

South; slavery prevented foreign recognition; slavery gave the North a new goal and a new ideal; slavery encouraged states rights; slavery in the end weakened the economy and the military effort more than it strengthened them.

Or perhaps it was all of these things combined—something which, for want of a better term, historians call “loss of nerve.” The fall of Rome has been ascribed to that mysterious thing called “loss of nerve,” and so too, in our own time, the decline of the West. Did the South, in the end, lose its nerve? Perhaps so, but we still want to know why the mettlesome South of 1861 became the nerveless South of 1865. To argue that defeatism causes defeat is a circular argument that gets us nowhere.

Two things should be clear to anyone who considers these interpretations: first that the defeat of the Confederacy was not inevitable, and second, that causation is not simple but complex, not singular but plural. And the student will do well to reflect that the failure of the Confederacy to achieve independence is not a unique miscalculation in history; the whole of history is bestrewn with mighty miscalculations. On almost every page we see written the words of Euripides:

*The end men looked for cometh not,
And a path there was, where no man thought;
So hath it fallen here.*

God and the Strongest Battalions

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WHEN WAR BEGAN in 1861, the statistics from the latest federal census decidedly favored the twenty-three states remaining in the Union as against the eleven that had withdrawn from it. In population the North had an advantage of almost five to two, and this advantage appears even greater if the slaves (more than one-third of the Southern people) are counted as somewhat less than the same number of freemen. In wealth and capacity to produce, the North held a still greater edge: in value of real and personal property, more than three to one (even with the inclusion of \$2 billion for the slave property of the South); in capital of incorporated banks, more than four to one; in value of products annually manufactured, more than ten to one. The seceded states probably had a much less than proportional share of the national income. Besides, they contained only about a third of the total railroad mileage and practically none of the registered shipping. Though these comparisons are incomplete and inexact, they will serve to illustrate the point that the Union went to war with an overwhelming preponderance in most sources of economic power.

If wars are won by riches, there can be no question why the North eventually prevailed. The only question will be: How did the South manage to stave off defeat so long? Or perhaps the question ought to be: Why did the South even risk a war in which she was all but beaten before the first shot was fired?

Indeed, this last question occurred to at least a few Southerners during the secession winter. For example, the editor of the *Lynchburg Virginian* wrote: "Dependent upon Europe and the North for almost every yard of cloth, and every coat and boot and hat that we wear, for our axes, scythes, tubs, and buckets, in short, for everything except our bread and meat, it must occur to the South that if our relations with the North are ever severed,—and how soon they may be none can know; may God forbid it long!—we should, in all the South, not be able to clothe ourselves; we could not fill our firesides, plough our fields, nor mow our meadows; in fact, we should be reduced to a state more abject than we are willing to look at even prospectively. And yet, all of these things staring us in the face, we shut our eyes and go in blindfold." Of course, the view of the *Lynchburg Virginian* was: not the prevailing attitude of Southerners at that time. If it had been, most likely there would have been no war.

Nor was this the opinion of most leading Southerners afterwards, when the war had been lost and they were casting about for reasons why it had been. These men refused to adopt the handy and easy rationalization that the North simply had been too much and too many for the South. These men could not very well accept such an explanation, for it would have convicted them of blindness, stupidity, or even worse in going into a conflict they could not hope to win. In his memoirs General Joseph E. Johnston defended his fellow Southerners against such a possible charge. "That people," he wrote, "was not guilty of the high crime of undertaking a war without the means of waging it successfully."

As Johnston looked back, it seemed to him that the Confederacy had possessed "ample means." Other Southerners agreed with him. General P. G. T. Beauregard, for one, declared that "no people ever warred for independence with more relative advantages than the

Confederacy; and if, as a military question, they must have failed, then no country must aim at freedom by means of war." The outcome was not to be explained, Beauregard insisted, by "mere material contrast" between the North and the South. So, too, the Richmond journalist and historian Edward A. Pollard maintained that "something more than numbers makes armies" and that "against the vast superiority of the North in material resources, the South had "a set-off in certain advantages."

Among these presumed advantages of the South, the first was psychological. Her people, fighting as they did for the high ideal of independence, for the protection of their very homes, were moved by a "superior animation," a more determined spirit than the enemy could attain. The second point in the South's favor was geographic. She possessed rivers, swamps, and mountains that were "equivalent to successive lines of fortification"; she had the "immense advantage of the interior lines"; and, besides all this, she was favored with "one single advantage" which, alone, "should have been decisive of the contest." "That advantage was space." Even some economic aspects favored the South. At the beginning of the war it was a "remarkable fact" that "the South was richer than the North in all the necessaries of life," producing as she did more corn and livestock per person. The fourth and most important item might be viewed as either economic or diplomatic. This was cotton—a magic word, a magic staple, which theoretically ought to have done wonders for the Confederacy.

If statistics were on the side of the North, history seemed to be on the side of the South. In previous struggles for liberty the Dutch had beaten the Spaniards, the Russians had repelled the French, and the Americans had won out over the British against odds as bad or worse than those the Southerners faced in 1861. "In an intelligent view of the precedents of history," Pollard concluded, "it might safely [have been] predicted that the South . . . would be victor in the contest, however unequally matched in men and the materials of war, unless the management of her affairs should become insane, or her people lose the virtue of endurance."

Possibly, then, the Confederacy at last succumbed not because of any economic handicap but because of a loss of virtue, that is,

of morale or fighting spirit. This, indeed, is the view of Charles H. Wesley, who discounts the "customary" explanation of the collapse of the Confederacy as due to Northern economic preponderance, and who repudiates the "astonishing conclusion that we must all be amazed that the Confederacy was able to continue the contest for so long a period." According to Wesley, the "psychological factors which entered into the disruption of Southern morale and the inherent political weaknesses of the Confederacy were fundamental" in bringing about the final collapse. But others writers deny that a failure of will was the prime cause of defeat. They point to the fact that Southerners sacrificed far more for the Lost Cause than the Revolutionary patriots had sacrificed for victory over England.

If the defeat was not due to a loss of will to win, then perhaps it was caused by bad management, by human errors, by failures of statesmanship. Certainly the carping Pollard thought so. His book is replete with contemptuous references to the policies of the Jefferson Davis government—with such phrases as "silly prospects," "a new delusion," "silly declamation," "puerile argument," "feeble and mismanaged efforts," "a policy of blunders," "silly devices," and "childish expedients." Pollard, of course, enjoyed the privilege of the second guess. Other similarly privileged critics of the Davis government, while not always agreeing with Pollard in detail, concurred with him in the general proposition that the Confederacy had fallen because of mistakes in the use of its resources and not because of a lack of sufficient resources to begin with.

In economic policy the chief errors commonly attributed to the Confederate government are these: its failure to exploit cotton promptly as a basis for foreign credit; its unwillingness to tax its people and its reliance, instead, on issues of paper money in the form of treasury notes; its impressment, or seizure at arbitrary prices, of the goods of its citizens; and its lack of thoroughness in the promotion of manufacturers and in the control of transportation, especially by railroad. A brief re-examination of these matters may throw light on the question of whether the Confederacy was more handicapped by human or by material shortcomings.

In cotton, the South had a cash crop of great value, and yet, in

the midst of war, Southerners reduced their planting, burned some of the bales they had on hand, and discouraged shipments abroad. "Instead of making the best use of this resource," B. J. Hendrick observes, "the Davis government deliberately did all in its power to make it useless." At first glance the policy appears downright insane.

Surely there were alternatives, and in fact the Vice-President of the Confederacy, Alexander H. Stephens, proposed a different course during the war. Take two million bales from the 1860 and another two million from the 1861 crop, Stephens recommended. Pay for these with \$100 million in government bonds. Buy fifty ironclad steamers to carry the cotton safely to Europe. Store it there until the price rises to fifty cents a pound, then sell it. Thus, Stephens thought, the Confederacy could net a profit of \$800 million! Afterwards General Johnston was positive that this plan, if promptly put into effect, would have won the war. The cotton money, Johnston averred, would have procured arms for half a million men, who could have been ready and in the field by the time the very first battle was fought. The first battle, he implied, might well have been the last. In any event, "the Confederate treasury would have been much richer than that of the United States," and the South would have had the means of eventual success.

That the Confederacy failed to seize this splendid and obvious opportunity during the first year of the war—before the blockade had become too tight—must prove the stupidity if not the insanity of government leaders, of President Davis and his Secretary of the Treasury, Christopher G. Memminger. So it afterward seemed to historian Pollard, who berated Memminger for not having purchased cotton and sent it abroad while he had the chance. Pollard said Memminger had dismissed the Stephens plan as "soup-house legislation," as a scheme of government relief for cotton planters. But historian Pollard forgot a great deal that journalist Pollard had said during the war. Actually, it was Pollard's *Richmond Examiner* which had denounced Stephens for proposing "soup-house legislation." Afterwards, having reversed himself, Pollard put his own words into the mouth of poor Memminger!

The truth is that neither Davis nor Memminger had foisted upon

the South the idea of withholding cotton. When the war began, not only these two men but practically all Southern leaders believed that cotton—or rather the lack of it—would win the war for the South. On the Southern staple Great Britain presumably depended for its prosperity, and so did France, and so too did the United States. Without cotton, Great Britain and France would face economic prostration, and to avert this they would have to come to the Confederacy's aid. Without cotton, the United States would suffer the closing of its textile mills and, more important, would have no export crop sufficient for obtaining indispensable foreign exchange. If the notions about "King Cotton" were delusions, they were not the private dreams of Memminger or Davis.

In the light of the times, these ideas were not quite so crazy as they seem in retrospect. True, the cotton shortage failed to accomplish what Southerners had expected it to do. Yet it did create a serious problem for the North, the problem of finding means of payment for necessary imports. Unfortunately for Southern hopes, the North was able to make up for her lack of cotton shipments by means of increased exports of wheat. Unfortunately, also, there were British economic interests that ran counter to the British interest in continued cotton shipments from the South, as Frank L. Owsley had demonstrated.

The Stephens-Johnston-Pollard view regarding cotton exports was at least as visionary as the King Cotton theory itself. There simply was not so much cotton available in 1861 as Stephens estimated: there were not two million bales left over from the 1860 crop, but only a few hundred thousand. Then, too, it is doubtful whether many owners of this cotton would have given it up in return for Confederate bonds. Even if enough money were obtained, the fifty ironclads probably could not have been purchased, and without them the South did not have enough shipping to send the cotton overseas. "Finally," Rerribert W. Patrick concludes, "the idea . . . that with four million bales in storage the price of cotton would have risen to fifty cents a pound, was fanciful."

Granting that Stephens' gigantic cotton-export scheme was not feasible in 1861, there remains the question whether *something* could not have been accomplished by a more prompt and vigorous

export policy than was adopted. Whether or not Davis and Memminger should have done more than they did to base financing upon cotton, the fact is that they did more than their critics have credited them with doing. The cotton embargo, it must be remembered, was not the work of the Davis administration or of the Confederate Congress. It was the work of state and local officials and private groups, who had the backing of an almost unanimous public opinion. It did not have the official support of Memminger and Davis, who used their influence to prevent Congress from passing an embargo act, and who encouraged shipments of cotton in so far as vessels were available. Almost from the outset, the Confederate government sought to obtain cotton by purchase or by produce loan, keeping some of it at home as a basis of credit for the purchase of foreign supplies, and sending the rest abroad. The fiasco of the Erlanger loan resulted from an attempt to use cotton for bolstering the foreign credit of the Confederacy. Not until the third year of the war, however, did the government take complete control of cotton exports and push them with determination. If this program had been undertaken earlier, probably Confederate finances could have been made much stronger than they actually became.

Certainly, Confederate financing was much less sound and less successful than Union financing. Of the Confederacy's income, to October 1864, almost 60 per cent was derived from the issue of paper money, about 30 per cent from the sale of bonds, and less than 5 per cent from taxation (the remaining 5 per cent arising from miscellaneous sources). Of the Union's income, by contrast, 13 per cent was raised by paper money, 62 per cent by bonds, and 21 per cent by taxes (and 4 per cent by other means). Thus the Confederacy relied much more upon government notes and much less upon taxation and borrowing than the Union did. Exactly how much paper money was affloat in the wartime South, nobody knows for sure. "Even if we knew the successive amounts of Confederate treasury notes in the hands of the public during the war," John C. Schwab remarks, "this would signify little, as they formed but a part of the currency; the State, municipal, bank, corporate, and individual notes formed the other, and . . . no inconsiderable part."

The economist Eugene M. Lerner estimates that the stock of money in the South increased approximately eleven fold in the three years from January, 1861, to January, 1864. In any case, the prices of gold and other commodities were multiplied by much more than eleven. The price of gold, in Confederate dollars, rose eventually to sixty-one (in United States greenbacks it never rose even as high as three). The general price level, in Confederate dollars, soared to ninety or a hundred times its original level. The Confederacy suffered the worst inflation that Americans had known since the Revolutionary War.

In its effort to escape the evils of inflation the Confederate government but compounded them. The Funding Act of 1864, designed to force the exchange of treasury notes for bonds by threatening a partial repudiation of the notes, only speeded the loss in value of the currency. The impressment of government supplies, at less than the inflated market price, caused suppliers to withhold their goods and thus lessened the available amount. Unwittingly, the government defeated its own purposes. "The army suffered from want of food," as Schwab has observed, "though in the country at large there was no serious lack of it."

To the later critics of the Davis government it was perfectly obvious that the government should have taxed and taxed and borrowed and borrowed, rather than relying so heavily on the printing of batch after batch of treasury notes. These critics blamed Secretary Memminger, and some historians still blame him (Owsley refers to him as the "measly" Memminger). In truth, however, Memminger was just as well aware of the dangers of inflation as any of his denouncers. They were to have hindsight; he had at least a degree of foresight. But there was little he could do, especially since he lacked the force of personality to carry the Congress with him. As for taxes, he favored them, but at the start of the war he had no going machinery of tax collection to work with, and he was dealing with people who had even more than the typical American's resistance to taxation. Besides, cash was comparatively scarce in the Confederacy. The Secretary and the Congress had little choice but to resort to the 1861 requisition upon the states, which the states raised almost entirely by borrowing instead of taxing. As for issuing

bonds to sop up the excess currency, Memminger favored that too, but the plain fact was that the people would not or could not buy the bonds in sufficient quantities. Hence his recommendation of the funding scheme to force the sale of bonds—a scheme that Congress carried even farther than he had intended.

There can be no doubt that the government's fiscal policies failed in their main object, namely, to transfer goods efficiently from private to public hands. There is considerable doubt, however, whether Davis or Memminger or any individual was to blame. There also is doubt whether the paper money issues, alone, accounted for the extent of inflation in the South. Actually, the price rise was uneven, and the prices that rose the most were those of goods in short supply, such as leather, wool, coffee, salt, tea, and drugs. So the actual scarcity of some items, as well as the overabundance of money, seems to have been responsible for soaring prices. Moreover, the flight from the currency, at least during the last couple of years of the war, must have been due in part to a growing popular skepticism as to the chances of the Confederacy's ever winning the war and making good on its promises to pay.

By interfering with the free market, the Davis government unintentionally discouraged production, both agricultural and industrial. At the same time the government did not interfere enough by means of positive measures to make the most of manufacturing possibilities. "The failure of the Confederacy, though predictable from the start," Ella Lonn writes, "was immediately attributable to errors of judgment in not anticipating and justly estimating its inability to supply certain indispensable necessities." This is the main conclusion of Miss Lonn in her study of *Salt as a Factor in the Confederacy*, and it is a conclusion which may be applied to other items as well as salt. In controlling manufacturers the government never aimed to do more than provide the army with essential supplies. Even the efforts in this direction were slow, halting, and indirect. The chief methods of influencing industrial production were the assignment or withholding of labor through manipulation of the draft, and the provision or denial of raw materials through control of the railroads.

Yet the government was "loath to enforce the kind of transporta-

tion policy the war effort demanded." At the start the railroad system of the South was, of course, defective. There were not enough railroad lines, and few of these were located where, strategically, they would do the most good. Besides, there were too many gaps, and there was too little rolling stock and too few mechanics and facilities for upkeep or repair. Despite these shortcomings, the railroads gave as much reality to the concept of "interior lines" as this concept ever attained. At the first battle of Bull Run the Confederates reinforced an army by railroad, in the midst of battle, for the first time in history. In moving General James Longstreet's men from Virginia to Tennessee before the battle of Chickamauga the Confederates again made history in the military use of railroads. Still, in the judgment of R. C. Black, historian of Confederate railroads, "the Confederates by no means made the best use of what they had." The government delayed too long in taking over and operating all the lines as a unified system. Confederate transportation often had to depend on wagons or carts, mule teams, and dirt roads. Instead of leaving teams and vehicles in the hands of owners, so as to let the economy go on functioning efficiently, the government too often impressed these things for strictly military uses. The resulting transportation difficulties, in the opinion of Charles W. Ramsdell, ranked next to fiscal policies in their "deleterious consequences" for the Confederacy. Without adequate transportation, the geographical advantages of the South were largely lost.

In their handling of finances, manufactures, and transportation, the Confederate leaders made a number of errors that have become clear enough in retrospect. So the question persists: Were the South's economic disasters to be blamed upon human failings rather than material inadequacies? Was Davis inferior to Lincoln, and Memminger to Salmon P. Chase, the Union treasury head, in economic statesmanship? Were Southern civilians inferior to Northern in business ability and capacity for work? It has been said that the Confederate civil leaders in general and Memminger in particular proved themselves incompetent. And yet, if we imagine Chase in Memminger's position, it is hard to believe that he could have made a reputation as a successful financier. Memminger had

to deal with problems in comparison with which those of the Union treasury were almost child's play. As for the Southern people as a whole, they unquestionably lagged behind Northerners in business experience and in education and literacy, if not also in physical health. Yet it is hard to agree with the emphasis of Pollard when he concludes: "He who seeks to solve the problem of the downfall of the Southern Confederacy must take largely into consideration the absence of any intelligent and steady system in the conduct of public affairs, the little circles that bounded the Richmond administration; the deplorable want of the commercial or business facility in the Southern mind."

It is hard to believe, and impossible to prove, that the Southerners did a worse job with economic affairs than Northerners would have done in the same circumstances. It is unimportant and unnecessary to try to prove this. The point is that the North had an economic strength several times greater to start with. In order to overcome this handicap and attain even so much as equality in economic power, the civilians of the South would have had to be *several times* as able, man for man, as those of the North. And this, obviously, is too much to have expected of any people, however willing and determined they might have been.

If the South could not meet the North on anything like an equal economic footing, she would have to compensate in some other respect. She would have to be blessed with better luck or higher achievement in matters political, diplomatic, military, or psychological. A mere glance at these other considerations reveals at once that they cannot be appraised apart from one another, or the economic apart from any of them. These categories, after all, are purely arbitrary: we distinguish among them only for our own convenience.

In waging war, the Confederacy faced problems of politics and government that vastly complicated its problems of economic mobilization. Always the Southerners had to struggle with the incubus of John C. Calhoun, with the idea of state rights, with that fatal principle upon which their new government had been based. A Confederacy formed by particularist politicians could hardly be expected to adopt promptly those centralist policies—for marshal-

ing resources and transportation—which victory demanded. Even apart from this ideological handicap, the Confederacy faced insuperable difficulties in attempting to set up, from scratch, a going administration in the midst of war. Professor Ramsdell has put the matter admirably: “. . . the southern people and their governments failed, with a few exceptions, to conserve, develop, and efficiently administer their resources; but it must be said that these were gigantic tasks, intricate, complex, and baffling. That they did not succeed better is not surprising when we remember the simplicity of southern economic and political organization before secession. There was not time, while a powerful and determined enemy was crashing at the gate, to reorganize their whole system and, without previous experience, create a complex administration, and train administrators. Problems had to be met as they arose. . . . All in all, it is not surprising that they could not be solved, or that, in the end, the collapse was complete.”

By successful diplomacy, by winning the support of Great Britain or France, the South most likely could have canceled out all the economic advantages of the North. The Confederate financial policies, by the way, were not always easy to distinguish from the Confederate foreign policies. Thus, for example, the Erlanger loan, at least from the point of view of Judah P. Benjamin, was more a diplomatic than an economic measure, intended to elicit the support of France rather than, primarily, to raise funds. To explain why Southern hopes for foreign aid finally were dashed, it is necessary to look into a tangle of international economic relationships. It is necessary also to look into the world politics of the time, especially the divergent interests of Great Britain, France, and Russia. It is necessary even to look into the internal politics of England.

Certainly the economic history of the Confederacy cannot be told without including also the military and naval history (nor, for that matter, the military and naval without the economic). Bad as Southern transportation was at the start of the war, it soon was made worse by the advance of Union forces on land and sea. River and coastal waterways were occupied or blockaded and thus rendered useless to the Confederacy. Rail centers, like Chattanooga and Atlanta, were taken and new gaps thereby made in the already

defective railroad system. The capture of New Orleans, only a year after the fighting had begun, meant the loss of the Confederacy's financial heart. As the Union armies took over more and more Southern territory, there was a continual shrinking of the area within which Confederate notes passed as money. And as this area contracted, the quantity of paper money in it increased even more rapidly than the treasury put forth: new issues, for Southerners living in the occupied territory got rid of their Confederate money by sending it to places where it still had at least a little value—to places where the Stars and Bars still waved. The more ground the Confederacy lost in battle, the worse the problem of inflation became. Meanwhile, in filling her armies, the South had to draw off from the economy a much higher proportion of her manpower than the North did of hers. The South's capacity to produce, already so small by comparison, was made even smaller by a disproportionate reduction of her labor supply. While Union military power was weakening the Southern economy, Union naval power had the same effect in perhaps even greater degree. The blockade, by bringing about serious shortages in strategic items, not only added to the inflationary trends but also frustrated efforts to maintain the transportation network and to increase industrial output. And, toward the end of the war, the Southern loss of faith in victory, as has been seen, contributed to the currency depreciation and to the economic disorganization that ensued.

Thus psychological influences, resulting from military events, fatally affected economic conditions. The reverse is equally true. Economic conditions gave rise to psychological influences that seriously affected military events.

Strategy itself at times conformed to economic facts. When the South resorted to the draft, in April, 1862, the congressional critics of Davis blamed him for having made such an extreme measure necessary. They charged that he had adopted a strategy of the “dispersed defensive” and that this, in turn, had chilled the enthusiasm of Southern men, who would have volunteered in ample numbers for an aggressive, concentrated campaign against the North. In reply to his critics Davis explained that the Confederacy lacked the means for such a campaign. “Without military stores,” he said,

"without the workshops to create them, without the power to import them, necessity not choice has compelled us to occupy strong positions and everywhere to confront the enemy without reserves."

Soldier morale, presumably hurt by the dispersed defensive, was further damaged by economic developments behind the lines. As General Johnston remarks, "after the Confederate currency had become almost worthless" the married soldiers from the farms "had to choose between their military service and the strongest obligations they knew—their duties to wives and children." The dilemma of these soldiers was made especially poignant by the actions of Confederate impressment officials. Those officials, as Johnston says, frequently preyed upon the most defenseless of the citizens, especially upon farm women whose husbands were away in the army. Hard beset by inflation and impressment, wives summoned their soldier-husbands home, and, faced with a torturing choice of loyalties, the soldiers often placed family above country. In other ways, too, the fiscal policies of the Confederacy no doubt impaired the morale of both soldiers and civilians. Amid the wild inflation some people grew rich overnight, at least on paper, and others lost their fortunes just as suddenly. A gambling spirit infected the land, and almost everybody became a speculator of some kind. Those gamblers who lost—and practically all of them lost in the end—naturally were prone to feelings of bitterness and envy—And they directed these feelings against one another as well as against the Yankee foe.

Since so much of the Southern despair was induced by objective conditions and events, on the battlefield and on the home front, it is difficult to accept the Wesley thesis that the Confederacy collapsed because of a failure of the spirit. In most respects the loss of morale seems to have been a secondary rather than a primary cause of defeat.

The prime cause must have been economic. Given the vast superiority of the North in men and materials, in instruments of production, in communication facilities, in business organization and skill—and assuming for the sake of the argument no more than rough equality in state-craft and generalship—the final outcome seems all but inevitable. At least, it seems to have become inevitable

once two dangers for the Union had been passed. One of these was the threat of interference from abroad. The other was the possibility of military disaster resulting from the enemy's superior skill or luck on the battlefield, from his ability to make decisive use of his power-in-being before the stronger potential of the Union could be fully developed and brought into play. Both dangers appear to have been over by midsummer, 1863, if not already by autumn, 1862. Thereafter, month by month, the resources of the North began increasingly to tell, in what became more and more a war of attrition.

True, the victory is not always to the rich. The record of mankind offers many an example of a wealthy and fat and decadent people overcome by an enemy who was poor and lean and vigorous. Indeed, these historical examples heartened those Southerners who, at the outset, assumed that all Yankees had been corrupted by commerce and industry, that the "mudsills" of the factory and the money-grubbers of the counting-house would lack the fortitude that victory required. On the other hand, many in the North looked upon Southerners as a people debased, debauched, and incapacitated by contact with the institution of slavery. Today, at this distance in time, we can see that the two sides must have been about even in virtue and vice, devotion and disloyalty, human strength and weakness.

For the North to win, she had only to draw upon her resources as fully and as efficiently as the South drew upon hers; or, rather, the North had to make good use of only a fraction of her economic potential. Her material strength was so much greater that she could, as it were, almost lick the South with one hand tied behind her back. In fact, the North during the war years did devote a large part of her energies and resources to nonmilitary enterprise. Once the financial crisis of late 1861 was past, the Union entered upon an economic boom. She actually grew in material strength, while the South wasted away. From 1861 to 1865 nearly 5,000,000 acres of the public domain in the West were transferred to settlers and corporations. Railroad mileage lengthened from about 31,000 to more than 35,000 miles—an increase of approximately one-eighth. The value of imports for the North alone in 1864 was almost as

great as it had been for the entire country, the South included, in 1860.

With justifiable pride President Abraham Lincoln boasted of the wartime progress and prosperity in his annual message to Congress of December, 1864. "It is of noteworthy interest," Lincoln declared, "that the steady expansion of population, improvement, and governmental institutions over the new and unoccupied portion of our country have scarcely been checked, much less impeded or destroyed, by our great civil war, which at first glance would seem to have absorbed almost the entire energies of the nation." He noted the sales of public land, the work on the Pacific railroad, the discovery and exploitation of gold and silver and mercury in the West. "The important fact remains demonstrated," he concluded, "that we have *more men now* than we had when the war began; that we are not exhausted, nor in process of exhaustion; that we are *gaining strength*, and may, if need be, maintain the contest indefinitely. This as to men. Material resources are now more complete and abundant than ever. The national resources . . . are unexhausted, and, as we believe, inexhaustible."

Jefferson Davis could not truthfully have said the same of the South in 1864. At that time the Confederacy was not yet beaten on the field of battle, but already economic exhaustion was setting in behind the lines. As Ramsdell has remarked, ". . . the Confederacy had begun to crumble, or to break down *within*, long before the military situation appeared to be desperate."

From Ramsdell's observation it is but a step to the conclusion that economic rather than strictly military superiority was the basic reason for the ultimate victory of the North. At the start the North had possessed no significant advantage in a narrowly military sense—certainly no advantage comparable to that of her economic power and potential. This vast productive ability made the Union armies the best fed, the best clothed, the best cared for that the world ever had seen. The economic might made it possible for the North to field the stronger forces and, when the final test came, to place at every crucial point, as A. B. Hart has said, "more officers, more men, more camp followers, and more army mules."

Some Northerners used to cherish a simple—and, it would

seem, an irrefutable—explanation of the Northern victory. God had willed that the Union be preserved. Surely, in view of the disparity of resources, it would have taken a miracle, a direct intervention of the Lord on the other side, to enable the South to win. As usual, God was on the side of the heaviest battalions.