in the fighting which followed, as were the people of the North in their adherence to the Union itself. The difference was one of opinion as to what the duties of a patriot were, and not at all a difference in the degree of

patriotism existing in the two sections.

4. You, reader, who shouldered your musket and fought like the hero you are, for the Union and the old flag, if you had been bred at the South, and had understood your duty as the Southerners did theirs, would have fought quite as bravely for secession as you did against it; and you would have been quite as truly a hero in the one case as in the other, because in either you would have risked your life for the sake of that which you held to be the right. If the reader will bear all this in mind we shall get on much better than we otherwise could, in our effort to catch a glimpse of the war from a Southern point of view.

With all its horrors and in spite of the wretchedness it has wrought, this war of ours, in some of its aspects at least, begins to look like a very ridiculous affair, now that we are getting too far away from it to hear the rattle of the musketry; and I have a mind, in this chapter, to review one of its most ridiculous phases, to wit, its beginning. We all remember Mr. Webster's pithy putting of the case with regard to our forefathers of a hundred years ago: "They went to war against a preamble. They fought seven years against a declaration. They poured out their treasures and their blood like water, in a contest in opposition to an assertion." Now it seems to me that something very much like this might be said of the Southerners, and particularly of the Virginians, without whose pluck and pith there could have been no war at all worth writing or talking about. They made war upon a catch-word, and fought until they were hopelessly ruined for the sake of an abstraction. And certainly history will not find it to the discredit of those people that they freely offered themselves upon the altar of an abstract principle of right, in a

war which they knew must work hopeless ruin to themselves, whatever its other results might be. Virginia did not want to secede, and her decision to this effect was given in the election of a convention composed for the most part of men strongly opposed to secession. The Virginians believed they had both a moral and a constitutional right to withdraw voluntarily from a Union into which they had voluntarily gone, but the majority of them preferred to remain as they were. They did not feel themselves particularly aggrieved or threatened by the election of Mr. Lincoln, and so, while they never doubted that they had an unquestionable right to secede at will, they decided by their votes not to do anything of the kind. This decision was given in the most unmistakable way, by heavy majorities, in an election which involved no other issue whatever. But without Virginia the States which had already passed ordinances of secession would have been wholly unable to sustain themselves. Virginia's strength in men, material, and geographical position was very necessary, for one thing, and her moral influence on North Carolina, Arkansas, and other hesitating States, was even more essential to the success of the movement. Accordingly every possible effort was made to "fire the heart" of the conservative old commonwealth. Delegations, with ponderous stump speeches in their mouths and parchment appeals in their hands, were sent from the seceding States to Richmond, while every Virginian who actively favored secession was constituted a committee of one to cultivate a public sentiment in favor of the movement.

Then came such a deluge of stump speeches as would have been impossible in any other state or country in the civilized world, for there never yet was a Virginian who could not, on occasion, acquit himself very well on

the hustings. The process of getting up the requisite amount of enthusiasm, in the country districts especially, was in many cases a very laughable one. In one county, I remember, the principal speakers were three lawyers of no very great weight except in a time of excitement. One of them was colonel of the county militia, another lieutenant-colonel, and the third captain of a troop of volunteer cavalry, a fine body of men, who spent three or four days of each month partly in practicing a system of drill which, I am persuaded, is as yet wholly undreamed of by any of the writers upon tactics, and partly in cultivating the social virtues over that peculiar species of feast known as a barbecue. When it became evident that the people of Virginia were not duly impressed with the wrong done them in the election of Mr. Lincoln, these were unquestionably the right men in the right places. They were especially fond of fervid speech-making, and not one of them had ever been known to neglect an opportunity to practice it; each could make a speech on any subject at a moment's warning. They spoke quite as well on a poor theme as on a good one, and it was even claimed for one of them that his eloquence waxed hottest when he had no subject at all to talk about. Here, then, was their opportunity. The ever-full vials of their eloquence waited only for the uncorking. It was the rule of their lives to make a speech wherever and whenever they could get an audience, and under the militia law they could, at will, compel the attendance of a body of listeners consisting of pretty nearly all the voters of the county, plus the small boys. When they were big with speech they had only to order a drill. If a new gush of words or a felicitous illustration occurred to them overnight, they called a general muster for the next day. Two of them were candidates, against a quiet and sensible plant-

er, for the one seat allowed the county in the convention, and the only difference of opinion there was between them was involved in the question whether the ordinance of secession should be adopted *before or after* breakfast on the morning of the first day of the convention's existence. One wanted coffee first and the other did not. On the day of election, a drunken fellow, without a thought of saying a good thing, apologized to one of them for not having voted for him, saying, "I promised you, Sam, but I couldn't do it. You're a good fellow, Sam, and smart at a speech; but you see, Sam, you *haven't the weight o' head.*" The people, as the result of the election showed, entertained a like view of the matter, and the lawyers were both beaten by the old planter.

It was not until after the convention assembled, however, that the eloquence of the triad came into full play. They then labored unceasingly to find words with which to express their humiliation in view of the degeneracy and cowardice of the ancient commonwealth.

They rejoiced in the thought that sooner or later the People – which they always pronounced with an uncommonly big P – would "hurl those degenerate sons of illustrious sires," meaning thereby the gentlemen who had been elected to the convention, "from the seats which they were now polluting," and a good deal more of a similar sort, the point of which was that these orators longed for war of the bloodiest kind, and were happy in the belief that it would come, in spite of the fact that the convention was overwhelmingly against secession.

Now, in view of the subsequent history of these belligerent orators, it would be a very interesting thing to know just what they thought a war between the sections promised. One of them, as I have said, was colonel of the



two or three hundred militia-men mustered in the county. Another was lieutenant-colonel, and the third was captain of a volunteer troop, organized under the militia law for purposes of amusement, chiefly. This last one could, of course, retain his rank, should his company be mustered into service, and the other two firmly believed that they would be called into camp as full-fledged field-officers. In view of this, the colonel, in one of his speeches, urged upon his men the necessity of a rigid self-examination, touching the matter of personal courage, before going, in his regiment, to the battle-field; "For," said he, "where G. leads, brave men must follow," a bit of rhetoric which brought down the house as a matter of course. The others were equally valiant in anticipation of war and equally eager for its coming; and yet when the war did come, so sorely taxing the resources of the South as to make a levy *en masse* necessary, not one of the three ever managed to hear the whistle of a bullet. The colonel did indeed go as far as Richmond, during the spring of 1861 but discovering there that he was physically unfit for service, went no farther. The lieutenant-colonel ran away from the field while the battle was yet afar off, and, the captain, suffering from "nervous prostration," sent in his resignation, which was unanimously accepted by his men, on the field during the first battle of Bull Run.

I sketch these three men and their military careers not without a purpose. They serve to correct an error. They were types of a class which brought upon the South a deal of odium. Noisy speech-makers, they were too often believed by strangers to be, as they pretended, representative men, and their bragging, their intolerance, their contempt for the North, their arrogance — all these were commonly laid to the charge of the Southern people as a

whole. As a matter of fact, these were not representative men at all. They assumed the *rôle* of leadership on the court-house greens, but were repudiated by the people at the polls first, and afterwards when the volunteers were choosing officers to command them in actual warfare. These men were clamorous demagogues and nothing else. They had no influence whatever upon the real people. Their vaporings were applauded and laughed at. The applause was ridicule, and the laughter was closely akin to jeering.

Meantime a terrible dread was brooding over the minds of the Virginian people. They were brave men and patriots, who would maintain their honor at any cost. They were ready to sacrifice their lives and their treasures in a hopeless struggle about an abstraction, should the time come when their sense of right and honor required the sacrifice at their hands. There was no cowardice and no hesitation to be expected of them when the call should come. But they dreaded war, and most of them prayed that it might never be. They saw only desolation in its face. They knew it would lay waste their fields and bring want upon their families, however it might result in regard to the great political questions involved in it. And so they refused to go headlong into a war which meant for them destruction. Some of them, believing that there was no possibility of avoiding the struggle, thought it the part of wisdom to accept the inevitable and begin hostilities at once, while the North was still but poorly prepared for aggressive measures. But the majority of the Virginians were disposed to wait and to avoid war altogether, if that should prove possible. These said, "We should remain quiet until some overt act of hostility shall make resistance necessary." And these were called cowards and fogies by

the brave men of the hustings already alluded to.

There was still another class of men who were opposed to secession in any case. Of these, William C. Wickham, of Hanover, and Jubal Early will serve as examples. They thought secession unnecessary and imprudent in any conceivable event. They believed that it offered no remedy for existing or possible ills, and that it could result only in the prostration of the South. They opposed it, therefore, with all their might; not only as not yet called for, but as suicidal in any event, and not to be thought of at all. And yet these men, when the war came, believed it to be their duty to side with their State, and fought so manfully in behalf of the South as to make themselves famous military leaders.

Why, then, the reader doubtless asks, if this was the temper of the Virginians, did Virginia secede after all? I answer, because circumstances ultimately so placed the Virginians that they could not, without cowardice and dishonor, do otherwise; and the Virginians are brave men and honorable ones. They believed, as I have said, in the abstract right of any State to secede at will. Indeed, this right was to them as wholly unquestioned and unquestionable as is the right of the States to establish free schools, or to do any other thing pertaining to local self-government. The question of the correctness or incorrectness of the doctrine is not now to the purpose. The Virginians, almost without an exception, believed and had always believed it absolutely, and believing it, they held of necessity that the general government had no right, legal or moral, to coerce a seceding State; and so, when the President called upon Virginia for her quota of troops with which to compel the return of the seceding States, she could not possibly obey without doing that which her people be-

lieved to be an outrage upon the rights of sister commonwealths, for which, as they held, there was no warrant in law or equity.

She heartily condemned the secession of South Carolina and the rest as unnecessary, ill-advised, and dangerous; but their secession did not concern her except as a looker-on, and she had not only refused to be a partaker in it, but had also felt a good deal of indignation against the men who were thus endangering the peace of the land. When she was called upon to assist in reducing these States to submission, however, she could no longer remain a spectator. She must furnish the troops, and so assist in doing that which she believed to be utterly wrong, or she must herself withdraw from the Union. The question was thus narrowed down to this: Should Virginia seek safety in dishonor, or should she meet destruction in doing that which she believed to be right? Such a question was not long to be debated. Two days after the proclamation was published Virginia seceded, not because she wanted to secede – not because she believed it wise – but because, as she understood the matter, the only other course open to her would have been cowardly and dishonorable.

Now, unless I am sadly mistaken, the Virginians understood what secession implied much more perfectly than did the rest of the Southern people. They anticipated no child's play, and having cast in their lot with the South, they began at once to get ready for war. From one end of the State to the other, every county seat became a drill field. The courts suspended their sessions, on the ground that it was not a proper time for the enforced collection of debts. Volunteer companies soon drained the militia organization of its men. Public opinion said that every man who did not embrace the very surest and earliest opportu-

nity of getting himself mustered into actual service was a coward; and so, to withdraw from the militia and join a volunteer company, and make a formal tender of services to the State, became absolutely essential to the maintenance of one's reputation as a gentleman.

The drilling, of which there was literally no end, was simply funny. Maneuvers of the most utterly impossible sort were carefully taught to the men. Every amateur officer had his own pet system of tactics, and the effect of the incongruous teachings, when brought out in battalion drill, closely resembled that of the music at Mr. Bob Sawyer's party, where each guest sang the chorus to the tune he knew best.

The militia colonels, having assumed a sort of general authority over the volunteer companies which had been formed out of the old militia material, were not satisfied with daily musterings of the men under their captains – musterings which left the field-officers nothing to do – and so in a good many of the counties they ordered all the men into camp at the county seat, and drew upon the people for provisions with which to feed them. The camps were irregular, disorderly affairs, over which no rod of discipline could very well be held, as the men were not legally soldiers, and the only punishment possible for disobedience or neglect of duty was a small fine, which the willful men, with true Virginian contempt for money in small sums, paid cheerfully as a tax upon jollity.

The camping, however, was enjoyable in itself, and as most of the men had nothing else to do, the attendance upon roll-call was a pretty full one. Every man brought a servant or two with him, of course. How else were his boots and his accouterments to be kept clean, his horse to be groomed, and his meals cooked? Most of the ladies

came, too, in their carriages every morning, returning to their homes only as night came on; and so the camps were very picturesque and very delightful places to be in. All the men wore epaulets of a gorgeousness rarely equaled except in portraits of field-m Marshals, and every man was a hero in immediate prospect.

One day an alarming report came, to the effect that a little transport steamer, well known in James River, was on her way up to Richmond with ten thousand troops on board, and instantly the camps at the courthouses along the railroads were astir. It entered into nobody's head to inquire where so many troops could have come from at a time when the entire active force of the United States army from Maine to Oregon was hardly greater than that; nor did anybody seem surprised that the whole ten thousand had managed to bestow themselves on board a steamer the carrying capacity of which had hitherto been about four or five hundred men. The report was accepted as true, and everybody believed that the ten thousand men would be poured into Richmond's defenseless streets within an hour or two. In the particular county to which I have alluded in the beginning of this chapter, the cavalry captain sent for half a dozen grindstones, and set his men to grinding their sabres – a process which utterly ruined the blades, of course. The militia colonel telegraphed a stump speech or two to Richmond, which did no particular harm, as the old station agent who officiated as operator could not for his life send a message of more than three words so that it could be read at the other end of the line. A little telegraphic swearing came back over the wires, but beyond that the colonel's glowing messages resulted in nothing. Turning his attention to matters more immediately within his control, therefore, he ordered the drums to

beat, and assembling the men he marched them boldly down to the railroad station, where mounting a goods box he told them that the time for speech-making was now past; that the enemy (I am not sure that he did not say "vandal," and make some parenthetical remarks about "Attila flags" and things of that sort which were favorites with him) was now at our very thresholds; that he (the colonel) had marched his command to the depot in answer to the call of his country; that they would proceed thence by rail to Richmond and at once encounter the enemy, etc., etc., etc. He had already telegraphed, he said, to General Lee and to Governor Letcher, requesting them to dispatch a train (the colonel would have scorned to say "send cars" even in a telegram), and the iron horse was doubtless already on its way.

No train came, however, and after nightfall the men were marched back to their quarters in the courthouse.

A few days later some genuine orders came from Richmond, accepting the proffered services of all the companies organized in the county, and ordering all, except the one cavalry troop, into camp at Richmond. These orders, by some strange oversight, the colonel explained, were addressed, not to him as colonel, but to the several captains individually. He was not disposed to stand on ceremony, however, he said; and so, without waiting for the clerical error to be rectified, he would comply with the spirit of the order, and take the troops to Richmond as soon as the necessary transportation should arrive. Transportation was a good, mouth-filling word, which suited the colonel exactly. In order that there should be no delay or miscarriage, he marched the men a hundred yards down the hill to the station, ten hours in advance of the time at

which the cars were to be there; and as there was nothing else to do, he and his lieutenant thought the occasion a good one for the making of a speech apiece. The colonel expressed his hearty sympathy with the woes of the cavalry, who were to be left at home, while the infantry was winning renown. And yet, he said, he had expected this from the first. The time had been, he explained, when the cavalry was the quick-moving arm of the service, but now that the iron horse – The reader must imagine the rest of that grandiloquent sentence. I value my reputation for veracity too much to risk it by following the colonel in this, his supreme burst of impassioned oratory. He was sorry for the cavalry, but they should console themselves with the thought that, as preservers of order in the community and protectors of their homes, they would not be wholly useless in their own humble way; and should any of them visit the army, they would always meet a hearty welcome in his camp. For the present his head-quarters would be in the Spottswood Hotel, and he would be glad, whenever military duty did not too greatly absorb his attention, to grasp the hand of any member of the troop who, wishing to catch a glimpse of real warfare, should seek him there.

The train came, after a while, and the unappreciative railroad men obstinately insisted that the State paid for the passage of certain designated companies only, and that these distinguished field-officers, if they traveled by that train at all, must pay their way at regular passenger rates. The colonel and his lieutenant pocketed the insult and paid their fare; but when, upon the arrival of the troops at Richmond, nobody seemed to know anything about these field-officers, and the companies were sent, without them, into camps of instruction, the gallant leaders returned by passenger train to their homes. The colonel



came back, he said in a speech at the station, still further to stir the patriotism of the people. He had been in consultation with the authorities in Richmond; and while it would not be proper for him to reveal even to these, his patriotic countrymen, the full plan of campaign confided to him as a field-officer, he might at least say to them that the government, within ten days, would have fifteen thousand men in line on the Potomac, and then, with perchance a bloody but very brief struggle, this overwhelming force would dictate terms to the tyrants at Washington.

This time the colonel got himself unmistakably laughed at, and, so far as I have heard, he made no more speeches.

Meantime it had become evident to everybody that a very real and a very terrible war was in prospect, and there was no longer any disposition to tolerate nonsense of the sort I have been describing. As fast as arrangements could be made for their accommodation, the volunteers from every part of the State were ordered into camps of instruction at Richmond and Ashland. As soon as any company was deemed fit for service, it was sent to the front and assigned to a regiment. Troops from other States were constantly pouring into Richmond, and marching thence to the armies which were forming in the field. The speech-making was over forever, and the work of the war had begun.