

HARPER'S WEEKLY

MAY 6, 1865



GENERAL SHERMAN.

THE convention of General SHERMAN with the rebel General JOHNSTON is not the least of the astounding events of the last few weeks. The rebellion had failed. Its chief army was disbanded. Its military chief had surrendered. Its civil chief was a fugitive. Its capital had fallen. Its last sea-port was gone. The sudden dispersion of its offensive force had been marvelous, when the hero of Georgia and of the Carolinas, the soldier who had led his army through the rebel section from the Ohio to the coast, the Lieutenant who had just returned from an interview with his superior at City Point, and who knew as every body in the country knew that the idea of an armistice had been steadily repelled by the people and the Government, who knew that when President LINCOLN went to Hampton Roads to meet the rebel commissioners he expressly told General GRANT not to suspend military operations for a moment, who knew that General GRANT himself while corresponding with LEE was still fighting him, the soldier who knew all this and the terms upon which JOHNSTON'S superior had just surrendered to his own superior officer, suddenly quits the military sphere, and dashing into the political and diplomatic, fails as signally and sadly as before he had gloriously triumphed.

General SHERMAN not only treats with the rebel General JOHNSTON, but with "high officials"—that is to say, with the conspirators who have formed what was called "the Confederate Government." He says to his army that, when ratified, the terms will secure peace from the Potomac to the Rio Grande. Ratified by whom? He has already told us in the convention with JOHNSTON: "Not being fully empowered by our respective principals to fulfill these terms," etc. They are then to be ratified by the principals—that is, by the Government of

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the United States and the "Confederate Government."

General SHERMAN could not have surprised his country more if he had surrendered his army to JOHNSTON, and the first emotion of every loyal man was the wish to await some explanation of conduct apparently inexplicable. In the absence of such assistance we must seek the solution in what we already know.

General SHERMAN had lived long in Louisiana when the war began. He has been constantly in the remote field of operations, far from the knowledge of current opinion, and he has shown a peculiar hostility to newspapers and correspondents. He had no special sympathy with the moral sentiment which animated the patriotism of the Northern States. He probably held the Southern view of slavery, although he did not hesitate to say, while opposed to the arming of colored men, that whoever was worthy to carry a musket in defense of the Government was not unworthy to cast a ballot. He has, however, always taken a purely military view of the rebellion. His demand has constantly been merely that the insurgents should lay down their arms; and he said last autumn that the war had but just begun. By this we understood him to mean that the spirit of rebellion was so desperate that it would prevent the possibility of peace so long as any considerable number of rebels remained in arms.

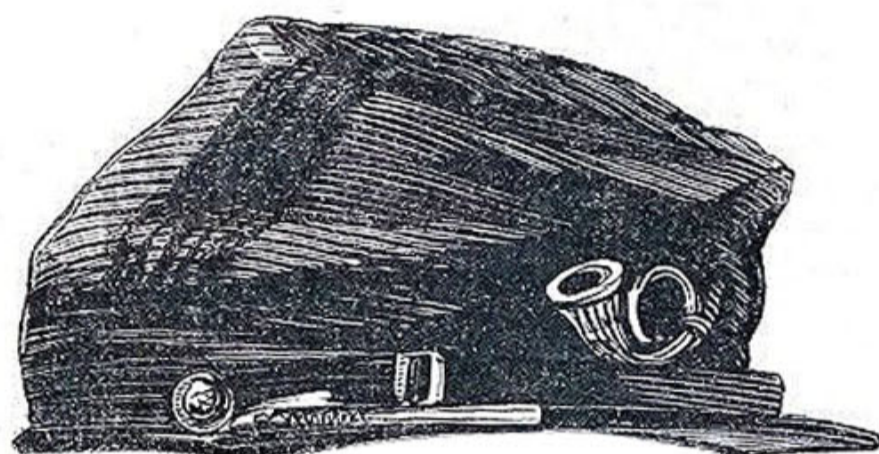
It was a necessary result of such opinions that he should believe a consent to disband its military forces was a result to be bought of the rebellion at almost any price. We must assume that his experience in Georgia and the Carolinas had confirmed this view. But it still remains inexplicable why he should suppose that he could not make as favorable terms for his country with the miscellaneous army of JOHNSTON as General GRANT had, as he knew, already made with the veterans of LEE; or why he should undertake to do upon his own responsibility what he knew the Government had refused to allow his superior to do under circumstances a thousand-fold more unpromising than those in which he stood.

It is hardly possible to believe that he supposed his convention would be approved by the country and Government, even before the murder of President LINCOLN; and equally difficult to perceive how any man of ordinary common sense could anticipate peace upon the terms of his arrangement. But the painful event vindicates the wisdom of President LINCOLN in refusing from the beginning to allow the Generals in the field to decide the questions that were really political. He disapproved all such action in the instances of Generals FREMONT, HUNTER, and M'CLELLAN, and his last official act in his first term was an express instruction to General GRANT to confine himself to military operations. General SHERMAN knew that this was the un-deviating policy of the Government. He has yet to explain why he utterly disregarded it.

That he had any personal political advantage in view the country will hesitate to believe. That some vision of being the great final Pacifier for a moment bewildered an impetuous and imperious nature is not inconceivable. But that he utterly misunderstands the scope of the war in which he has been so conspicuous and successful a soldier—that he comprehends nei-

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ther the spirit nor the purpose nor the character of the "high officials" who have been now for four years by arms, and for thirty years by the most unscrupulous and appalling debauchery of the national mind and heart, seeking to destroy the Government of his country—this humiliating proposal to the conspirators is the final and painful proof. That the best of soldiers may be the worst of statesmen is easily credible; but it is lamentable to have the truth illustrated by a man of whom we were all so proud as we were of General SHERMAN.



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