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## “THE GENIUS OF BATTLE.”

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FROUDE speaks of Newman as the embodiment of subtlety, because when an Oxford curate in his Anglican days, the Cardinal would preach an apparently harmless sermon, to develop some one phrase which might unsettle the faith of the young men from whose ecclesiastical communion he was contemplating a withdrawal. General W. F. Smith's article on “The Genius of Battle” in the February number of *THE NORTH AMERICAN REVIEW* is open to the same criticism. Reduced to its final analysis, the article may be summed up in two sentences :

“M. Thiers . . . says when war is conducted as a purely mechanical routine . . . it is hardly worthy of history.” “War conducted as a mechanical routine was perfectly exhibited in the ‘Campaign of Attrition,’ inaugurated by General Grant on the 5th of May, 1864.”

These two sentences, General Smith, in imitation of the subtle purpose attributed to Cardinal Newman, has written a whole article to embody.

General Smith belongs to a class of patriotic, hopeful, and intelligent men, who, having had in the war as good an opportunity as Grant, Sherman, and Thomas, gave their minds to other than military duties, and now spend much time in explaining why they failed. In 1861, General Smith was one of a hundred promising youths, with a military education, of whom far more was expected than from Grant or Sheridan. After winning reputation as a builder of pontoon bridges, and special commendation and promotion from Grant, General Smith was unfortunate enough to lose the confidence of his chief, and with it further opportunity of usefulness. History would be content to close the General's military career with this cold statement. But the General is impatient with history as it is, and is busy in writing it as he would like it to be. According to the new chronicles,

having failed in the war, except as a builder of pontoon bridges, none of those who succeeded were true generals, while Grant especially, in the words of Thiers, “was hardly worthy of history.” What gives a certain quality to these criticisms, and renders them partly unanswerable, is the fact that Grant is dead.

As one who loved and honored Grant, I would like to submit some hasty notes in reply to General Smith, more as suggestions, however, than as a consecutive answer to an article ingeniously written to conceal an ignoble assault upon the dead captain.

General Smith epitomizes the qualities which constitute a great captain. “The number” of great captains “may be counted upon the fingers of one hand,” and among them “Napoleon stands pre-eminent.”

Leaders of armies—“great captains”—war heroes, in these modern constitutional times, when government is the will, and sometimes the caprice of a free people, cannot all be emperors, kings, or even presidents. Generals must take their armies and war resources from legislatures; they must consider the civil policy of their government, and act in accord with that policy. They must produce their best results with a view to the government’s stability.

Our civil war was, therefore, truly civil, curiously marked on either side by the dependence of civil authority upon military success, and as such to be studied as unique among wars. I know of no campaigns resembling it, unless those of Marlborough, who arranged the marching of his columns according to the votes of the House of Commons.

The attack of Beauregard on Sumter was a civil act, intended to force Virginia into secession. Grant considered the exigencies of Lincoln’s administration in his move on Vicksburg. Sherman’s capture of Atlanta was a political answer to the declaration of the Democratic convention that the war was a failure. Sheridan’s Shenandoah campaigns in 1864 were swayed by the necessity for re-electing Lincoln. Here are definite examples of war under representative constitutional conditions—of war governed by civil rather than military considerations.

Beauregard, Grant, Sherman, and Sheridan, in these campaigns, were subordinate to their governments, as Washington and Wellington had been before them. So likewise was Napoleon in his

earlier campaigns, so long as France had a government reputable enough to inspire his respect and strong enough to insure his obedience. His pre-eminence as a great captain came from the absolute possession of the resources of a vast empire. Washington, Wellington, and Grant are great captains, whose achievements were under civil control. While history shows that this irresponsibility of Napoleon gave him mighty opportunities, it shows likewise that it led to self-will, ambition, vanity, and to what surely comes as the consequence—humiliation and downfall. History, on the other hand, in the case of Washington, Wellington, and Grant, shows splendid, enduring results, the career of each a blessing to civilization, and their names to live with lustrous and enduring fame.

General Smith sees in modern history but one great captain whose powers were “used in the cause of liberty”—and no such man among his comrades and friends in the Union army. This is a pathetic confession by a soldier who, like Napoleon, had the chance to have shown what great powers could have accomplished. I have read few things more touching, for General Smith writes as one who remembers the great days, and who would live in history as having done something more than build pontoon bridges for the armies of Thomas and Sherman to cross.

Let us be just to our own time. If history is truly read, will it not appear that Washington fought for independence of British rule, rather than individual freedom? Was not our early war a Parnell movement for Home Rule—and not like that of Garibaldi for the freeing of a nation from alien domination, and of Garrison for the enfranchisement of a race? Washington bought and sold slaves. The constitution of 1789, although studiously avoiding the word “slave,” protected slavery. We give to Washington absolute love and veneration, but is it not rather as the founder of a nation regarding slavery as a sacred institution than as a soldier of liberty. I find Washington to be my great captain of American Independence. But I find Grant, Sherman, and their companions to be my great captains of American liberty, and, so far as the liberty of the citizen is above the independence of the State, so will the war for liberty in 1861 stand in history above the war for Independence in 1776.

Grant’s civil object as a soldier was to safeguard the Government. In the beginning the war was for the Union. He was the

soldier of the Union. The war became a war for Freedom. Grant became the soldier of Freedom, moving ever in the orbit of Washington and Wellington, a soldier in obedience to the law, a soldier who would have as readily suppressed the secession of New England as the secession of Virginia.

As a military study the “campaign of attrition” is scientific, and will be sustained by the highest authorities on the art of war. The problem before Grant was what has rarely devolved upon a great captain. It was not the defeat, but the destruction of his enemy. He could not fight, like Wellington or Moltke, for a peace conference, or a treaty—fight while diplomatists were in negotiation—he had to destroy or be destroyed. He had an enemy with whom he could not treat, with whose commander he was sternly forbidden to have a conference on any but military matters. His “campaign of attrition” was, therefore, to hold as in a vise his immediate antagonist, sending minor armies to destroy the country upon which that enemy subsisted. When those armies came within supporting distance Grant launched forth and conquered in one of the greatest battles of history. He not only defeated but destroyed his enemy, securing freedom to millions of slaves, and assuring a republican form of government to hundreds of millions of freemen. “If,” says Thiers, in the passage quoted by General Smith, “the identification of the multitude with a single individual, which produces force in the highest degree, serves to protect, to defend a noble cause, that of liberty, then the scene has a grandeur in its moral as well as its other aspects.”

I see this grandeur in the achievements of Grant, Sherman, and Sheridan, who are the great captains of this age, and as such will be honored by our children. I take Grant as the chief and type, one of the host of patriotic people who, suddenly aroused to war, met it as brave men should. Some had professional education, some limited experience, but they had one soul, one purpose. They were the heroes, and because of what they did Freedom is the law of the land.