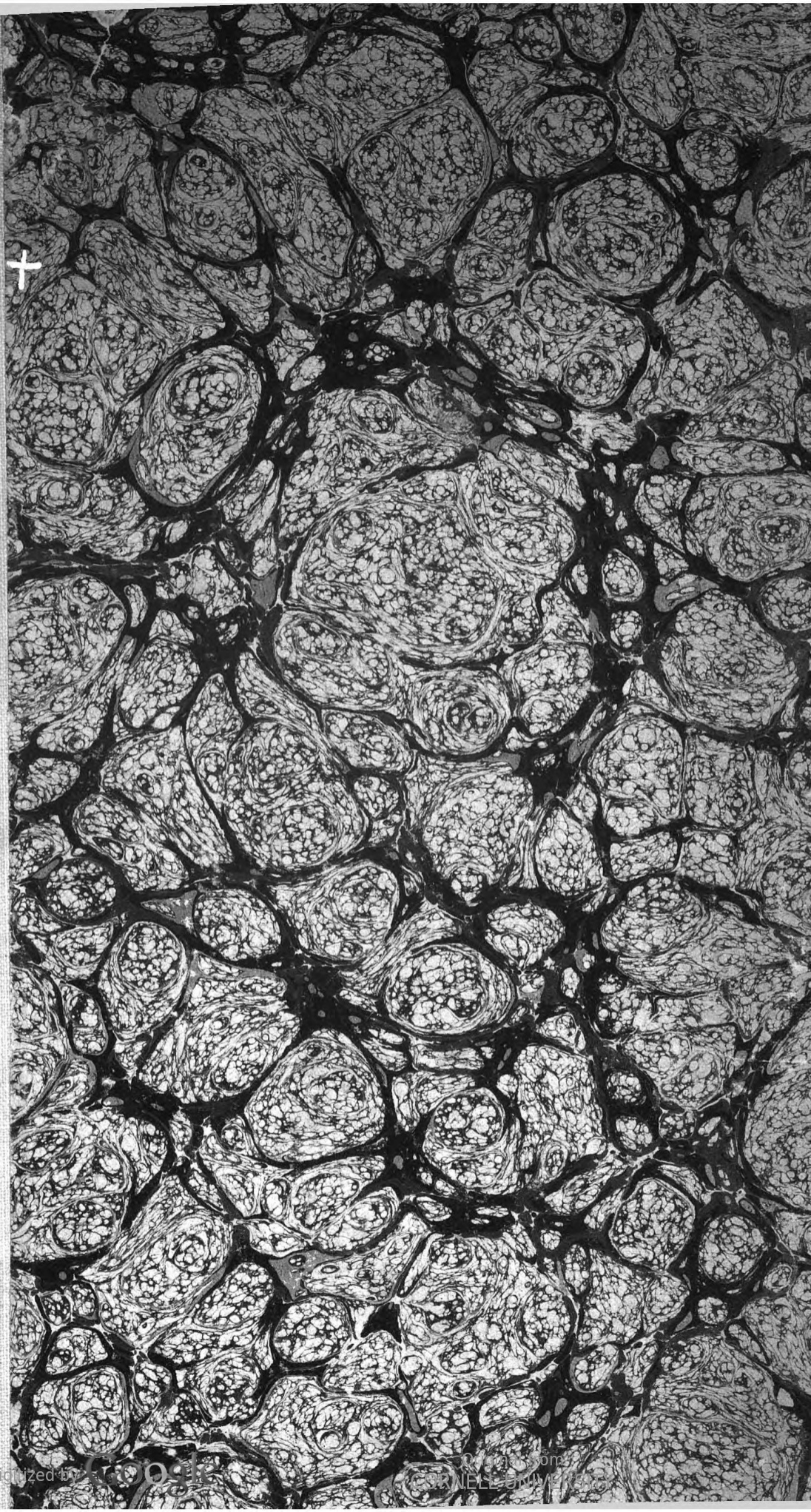


BOYD. Gen. W. T. Sherman as a College President.

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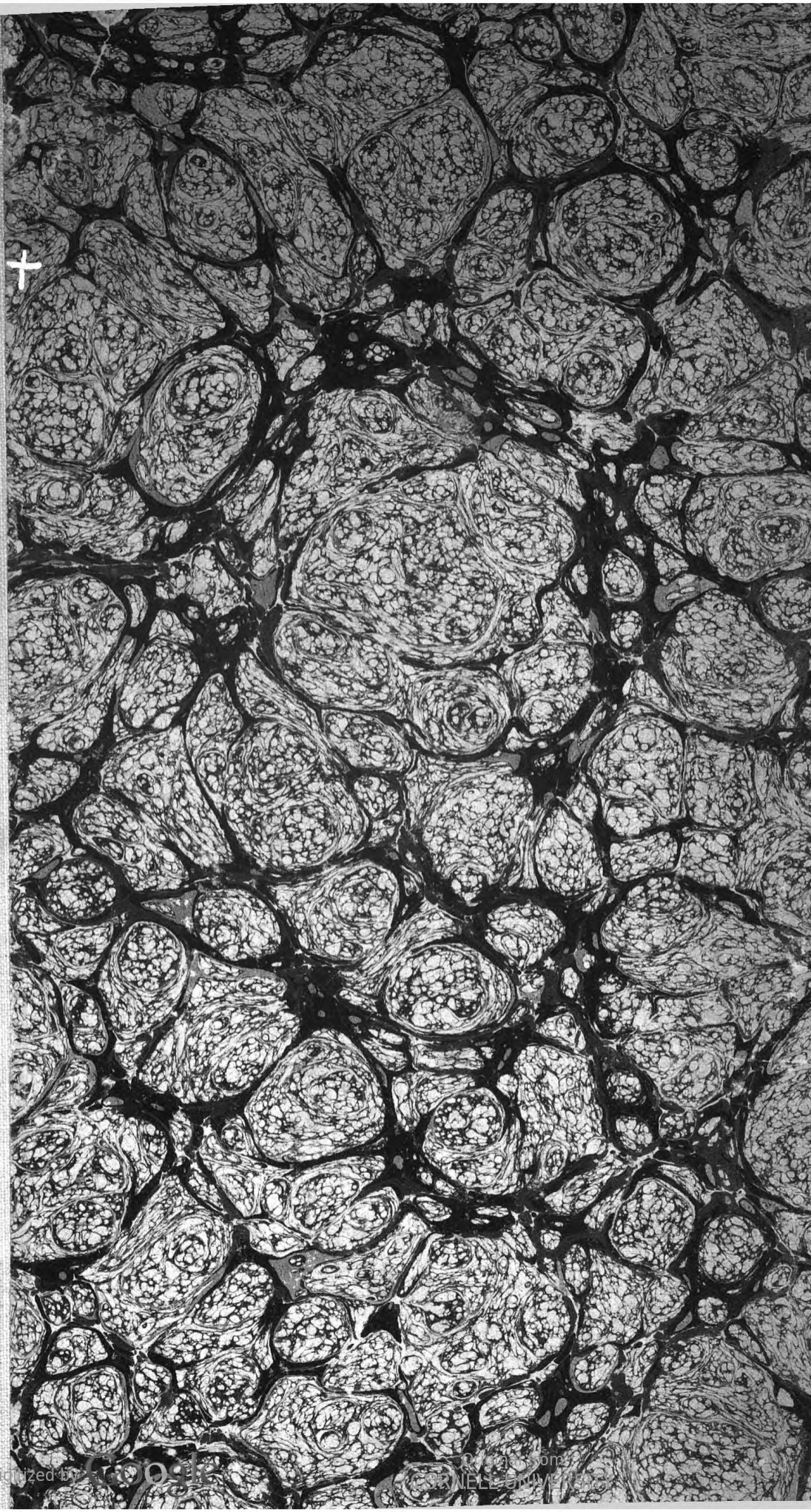
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No. 10

### General W. T. Sherman as a College President


BY

**DAVID FRENCH BOYD**

Late President Louisiana State University

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## GENERAL W. T. SHERMAN AS A COLLEGE PRESIDENT

By DAVID FRENCH BOYD

[The Louisiana State Seminary and Military Academy (soon renamed the Louisiana State University), was organized by W. T. Sherman, who was its first executive. The following account of Sherman at the head of the Seminary was written, in 1896, shortly before his death by the late David French Boyd, who was a professor under Sherman, and who in 1865 succeeded Sherman as President, and who was for eighteen years connected with the University. At the recent celebration of the semi-centennial of the opening of the University, the Sherman family was represented by Philemon Tecumseh Sherman. Ed.]

**T**HIS chapter of General Sherman's life has never been written. It was the good fortune of the writer to be a professor under him for nearly two years at the Louisiana State Seminary and Military Academy (now the Louisiana State University), near Alexandria, La., from its organization in 1859 to the breaking out of the war. Sherman was its first superintendent, organized it, and started it; and I was his professor of Ancient Languages. The war was then brewing. Sherman, from the north and an old Whig, I, a Virginian and a Calhoun Democrat, together watched the political discussions and events very closely; and, being rather secluded in the pine woods, and entertaining a high mutual respect, we saw much of each other, not only officially but personally, and discussed freely the all-absorbing topics of the day. To me certainly was it a treat to listen to his clear cut and original views on nearly every subject that came up. And, young as I was, intimate association with so strong and fertile a mind, along with his sterling honesty and warm heart, was a rare benefit then and a pleasing memory now. When the world knew but little of him I looked up to Sherman as a singularly gifted man; his mind so strong, bright and clear, and original and quick, as to stamp him a genius; his heart, under his stern, brusque, soldierly exterior, the warmest and tenderest; of a happy nature himself, he strove to make all around him happy, and his integrity and scorn for a mean act were as firm as the rock.

Such was Sherman as I knew him most intimately for two years in the pine woods of Louisiana, before he became a great figure in American history. I respected and loved him then as I do now and as I did ever after, though I became a southern soldier, and I revere his memory now. And as I believe that he was the ablest and best college president I ever knew, so do I believe that he was the master, grand strategist of our Civil War.

In 1859, late in the afternoon of the day before our Louisiana State Seminary was to open, I reported at the office of the superintendent, Colonel W. T. Sherman. He was absent. I was received by a sprightly young man, the orderly. Colonel Sherman soon came. He received me very kindly and graciously; took me to tea with him, and in his characteristic way chatted about everything. He was then, as he ever was, the prince of talkers. I fell in love with him at first sight. His appearance then was very striking. Tall, angular, with figure slightly bent, bright hazel eyes and auburn hair; with a tuft of it behind that would, when he was a little excited, stick straight out.

Until I met him I had supposed him a Georgian. There was a prominent educator by the name of Sherman in Georgia, and I had thought that he was our superintendent. And when Colonel Sherman corrected me and told me that he was from Ohio, I could but ask, considering the great sectional feeling over the country, if he was related to the then famous Republican candidate for the speakership of the House, John Sherman? "Only a brother," said he, "and I don't care who knows it." Well, from that time on he and I had it up and down on politics, but always so pleasantly. He believed that the Union was supreme and secession treason; I believed the states supreme and secession a reserved right. For two long years in Louisiana, before secession became an attempted fact, was this the burden of his political talk, with no concealment whatever. We all knew what he thought and what he would do if war came.

Sherman was a fine organizer and splendid executive officer. He could organize and run successfully any enterprise—school included—from a saw mill up to an army of 100,000 men. Naturally alert and observing, his long military training had exercised and fixed, as a second nature, habits of order, precision, promptness and punctuality. These he impressed on the Seminary. Under him it was running beautifully in all the departments. The people of Louisiana recognized it; hence their anxious wish that Sherman remain at the head of the school.

One soon saw in him two men—the stern, strict, exacting man of business or duty, and the kind sympathetic friend and adviser. He made every professor and cadet at the Seminary keep his place and do his duty.

At the same time he was the intimate social companion and confidential friend of the professors and a kind loving father to the cadets. All loved him. In the "off hours" from duty or drill he encouraged the cadets to look him up and have a talk. And often have I seen his private rooms nearly full of boys, listening to his stories of army or western life which he loved so well to tell them. Nor could he appear on the grounds in recreation hours without the cadets one by one gathering around him for a talk. Nothing seemed to delight him so much as to mingle with us socially; and the magnetism of the man riveted us all to him very closely, especially the cadets. Scarcely a day passed that he did not see each and every one of them personally, asking about themselves not only, and all that concerned them at the school; but also about their people at home, when they had heard from them, how they were, and about the crops, etc. And if a cadet fell sick, the loving care and attention he gave him! He was at his bedside several times a day and at night, watching him closely, consoling and encouraging him. Such interest in his students, and such confidence and affection for him in return, I have never seen in any college president.

Sherman looked well, not only to the happiness and health of his charges and to the military discipline and drill, but especially to the progress of the cadets in their academic studies. Besides being superintendent, he was the professor of engineering and drawing. As few cadets were yet sufficiently advanced to take his classes he devoted much time to instruction in physical geography and American history, and a treat it was, even to his professors, to listen to his clear, instructive and often original presentation of these subjects.

He had no patience with inefficient teaching, whether from want of ability or too much ability, rendering it difficult for the learned savant to come down to the plane of comprehension of beginners. A funny case in point was at the opening of our school. One of the professors, a graduate and late professor of a European university, gave an opening or inaugural lecture to his class, the whole school being present. He talked as he might have talked to the faculty and seniors of Harvard. I noticed Sherman looking grum and biting his lip; and the lecture over, passing out near him—the world knows he would "cuss" a little now and then—he whispered: "Every d—d shot went clear over their heads."

But he soon clipped the wings of our grandiloquently soaring eagle, and made him a plain barnyard fowl—a practical, useful instructor.

He was not himself a scholar in the professional sense; not a man of varied and extensive literary and scientific acquirements, nor a general reader. He was eminently practical; and whatever subject it was neces-



sary or desirable for him to be informed about, his strong, quick mind soon went to the bottom of it. He had a great way of dropping in on the professors at recitation. Nearly every day he would visit our classes, and though he might know nothing of the subject—as of Greek for instance—his intuition told him whether I knew anything about it, and was teaching it well, and my boys learned it well. These visits of his—nobody knew when he was coming—stimulated both professors and cadets.

He was a natural-born detective. From the least little clew he would infer what a cadet was doing. Once I remember we were strolling in the woods, and passed a group of cadets a little distance off. I had observed nothing unusual when he spoke up: "Those fellows seem a little flushed. They are up to something." I thought no more of it. The next day he called me into his office and said: "You remember those boys we passed yesterday in the woods? They were concocting a plan to rob the hen roosts of the neighbors. They have confessed it all to me." And by his everlasting vigilance and quick perception he prevented much petty mischief. He was well named Tecumseh. The wily old Indian was hardly superior to Sherman in reading the "signs" and divining the plans of foe or cadet. Years after the war he told me that he had run a bank in California, and had commanded an army of 100,000 men, but the hardest job he ever had was running that little school in Louisiana. But he ran it so easily and smoothly that we little dreamed that it gave him care or trouble.

Sherman had one peculiarity. He could not reason—that is, his mind leaped so quick from idea to idea that he seemed to take no account of the time over which it passed, and if he was asked to explain how he came by his conclusions it confused him. This weakness, if weakness it can be called, was due to his genius. His mind went like lightning to its conclusions, and he had the utmost faith in his inspirations and convictions. Such minds have no patience with the slow, short steps by which the less gifted must plod along to their laboriously reached conclusions. Sherman reached his conclusions at a bound, and with him that was the end of it. Hence his conversations and letters usually consisted merely of his opinions or hints of what he thought, without elaboration or attempt to give his reasons.

Once I remember he asked my opinion about something. I gave it, and then began to give my reasons, when he stopped me with this remark: "I only wanted your opinion. I didn't ask for your reasons, and remember, never give reasons for what you think or do until you must. Maybe, after a while, a better reason will pop into your head."

Stonewall Jackson had much the same type of mind and mental habits as Sherman. Men of the stamp of Sherman and Jackson need but little

of the opinions and advice of other men. Nature makes them gifted, great and self-reliant.

These humble and comparatively unknown schoolmasters before the war became its grand masters of strategy, and as time rolls on they will fill still higher niches in the temple of fame. The romance of the great civil war must ever center much on Jackson in the Valley and Sherman in Georgia, and how strange that Jackson, the stern, ascetic, everpraying Puritan in religion, if not blood, was a Southern leader, while Sherman, the gay, joyous, lively man of the world, ever ready for a fight or a frolic and not caring much which, was a Northern general.

Sherman studied the amusements and recreations of his charge. Fond himself of young society and dancing he gave the cadets frequent hops, the planters and their pretty daughters coming in swarms. They soon got to be as fond of Sherman as his cadets were. They delighted to have him at their homes on the river and bayous, and many an evening did he steal away and spend with them, usually attended by his handsome young commandant of cadets, Major Frank Smith (killed in Lee's army the night before the surrender of Appomattox), and his accomplished surgeon, Dr. Powhatan Clark, now living in Baltimore, while I, not so much of a lady's man, remained behind to run the school.

About half or more of our cadets were Creoles, and people of sweeter disposition and gentler manners never lived. I have had experience with many bodies of students North and South. A lot of Louisiana military cadets are just the nicest and most attractive and affectionate young fellows a teacher ever had to deal with. Always gentlemanly, always cheerful and affectionate, and seldom disobedient, no wonder Sherman loved his boys, and it was such a trial for him to give up them and their warm-hearted, hospitable parents.

While he was away during the vacation, in 1860, I remained at the school attending to his duties for him. It was a pleasant and instructive period for me, for I was in almost daily correspondence with him for three months. In his leisure at Lancaster, Ohio, he wrote about any and everything that he thought would be of interest to me, as well of course as to give me general directions about the business. And as the exciting presidential canvass of 1860 was then going on, he touched much on it. These letters have been preserved. They are but so many vouchers of his forethought—his steadfast and unshakable loyalty to the Union, his horror of disunion, the war cloud that was then threatening, his love for his whole country, and especially, I might say, his love for the South and his many friends there.

But an end had come to Sherman's career in Louisiana—to all his efficiency at the Seminary, and to all the good times, directly and indirectly, which his fine social qualities and his brilliant, instructive conversation gave us. The secession of Louisiana was coming fast upon us.

The threatening of war disturbed him—pained him more, I really think, than any one I knew. He was constantly talking about it and deploring it, openly as well as privately. But his moral courage, his free, outspoken thought commanded the respect of the people of Louisiana. Besides he was so singularly efficient as chief of the State Seminary and Military Academy, and so universally popular, that there was no feeling against him on account of his political views—only a general regret that so good and true a man differed from us.

The question of the leading men of Louisiana was to keep him there at the head of the school, his opposition to secession notwithstanding. Bragg, Beauregard (who had two sons with us), Dick Taylor, Governor Thomas O. Moore and others of influence, were warm personal friends of Sherman. They wrote him and begged him to stay in Louisiana—I saw the letters at the time—telling him that his opinions were well known; that he would not be asked or expected to take up arms for the South; that no one would molest him, but that all wanted him to remain in Louisiana at the head of the school which he had inaugurated so auspiciously, and was conducting so successfully. But he did go—resigning an office with a salary of \$4,500 a year and house free of cost, to return North a poor man, with nothing assured for the support of his family. This was Sherman's first sacrifice for the Union.

I happened to be with him in his private room when the mail came, telling us of the actual passage of the Ordinance of Secession of South Carolina. Sherman burst out crying and began, in his nervous way, pacing the floor and deprecating the step which he feared might bring destruction on the whole country. For an hour or more this went on. Every now and then he would stop and addressing himself to me, he would exclaim, as if broken hearted, "You, you people of the South, believe there can be peaceable secession. You don't know what you are doing. I know there can be no such thing as peaceable secession. If you will have it, the North must fight you for its own preservation. Yes, South Carolina has by this act of secession precipitated war. Other Southern states will follow through sympathy. This country will be drenched in blood. God only knows how it will all end. Perhaps the liberties of the whole country, of every section and every man will be destroyed, and yet you know that within the Union

no man's liberty or property in all the South is endangered. Then why should any Southern state leave the Union? Oh, it is all folly, madness, a crime against civilization!"

Governor Moore even before the passage of the Ordinance of Secession by Louisiana had seized the forts in lower Louisiana and the barracks and arsenal at Baton Rouge with all its munitions of war. Our school was a state ordnance post and Sherman was still ordnance officer, and so a large consignment of the captured muskets and munitions was shipped up to him. I shall never forget his disgust and mortification that he was thus called upon to take a part, however insignificant, in what he called "treason." He complained to me most bitterly that the governor and Bragg, his military adviser, would expect and ask of him as it were to do such a thing, and his receipt for those arms was his only act of aid and comfort to the Confederacy. Southerner and Confederate as I was, I could but sympathize with him—a victim of circumstances placed in a false position.

Shortly Louisiana seceded, and his resignation went promptly in. Soon his business affairs were all closed up, with accounts of every kind balanced, and his acquit given him by the state authorities with great regret; I may truly say in sadness and sorrow. All felt the loss of him personally, and all felt that no one could take his place officially. Governor Moore wrote him a feeling letter of regret for the state and himself, and the board of supervisors of the Academy and its academic board both passed touching resolutions of like tenor. To me, who had seen more of him and knew him better than any one else in Louisiana, his leaving was like parting with a father and a dear, loving friend both in one person. I never lost this feeling for him a jot or tittle. And the cadets! How they loved him.

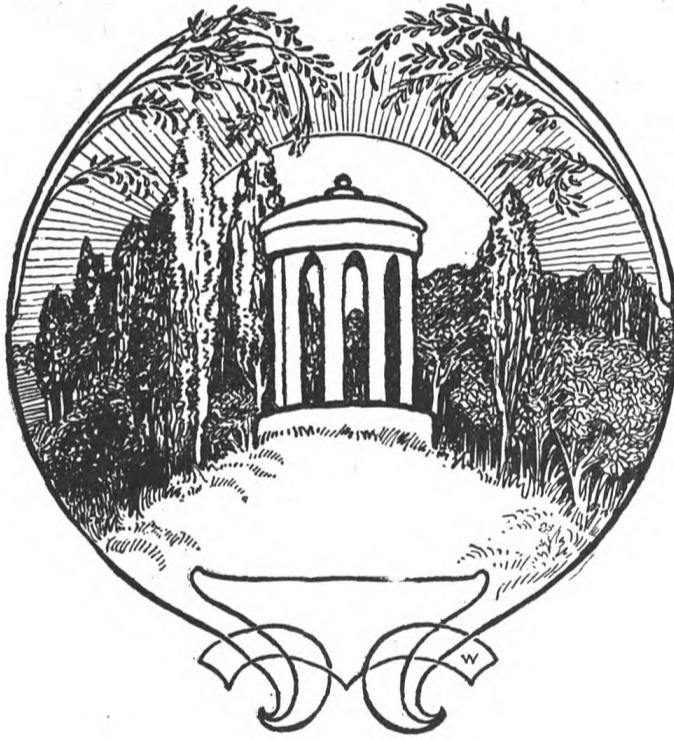
The morning he left he had the battalion formed. Stepping out in front of them, he made them a short talk, and then, passing along the line, right to left, bade each and every officer and man—not a dry eye among them—an affectionate farewell. Then, approaching our sad group of professors, he silently shook our hands, attempted to speak, broke down, and, with tears trickling down his cheeks, with another effort, he could only lay his hand on his heart and say: "You are all here." Then, turning quickly on his heel, he left us, to be ever in our hearts.

And is it not strange that the very spot Sherman left that morning to go North and enter the Union army was the boyhood of home of Albert Sidney Johnston, from which he went to the cadetship at West Point?

Nearly every man and boy of us who remained that morning at the Academy went into the Confederate army, except two who entered the Union army. Some of us were captured, I among them, and whenever

Sherman heard of it we soon felt his sympathy and his helping hand. He never forgot us. Of all the men I have ever known intimately and well, he was the greatest and one of the very best.

I am proud of my unique experience—a professor under Sherman and a soldier under Stonewall Jackson.





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