

The Trial of Major Henry Wirz

BY WILLIAM H. JEWELL.
 Honorary Commander Florida Division of
 United Confederate Veterans.
 SAVANNAH, Ga., May 12.—To the
 Editor of The Bee: In your paper
 of Sunday, April 30, 1911, you pub-
 lished an article on the above sub-
 ject purporting to come from John Howard
 Sibbs, whose photograph appears with
 under it the name "General Sibbs," and
 he claims to be the "sole survivor of the
 military commission which tried Henry
 Wirz." I find that there was a member
 of the military court named "J. H. Sibbs"
 who is given the rank of "lieutenant
 colonel of the Twelfth Iowa Volunteers."
 Although you are the editor of a northern
 paper and probably view this matter of
 Henry Wirz' trial and death about as
 General Sibbs does, yet I am hopeful that
 you will open your columns to me and
 allow me to show the south's side of this
 matter, especially in this semi-centennial of
 the good will and good feeling between the
 sections.

CONFEDERATE VETERAN DEFENDS AN OLD COMRADE.



WILLIAM H. JEWELL.

the refusal of the north to exchange.

So far then, as this suffering was the result of lack of necessities, the south did not have them for its own men and therefore could not provide its prisoners with these things. If the south and the confederate government did not have these things neither could Wirz have them nor provide the prisoners under his charge with them.

And with these necessities provided even then the terribly overcrowded condition of the prison would and did result in much suffering and many deaths; and this was due to the federal's refusal to exchange. Let us look at this point a moment.

In August, 1864, General Grant wrote General B. P. Butler speaking of the refusal to exchange prisoners: "It is hard on our men in southern prisons, but it is humanity to those left in the ranks. If we commence a system of exchange we will have to fight on until the whole south is exterminated. (Quite a compliment to the fighting qualities of the south.)"

"At this particular time to release all rebel prisoners north would ensure Sherman's defeat and would compromise our safety here."

Thus Grant justified his action in refusing to exchange, knowing "it would be hard on our (his) men." And it was "hard." It was awful in the misery it caused. Commenting on this, General Butler said afterwards, speaking of the suffering and deaths that followed:

"Those lives were spent as part of the system of attack upon the rebellion devised by the wisdom of the general in chief of the armies to destroy it by depletion, depending upon our superior numbers to win the victory at last." But Butler speaks of the lives lost in northern prisons by this policy of nonexchange.

I do not intend to use the "argument" of saying "you are another." That if federal prisoners starved and died, so also did confederates in northern prisons. I do not mention it as argument at all; I only cite it as fact. The south during the war held in all 250,000 prisoners; the north in all 25,000. Among prisoners held by the south the records show that 25,782 died; among prisoners held in the north 2,242 died; 12 per cent of confederates and but 9 per cent of federals.

But let me go back to the specific charges upon which Wirz was convicted.

General Sibbs says: "The evidence presented before the Wirz commission while this Andersonville prison was being made ready, if not before, a conspiracy was entered into by certain persons high in authority in the confederate service to destroy the lives of our men, or at least to subject them to such hardships as would render them unfit for further military service."

I might remark right here that I have just quoted Grant's and Butler's own words wherein they practically admit that they were doing a similar thing; that was why they would not exchange—destroying the confederate army by a process of depletion.

But Wirz was convicted upon this charge of "conspiracy." But a man cannot conspire all by his long self; who conspired with him? Well, the indictment and specification says it was President Davis and James A. Seddon, the secretary of war, and General Howell Cobb, and General J. H. Winder, and others.

But no one else was ever convicted of this charge. If Wirz was guilty of it then that Andersonville prison was being made ready, if not before, a conspiracy. The United States government had all these men in their power. Why did not they try them? It seems to me this sufficiently answers the charge of conspiracy.

There were two charges against Wirz, this of conspiracy and the charge of murder. There were thirteen specifications. One of these related to the charge of conspiracy, the others to that of murder, setting up different murders done upon federal prisoners by Wirz.

On ten of these specifications of murder Wirz was found guilty. One of these murders was charged as being committed by him in February, 1864; Wirz did not come to Andersonville until April 12, 1864. This is the record. These three murders were alleged to have been committed by him in the month of August, 1864; Wirz was absent on sick leave all that month and did not return until about September 1. This, too, is shown by public records.

Now, most remarkable of all, in not one of these specifications was the name of the poor victim of Wirz given. Six or eight prisoners killed and nobody knew who any of them were. So the record says; go to it and see. I do not, and do not intend to, dissect the evidence, but I do want to say enough on this line to at least show there is something else to the Wirz story.

If anyone really would like to know something more of this Andersonville business, then let him get and read "The True Story of Andersonville," by Lieutenant James Madison Page, who in the civil war was an officer of the Sixth Michigan cavalry, promoted from the ranks for loyalty and courage. It is published by the Neale Publishing company, New York. There you will find a much stronger story than the south than I am telling, for it comes from a man who fought against us and cannot be said to be prejudiced, as you may say I am.

He was a prisoner in Andersonville for months, from its beginning, and tells of Wirz' kindness and quietness from other prisoners to the same effect. The records of the confederacy in the hands of the federal government show letters where Wirz several times wrote the Richmond authorities begging, actually begging, for help for the prisoners under his charge. See Series 2, vols. iv, v, vi, and Series 3, vol. v.

General Sibbs cites two instances which he evidently looks upon as evidence. One is, a visit to Andersonville of one Dr. Jones, a confederate surgeon, by direction of Surgeon General Moore of the confederacy. Dr. Jones finds a terrible condition of things, of course, and honestly reports same to headquarters. And General Sibbs thinks this proves something for his side. Nay, it is just the other way. It shows the confederate government was willing to put the probe in at Andersonville and tell the truth about it, and do the best they could to remedy the evil conditions. If not, why probe? Does this look like "a conspiracy to destroy?"

Again, General Sibbs tells of an order of General Winder, when General Killpatrick was advancing upon Andersonville and it was feared he would turn the prisoners loose, or that, emboldened by his approach, they would mutiny and escape. General Winder ordered that upon the near approach of the enemy and the attempt of the prisoners to escape to fire upon them with cannon, for it was better that they should die than escape to ravage the helpless women and children in the country about.

Well, would not Sherman or Grant or any other good officer have done the same thing under the circumstances? Was it not better these prisoners should die rather than go loose to burn, ravage and murder helpless women and children? Perhaps it may be said that they would not have done it. Well, how about Sherman's "Bummers" when "Marching Through Georgia?" There is another point I wish to speak of. Lieutenant Page, in his book referred to, tells of a mass meeting held by the prisoners of Andersonville, and their choosing a committee to go to Washington to implore the federal government to exchange or grant them some relief. "This has been done," but it is true, President Davis tells of it in his "Rise and Fall of the Southern Confederacy." On page 62 he says: "One final effort was made to obtain an exchange. This consisted in my sending a delegation from the prisoners at Andersonville to plead their cause before the President Lincoln refused to see them. They were made to understand that the interests of the government of the United States, required that they return to prison and remain there. They carried back the sad tidings that their government held out no hopes of relief."

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Does his look like a conspiracy by Davis and Wirz et al., to "destroy" these prisoners?

Another thing, President Davis did or directed, was to offer to the United States government to buy medicine, food, clothing, etc., from the federals at Andersonville, and let the northern surgeons come and administer these goods and care for the prisoners.

See Davis' work, page 62.

Finding the federals would do nothing to afford relief at Andersonville, the confederate government offered at last to turn over the federals without exchange all sick and disabled prisoners if they would come for them to Savannah. It took about six months to make a move on the federals in this behalf, but at last in November, 1864, they sent, and having come at last unexpectedly, the confederate government not having his sick all ready per- mitted 4,000 prisoners to go without exchange. It is true, the federals did send in return, 8,500 for the 13,000 sent them, but of these 3,500 one-fifth died on the way, so terribly ill and feeble were they, but the federals would take no more from us.

Let me mention what I forgot a moment ago in speaking of the character of the evidence. One Felix de la Baume was the chief witness against Wirz. He knew it all. Claimed to be a relative of Lafayette. Just eleven days after the trial he was discovered to be a deserter from the Seventh New York volunteers and was named Felix de la Baume in the bounty jumper and a first class rascal. Lieutenant Page tells of other witnesses against Wirz, who afterwards laughingly admitted that they lied. I know this is too long already, but permit me to sum up some of the points I have tried to advance in this effort to show that there is two sides to this story, at least one side from that generally held by the north.

First, I do not mean in any way to reflect upon General Sibbs in what I have said. He, no doubt, was trying to do his duty, as were the others of the commission. It will be said, and naturally—"Why, these were good men, excellent men, who tried Wirz; he had a fair trial, etc." Yes, well, those were good, honest, pious men who tried innocent men, women and children for witchcraft at Salem, and sent them to death convicted of witchcraft. What was the matter? O, just superstition. When General Sibbs and his companion tried Wirz men's hearts were not with passion, bitter as death against the south, who, it was being charged had just killed President Lincoln. To read today the denunciations of the south as a whole, uttered from the "Christian" pulpits of the north, makes one actually shudder and ask if we have or had then a Christian civilization? If Wirz were tried today on the same evidence he would be triumphantly acquitted, even by General Sibbs.

Second, Wirz would not have been guilty of "conspiracy" as charged, for it could not be shown that he "conspired" with any person.

Third, it is incredible that Wirz would have murdered some eight or ten prisoners openly or secretly and not a soul know the name of a single one of them.

Fourth, Wirz asserted his innocence from beginning to the end. Father Boyle, his confessor, also firmly asserted the innocence of Wirz.

Fifth, the chief witness against Wirz proved to be utterly unprincipled and a deserter and liar. Others were heard to say that they lied in giving their evidence.

Sixth, out of nearly 300 witnesses against Wirz not a dozen were of any account. Wirz some told of kindness and care by Wirz for the prisoners. Witnesses for Wirz and those found to be favorable to him were quickly turned down.

The records of the confederate government show that Wirz several times appealed to it for help for these prisoners. Lieutenant Page's book cites many instances of Wirz's kindness.

Eighth, the prisoners themselves blamed their own government for much of their sufferings and the many deaths. It refused to help the delegation sent from Andersonville prison, and sent them back hopeless to die.

Ninth, it is impossible to believe today that there was a "conspiracy." The many acts already cited disprove any such thing.

Tenth, some prisoners may have been shot; it was done in northern prisons. It may have been done in southern prisons. There are times when even shooting is necessary with prisoners, even in civil life, especially in an attempt to escape or to resist arrest.

Eleventh, the records show that although the south held the larger number of prisoners that less per cent died than those of the south in Northern prisons.

Twelfth, the refusal to exchange prisoners by the federals was a great, if not the chief cause of the great suffering and mortality in southern prisons, especially at Andersonville. Grant said it would be so. Thirteenth, the confederate government nor Wirz, its agent, could provide at Andersonville, the medicine, food, clothing, bedding, etc., so sorely needed; nor the accommodations necessary.

Take these points and think them over;

meditate upon what has been said here; consider the hatred, the hot passions existing when Wirz was tried and hung and then say, my northern comrade, my northern brother, you think there is any stain on the honor of the south.

MEETING SERVANT PROBLEM

Some Remarks on the Domestic Adviser and the Ideal House-keeper.

A certain western woman believes herself to be the first domestic adviser in the country. Her adoption of what may be called her profession was the result of necessity, for, being left a widow with one small daughter and casting about her for a livelihood, she could think of nothing but housekeeping on which she could rely as a means of earning a living. For a while she thought there was literally no chance for her, but when she applied for the place of housekeeper at every respectable hotel in her native city and found no place for her, it seemed discouraging.

Through an intelligence office she got days work at cooking, housework, washing and sewing, which was hard for one who had had her own home. However, she made the best of it, but she came to the unavoidable conclusion that the chief reason why servants stayed so short a time in one place was because so little was done to make them comfortable, and she began work on this problem by helping both mistress and maid. All this time she was studying at a school of household economics and, securing her certificate, she began her crusade in the interest of employer and employed by advertising that she would give advice and work to straighten domestic relations between them. It was a success, and now she has office hours and makes appointments to visit houses where there is trouble with servants, find the cause and instruct the employer. She gives one case as an example, a woman in New York. This is what she found:

"The kitchen was in a disagreeable condition, with unwashed dishes and utensils of all sorts. Indeed, I don't believe there was a clean article in it. There were the usual cockroaches in evidence. As we looked things over the young lady told me that she had had twenty-eight maids during her short married life. Not one of them had remained more than two weeks and the majority had left at the end of the first day. When I asked where the maid slept, she explained that she had a room for that apartment was on the top floor. Because of that fact she had used the room on the same floor with her apartment which was evidently intended for a maid, for a smoking room. She said she and her husband preferred to have the entire apartment to themselves.

"When we reached that maid's room under the roof I was surprised. It was a skylight room, eight feet by eight and one-half feet. There was no way of heating it and besides the skylight the only light was from a single gas jet placed so high up that I had to stand on my toes to reach it. The room contained one chair, a single bed and a table which took the place of both washstand and dressing table. The mirror and mattress were both good; I had to admit that much, but I felt obliged to inform this young and inconsiderate housekeeper that I had never seen poorer accommodations for a servant in a respectable house; and when I further ascertained that there was a several course luncheon, that the dinner hour was 7 and there were guests three or four times a week, I told this incompetent housekeeper she must get a second maid and divide the work."

A great deal of instruction and advice, followed by strenuous scrubbing and cleaning, in order that the kitchen might be decent for the entrance of a new maid, had an effect, and the domestic adviser watched the ignorant and thoughtless bride and her maid, with a certain prospective maid, with better furniture, promise that luncheons and dinners should require less labor, and that the maid should have her afternoon a week, her partial freedom on Sunday, and a whole day once a month. It would have been quite interesting to know whether the young housekeeper was converted to a more sensible and Christian course.

Another side to the housekeeping expert's duties lies in her being called "to prescribe for the servants of my regular clients, usually finding it a case of the blues rather than a real grievance." If, however, there is real trouble, this adviser acts as go-between for mistress and maid, and usually is able to arrange matters. Another part of her work is told by the woman as follows:

"I have four clients who pay me to make a monthly visit to their help, go through the home, inspect every department, and when necessary make suggestions for improvements. Though I let everyone know that I am able and willing to work to take the place of the disappearing domestic, I have many more calls than I can possibly attend to. I break in new maids and keep old ones contented to do their work. Within a few years I expect to see domestic help getting the same hours and wages as are given to factory workers and saleswomen. When this happens you will see a change in the tide. Make the hours and the remuneration the same, and the average girl will take housework before she will go into the factories."

The ideal housekeeper has no need for this adviser. There is one, for example, who has had her cook for twelve years. The reason why is not far to seek. She requires that her maids shall reach a certain standard, and her two servants willingly comply, for this mistress never makes any unjust demands. The maids have their Sundays out from breakfast time, and every evening through the week. Because they may have the evenings, they rarely take them.

On Sundays they do not return to find dining-room and kitchen a welter of dirty dishes, as is too often the case when the Sunday out is given. The family get the meals and clear away the dishes, leaving dining-room and kitchen in neat condition. Washing and ironing days the breakfast dishes are washed and put away for the maids. Then the girls have their own sitting-room, bath-room and separate sleeping rooms, not under the roof, either. The result is that there are no notions in the kitchen—the maids stay on year after year, and mistress and maids are friends.—Springfield Republican.

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