

### **William Meade Dame**

# From the Rapidan to Richmond and the Spottsylvania Campaign

A Sketch in Personal Narration of the Scenes a Soldier Saw

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# INTRODUCTION

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# By

# **Thomas Nelson Page**

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"The land where I was born" was, in my childhood, a great battleground. War—as we then thought the vastest of all wars, not only that had been, but that could ever be swept over it. I never knew in those days a man who had not been in the war. So, "The War" was the main subject in every discussion and it was discussed with wonderful acumen. Later it took on a different relation to the new life that sprung up and it bore its part in every gathering much as the stories of Troy might have done in the land where Homer sang. To survive, however, in these reunions as a narrator one had to be a real contributor to the knowledge of his hearers. And the first requisite was that he should have been an actor in the scenes he depicted; secondly, that he should know how to depict them. Nothing less served. His hearers themselves all had experience and demanded at least not less than their own. As the time grew more distant they demanded that it should be preserved in more definite form and the details of the life grew more precious.

Among those whom I knew in those days as a delightful narrator of experiences and observations—not of strategy nor even of tactics in battle; but of the life in the midst of the battles in the momentous campaign in which the war was eventually fought out, was a kinsman of mine—the author of this book. A delightful raconteur because he had seen and felt himself what he related, he told his story without conscious art, but with that best kind of art: simplicity. Also with perennial freshness; because he told it from his journals written on the spot.

Thus, it came about that I promised that when he should be ready to publish his reminiscences I would write the introduction for them. My introduction is for a story told from journals and reminiscent of a time in the fierce Sixties when, if passion had free rein, the virtues were strengthened by that strife to contribute so greatly a half century later to rescue the world and make it "safe for Democracy."

It was the war—our Civil War—that over a half century later brought ten million of the American youth to enroll themselves in one day to fight for America. It was the work in "the Wilderness" and in those long campaigns, on both sides, which gave fibre to clear the Belleau Wood. It was the spirit of the armies of Lee and Grant which enabled Pershing's army to sweep through the Argonne.

Rome, March 27, 1919.

### **WOLSELEY'S TRIBUTE TO LEE**

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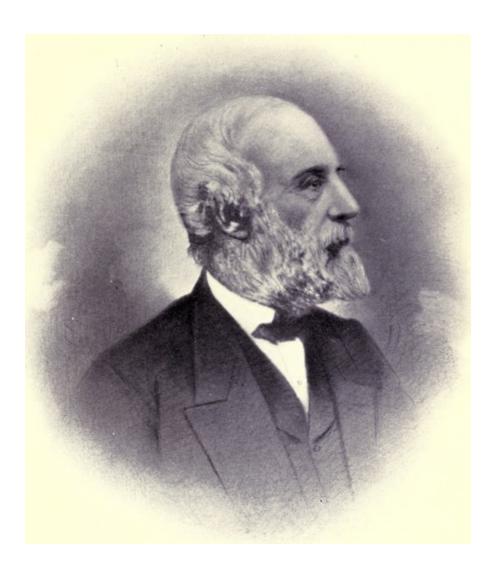
The following tribute to Robert E. Lee was written by Lord Wolseley when commander-in-chief of the armies of Great

Britain, an office which he held until succeeded by Lord Roberts.

Lord Wolseley had visited General Lee at his headquarters during the progress of the great American conflict. Some time thereafter Wolseley wrote:

"The fierce light which beats upon the throne is as a rushlight in comparison with the electric glare which our newspapers now focus upon the public man in Lee's position. His character has been subjected to that ordeal, and who can point to a spot upon it? His clear, sound judgment, personal courage, untiring activity, genius for war, absolute devotion to his State, mark him out as a public man, as a patriot to be forever remembered by all Americans. His amiability of disposition, deep sympathy with those in pain or sorrow, his love for children, nice sense of personal honor and generous courtesy, endeared him to all his friends. I shall never forget his sweet, winning smile, nor his clean, honest eyes that seemed to look into your heart while they searched your brain. I have met with many of the great men of my time, but Lee alone impressed me with the feeling that I was in the presence of a man who was cast in a grander mold and made of different and finer metal than all other men. He is stamped upon my memory as being apart and superior to all others in every way, a man with whom none I ever knew and few of whom I have read are worthy to be classed. When all the angry feelings aroused by the secession are buried with those that existed when the American Declaration of Independence was written; when Americans can review the history of their last great war with calm impartiality, I believe all will admit that General Lee towered far above all men on either side in that struggle. I believe he will be regarded not only as the most prominent figure of the Confederacy, but as the greatest American of the nineteenth century, whose statue is well worthy to stand on an equal pedestal with that of Washington and whose memory is equally worthy to be enshrined in the hearts of all his countrymen.

"WOLSELEY."



GENERAL ROBERT E. LEE

## INTRODUCTORY

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In 1861 a ringing call came to the *The Cause of* manhood of the South. The world knows *Conflict and the* how the men of the South answered that *Call to Arms* call. Dropping everything, they came from mountains, valleys and plains—from Maryland to Texas, they eagerly crowded to the front, and stood to arms. What for? What moved them? What was in their minds?

Shallow-minded writers have tried hard to make it appear that slavery was the cause of that war; that the Southern men fought to keep their slaves. They utterly miss the point, or purposely pervert the truth.

In days gone by, the theological schoolmen held hot contention over the question as to the kind of wood the Cross of Calvary was made from. In their zeal over this trivial matter, they lost sight of the great thing that did matter; the mighty transaction, and purpose displayed upon that Cross.

In the causes of that war, slavery was only a detail and an occasion. Back of that lay an immensely greater thing; the defense of their rights—the most sacred cause given men on earth, to maintain at every cost. It is the cause of humanity. Through ages it has been, pre-eminently, the cause of the Anglo-Saxon race, for which countless heroes have died. With those men it was to defend the rights of their States to control their own affairs, without dictation from anybody outside; a right not *given*, but *guaranteed* by the Constitution, which those States accepted, most distinctly, under that condition.

It was for that these men came. This was just what they had in their minds; to uphold that solemnly guaranteed constitutional right, distinctly binding all the parties to that compact. The South pleaded with the other parties to the Constitution to observe their guarantee; when they refused, and talked of force, then the men of the South got their guns and came to see about it.

They were Anglo-Saxons. What could you expect? Their fathers had fought and died on exactly this issue—they could do no less. As their noble fathers, so their noble sons pledged their lives, and their sacred honor to uphold the same great cause—peaceably if they could; forcibly if they must.

So the men of the South came together. Those Who They came from every rank and calling of Answered the life—clergymen, bishops, doctors, lawyers, Call statesmen, governors of states, judges, editors, merchants, mechanics, farmers. One bishop became a lieutenant general; one clergyman, chief of artillery, Army of Northern Virginia. In one artillery battalion three clergymen were cannoneers at the guns. All the students of one Theological Seminary volunteered, and three fell in battle, and all but one were wounded. They came of every age. I personally know of six men over sixty years who volunteered, and served in the ranks, throughout the war; and in the Army of Northern Virginia, more than ten thousand men were under eighteen years of age, many of them sixteen years.

They came of every social condition of life: some of them were the most prominent men in the professional, social,

and political life of their States; owners of great estates, employing many slaves; and thousands of them, hornyhanded sons of toil, earning their daily bread by their daily labor, who never owned a slave and never would.

There came men of every degree of intellectual equipment—some of them could hardly read, and per contra, in my battery, at the mock burial of a pet crow, there were delivered an original Greek ode, an original Latin oration, and two brilliant eulogies in English—all in honor of that crow; very high obsequies had that bird.

Men who served as cannoneers of that same battery, in after life came to fill the highest positions of trust and influence—from governors and professors of universities, downward; and one became Speaker of the House of Representatives in the United States Congress. Also, it is to be noted that twenty-one men who served in the ranks of the Confederate Army became Bishops of the Episcopal Church after the war.

Of the men who thus gathered from all the Southern land, the first raised regiments were drawn to Virginia, and there organized into an army whose duty it was to cover Richmond, the Capital of the Confederacy—just one hundred miles from Washington, which would naturally be the center of military activities of the hostile armies.

The body, thus organized, was An Army of composed entirely of volunteers. Every Volunteers man in it was there because he wanted to come as his solemn duty. It was made up of regiments from every State in the South—Maryland, Virginia, North and South Carolina, Georgia, Florida, Alabama, Mississippi,

Louisiana, Texas, Arkansas and Tennessee. Each State had its quota, and there were many individual volunteers from Kentucky, Missouri and elsewhere. That army was baptized by a name that was to become immortal in the annals of war—"The Army of Northern Virginia."

What memories cluster around that name! Great soldiers, and military critics of all nations of Christendom, including even the men who fought it, have voiced their opinion of that army, and given it high praise. Many of them, duly considering its spirit, and recorded deeds, and the tremendous odds against which it fought, have claimed for it the highest place on the roll of honor, and in the Hall of Fame, among all the armies of history.

Truly it deserves high place! when you think that after four years of heroic courage, devotion, and endurance, never more than half fed, poorly supplied with clothes, often scant of ammunition, holding the field after every battle, that it fought, till the end, worn out at last, it disbanded at Appomattox, when only eight thousand hungry men remained with arms in their hands, and they, defiant, and fighting still, when the white flags began to pass. They surrendered then only because General Lee said they must, because he would not vainly sacrifice another man; and they wept like broken-hearted children when they heard his orders. They would have fought on till the last man dropped, but General Lee said: "No, you, my men, go home and serve your country in peace as you have done in war."

They did as General Lee told them to *Our Great* do, and it was the indomitable courage of *Leader* those men and of the women of their land,

who were just as brave, at home, as the men were, at the front, which has made the South rise from its ruins and blossom as the rose as it does this day.

Thus "yielding to overwhelming numbers and resources," the Army of Northern Virginia died. But its *glory* has not died, and the splendor of its deeds has not, and will not grow dim.

As, in vision, I look across the long years that have pressed their length between the now and then, I can see that Army of Northern Virginia on the march. At its head rides one august and knightly figure, Robert E. Lee, the knightliest gentleman, and the saintliest hero that our race has bred. He is on old "Traveler," almost as famous as his master. On his right rides that thunderbolt of war, Stonewall Jackson, on "Little Sorrel," with whose fame the world was ringing when he fell. On Lee's left, on his beautiful mare, "Lady Annie," the bright, flashing cavalier, "Jeb" Stuart, the darling of the Army.

Behind these three, in their swinging stride, tramp the long columns of infantry, artillery, and cavalry of the army. As we gaze upon that spectacle, we say, and nothing better can be said, "Those chiefs were worthy to lead those soldiers; those soldiers were worthy to follow Robert Lee."

In this order, The Army of Northern Virginia, General Lee in front, has come marching down the road of history, and shall march on, and all brave souls of the generations stand at "Salute," and do them homage as they pass. Noble Army of Northern Virginia!

All true men will understand and none, least of all the brave men who faced it in battle, will deny to the old Confederate the just right to be proud that he was comrade to those men and marched in their ranks, and was with their leader to the end. Of that army, I had, thank God! the honor to be a soldier. It came about in this way.

When the war began I was a school boy The Call Comes attending the Military Academy in Danville, Home Virginia, where I was born and reared. At once the school broke up. The teachers, and all the boys who were old enough went into the army. I was just sixteen years old, and small for my age, and I can understand now, but could not then, how my parents looked upon the desire of a boy like that to go to the war, as out of the guestion. I did not think so. I was a strong, well-knit fellow, and it seemed to me that what you required in a soldier was a man who could shoot, and would stay there and do it. I knew I could shoot, and I thought I could stay there and do it, so I was sure I could be a soldier, and I was crazy to go, but my parents could not see it so, and I was very miserable. All my classmates in school had gone or were going, and I pictured to myself the boys coming back from the war, as soldiers who had been in battle, and all the honors that would be showered upon them—and I would be out of it all. The thought that I had not done a manly part in this great crisis would make me feel disgraced all my life. It was horrible.

My father, the honored and beloved minister of the Episcopal Church in Danville, and my mother, the daughter and grand-daughter of two Revolutionary soldiers, said they wanted me to go, and would let me go, when I was older—I was too young and small as yet. But I was afraid it would be

all over before I got in, and I would lay awake at night, sad and wretched with this fear. I need not have been afraid of that. There was going to be plenty to go around, but I did not know that then, and I was low in mind. I suppose that my very strong feeling on the subject was natural. It was the inherited microbe in the blood. Though I was only a school boy in a back country town, my forebears had always been around when there was any fighting to be done. My greatgrandfather, General Thomas Nelson, and my grandfather, Major Carter Page, and all their kin of the time had fought through the Revolutionary War. My people had fought in the war of 1812, and the Mexican War, and the Indian Wars. Whenever anybody was fighting our country, some of my people were in it, and back of that, Lord Nelson of Trafalgar, was a second cousin of my great-grandfather, Thomas Nelson; and, still farther back of that, my ancestor, Thomas Randolph, in command of a division of the Scottish Army under King Robert Bruce, was the man who, by his furious charge, broke the English line at "Bannockburn" and won the Independence of Scotland.

You see that a boy, with all that back of him, in his family, had the virus in his blood, and could not help being wretched when his country was invaded, and fighting, and he not in it. He would feel that he was dishonoring the traditions of his race, and untrue to the memory of his fathers. However, that schoolboy brooding over the situation was mighty miserable. When my parents realized my feelings, they, at last, gave up their opposition, and I went into the army with their consent, and blessing.

While this matter was hanging fire, First Company having been at a military academy, I was Richmond trying to do some little service by helping Howitzers to drill some of the raw companies which were being rapidly raised, in and around Danville. The minute I was free, off I went. Circumstances led me to enlist in a battery made up in Richmond, known as the "First Company of Richmond Howitzers," and I was thus associated with as fine a body of men as ever lived—who were to be my comrades in arms, and the most loved, and valued friends of my after life.

This battery was attached to "Cabell's Battalion" and formed part of the field artillery of Longstreet's Corps, Army of Northern Virginia. It was a "crack" battery, and was always put in when anything was going on. It served with great credit, and was several times mentioned in General Orders, as having rendered signal service to the army. It was in all the campaigns, and in action in every battle of the Army of Northern Virginia. It fought at Manassas. Williamsburg, Seven Pines, Seven Days' Battle around Richmond in 1862, Second Manassas, Sharpsburg, Harpers Ferry, Fredericksburg, Chancellorsville, Gettysburg, Morton's Ford, The Wilderness, The Battles of Spottsylvania Court House, North Anna, Pole Green Church, Cold Harbor, Petersburg, and at Appomattox Court House. Every one of the cannoneers, who had not been killed or wounded, was at his gun in its last fight. The very last thing it did was to help "wipe up the ground" with some of Sheridan's Cavalry, which attacked and tried to ride us down, but was cut to pieces by our cannister fire, and went off as hard as their horses could run—as if the devil was after them. Then the surrender closed our service.

My comrades, as the rest of the army, Back to Civil scattered to their homes. I went to my Life home in Danville, and had to walk 180 miles to get there. After a few days, which I chiefly employed in trying to get rid of the sensation of starving, I went to work—got a place in the railroad service.

After eighteen months of this, I proceeded to carry out a purpose that I had in mind since the closing days of the war. I had been through that long and bloody conflict; I had been at my gun every time it went into action, except once when I was lying ill of typhoid fever; I had been in the path of death many times, and though hit several times, had never been seriously wounded, or hurt badly enough to have to leave my gun—and here I was at the end of all this—alive, and well and strong, and twenty years of age. As I thought of God's merciful protection through all those years of hardship and danger, a wish and purpose was born, and got fixed in my mind and heart, to devote my life to the service of God in the completest way I could as a thanksgiving to Him. Naturally, my thoughts turned to the ministry of the Gospel, and I decided to enter the seminary and train for that service as soon as the way was open.

While I was in the railroad train work, I studied hard in the scraps of time to get some preparation, and in September, 1866, I entered the Virginia Theological Seminary along with twenty-five other students—all of whom were Confederate soldiers. I here tackled a job that was much more trying than working my old twelve-pounder

brass Napoleon gun in a fight. I would willingly have swapped jobs, if it had been all the same, but I worked away, the best I could, at the Hebrew, and Greek, and "Theology," and all the rest, for three years.

Somehow I got through, and graduated, and was ordained by Bishop Johns of Virginia, the twenty-sixth of June, 1869. Thus the old cannoneer was transformed into a parson, who intended to try to be as faithful to duty, as a parson, as the old cannoneer had been. He has carried that purpose through life ever since. How far he has realized it, others will have to judge.

After serving for nine years in several parishes in Virginia, I came to Baltimore as rector of Memorial Church, and have been here ever since. Hence I have served in the ministry for fifty years—forty-one of which I have spent serving the Memorial Church, and having, as a side line, been Chaplain of the "Fifth Regiment Maryland National Guard" for thirty-odd years. When one is bitten by the military "bee" in his youth, he never gets over it—the sight of a line of soldiers, and the sound of martial music stirs me still, as it always did, and I have had the keenest interest and pleasure in my association with that splendid regiment, and my dear friends and comrades in it.

So, through the changes and chances of this mortal life, I have come thus far, and by the blessing of God, and the patience of my people, at the age of seventy-four I am still in full work among the people, whom I have served so long, and loved so well—still at my post where I hope to stay till the Great Captain orders me off to service in the only place I know of, that is better than the congregation of Memorial

Church, and the community of Baltimore—and that is the everlasting Kingdom of Heaven.

Now, what I have been writing here is *Origin of This* intended to lead up to the narrative set *Narrative* forth in the pages of this volume. Sam Weller once said to Mr. Pickwick, when invited to eat a veal pie, "Weal pies is werry good, providin' you knows the lady as makes 'em, and is sure that they *is weal* and not *cats*." The remark applies here: a narrative is "werry good providin' you knows" the man as makes it, and are sure that it is facts, and not fancy tales. You want to be satisfied that the writer was a personal witness of the things he writes about, and is one who can be trusted to tell you things as he actually saw them. I hope both these conditions are fulfilled in this narrative.

But some one might say, "How about this narrative that you are about to impose on a suffering public, who never did you any harm? What do you do it for?"

Well, I did not do it of malice aforethought. It came about in this way. Young as I was when I went into the war, and never having seen anything of the world outside the ordinary life of a boy, in a quiet country town, the scenes of that soldier life made a deep impression on my mind, and I have carried a very clear recollection of them—everyone—in my memory ever since. As I have looked back, and thought upon the events, and especially the spirit, and character, and record, of my old comrades in that army, my admiration, and estimate of their high worth as soldiers has grown ever greater, and I felt a very natural desire that others should know them as I knew them—and put them in

their rightful rank as soldiers. The only way to do this is for those who know to tell people about them; what manner of warriors they were.

Now mark how one glides into mischief unintentionally. Years ago, I was beguiled into making, at various times, places, and occasions, certain, what might be called, "Camp Fire Talks" descriptive of Soldier Life in the Army of Northern Virginia. Weakly led on by the kindly expressed opinions of those who heard these talks, and urged by old friends, and comrades, and others, I ventured on a more connected narrative of our observations and experiences, as soldiers in that army. I wrote a sketch, in that vein, of the "Spottsylvania Campaign"—in 1864—fought between General Lee and General Grant. It was a tremendous struggle of the two armies for thirty days—almost without a break. It was a thrilling period of the war, and brought out the high quality of both the Commander and the fighting men of the Army of Northern Virginia.

It was the bloodiest struggle known to history, up to that time. As one item, at Cold Harbor, General Grant, in fifteen minutes, by the watch, lost 13,723 men, killed and wounded, irrespective of many prisoners—more men in a quarter of an hour than the British Army lost in the whole battle of Waterloo. That gives an idea of the terrible intensity of that campaign—one incident of it the bloodiest quarter of an hour in all the history of war.

I took as a title for my sketch "From the Rapidan to Richmond" or "The Bloody War Path of 1864"—"The Scenes One Soldier Saw."