

1983

## John Brown Gordon: Soldier, Southerner, American. (Volumes I and II) (Georgia).

Ralph Lowell Eckert

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JOHN BROWN GORDON: SOLDIER, SOUTHERNER, AMERICAN. (VOLUMES  
I AND II)

*The Louisiana State University and Agricultural and Mechanical Col.*

PH.D. 1983

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JOHN BROWN GORDON:  
SOLDIER, SOUTHERNER, AMERICAN  
VOLUME I

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the  
Louisiana State University and  
Agricultural and Mechanical College  
in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy

in

The Department of History

by  
Ralph Lowell Eckert  
B.A., Pennsylvania State University, 1971  
M.A., Pennsylvania State University, 1975  
August 1983

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thanking the many individuals who helped make the ordeal more bearable is probably the most pleasurable task associated with writing a dissertation. Even so, these expressions of gratitude seem woefully inadequate for the assistance that each provided.

Professor Warren W. Hassler of Pennsylvania State University was the first to encourage me to pursue my investigations of John B. Gordon. He also helped convince me that a career in history was still possible. Several suggestions by the late Professor T. Harry Williams both broadened the scope as well as sharpen the focus of this study. My greatest scholastic debt, however, is to Professor William J. Cooper, Jr. His careful reading of every page and his willingness to discuss Gordon at length greatly improved the style and substance of this biography. His observations and criticisms constantly challenged me to revise and clarify my arguments. He undoubtedly shares the sense of relief that this particular journey is at last at an end. For his promptness, patience, concern, and direction, I am deeply grateful.

Ken Startup, another traveller on the doctoral path, read the entire manuscript and offered numerous important suggestions and criticisms. His probing questions from a perspective often vastly different from my own frequently opened new avenues of thought. It is my sincere hope that my contributions to his work are of equal value as his were to mine.

The benefits derived from my association with John Wallin, though difficult to describe, are substantial. His incessant badgering either to play

softball, or to talk football, or to play or to talk about any sport whatsoever unquestionably prolonged my stay at Louisiana State University. But more importantly, his intelligence, his wit, and his deteriorating athletic ability made my days in the Bayou State infinitely more enjoyable. In spite of his rabid allegiance to the crimson tide of alabama, my regard for him is exceeded by no other. He is a true friend.

The efforts of the late Hugh H. Gordon, III to reassemble the letters, mementoes and personal papers of his great-grandfather that had long ago been divided among various family members were as valuable to me as they were gratifying to him. His success at persuading Gordon relatives to donate their holdings to the University of Georgia insured the preservation of a personal record of the General. In addition, Mr. Gordon and his wife graciously invited me into their home and gave me free access to all family papers prior to donation.

I also owe a special debt of gratitude to several other persons who opened their homes to me while I was researching. They provided a "home away from home" with the warmth, friendly conversation, and home cooked meals that researchers too long on the road genuinely appreciate. To Bob Shell, Bob and Janet Hersh, Michael and Rayan Trull, Sue Ellen Eckert, Jerry McAndrews, Jim and Cindy Mostoller, Harry Smyser, Roy Lisko, Jim and Joy Oriole, Bob and Debbie Hunter, Rick and Susan Lawson, Ron Mohny, and Will Greene, thanks for your hospitality and most of all for your friendship.

The generosity of the law firm of McCollister, McCleary, Fazio & Holliday greatly alleviated the onerous task of typing and reproducing this dissertation. Special thanks must go to Sidney D. Fazio for his permission to use

the offices of the firm, their word processors and copying machines. Overlooking the Mississippi River and downtown Baton Rouge, the firm's offices offered both a magnificent view and an ideal place to work.

I would be remiss if I did not acknowledge as well as pay tribute to the accomplishments of Coach Joe Paterno and the 1982 National Football Champion Nittany Lions. The thrills and excitement which they generated supplied the impetus for my final push to complete this work. At a time when collegiate athletics are justifiably under attack, Penn State's resolve to do it the "right" way serves as a shining example. Moreover, it provides a source of great pride for me personally.

And lastly, but foremost, I wish to recognize the labors and love of my wife, Jeanne D. Dier-Eckert. John Brown Gordon came to occupy as important a role in her life as he did in mine. Despite her own full-time job, she willingly sacrificed countless nights and weekends to type, retype and reformat what must have seemed an endless series of rewrites. During numerous infuriating bouts with word processors, her patience endured long after mine had been exhausted. For her untold hours of toil, for her steadfast encouragement, and for her unshakeable commitment to see the dissertation through to the end, there are no words to express adequately my appreciation and love. So to Jeanne and Fanny, a little black dog, thanks for always being there, especially at those times when you were most needed.

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## ABSTRACT

Born in Upson County, Georgia in February 1832, John Brown Gordon attended the University of Georgia, practiced law in Atlanta and, in the years immediately preceding the Civil War, developed coal mines in northwestern Georgia. He responded to the Confederate call to arms by raising a company of volunteers. In spite of his want of formal military schooling, Gordon displayed courage, boldness, vigilance, aggressiveness, and sound military sense on every battlefield upon which he fought. His rise from captain to corps commander was unmatched in the Army of Northern Virginia.

Emerging from the war as one of the South's most respected generals, Gordon drifted into politics. He was elected to the United States Senate in 1873 despite formidable opposition from several of Georgia's most prominent politicians. In Washington, Gordon quickly established himself as a spokesman for Georgia and for the South as a whole. He defended the integrity of southern whites while working for an end to federally supported Republican governments in the South and for a restoration of home rule. In addition to defending and promoting southern interests, he also preached a nationalism that supplanted sectional antagonism and replaced it with a commitment to the growth of a strong and united country. Throughout his postwar career, Gordon contributed significantly to the process of national reconciliation.

Even in the wake of charges of corruption surrounding his 1880 resignation from the Senate, he remained the most popular man in Georgia, if not in the South. Energetically engaged in a variety of speculative ventures,

Gordon was widely recognized as a major proponent of the "New South." His occasionally spectacular successes, however, were overshadowed by his business failures and led to his return to politics in 1886 when he was elected governor. He permanently retired from public office in 1897 following two terms as governor and another as senator. He devoted his final years to extensive lecture tours, serving as commander-in-chief of the United Confederate Veterans, and writing Reminiscences of the Civil War--all of which helped to promote national reconciliation. He died at his winter home in Miami, Florida in January 1904.

## PROLOGUE

"The General is dead." The news travelled rapidly from city to countryside as word swept across Georgia, then the South, and finally the nation. It seemed impossible that death had finally claimed the Gallant Gordon. Despite his advanced age and the seriousness of his sudden illness, most Georgians were stunned by the announcement. For so long, Gordon had seemed an Olympian figure--there was something indestructible in the bearing of the scarred veteran who had suffered so severely during the Civil War. Gravely wounded five times at Sharpsburg, he had survived and, remarkably, returned to duty in less than seven months. In the postwar decades, he had often been beset by illness and injury only to recover rapidly and resume his indefatigable course. No, Gordon had faced death many times before and always emerged victorious. And yet, early on the morning of 10 January 1904, Georgia and the nation learned that Gordon was dead.

The death of John Brown Gordon released a deluge of grief and sorrow unparalleled in Georgia history. The deep sense of loss felt by Georgians was not, however, confined either to the state or to the South; eulogies and memorials poured in from every section of the country. A shocked and saddened President Theodore Roosevelt expressed his honor at counting Gordon among his friends, for a "more gallant, generous, and fearless gentleman and soldier has not been seen by our country"--high praise indeed for a man who less than a half century before had fought to dissolve the Union Roosevelt governed. The extravagant praise accorded Gordon in the days and months following his death

was extraordinary even by nineteenth century standards. Clearly, the depth of sentiment that marked Gordon's passing carried well beyond the usual commemoration of a public figure's demise. His brilliant military record with the Army of Northern Virginia, his efforts both as a politician and a businessman to defend and promote the interests of his native South, and his patriotic contributions to national reconciliation set him apart from most public figures of his time. Gordon was by no means ordinary.<sup>1</sup>

The effusiveness of the tributes paid to the Georgian bears out this assertion. Gordon's military career captured the imagination of all Americans. His successor as commander-in-chief of the United Confederate Veterans observed:

His imposing and magnificent soldierly bearing, coupled with his splendid ringing voice, and magnetic oratory gave him a god-given talent, not equalled or possessed by any other officer in either army--that of getting in front of his troops, and in a few ringing appeals, inspiring them almost to madness, and being able to lead them into the very Jaws of death.

Gordon was the "beau ideal of military leaders," the "idol of the whole army" and "one of the knightliest soldiers in all the tide of time." Only Robert E. Lee had a stronger hold on the admiration and affection of the Confederate veterans than the beloved Gordon. His native ability and military instinct "exemplified in the highest degree the best qualities of the American volunteer soldier."<sup>2</sup>

Although unstinting in their praise of his military performance, most eulogists recognized that Gordon's martial prowess was only one dimension of his remarkable character. It was his devotion to the South and his commitment to

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1 New York Times, 13 January 1904; Atlanta Constitution, 13 January 1904.

2 Atlanta Journal, 14 January 1904; Atlanta Constitution, 15 January, 13 January, 8 January 1904; Houston Chronicle, quoted in Atlanta Journal, 16 January 1904; Baltimore Sun, quoted in ibid., 12 January 1904.

the reunited nation that they most heartily extolled. One Georgian believed that it was generally conceded that Gordon alone occupied "the unique distinction, not only in the south, but as well in the eyes of all the world, as being, beyond a doubt, the greatest and most conspicuous southerner." "True to his section and the traditions of his native south," Gordon labored tirelessly on her behalf in both public service and private life. He particularly devoted himself to preserving an accurate account "of the honesty and nobility of the motives and contentions" of southerners who had gone to war in 1861.<sup>3</sup>

"He loved the South and was loyal to its interests and its spirit, but he rose completely above the plane of sectional feeling." Instead of dwelling upon the differences which precipitated the war, Gordon "sought to allay the rancorous feelings engendered by strife without imputing unworthy motives to the union cause." He was "among the first to lead in the great work of reconciliation of the sections" and quickly became "one of the most eloquent and persuasive advocates" of national pacification. Enjoying "to an exceptional extent the respect and admiration of those whom he had opposed in war, and also of his political opponents in congress," he preached a new nationalistic message to which all Americans could subscribe. Gordon, in a New Yorker's opinion, "did more by word and pen and deed than any other southern man to assuage the feeling of animosity and restore real harmony and fraternal good will between the north and south." Recognizing Gordon's work as "the great apostle of reconciliation and obliteration of sectional feeling," a Connecticut editor urged citizens of all sections to "unite in paying due tribute to the memory of one than

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<sup>3</sup> Atlanta Constitution, 11 January 1904; Houston Post, quoted in Atlanta Journal, 13 January 1904; Nashville Banner, quoted in ibid., 13 January 1904.

whom no stauncher patriot and lover of his country and institution now lives." Gordon "died as he lived—an American, a patriot, a southern gentlemen, a Christian."<sup>4</sup>

These eloquent eulogies leave no doubt that Gordon's contemporaries thought his passing marked a profound loss to Georgia, to the South, and to the nation as well. Curiously, however, historians have paid relatively little attention to the Georgian. A comprehensive, critical study of Gordon's remarkable public career, which spanned more than four of America's most turbulent decades, has yet to be written. Historical treatment of his life consists of a badly dated, uncritical biography, scattered accounts of certain aspects of his military service, and isolated references to his postwar political activities and business involvements. Although a dearth of private papers partially explains this lack of scholarly attention, Gordon clearly deserves better.

The purpose of this study is to present a thorough and balanced examination of the life of General John B. Gordon. In writing a full-length biography, I have developed all areas of Gordon's life, not focusing upon any single portion at the expense of the others. Even though his participation in the Civil War was unquestionably the most dramatic chapter of his life, it is his postwar career that warrants much more extensive investigation and analysis. Barely thirty-three years of age at the end of the war, Gordon remained in the public spotlight for nearly forty years more. He made his most important

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4 "Soldier and Gentleman," The Outlook: A Weekly Newspaper 76 (January 1904): 152; Nashville Banner, quoted in Atlanta Journal, 13 January 1904; Atlanta Constitution, 11 January, 15 January 1904; Baltimore Sun, quoted in Atlanta Journal, 12 January 1904; Horatio C. King of Brooklyn (New York) Eagle, quoted in Atlanta Constitution, 14 January 1904; Atlanta Journal, 14 January, 10 January 1904; Mobile Register, quoted in ibid., 13 January 1904; Bridgeport (Connecticut) Morning Telegram, quoted in ibid., 14 January 1904.

contributions to American history during the last third of the nineteenth century, and in doing so, left an indelible imprint upon his state, his section, and his nation. It is this imprint—his influence upon his times--that I wish to examine.

This biography is more than just a narration of Gordon's actions. It is also an attempt to ascertain and to understand the myriad of historical forces --often contradictory and conflicting forces--that operated upon him. By identifying these influences and determining how they affected the Georgian, additional insight into the political, social, and economic mentality of both the South and the nation in the difficult years after the war may be provided. Gordon played a significant role in the process of national reconciliation and in helping bring a new economic order to Georgia and the South. Thus, he is a much more important figure in postwar America than previously believed. Gordon should properly be numbered among the most important figures in southern and American history during the last half of the nineteenth century.

## CHAPTER I

### THE EARLY YEARS

During a political campaign in the 1880s, John Brown Gordon returned to the place of his birth along the Flint River in Upson County, Georgia. As he surveyed the familiar surroundings, he found that the "river isn't nearly so wide and the hills are not nearly so high" as he remembered them. Gaining that perspective which comes only with the passage of years, Gordon, nonetheless, fondly recalled the days of his youth in Georgia. When later reflecting back over a career laced with countless military and political battles, he wistfully observed that whatever martial spirit may have been born in him "was greatly stimulated by the frequent rallies of the farmers and planters to meet reported raids by the Indians." For, indeed, the Upson County of Gordon's youth lay on the fringe of the frontier with the recently dispossessed Creek Indians only fifty miles west of the Flint River.<sup>1</sup>

Four earlier generations of Gordons had helped push back the American frontier. The first of Gordon's forebears to reach the North American continent sailed from Aberdeen, Scotland in 1724. John George Gordon, John Brown's great-great-grandfather, disembarked in Charleston, South Carolina, but soon moved to Maryland and then on to Spotsylvania Court House, Virginia,

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<sup>1</sup> Atlanta Journal, 11 October 1931; John B. Gordon, "A Boyhood Sketch," (n.p., n.d.), p. 1. What is perhaps the only extant copy of this brief personal narrative of Gordon's early life in Georgia can be found in the Atlanta Public Library, Atlanta, Georgia. A portion of this sketch was also published under the title, "Boyhood in the South," The Youth's Companion: An Illustrated Weekly Paper for Young People and Families 74 (January 1900): 15-16.

before finally settling down. Like most Americans of the time, the first four generations of Gordons in America demonstrated a remarkable willingness to pick up and move at almost any time. Gordon's ancestors spread out through the South, but most remained in North Carolina and Georgia. His father, the Reverend Zachariah Herndon Gordon, moved from his birthplace in Wilkes County, North Carolina into Georgia in the early 1800s. Once situated in Upson County in the mid-1820s, he rapidly established himself as one of the county's most prominent ministers and added to his distinction by acquiring and running a large plantation. It was on this plantation on 6 February 1832 that John Brown Gordon was born.<sup>2</sup>

John was the fourth of twelve children born to Zachariah and Malinda Cox Gordon. Although successful in Upson County, the Reverend Gordon moved his family to Walker County in northwestern Georgia around 1840. He settled about ten miles from Lafayette on property he dubbed Gordon Springs because of its great abundance of mineral water. With twelve main springs in the space of a quarter of an acre, the elder Gordon took advantage of their medicinal value by building a large hotel which served as a summer resort. In the decade preceding the Civil War, Gordon Springs became one of the "most fashionable

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<sup>2</sup> Francis Beal Smith Hodges, The Gordons of Spotsylvania County, Virginia with Notes on Gordons of Scotland (Wichita Falls, Texas: Wichita Multigraphing Co., 1934), pp. 12, 20-21; Paul W. Gregory, Early Settlers of the Reddies River (Wilkes County, North Carolina: Wilkes Genealogical Society, 1972), pp. 59-63; Allen P. Tankersley, "Zachariah Herndon Gordon: His Life and His Letters on the Battle of King's Mountain," Georgia Historical Quarterly 36 (September 1952): 233-37; Carolyn Walker Nottingham and Evelyn Hannah, The Early History of Upson County (Macon, Georgia: J. W. Burke Co., 1930), p. 58; Atlanta Journal, 3 April 1932; History of the Baptist Denomination in Georgia: With Biographical Compendium and Portrait Gallery of Baptist Ministers and Other Georgia Baptists, 2 vols. (Atlanta: J. P. Harrison and Co., 1881), 2: 228-29.

watering places in Georgia." Ironically, it was in the peaceful fields and valleys surrounding the Gordon homestead over which John roamed during his adolescence, that the battle of Chickamagua—one of the Civil War's bloodiest struggles—would later rage.<sup>3</sup>

While Gordon cultivated respect for the out-of-doors and developed what would become remarkable skills as a horseman, religion also played a formative role in his early life. "Among my earliest recollections," he wrote many years later, "are the great gatherings of the people at the old country church" in his father's charge. Young John, in addition to attending regular church services, often accompanied the Reverend as he travelled about Georgia preaching the gospel. At one church meeting when Gordon was but seven years of age, he came forward and made his profession of faith. Placed upon a rough pine table so that all might hear, Gordon related how he had "decided to put my trust in the Lord" when a team of mules he was driving earlier in the week had gotten away from him on a muddy hill. The congregation, convinced by the earnestness of the youth's religious experience, immediately voted to receive him into their membership. Although reared as a Baptist, Gordon later became a Presbyterian and helped establish a church in Kirkwood, Georgia. He would remain an active Christian the rest of his life, in no small part because of the influence of his

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<sup>3</sup> Sarah Harriet Butts, compiler, The Mothers of Some Distinguished Georgians (New York: J. J. Little and Co., 1902), pp. 1-2; History of Georgia Baptists, 2: 228-29; Atlanta Journal, 3 April 1932; George White, Statistics of the State of Georgia: Including an Account of its Natural, Civil and Ecclesiastical History; Together with a Particular Description of Each County, Notices of the Manners and Customs of its Aboriginal Tribes, and a Correct Map of the State (Savannah: W. Thorne Williams, 1849), pp. 584-85; John B. Gordon, Reminiscences of the Civil War (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1903), pp. 198-99; United States Census Records, 1840, Walker County, Georgia, p. 84; United States Census Records, 1850, Walker County, Georgia, Free Schedule, p. 342.

father and the religious instruction of his youth.<sup>4</sup>

Gordon's early education differed little from what the sons of most small planters received at the time. He attended rural schools, but when his father became dissatisfied with the quality of instruction in Walker County, the Reverend established a school on his own and assumed responsibility for securing and paying a good teacher. He also provided housing at a nominal cost for neighborhood boys who attended the institution. After finishing his father's school, Gordon ventured to Lafayette where he entered Pleasant Green Academy, reputedly "one of the best schools in all northwest Georgia." The reputation was evidently well-deserved because when Gordon completed his studies there near the end of 1850, he enrolled at the University of Georgia in Athens as a second semester sophomore. He quickly established himself as an excellent student and soon joined the Demosthenian Literary Society on campus. In a declamation competition with sixteen of his fellow sophomores at the end of his first semester, Gordon won first place and the gold medal awarded to the victor.<sup>5</sup>

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4 Gordon, "Boyhood Sketch," pp. 4-5, 7; *Atlanta Journal*, 15 February 1932, 11 October 1931; Nottingham and Hannah, *Upson County*, pp. 346, 844; Caroline Lewis Gordon, "De Gin'ral an' Miss Fanny," (unpublished and unnumbered manuscript located in Gordon Family Collection, University of Georgia, Athens, Georgia [hereafter cited as Gordon Family Collection UGA]). After settling in Kirkwood on the outskirts of Atlanta in the late 1860s, Gordon joined the Decatur Presbyterian Church in Decatur. He became one of the Ruling Elders and remained active until June 1892 when he and other Kirkwood parishoners left the parent church. Moving as a colony, they established the Kirkwood Presbyterian Church nearer their homes. Caroline McKinney Clarke, *The Story of the Decatur Presbyterian Church, 1825-1975* (n.p., 1975), pp. 46, 83-84; Kirkwood Presbyterian Church, Georgia Historical Records Survey Inventory of Presbyterian Church Records in Georgia, Georgia Department of Archives and History, Atlanta, Georgia.

5 Gordon, "Boyhood Sketch," pp. 1-3, 8-13; James Alfred Sartain, *History of Walker County, Georgia* (Dalton, Georgia: A. J. Showalter Co., 1932), pp. 159, 163; *Sketches of Alumni of University of Georgia*, UGA; Demosthenian Society Minute Book, 1851-52, UGA; Athens *Southern Banner*, 7 August, 21

Gordon remained a superb student during his junior year, at the end of which the faculty again chose him as one of six class orators. Even though no prizes or medals were awarded for this competition, Gordon devoted a great deal of effort to preparing "an elaborate eulogy" honoring Henry Clay of Kentucky. He had completed his address and committed it to memory when the faculty notified him only days before the commencement exercises that University policy prohibited eulogies to living statesmen. This decision obviously upset him, for as he later recalled, "It was Clay, or nothing. Even if a subject could be thought of, the time was too short for suitable presentation." The faculty when informed of his dilemma, nevertheless refused to make any exceptions. It was with a touch of wry humor that Gordon later wrote, "I am afraid that my grief was not as profound as it should have been over the death of Henry Clay, which occurred a few days before commencement, and just in time to permit the delivery of my eulogy."<sup>6</sup>

Gordon began his senior year at the University in August 1852. Despite possessing one of the highest averages, if not the highest, in his class, he did not graduate from college because on 14 October he withdrew from school. Why he left the University so precipitously can not be determined with certainty. Most sources claim that he resigned in order to return home and assist his father. Such was probably the case because his father had sent a letter to the faculty requesting that his son be allowed to leave. However, in a brief biographical

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August 1851; Atlanta Constitution, 24 November 1878; Gordon, "De Gin'ral an' Miss Fanny," Gordon Family Collection, UGA; Atlanta Constitution, 15 January 1904.

<sup>6</sup> Gordon, "Boyhood Sketch," p. 13; Minutes of the Faculty, 18 June 1852, University of Georgia, Athens, Georgia (hereafter cited as Faculty Minutes, UGA); Athens Southern Banner, 11 August 1852; Athens Herald, 5 August 1852; Atlanta Constitution, 24 November 1878.

sketch written in 1878, Henry Grady, who was then very close to the current Senator from Georgia, wrote that Gordon left college "for the purpose of marrying--a frustrated elopement being the history of this event." In any case, Gordon's withdrawal from the University of Georgia and his failure to return prevented him from earning a college degree. But there can be no question of his ability, for while in college, Gordon had amply demonstrated his academic competence. And he had revealed in his penchant for public speaking an indication of the outstanding oratorical powers that would later prove so very valuable.<sup>7</sup>

After leaving the University, Gordon evidently returned to northwestern Georgia, but he did not remain there long. In 1854, he moved to Atlanta where he determined to pursue a career in law. Under the tutelage of two of Atlanta's most respected attorneys, Basil H. Overby and Logan E. Bleckley, Gordon "read law" and took and passed the bar examination. He immediately joined the Overby & Bleckley firm, but experienced considerable difficulty in attracting clients. As a result, his career as a lawyer proved short-lived; nevertheless, his brief association with Overby & Bleckley proved far more valuable than the legal training he received.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Faculty Minutes, 14 October 1852, UGA; Atlanta Constitution, 24 November 1878; Gordon, "De Gin'ral an' Miss Fanny," Gordon Family Collection, UGA. Although it is impossible to determine with absolute certainty why Gordon left the University, I believe it was at the request of his father, in order to aid the elder Gordon in developing his coal mines. A letter from young Gordon to a close friend in Athens in the summer of 1853 seems to indicate that he had compelling reasons for withdrawing the previous fall and that he did not leave under a cloud of controversy. In the letter from Gordon Springs, Gordon requested information about commencement for his class and about the trains travelling to Athens. Obviously, he wanted to return to the University to be with his classmates when they were graduated. Gordon to Governor Lumpkin, 21 July 1853, Keith Morton Read Collection, University of Georgia, Athens, Georgia.

<sup>8</sup> Atlanta Constitution, 24 November 1878; Gordon, "De Gin'ral an' Miss Fanny," Gordon Family Collection, UGA; Allen D. Candler and Clement A.

Shortly after joining the law firm, Gordon met Mrs. Overby's younger sister, Fanny Rebecca Haralson. Smitten at first sight, Gordon began courting the daughter of General Hugh Anderson Haralson of LaGrange, Georgia. He pursued her with such intensity and sincerity that in less than a month she consented to become his wife. Gordon married his child-bride on her seventeenth birthday, 18 September 1854, in a private ceremony in the bedroom of Fanny's desperately ill father. The General's death one week later undoubtedly cast a pall of gloom over the early days of John and Fanny's marriage, but this union would develop as one of the most solid and most stabilizing influences in Gordon's life. This charming, intelligent lady was the love of his life and he of hers. Throughout their nearly fifty years of marriage, Fanny provided "her beloved John" with trusted counsel, unwavering support and unquestioned devotion.<sup>9</sup>

Gordon and his young bride returned to Atlanta following the death of Fanny's father. But by late 1855, when his law practice had not improved appreciably, Gordon felt compelled to seek employment elsewhere. He opted for

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Evans, eds., Georgia: Compromising Sketches of Counties, Towns, Events, Institutions, and Persons, Arranged in Cyclopedia Form, 3 vols. (Atlanta: State Historical Association, 1906), 2: 138.

9 Gordon, "De Gin'ral an' Miss Fanny," Gordon Family Collection, UGA; Marriage Records, Court of Ordinary, Troup County, Georgia (located in Georgia Department of Archives and History, Atlanta, Georgia), volume D, p. 66; Mrs. Bryan Wells Collier, Biographies of Representative Women of the South, 6 vols. (n.p., 1920-1938, property of Atlanta Historical Society, Atlanta, Georgia), 4: 229. Three of the four Haralson sisters eventually married the partners of the law firm, Overby, Bleckley, and Gordon. The fourth, Leonora, or "Nora," married James M. Pace of Covington, Georgia, who served on Gordon's staff during the Civil War. William J. Northern, ed., Men of Mark in Georgia: A Complete and Elaborate History of the State from its Settlement to the present time, chiefly told in biographies and autobiographies of the most eminent men of each period of Georgia's progress and development, 7 vols. (Atlanta: A. B. Caldwell, 1910; Spartanburg, South Carolina: Reprint Company, 1974), 2: 34; Collier, Representative Women, 4: 229.

Milledgeville where he served as a newspaper reporter covering the 1855-1856 session of the Georgia General Assembly. When the legislature adjourned in March 1856, Gordon returned to northwest Georgia and joined his father in developing coal mining in the mountainous tri-state region of Alabama, Georgia and Tennessee. The Reverend had acquired several mines and was heavily engaged in their operation. The younger Gordon threw himself into the coal mining industry, initially settling in Dade County, in the northwestern most corner of Georgia, but later moving to Jackson County, Alabama. Later commenting on the geographical propinquity of the three states, he wrote, "I lived so near the lines that my mines were in Georgia, my house in Alabama, and my post-office in Tennessee." In the years preceding the Civil War, the Gordons formed the Castle Rock Coal Company which profitably developed several mines in the mineral rich region.<sup>10</sup>

As he established himself economically, Gordon also gravitated toward politics. Initially a Whig, he left the party as it disintegrated in the mid-1850s and became a Democrat. His rise to political prominence in northern Alabama was not spectacular, but in the half-decade prior to the outbreak of

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<sup>10</sup> Atlanta Constitution, 3 December 1876, 24 November 1878, 8 June 1880; Gordon, "De Gin'ral an' Miss Fanny," Gordon Family Collection, UGA; Gordon, Reminiscences, p. 3; Ethel M. Armes, The Story of Coal and Iron in Alabama (Birmingham: Chamber of Commerce, 1910) p. 183; United States Census Records, 1860, Jackson County, Alabama, Free Schedule, pp. 476-77; Slave Schedule, p. 432; Gordon to Barlow, 29 January, 7 April, 21 September 1868, Samuel Latham Mitchill Barlow Papers, Huntington Library, San Marino, California; Detroit Free Press, quoted in LaGrange Reporter, 24 January 1878, cited in Allen P. Tankersley, John B. Gordon: A Study in Gallantry (Atlanta: Whitehall Press, 1955), p. 75. Tankersley's study is the only previous full length biography of Gordon, but it is marred by numerous flaws. Although useful as an introduction to the whole of Gordon's life, this work failed to utilize many primary sources essential to a scholarly treatment of any historical figure. More importantly, however, Tankersley provided little or no critical analysis of the General and his career; thus Gordon was portrayed as a man unable to do any wrong.

war, he distinguished himself among the mountain folk "as a brilliant and captivating orator." He actively participated in every campaign in the state and, in the words of Henry Grady, "was accounted one of the best of the campaign orators, always drawing immense crowds." Although none of his purely political speeches have survived, it is apparent that as the sectional crisis deepened, Gordon moved increasingly into the secessionists' camp.<sup>11</sup>

In a commencement address delivered before the literary societies of Oglethorpe University on 18 July 1860, Gordon expounded upon the "Progress of Civil Liberty." He openly questioned whether a government "from which you cannot receive, for your person and your property, protection from any and all enemies on the common domain" was worth preserving. Though he hoped the current political controversy would be peaceably resolved, he stressed that southerners must be permitted to retain their slaves and to carry them into the territories. African slavery, for him, was "the Mightiest Engine in the universe for the civilization, elevation and refinement of mankind--the surest guarantee of the continuance of liberty among ourselves." If their alternatives were reduced to "dismemberment of this Union" or "fanatical dictation and Abolition rule," Gordon warned his fellow southerners not to hesitate for even a moment. "The spirit of RESISTANCE is the spirit of LIBERTY . . . let us do our duty, protect our liberties, and leave the consequences with God, who alone can control them." Rather than admit that slavery was an evil or a tyrannical institution, Gordon, in stark contrast, urged his audience to "take the position everywhere, that it [slavery] is morally, socially, and politically right--and that it is, in truth, the hand-maid of civil liberty." In Gordon's mind, southern

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11 Atlanta Constitution, 24 November 1878.

slavery and southern liberty were inextricably intertwined.<sup>12</sup>

Consequently, Gordon campaigned extensively in the summer and fall of 1860 on behalf of the southern Democratic candidate, John C. Breckenridge. According to one newspaper account, "he was literally everywhere, and was pronounced a marvel of eloquence in address and endurance." At Huntsville before one of the largest gatherings of the campaign, he spoke on the same platform with Alabama's foremost fire-eater, William Lowndes Yancey. Gordon's interest in the momentous questions of the day steadily intensified in the weeks following the defeat of Breckenridge and the election of Abraham Lincoln. He travelled to Montgomery in early January 1861, so that he might be present while the secession convention debated the fate of Alabama. On the evening that Alabama seceded, a frenzied crowd outside of Montgomery Hall prevailed upon him to deliver a brief address. Gordon then moved on to Milledgeville where on 19 January 1861, Georgia secessionists voted to join their sister states in leaving the Union. As in Montgomery, Gordon, speaking at the insistence of a fired-up throng, fanned the flames of southern independence. The state of his birth and the state in which he resided were no longer part of the United States.<sup>13</sup>

Gordon returned to his home in northeastern Alabama to await the reaction of the Republican administration. While there, citizens in his district called upon him to stand for election to the Confederate Congress. How

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<sup>12</sup> Milledgeville Federal Union, 24 July 1860; Milledgeville Southern Recorder, 24 July 1860; John B. Gordon, Progress of Civil Liberty. An Address Delivered Before the Thalian and Phi Delta Societies, of Oglethorpe University, Georgia, at the Last Annual Commencement (Macon: Telegraph Mammoth Steam Press, 1861), pp. 13-16. A copy of this speech is located in the Georgia State Library, Atlanta, Georgia.

<sup>13</sup> Atlanta Constitution, 24 November 1878.

seriously Gordon entertained the suggestion is unknown because it became a moot point when in the days following the firing on Fort Sumter, President Abraham Lincoln called for 75,000 militiamen. Gordon's course of action was unmistakably clear—he must offer his military services to the infant Confederate States of America. But, as he remembered many years later, "the struggle between devotion to my family on the one hand and duty to my country on the other was most trying to my sensibilities." Fanny allayed such misgivings by boldly announcing that she would leave their two young sons with his mother and accompany her husband to the war. So in April 1861, the twenty-eight year old Gordon began preparing for the uncertain ordeal that lay ahead. John B. Gordon was going to war.<sup>14</sup>

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14 *Atlanta Constitution*, 24 November 1878; Gordon, *Reminiscences*, pp. 3-4.

## CHAPTER II

### THE MAKING OF A SOLDIER, 1861-1864

Shortly after the firing on Fort Sumter, Gordon helped raise a company of volunteers from the tri-state region of Georgia, Tennessee and Alabama. Well known among the mountain folk, he was elected captain. The company organized as cavalry, but soon discovered that quotas for horsemen had quickly been filled. Disappointed but still imbued with the passion of the times, Gordon and his men reluctantly abandoned their horses and "resolved to go at once to the front as infantry. . . ." Without waiting for orders to move, the company began the journey to Milledgeville--then the capital of Georgia--where it would enlist; however, their plans were once again thwarted when a telegram from Governor Joseph E. Brown, stating their services were not needed at the present, reached them in Atlanta. The number of volunteers had far exceeded all the quotas requested, so Brown advised them to go home until circumstances warranted their recall. Unwilling to accede to the Georgia governor's wishes, the individualistic mountaineers determined to set up camp on the outskirts of town while imploring the governors of other states to accept their services.<sup>1</sup>

Gordon's company received its name as it marched through the streets of Atlanta on the way to its temporary camp. Moving in rag-tag fashion with no two men in step, this motley group of volunteers sported no semblance of

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<sup>1</sup> John B. Gordon, Reminiscences of the Civil War (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1903), pp. 3-5, 7-8.

uniformity save their fur caps adorned with raccoon tails. When a curious resident of Atlanta inquired as to what company it was, Gordon took it upon himself--as a name had yet to be determined--to announce proudly, "This company is the Mountain Rifles." A tall mountaineer instantly replied "in a tone not intended for his captain . . . 'Mountain hell! we are no Mountain Rifles; we are the Raccoon Roughs.'" In a single stroke, the undisciplined mountainman had named this soon-to-be-famous company.<sup>2</sup>

When word arrived that Alabama Governor A. B. Moore had accepted the service of the company, the "Raccoon Roughs" quickly set out for Montgomery. Gordon and his men reveled in the unbounded optimism that characterized the early days of the Confederacy. He described the trip by train from Atlanta to Montgomery as "one unbroken scene of enthusiasm." The throngs that flocked to the depots along the track frequently prevailed upon Gordon, the only captain aboard, to speak briefly and, in doing so, drew from him promises that were to prove impossible to honor. He later recalled that "in ardor and inexperience of my manhood," he boldly proclaimed his intention never to retreat. With only the vaguest knowledge of military science and barely an inkling of what lay ahead, the twenty-nine year-old captain had much to learn.<sup>3</sup>

Upon arrival in Montgomery, the "Raccoon Roughs" were assigned to the Sixth Alabama Regiment of Infantry. Though regulations called for ten companies per regiment, Governor Moore authorized the Sixth to include two extra companies in order to accomodate those to whom he had promised immediate assignment. The Sixth's twelve company, 1,400 man complement

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2 Ibid., pp. 8-9.

3 Ibid., pp. 9-12.

made it one of the largest regiments in the Confederate army. When regimental elections took place in early May, Gordon was unanimously elected major despite his wishes to the contrary. He received his commission as major of the Sixth Alabama on 14 May 1861, and formally enlisted as a twelve-month volunteer three days later.<sup>4</sup>

Near the end of May, the Sixth Alabama received orders to move to Corinth, Mississippi to undergo an indefinite period of instruction and military training. Yet, even after officially entering military service and receiving Confederate uniforms, the "Raccoon Roughs" continued to cling tenaciously to their distinctive "'coonskin' head-dress." "Amid the roar of cannon, the shouts of the multitude, the waving of flags and handkerchiefs, and the prayers and tears of mothers, wives, and sisters," the Sixth departed from Montgomery by train. Despite the enthusiasm that surrounded the Confederate cause, this trip in and of itself cast a grim portent of what was to come. The lack of a well-developed transportation network forced Gordon's men to travel from Montgomery, Alabama to Atlanta, Georgia to Chattanooga, Tennessee and on to Huntsville, Alabama before finally reaching Corinth--a distance by rail of about 500 miles. Corinth by air lay less than 235 miles northwest of Montgomery. Rapid movement of troops and materiel within the Confederacy would prove difficult if not impossible. Nevertheless, following a "brief and uneventful" encampment at Corinth, the regiment on 4 June 1861 was ordered to proceed to Richmond as quickly as possible. For Gordon and his men, perhaps the most important chapter

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid., pp. 13, 26; Gordon's Service File, Military Service Records, National Archives, Washington, D. C. (hereafter cited as Gordon's Service File, NA); Military Records of the Sixth Alabama, Alabama Department of Archives and History, Montgomery, Alabama (hereafter cited as Sixth Alabama Records, ADAH); Military Records of John B. Gordon, Alabama Department of Archives and History, Montgomery, Alabama (hereafter cited as Military Records of Gordon, ADAH).

of their lives was unfolding.<sup>5</sup>

The long journey from Mississippi to Virginia passed without serious incident; still, the trip left an indelible impression on Gordon's mind. Forced to travel through East Tennessee, a hotbed of Unionist sentiment, Gordon encountered the unmistakable signs of the divided allegiances that characterized the region. Whenever crowds gathered at the depots where the train stopped, both cheers and jeers greeted the Alabamians. Also in evidence were the flags of the two sections, which flew openly, almost mockingly, often on opposite sides of the street. Aware of the possibility of trouble between his troops and Union sympathizers, Gordon took particular care to restrain his men and avoid any action on their part that might precipitate a conflict. His vigilance was rewarded as the Sixth Alabama peacefully passed through the mountainous region of Tennessee into Virginia.<sup>6</sup>

Gordon and his men arrived in Virginia around 10 June and found the state burning with war fever as it hectically prepared for military action. Soon after reporting to Richmond, the Sixth moved northward to Manassas Junction where many of the Confederate regiments rapidly arriving from throughout the South were being assembled into an army. In the first major organization of troops of the Confederate Army of the Potomac, General P. G. T. Beauregard assigned the Alabama regiment to the Second Brigade of the First Corps, under

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5 Charles T. Jones, Jr., "Five Confederates: The Sons of Bolling Hall in the Civil War," Alabama Historical Quarterly 24 (1962): 139-41; U.S. War Department, The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies, 70 vols. (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1880-1901), Series I, volume 51, part 2, p. 128. (hereafter cited as O.R. and unless otherwise noted all references are from Series I with the volume, part and page numbers being given as 51, pt. 2, p. 128); Gordon, Reminiscences, pp. 26-27.

6 Gordon, Reminiscences, pp. 27-28.

the command of Brigadier General Richard S. Ewell. Gordon and the rest of Ewell's brigade occupied forward positions near Fairfax Station where they monitored Federal movements until 17 July when the Union army began its advance on Manassas. During the brigade's retirement back to the main Confederate line, Gordon commanded a portion of the Sixth and probably acted as the rearguard, for when he rejoined the main body, he excitedly told his comrades, "[H]e had seen the enemy."<sup>7</sup>

Even after the Battle of First Manassas four days later, Gordon could boast of little more than a "feel of the enemy." Early on the morning of 21 July, Ewell, joyful at the prospect of battle, lustily invited Gordon to join him for a quick breakfast. "Come and eat a cracker with me; we will breakfast together here and dine together in hell." The young major "who had never been under fire except at long range, on scouting expeditions, or on the skirmish-line" found the invitation neither appetizing nor inspiring. After breakfast, Ewell ordered Gordon to make a reconnaissance across Bull Run; Gordon had deployed his skirmishers and was about to open fire when his commander suddenly recalled him. The anticipated order for a general advance had not yet been delivered. These early morning movements exemplified the extent of Gordon's participation at First Manassas--though constantly expecting action throughout the battle, Gordon spent the entire day and part of the evening marching and counter-marching around Bull Run, but never actually engaging the enemy. When, at last, he returned to the same position he had held at daybreak, Gordon, must have reflected upon his part in the first major clash of arms of the war. In all probability, fatigue from the long day of marching and the anxiety of

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<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 32; *O.R.*, 2, pp. 944, 447, 440; Jones, "Five Confederates," pp. 142-44.

anticipated conflict overwhelmed his disappointment at not being actively engaged in combat. True, he had seen the enemy, but he had still not undergone the trial by fire that would prove his mettle. For that he would have to wait almost a year.<sup>8</sup>

In the months following the Union rout at Manassas, the Sixth Alabama remained in the vicinity of Bull Run. Gordon devoted much of his time to training and drilling his men, as well as to preparing himself for the demands of command. Like all other conscientious citizen soldiers without professional training in arms, Gordon had to teach himself the techniques of contemporary warfare. No record of what he read or how he educated himself in the science of war has survived, but it is quite probable that he utilized whatever military manuals that he could find, for above all else, he fully comprehended the necessity and importance of drill and discipline.<sup>9</sup> Letters home from a private in the Sixth bemoaned the tedium and discipline of army life. "Drilling everyday--

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<sup>8</sup> Jones, "Five Confederates," p. 145; Gordon, Reminiscences, pp. 37-39; O.R., 2, pp. 536-37.

<sup>9</sup> Gordon's speeches after the war, his famous lecture, "Last Days of the Confederacy," and Reminiscences of the Civil War are laced with references to the campaigns of Napoleon and his marshals as well as to earlier military history. Whether Gordon was well read in military history prior to the Civil War is impossible to determine, but it is quite probable that he read many of the same works that other citizen soldiers used to prepare themselves for war. Tactical manuals including Casey's Tactics, Hardee's Rifle and Light Infantry Tactics, Regulations for the Army of the United States, 1861, and Scott's Military Dictionary were plentiful and widely circulated. An excellent discussion of the problems volunteer officers faced and how they met them is found in T. Harry Williams, Hayes of the Twenty-third: The Civil War Volunteer Officer (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1965), pp. 19-38. The best evidence for the statement that Gordon appreciated the importance of discipline and training lies in the conduct of soldiers under his command in combat later in the war. The official reports of the battles and other contemporary sources frequently commented on the splendid performance of Gordon's men. The troops that he commanded--especially at the regimental level where his immediate control was most evident and important--unfailingly performed their tasks with remarkable discipline regardless of circumstances.

very hot and dull times,' . . . 'our employment is the same as ever--a very dull routine it is.'" Despite the monotony of ceaseless drilling, it was the only way to achieve effective control of troops in combat. As there was no further campaigning during 1861, Gordon and the troops posted along Bull Run occupied the remaining months of the summer and fall with drilling, doing picket duty, rebuilding bridges destroyed during the movements of July, and preparing for the coming of winter by constructing cabins.<sup>10</sup>

Gordon's command went into winter-quarters on the banks of Occoquan Creek near the mouth of Bull Run. As winter settled in, Gordon, like so many other soldiers, suffered the disappointment that came with the inactivity of camp-life. This general disenchantment may have prompted his December letter to the War Department in which he asked for a furlough in order to return home to raise a regiment. But he probably dismissed all thoughts of leaving Virginia when he received his promotion to lieutenant colonel of the Sixth on 26 December 1861. Although undoubtedly pleased with his advancement, Gordon found few other reasons to celebrate as the frigid winds of winter engulfed Virginia.<sup>11</sup>

The severity of the Virginia winter amazed Gordon as he witnessed the hardships it wrought upon the soldiers from the Deep South. Despite the fact that much of the fall had been devoted to gathering supplies and preparing their camps for the unaccustomed cold weather, the men suffered severely. Both food

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10 Gordon, Reminiscences, p. 48; Jones, "Five Confederates," pp. 145-48.

11 O.R., 5, p. 737; Gordon, Reminiscences, p. 48; Secretary of War Judah P. Benjamin to Major J. B. Gordon, 21 December 1861, John B. Gordon Papers, Gordon Family Collection, University of Georgia, Athens, Georgia (hereafter cited as Gordon Family Collection, UGA). This collection was recently donated to the University of Georgia by the Gordon family and has not yet been catalogued; Gordon's Service File, NA; Sixth Alabama Records, ADAH.

and warm clothing were in short supply; consequently, sickness spread throughout the Confederate camp. Measles became one of the primary killers, but Gordon encountered diseases that "ran through the whole catalogue of complaints to which boyhood and even babyhood are subjected . . . everything almost except teething, nettle rash, and whooping cough" and he even suspected that some were afflicted with the latter. Gordon himself suffered intensely from a crippling attack of diarrhea which incapacitated and confined him to private quarters for six weeks in February and March. He returned to duty on 28 March and continued preparing for the battles that would come with the warmer weather.<sup>12</sup>

April not only signalled a return to spring, but also brought movement on the part of the Union forces. Major General George B. McClellan initiated the long-expected move on Richmond when his troops began landing at the base of the Virginia peninsula at Fortress Monroe. The Sixth Alabama, now part of the brigade under the command of Brigadier General Robert E. Rhodes, left northern Virginia on 6 April, moving by train to Yorktown on the peninsula. While en route, a troop-laden train on which Gordon and his wife were travelling collided head-on with an empty train speeding in the opposite direction. "Nearly every car on the densely packed train was telescoped and torn into pieces; and men, knapsacks, arms, and shivered seats were hurled to the front and piled in horrid mass against the crushed timbers and ironwork." Although many were killed and scores injured, both Gordon and his wife fortunately escaped serious injury. The young Georgian was learning that disease and accident, as in all wars, often

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<sup>12</sup> Gordon's Service File, NA; Gordon, Reminiscences, pp. 49-50; Jones, "Five Confederates," pp. 146-49.

exacted a greater toll than rifle or cannon fire.<sup>13</sup>

Finally arriving in Yorktown, Gordon and the rest of the brigade labored to improve the weak defenses around the town. D. H. Hill, commander of the division to which Rodes' brigade was assigned, kept his command "at work day and night to remedy the defects, strengthen the intrenchments and secure shelter for the men." While engaged in these efforts, the regiment underwent reorganization and on 28 April 1862, the men of the Sixth unanimously elected Gordon their colonel. The improvements to the Yorktown defenses went for naught as the entire Confederate line evacuated the town on the night of 3-4 May. Portions of Hill's division engaged in a rearguard action at Williamsburg on 5 May, but Gordon and the Sixth did not become involved.<sup>14</sup>

As the Confederate retreat up the peninsula continued, Gordon saw little action. His command served as the rearguard of the army for a time, but the mud and slush of Virginia's deeply-rutted roads proved to be more troublesome than the advancing Union army. Virginia's rain-drenched countryside turned into a seemingly bottomless sea of mud in which wagons, horses, and artillery repeatedly bogged down, forcing Gordon's men to struggle with the mired materiel. On at least one occasion, Gordon himself waded into the mud to help his men who were laboring to free some artillery pieces stuck in the mud. With justifiable pride, he claimed that "[N]ot a gun or cassion was lost, and there was never again among those brave men a moment's hesitation about

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<sup>13</sup> O.R., 5, pp. 935-36, 961; 11, pt. 1, pp. 601-02; Gordon, Reminiscences, p. 52.

<sup>14</sup> O.R., 11, pt. 3, p. 426; pt. 1, pp. 601-05; Sixth Alabama Records, ADAH; Gordon's Service File, NA; "A Distinguished Southern Journalist" [E. A. Pollard], The Early Life, Campaigns and Public Services of Robert E. Lee, with a Record of the Campaigns and Heroic Deeds of his Companions in Arms (New York: E.B. Treat and Co., 1871), p. 536.

leaping in the mud and water whenever it became necessary on any account." Despite the severe conditions of the march, Gordon's shivering, tired and hungry troops finally limped into the incomplete breastworks behind the banks of the Chickahominy River east of Richmond. It was in this wooded swampland that Gordon's first real trial by fire took place less than three weeks later.<sup>15</sup>

The Confederate plan of battle at Fair Oaks or Seven Pines developed out of General Joseph E. Johnston's desire to crush a portion of McClellan's army located south of the Chickahominy.<sup>16</sup> His plans for a rapid convergence of his divisions to overwhelm the somewhat isolated Federals were seriously complicated by a torrential downpour that lasted throughout the evening of 30 May. Consequently, when D. H. Hill's division plunged forward on the morning of 31 May, the normally marshy woodland around Seven Pines was completely inundated and in some places covered by three feet of water.<sup>17</sup>

Gordon and the rest of Rodes' brigade experienced considerable difficulty in moving through the swampland to their point of attack south of the Williamsburg Road. A washed-out bridge forced the men to wade through waist-deep water and delayed their arrival on the field of battle.

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15 Gordon, Reminiscences, pp. 52-54.

16 Amid the tremendous volume of work on Civil War battles, there has been relatively little done on the Battle of Seven Pines or Fair Oaks or on the following conflict known as the Seven Days Battle. Clifford Dowdey's The Seven Days: The Emergence of Lee (Boston and Toronto: Little, Brown and Co., 1964) and Joseph P. Cullen's The Peninsula Campaign 1862: McClellan and Lee Struggle for Richmond (New York: Bonanza Books, 1973) include the battle of 31 May-1 June 1862 in their studies of actions on the Virginia Peninsula between April and July 1862.

17 O.R., 11, pt 1, p. 943; Gustavus W. Smith, "Two Days of Battle at Seven Pines (Fair Oaks)," Robert Underwood Johnson and Clarence Clough Buel, eds., Battles and Leaders of the Civil War, 4 vols. (New York: Thomas Yoseloff, Inc., 1956), 2: 225-27.

Only one other regiment besides Gordon's was in position when the signal guns announcing the general advance were fired. Gordon, probably sensing the apprehension and dread that haunts most soldiers just prior to their first real battle, and undoubtedly experiencing it himself, addressed his men in the moments before their advance. He reminded them of "Beast" Butler's actions in New Orleans, spoke of the disaster that would befall both them and their cause if they were defeated, and implored them to do their duty. Fortified by Gordon's oratory, the Sixth moved forward, deployed as skirmishers covering the brigade's entire front even though most of Rodes' men were still struggling to get in position. The thick undergrowth, the ever-present briars, the felled trees and spongy soil of this northern end of White Oak Swamp made Gordon's advance both difficult and exhausting; nevertheless, his men drove the enemy's pickets back to their first line of entrenchments.<sup>18</sup>

With the entire brigade now on the field and deployed, Rodes ordered Gordon to concentrate his regiment and move it to the extreme right. Once in position, the Sixth moved forward with the rest of the brigade and, despite heavy fire, forced the Federals to retreat from their first line of defense. At this point, Rodes halted his brigade so that he could reform and reorganize his line before assaulting the next Union position. This order to stop never reached Gordon and, as a result, the Sixth continued its advance past the first line of earthworks and into hastily abandoned enemy camps. Gordon, seeing that the troops on his left had halted, quickly stopped his men, ordered them about and marched them back to the point where Rodes was dressing his brigade line. When Rodes called for the advance to resume, Gordon ordered his men forward,

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18 O.R., 11, pt. 1, pp. 971-72, 979.

but to his immense consternation found the entire regiment continuing to march to the rear as previously ordered. The men had not been ordered about.<sup>19</sup>

Immediately realizing the misunderstanding of his order and "[I]mpressed with the importance of arresting the movement at once," Gordon galloped to a point equidistant between his line and the enemy where he called and gestured for his men to turn and move on the enemy. The startled Sixth then faced about and delivered its charge at the double-quick. In his official report, Gordon recorded that this incident "though insignificant in itself, is worthy of record, as evincing the spirit of the brave men under my command." It might be added that the regiment's orderly retrograde movement, consistent with previous orders, and its rapid about-face reflected extremely favorably upon Gordon and the discipline he had inculcated into his command.<sup>20</sup>

The assault upon the second Federal line sorely tested Gordon's control of his troops. Most of his officers, including his brother, had been disabled and he alone remained on horseback.<sup>21</sup> Despite providing a magnificent target for the numerous Union soldiers who drew a bead on this lone horseman, Gordon escaped unscathed though numerous bullets pierced his clothing. As he approached the abatis guarding the front of the Federal line, his horse was killed forcing him to advance on foot. Gordon led his men into a labyrinth whose

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19 *Ibid.*, 11, pt. 1, pp. 971-73, 979-80.

20 *Ibid.*, 11, pt. 1, p. 980.

21 When the Sixth Alabama organized in Montgomery in May 1861, three Gordon brothers enlisted--John, Eugene, and Augustus. At Seven Pines, Gordon saw that his nineteen year-old brother, Augustus, "had been shot through the lungs and was bleeding profusely," but he was unable to stop and aid him. "There was no time for that--no time for anything except to move on and fire on." Sixth Alabama Records, ADAH; Gordon, *Reminiscences*, pp. 56-57; Frances Beal Smith Hodges, *Gordons of Spotsylvania County, Virginia* (Wichita Falls, Texas: Wichita Multigraphing Co. 1934), pp. 21-22.

felled trees, dense growth of vines and briars, and two to three feet of water made it "an almost impassable barrier." Advancing in the face of intense fire, the Alabamians suffered severely, often finding it necessary to prop up the wounded when they fell lest they drown. In spite of these difficulties, the regiment continued to drive the enemy back steadily.<sup>22</sup>

As the Sixth moved through the swampy abatis, Gordon's right suddenly came under a withering fire from Union troops who had moved forward when they saw the Sixth's flank unsupported. Further advance was impossible until the supporting brigade under Brigadier General Gabriel J. Rains moved up. Despite urgent pleas from Gordon and Rodes and a written order from Hill, Rains' brigade "although within sight and but a few hundred yards distant" never advanced to protect Gordon's right. This destructive enfilading fire compelled Gordon to halt his advance and refuse his flank in an effort to protect his right and rear. Federal fire virtually annihilated Gordon's right flank company before the order to withdraw was given. Only one officer and but twelve of the fifty-six men that the company carried into battle escaped unharmed. Rodes, seeing "that nothing could be effected toward an advance while the right wing of the brigade was so exposed," ordered his entire command to fall back. With the fighting near an end and with sunset approaching, Rodes, nearly exhausted from a painful arm wound sustained earlier in the day, turned his decimated brigade over to the young colonel of the Sixth. After assuming command and reporting to D. H. Hill, Gordon moved the brigade to the rear where it camped for the evening. Even in the darkness rest did not come immediately for the brigade spent much of the evening searching out and attending to the wounded

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<sup>22</sup> Pollard, Companions in Arms, pp. 536-37; Gordon, Reminiscences, pp. 56-57; O.R., 11, pt. 1, pp. 972-73, 980.

who had not been removed. The brigade remained in reserve during the next day's fighting, though the prospects for action appeared good throughout the day.<sup>23</sup>

The grizzly aftermath of battle became painfully apparent to Gordon in the days after the conflict at Seven Pines. His inspection of the battlefield revealed a scene he found "sickening and shocking to those whose sensibilities were not yet blunted by almost constant contact with such sights." Having undergone his baptism of fire in these swamps, Gordon found himself almost overwhelmed by the human wreckage spread out before him. The dead bodies of soldiers of both sides littered the fields and swamps in which they had fought on 31 May. These images and the emotions stirred by the grim task of burying the dead burned deeply into Gordon's mind. When he reminisced about his Civil War experiences, he called his memories of the months he spent in the swampland east of Richmond "some of the saddest memories of those four years." Yet, it was in these "miasmatic swamps" of the Chickahominy that Gordon first learned the lessons of war.<sup>24</sup>

Gordon and his command had acquitted themselves quite well. For a young soldier with no previous military training or experience, Gordon had performed handsomely. Even if made only to ease his own nervousness, Gordon's speech to his men prior to their advance served to strengthen their resolve to stand fast regardless of what might come. He would employ his oratorical powers frequently throughout the war and obviously to good effect as a remark by one of his men evinced. After a battle later in the war, this

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<sup>23</sup> O.R., 11, pt. 1, pp. 944, 973-74, 976, 977, 980; Gordon, Reminiscences, pp. 57-58.

<sup>24</sup> Gordon, Reminiscences, pp. 54, 70.

soldier stated that he never again wanted to hear his commander speak before going into action. When asked why, he earnestly replied, "[B]ecause he makes me feel like I could storm hell." Gordon, more importantly, demonstrated the ability to inspire not only with his words but with his deeds as well. Once engaged at Seven Pines, he displayed coolness and courage which allowed him to make full use of the sound military sense that he possessed. One contemporary later observed that "[I]t was here [at Seven Pines] that Gen. Gordon for the first time, displayed those remarkable qualities: serene intrepidity, perfect self-possession, fertility of resource, & rapidity of decision & movement, that in the opinions of the Military . . . [would lend] such distinction to his subsequent career." Even in the heaviest of fire, he remained on horseback as long as possible in order to maintain more effective control of his regiment--a difficult task in any combat but one complicated by the terrain over which the Sixth advanced. Gordon's firm control of the regiment proved that he had mastered his manuals and had been equally successful in imparting his knowledge to his men.<sup>25</sup>

Gordon's Alabamians similarly exhibited remarkable discipline in their first fight under trying conditions. Their casualty lists bore bloody evidence of their dauntlessness in the face of intense fire and difficult terrain. The entire brigade suffered severely, but the Sixth was hammered the worst, losing nearly sixty per cent of the men it carried into action. Yet, under their young colonel, they never wavered. If in the final analysis, as one historian

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<sup>25</sup> Pollard, Companions in Arms, p. 540; Williams, Hayes of the Twenty-third, pp. 28-29; John S. Lewis to General Trousdale, 13 June 1865, William Trousdale Papers, Tennessee State Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee (hereafter cited as William Trousdale Papers, TSLA).

averred, "the discipline of the regiment depended largely on the personality of the colonel," the men of the Sixth were well served. Clearly, Gordon had admirably prepared them for combat. Moreover, he had won their complete confidence by his conduct during and direction of their battle. The gallant and cool manner in which Gordon handled his men in combat persuaded Rodes to turn brigade command over to the Georgian, even though he was the brigade's youngest colonel, both in age and time in grade.<sup>26</sup>

Just as Gordon had undergone his "baptism of fire" at Seven Pines, so to had Fanny first faced the emotional strains of a battle in which her husband was engaged. With cannonade rocking the countryside around Richmond and the roar of the raging battle increasing, Fanny's anxiety mounted steadily. Unable to bear the tension any longer, she prevailed upon her elderly uncle, John Sutherland Lewis, to accompany her as she moved closer to the action. There upon a hill, he remembered, "she listened in silence. Pale and quiet, with clasped hands, she sat statute-like, with her face toward the field of battle." She displayed remarkable self-control, only occasionally revealing her inner turmoil and then merely with a "quick-drawn sigh." But when she learned of John's safety and "the excessive tension was relaxed, . . . the intensity of mental strain to which she had been subjected . . . [left her] well-nigh prostrated." Although almost unnerved by this initial trial, Fanny soon recovered and gradually developed "a sublime fortitude" that enabled her to endure similar harrowing experiences during the next three years.<sup>27</sup>

After the battle at Seven Pines, Gordon continued in command of Rodes'

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26 John S. Lewis to General Trousdale, 13 June 1865, William Trousdale Papers, TSLA; Pollard, Companions in Arms, p. 537; O.R., 11, pt. 1, pp. 975-76; Williams, Hayes of the Twenty-third, pp. 24-27.

27 Quoted in Gordon, Reminiscences, pp. 58-59.

brigade. His temporary advancement over the other regimental commanders was "not only unexpected, but unwelcome and extremely embarrassing." Despite his apprehensions, Gordon warmly recalled many years later that his brother officers "did everything in their power to lessen my embarrassment and uphold my hands." By late June, Rodes--still quite feeble from his unhealed wound sustained on 31 May--returned to duty, thus freeing Gordon to resume command of the Sixth. He was at the head of the Alabamians when the newly organized Army of Northern Virginia marched out from the Richmond entrenchments to meet McClellan's army.<sup>28</sup>

The Seven Days Battles began on 25 June when General Robert E. Lee, successor to General Johnston, seized the initiative from McClellan by attacking north of the Chickahominy. Almost continuous fighting and constant movement marked the actions of the two armies during the following week. Although near the battlefields of the first two days, Gordon and his regiment did not see action until the fighting at Gaines' Mill late in the afternoon of 27 June. From his position on the extreme left of the Confederate line, D. H. Hill attacked with his five brigades deployed in a solid divisional front. Rodes' brigade, moving in the center of the division, found its line of advance carried it through an all but impenetrable swamp. Amid the tangled undergrowth, the orderly, organized advance rapidly degenerated into great confusion as brigade lines overlapped and regiments lost contact with one another.<sup>29</sup>

The Sixth passed through this "most densely wooded morass" in good order, but when it emerged from the swamp, Gordon found that the regiment had become separated from the rest of the brigade. After reforming his men,

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<sup>28</sup> Gordon, Reminiscences, p. 58.

<sup>29</sup> O.R., 11, pt. 2, pp. 624-25, 631.

Gordon advanced into a long open field, there encountering heavy fire from both artillery and infantry. He continued to move forward until his total isolation became dangerously apparent, whereupon he halted his men and ordered them to lie down while awaiting support. When reinforcements failed to arrive, Gordon calmly withdrew the Sixth "in perfectly good order" to the cover of the swamp. Efforts by Rodes and his regimental commanders to reassemble the brigade and resume the advance proved unsuccessful as nightfall brought an end to the day's fighting. Following a sleepless evening on the battlefield attending to the wounded, the brigade marched in pursuit of the retreating Federals on 28 June. At day's end, a nearly prostrated Rodes once again relinquished command of the brigade to Gordon.<sup>30</sup>

Gordon and the brigade were not seriously engaged again until 1 July. With its change of base from White House on the Pamunkey to Harrison's Landing on the James all but completed, McClellan's army withdrew behind its fortified lines atop Malvern Hill. The Federals were "strongly posted on a commanding hill, all the approaches to which could be swept by his artillery, and were guarded by swarms of infantry securely sheltered by fences, ditches and ravines." The firepower of the nearby gunboats on the James added to the virtual impregnability of the Union position. Despite his belief that an attack would be exceedingly hazardous, D. H. Hill prepared his division for an assault up the slopes of Malvern Hill.<sup>31</sup>

Shortly before sundown, the division moved forward. Gordon, having been ordered to charge the Union batteries some 700-800 yards in his front, led his brigade uphill across an open field. His men moved on, weathering

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30 *Ibid.*, 11, pt. 2, pp. 625-26, 631-32, 633, 637.

31 *Ibid.*, 11, pt. 2, pp. 627-28.

"a most destructive fire" and climbed within 200 yards of the deadly batteries. There grape and canister from the Federal artillery coupled with infantry fire made it "impossible to advance without support," so Gordon ordered his command to "lie down and open fire." While waiting for the promised supports, Gordon fearlessly walked among his men offering words of encouragement as they exchanged blows with Union infantry. An artillery shell exploded at his feet filling his eyes with sand and dirt, but the blast blinded him only momentarily. Enemy bullets shattered the handle of his pistol, pierced his canteen and ripped away part of the front of his coat, but Gordon again escaped uninjured. He held his brigade under the Federal guns on the heights until nightfall when darkness permitted a withdrawal with less loss of life. Gordon and the other brigade commanders collected their scattered commands in the darkness and bivouacked near the base of Malvern Hill. McClellan's troops retreated during the night, thereby ending the first serious threat to Richmond.<sup>32</sup>

Though disappointed by his inability to capture the Federal batteries, Gordon proudly reported "that the dead of this [Rodes] brigade marked a line nearer the batteries than any other." But the price in blood had been high, for almost one-half of the men he carried into battle on 1 July lay on the field killed or wounded. Gordon concluded his report of the battle by stating "that nothing so increases an officer's confidence in our strength as to lead such troops into battle." In the same vein, for the men in the ranks, nothing buoyed their spirits more than to be led into battle by a man like Gordon. His splendid conduct in the face of heavy fire led observers to declare that "the capacity of inspiring courage in action, & holding men long under fire is an endowment characteristic,

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<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 11, pt. 2, pp. 628-29, 634-35, 643; Gordon, *Reminiscences*, pp. 73-75.

unique, almost peerless in the young officer."<sup>33</sup>

Following Malvern Hill, Gordon retained command of Rodes' brigade and remained with D. H. Hill's division near Richmond shadowing McClellan's army. Except for minor skirmishing, Gordon and his men confined their activity to monitoring Union movements and saw no serious action during July and August. But by the middle of August, most of McClellan's army had slipped away from its base on the James without any significant Confederate interference. Lee, "greatly mortified" that the Federals "got off so easily," nevertheless, recalled Hill and his division to the Army of Northern Virginia in late August when it moved northward. Gordon and the rest of Hill's command missed the battle of Second Manassas on 30 August, but finally rejoined Lee's army three days later at Chantilly.<sup>34</sup>

Inaugurating Lee's first invasion of the North, Rodes' brigade with Gordon at its head crossed the Potomac into Maryland on 4 September. When he had learned the day before that his men were to be given the honor of crossing the river first, Gordon took the opportunity to address the Alabamians under his command. He told them that they richly deserved such an honor for in all their previous fights they had bestowed only glory upon themselves and the cause for which they fought. The young colonel reminded them to remain true to their colors and uphold their reputation, so that southern independence might be realized and peace and liberty restored to the country.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> O.R., 11, pt. 2, p. 635; John S. Lewis to General Trousdale, 13 June 1865, William Trousdale Papers, TSLA.

<sup>34</sup> O.R., 11, pt. 3, pp. 673-74, 677; 12, pt. 3, pp. 917, 942; 51, pt. 2, pp. 1075-76; 19, pt. 1, pp. 144-45, 1018-19.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 19, pt. 1, p. 1019; Pollard, Companions in Arms, p. 538; "Soldier" to Messrs. Editors, 2 November 1862, Sixth Alabama Records, ADAH.

Once the bulk of his army had safely crossed the Potomac, Lee divided his forces. He sent Jackson and a major portion of the army to capture the Federal garrison at Harper's Ferry, while D. H. Hill and Longstreet continued their northward march. Lee recognized the danger of dividing his army, but he believed that the disorganization that plagued the Union army after Second Manassas still remained. Such was not the case, however, as McClellan had resumed command and begun to pursue Lee with unexpected speed. West of the mountains, D. H. Hill had been ordered to guard the roads leading north from Harper's Ferry, to gather up escaping Federals and to protect the passes over South Mountain. He saw no particular danger to the passes until the morning of 14 September when he personally examined them. His inspection revealed that only a large force could defend the passes; nevertheless, he was reluctant to move his entire division forward until more could be learned about the Union presence. But as noon approached and the main body of the Union army came into view below him, Hill ordered the remainder of his division to South Mountain and hastily called upon Longstreet for reinforcements.<sup>36</sup>

Rodes' 1,200 Alabamians arrived atop South Mountain shortly after 1:00 p.m.<sup>37</sup> Having recently returned to duty, Rodes moved his brigade to the left of the road running through Turner's Gap and occupied a hill three-quarters of a mile to the north. This "bare hill" held the key to the defense of the Confederate left for it not only commanded the ridge controlling the gap, but

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36 O.R., 19, pt. 1, pp. 145-46, 1019-20, 1034.

37 The best monograph detailing the Maryland campaign of 1862 is James V. Murfin's The Gleam of Bayonets: The Battle of Antietam and the Maryland Campaign of 1862 (New York: Thomas Yoseloff, 1965). His discussion of the battle at South Mountain is adequate, but I believe that he, like almost all other military historians, has not stressed the importance of the action on 14 September fully enough. John W. Bryce, Jr., "The Battle of South Mountain" (located at the Antietam National Battlefield Site, May, 1965) is the only substantial work concentrating upon the action three days prior to Sharpsburg.

also dominated a road leading to the Confederate rear west of the mountain. To hold this vital hill, Rodes extended his line by ordering his extreme left regiment, Gordon's Sixth, to move further to the left along the crest of the hill. While Rodes continued to stretch his already thin line, the Federals, outflanking him "on either side by at least half a mile," began their advance. In clear view below the Confederates, three divisions of seasoned Union troops ably led by experienced officers moved against Rodes' single brigade. The Federal advance up the steep eastern face of the mountain against an enemy well posted among trees and rocks was slow, but steady.<sup>38</sup>

Once atop South Mountain, Gordon exhorted his men "not to allow their courage to falter in the event of his fall, but to acquit themselves nobly, that their names as heroes might live forever." This time, however, words were not enough, for Gordon and the other men of Rodes' brigade spent the rest of the afternoon and evening merely delaying the inevitable. Outflanked, outnumbered and isolated, Rodes' men found it impossible to hold any position for an extended period. Broken into small groups by the rocky terrain, they were forced to fight until nearly overwhelmed, then fall back and form a new line, and there continue to resist until compelled to retreat again. On the extreme left of Rodes' line, Gordon's regiment faced a grave danger in that the "apparently interminable right" of the advancing Federals greatly overlapped his flank. Despite this consistent threat to his rear and the continuous pressure on his front, Gordon kept his regiment "constantly in hand."<sup>39</sup>

Stubborn resistance finally yielded to the weight of Union numbers as

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38 O.R., 19, pt. 1, pp. 214-15, 267, 272, 1020, 1034.

39 Ibid., 19, pt. 1, pp. 1034-35; "Soldier" to Messrs. Editors, 2 November 1862, Sixth Alabama Records, ADAH.

Gordon and the rest of the brigade were forced off the hill. Rodes, seeing his left crumbling under overwhelming pressure, established a new line around the peak of another hill by changing fronts and facing his entire brigade to the left. In this manner, though still unable to form a united line owing to the terrain, Rodes' regiments continued their fight as nightfall approached. The brigade suffered severely, with some of the units completely shattered and demoralized. "Fortunately for the whole command," Rodes reported that Gordon's regiment remained intact as the sole organized force opposing the enemy and formed "a Nucleus around which the defeated could rally." Exposed to both enfilading and direct fire and repeatedly in danger of being surrounded, the Sixth retreated slowly "held together by its able commander." Gordon's men succeeded in making "one more desperate stand" near the top of the highest peak shortly before darkness brought an end to the fighting. During this last action, Gordon audaciously exposed himself upon a huge rock while shouting orders and words of encouragement to his men. Gordon's regiment and remnants of the brigade retained control of the key-points covering Turner's Gap until about 11:00 p.m., when they were ordered to march to Sharpsburg. As Rodes' brigade moved off the mountain, one-third of its number remained, dead or wounded.<sup>40</sup>

After reaching Sharpsburg early on the morning of 15 September, Gordon's men moved to occupy the center of the Confederate line about one-half mile northeast of the town. Under occasional artillery fire from the arriving Federal batteries across Antietam Creek, they passed that day and the next preparing for battle. The single bloodiest day of battle in the Civil War

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<sup>40</sup> "Soldier" to Messrs. Editors, 2 November 1862, Sixth Alabama Records, ADAH; O.R., 19, pt. 1, pp. 1035-36, 1021; John S. Lewis to General Trousdale, 13 June 1865, William Trousdale Papers, TSLA.

opened at first light on the morning of 17 September. McClellan's army savagely assaulted the Confederate left defended by Lieutenant General Thomas J. Jackson and the battle raged there almost continuously until mid-morning. Lee, without the luxury of ready reserves except those hurriedly marching from Harper's Ferry, found it necessary to pull troops from the right and center of his line and move them to relieve the hard-pressed left. When three of D. H. Hill's five brigades were shifted to the left, the remaining two brigades--Rodes' and Brigadier General G. B. Anderson's--side-stepped to the left in an attempt to cover the entire center themselves. Hill posted them along a narrow sunken road which ran east from the Hagerstown Pike for about 500 yards and then southeast for another 500 yards. In the hours that followed, this peaceful farm lane was to become known ever thereafter as the "Bloody Lane."<sup>41</sup>

Occupying that portion of the road immediately adjacent to the bend to the southeast, the Sixth Alabama held the most advanced point along this defensive front. The sunken road formed a natural rifle pit that shielded its defenders who further strengthened their position by dismantling wooden fences and piling rails in front of the lane. The fury on the Confederate left raged unabated until mid-morning when action died away as both sides had seemingly fought themselves to the point of exhaustion. With the carnage on the left drawing to a close, Hill's two brigades awaited the onslaught that appeared certain to descend upon them. General Lee, convinced that the next attack would fall on his center, rode along the narrow lane and offered words of encouragement to his troops. He called upon them to hold their ground at all costs for a breakthrough on their front would mean disaster for the entire army.

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41 O.R., 19, pt. 1, pp. 149, 1022-23, 1036-37.

Gordon, in an effort to assure General Lee and to make his men even more resolute, loudly proclaimed in voice for all to hear, "'These men are going to stay here, General, till the sun goes down or victory is won.'" As Lee moved away from the road, the attack began.<sup>42</sup>

Watching the blue-clad troops advance through the undulating fields on his front, Gordon could not help but marvel at the "thrilling spectacle." The Union forces marched forward with parade ground-like precision in four magnificently dressed columns while their band trailed in the rear playing martial music. Gordon thought to himself, "'What a pity to spoil with bullets such a scene of martial beauty!' But there was nothing else to do. Mars is not an aesthetic god." His enthrallment with this brilliant military pageant gave way to the tactical necessity of resisting the advancing blue columns. Unaccustomed to receiving charges, Gordon weighed his alternatives as it became increasingly clear that the enemy planned to carry his position by weight of numbers in a bayonet attack. How could his one line resist four Union lines? Realizing that his men could not possibly disable enough of the enemy to break the assault, Gordon rejected his impulse to open fire as soon as the Federals came within range. Instead, he opted for a plan which he had never employed, but one which he could only hope would work. He decided to hold his regiment's fire until the enemy was almost on top of them, "and then turn loose a sheet of flame and lead into their faces." Believing that no troops could withstand such a sudden shock, the young colonel determined that none of his men should fire "until the Federals were so close upon us that every Confederate bullet would take effect." He positioned himself in the center of the regiment and ordered his men to lie down

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42 Gordon, Reminiscences, p. 84; O.R., 19, pt. 1, p. 1037.

and await his command.<sup>43</sup>

As the Union troops drew near, an oppressive stillness hung over the field--neither artillery nor musketry fire could be heard. On came the Yankees, ever closer. When the eagle insignia on the Yankee buttons were clearly visible, many anxious Confederates begged to open fire, but Gordon simply replied, "Not yet, . . . Wait for the order." And the Federals came on. They had moved unhindered to within thirty paces of where Gordon stood when, at last, he shouted, "Fire!"<sup>44</sup>

The rifles of the Sixth Alabama simultaneously flamed and, in little more than an instant, virtually the entire Federal front line disappeared, consumed by the blast. Before the stunned Federals could recover, the men of the Sixth arose and poured a continuous fire into the blue ranks, compelling their immediate retreat beyond the range of Gordon's deadly rifles. Though the front line had been shattered, the other three remained intact and, once reformed, they charged Gordon's position a second time and were again bloodily repulsed. So it was with the third and fourth attempts. Unable to weather the storm of lead any longer, the Union troops lay down, taking shelter behind the crest of the ridge some eighty yards in front of the road, and opened fire. Both forces tried numerous flanking movements, but, in the main, the battle at the "Bloody Lane" settled down to a small arms fight between two closely drawn lines of infantry--each seeking to dislodge the other by musketry fire alone.<sup>45</sup>

In the initial Union volley Gordon went down with his first wound of the

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43 Gordon, Reminiscences, pp. 84-86.

44 Ibid., pp. 86-87; "Soldier" to Messrs. Editors, 2 November 1862, Sixth Alabama Records, ADAH.

45 Gordon, Reminiscences, pp. 87-88.

war when a ball passed through the calf of his right leg. He continued to walk among his men, encouraging them both by word and deed even after a second ball struck him higher up on the same leg. An hour later, a third ball ripped through his left arm "making a hideous and most painful wound, mangling the tendons and muscles, and severing a small artery." Even when his men caught sight of the blood streaming down his arm and pleaded for him to go to the rear and have his wounds attended to, Gordon refused to leave. He remembered his earlier promise to Lee. As he looked to the sun and hoped for nightfall, he thought to himself that "it [the sun] moved very slowly; in fact, it seemed to stand still." A short while later, a fourth Union ball pierced his shoulder, leaving a wad of clothing and the ball's base in the wound. Though extremely weak from the loss of blood, he remained alert and upright. Gordon, seeing that his extreme right companies were being torn apart by an enfilading fire, moved unsteadily in that direction to rectify the situation. He had staggered only a few yards when a fifth Minie ball struck him squarely in the face and passed through his left cheek and out through the jaw, just missing his jugular vein. Knocked unconscious, the battered colonel fell face forward into his cap and might have drowned in his own blood had not a "thoughtful" Yankee earlier shot a hole in his hat to let the blood run out.<sup>46</sup>

Gordon's fall went unnoticed for a time because when he came to, he found himself alone. Dazed by the shock of his multiple wounds, he experienced many curious thoughts and weird sensations. Lying there in his own blood, Gordon imagined that half his head had been carried away. Wondering if he was alive or dead, he reasoned that a dead man could not move a limb, so he tried to move one of his legs. His success not only proved to him that

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46 Ibid., pp. 89-90; Pollard, Companions in Arms, pp. 538-39.

he was alive but brought him to his senses, whereupon he crawled approximately one hundred yards to the rear where a new line was being formed.<sup>47</sup> There he collapsed and was carried away on a litter.<sup>48</sup>

Gordon and other badly wounded men were placed in a barn in the rear where they could safely be treated. When revived by stimulants late that evening, he found his friend, Dr. Weatherly, attending him. Immediately perceiving the distress etched on the surgeon's face, Gordon asked, "What do you think of my case, Weatherly?" Though the answer was hopeful, Gordon knew better and replied, "You are not honest with me. You think I am going to die but I am going to get well." These were brave words for a man whose blackened face was so swollen that both eyes were almost completely hidden and whose right leg, left arm and shoulder were covered in bandages and propped upon pillows. Not long thereafter, Fanny who had remained close to the front, reached him. Gordon feared his appearance might shock her, so he summoned up his remaining strength and attempted to reassure her by calling, "Here's your handsome (?) husband; been to an Irish wedding!" Fanny's response, as might be expected, was a "suppressed scream."<sup>49</sup>

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47 It would appear that immediately after Gordon's fall, the lieutenant colonel of the Sixth attempted to draw back the right of the regiment in order to eliminate the deadly enfilading fire that Gordon had been moving toward when he received his fifth wound. After obtaining Rodes' permission to execute such a move, the lieutenant colonel mistakenly ordered all of the Sixth to retreat and also told an adjoining regimental commander that the move was intended for the entire line. As all of the brigade fell back from its strong position at the Sunken Road, Rodes made numerous attempts to rally his men and form new lines in the rear of his former position. In all probability, it was one of these new lines that Gordon crawled to after he regained consciousness. O.R., 19, pt. 1, pp. 1037-38.

48 O.R., 19, pt. 1, pp. 1037-38; Pollard, Companions in Arms, pp. 538-39; "Soldier" to Messrs. Editors, 2 November 1862, Sixth Alabama Records, ADAH; Atlanta Constitution, 26 November 1878.

49 Gordon, Reminiscences, pp. 90-91; Atlanta Constitution, 25 March 1881.

Gordon's condition remained critical for several months. His immense loss of blood and the severity of his wounds seriously threatened his life. The necessity of wiring his jaw shut further complicated his weakened condition by making eating both "difficult and discouraging." He had to be fed "concentrated nourishment"--brandy and beef tea--frequently in order to rebuild his strength and guard against "constant drainage." His young wife faithfully attended to this and much more. She bathed him, dressed his wounds and sat devotedly by his bedside administering to all his needs. When Gordon contracted erysipelas in his left arm and the doctors instructed her to paint the arm with iodine three or four times daily, Gordon "complained" that she painted his wounds three or four hundred times a day. Fanny's vigilance and tender nursing strengthened both Gordon's body and his indomitable will to recover and return to the Army of Northern Virginia.<sup>50</sup>

If Gordon should return to duty, he would most certainly be given greater

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50 Gordon, Reminiscences, pp. 91-92; Pollard, Companions in Arms, pp. 539-40; Atlanta Constitution, 25 March 1881. Though Gordon spent much of his convalescent period in Virginia at Staunton and Winchester, he did travel south in early 1863 before returning to the Army of Northern Virginia. Evidently, while there residents of Alabama attempted to induce him to stand for election to the Confederate Congress, but Gordon declined the honor. The demands of the war prevented Dr. Weatherly or other army doctors from visiting Gordon often, thus forcing Fanny to act as both doctor and nurse in the months that his life "hung by a thread." She was assisted by her servant, Sarah, Gordon's body-servant, Jim, and another body-servant that General Wade Hampton sent to aid Mrs. Gordon. This slave, Buddy Hampton, remained with the Gordons until shortly before the colonel resumed active duty, at which time Buddy returned to his master. After the war, Gordon and his wife, wishing to recognize his services, invited Buddy to Atlanta where they helped him complete his education. He was so grateful and impressed with the Gordons' actions that he made sure his own children had the same educational opportunities. When he visited Gordon's grandson around 1930, Buddy Hampton proudly told him that all of his children held college degrees. Pollard, Companions in Arms, p. 539; "Soldier" to Messrs. Editors, 2 November 1862, Sixth Alabama Records, ADAH; Atlanta Constitution, 8 June 1880; Gordon to Major J. R. Fairbanks, 26 February 1863, Fairbanks Collection, The University of the South, Sewanee, Tennessee; Hugh H. Gordon, Jr., "General Wade Hampton's Slave," Gordon Family Collection, UGA.

command responsibilities. On all his fields of battle, he had performed superbly. Rodes felt Gordon deserved special attention for his conduct at South Mountain where the young commander of the Sixth not only acted with his customary gallantry, but handled his regiment "in a manner . . . [Rodes had] never heard or seen equalled during this war." Gordon's firm control of his men under extremely trying conditions played a major role in averting disaster on the Confederate left on 14 September. D. H. Hill, almost at a loss for words, reported simply that "Gordon, the Christian hero, excelled his former deeds at Seven Pines and in the battles around Richmond." The division commander maintained that the English language was incapable of expressing any higher compliment of the man he called "the Chevalier Bayard of the army." With such glowing words of praise, promotion seemed inevitable.<sup>51</sup>

On 27 October 1862, General Lee recommended that Gordon be promoted to the rank of brigadier general and assigned to command the brigade of Brigadier General Rains that had fought under Colonel Alfred H. Colquitt at South Mountain and Sharpsburg. Lee's plans, however, were frustrated when he learned shortly thereafter that the War Department had already promoted Colquitt and given him command of the same brigade. With this vacancy closed and Gordon's immediate, or even eventual, return to active duty seriously in doubt, the War Department decided not to confirm Gordon's 1 November 1862 appointment as a brigadier general. If he was able to endure the rigors of campaigning, Gordon would be reappointed.<sup>52</sup>

Gordon returned to active duty after less than seven months of what he

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<sup>51</sup> O.R., 19, pt. 1, pp. 1038, 1035, 1021, 1027.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 19, pt. 2, pp. 684, 697-98; Gordon's Service File, NA; Military Records of Gordon, ADAH.

called "prolonged and tedious" convalescence. Considering the seriousness of his wounds, his recovery, though not complete, had been remarkable. Despite his unhealed facial wound, Gordon reported on 30 March 1863 ready to assume brigade responsibilities even though he had not been confirmed as a general officer. A new command had to be found for him because there were no openings for brigadiers at the time with Georgia or Alabama troops in his old division. Consequently, on 11 April 1863, Gordon was assigned to command the brigade in Major General Jubal A. Early's division previously led by Brigadier General Alexander R. Lawton. Although distressed by his parting from the men with whom he had gone to war, Gordon, nonetheless, looked forward to leading his new brigade. Six Georgia regiments comprised "Gordon's Brigade" making it one of the largest Confederate brigades. He had less than three weeks with his new command before carrying it into action, but the positive effect of his discipline quickly became apparent and received mention in inspectors' reports. Gordon and his men were ready when the Union army under Major General Joseph Hooker assumed the offensive during the last week of April 1863.<sup>53</sup>

Though most of the fighting during the Chancellorsville campaign took place in the wooded maze surrounding Chancellorsville, Gordon played a prominent role in actions on the other front near Fredericksburg.<sup>54</sup> His brigade constituted a portion of the force under Early that Lee had left at Fredericksburg with instructions to defend the town and protect the army's rear

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<sup>53</sup> Gordon's Service File, NA; O.R., 25, pt. 2, p. 717; Pollard, Companions in Arms, p. 540; Gordon, Reminiscences, pp. 92, 95; Jubal Anderson Early, Autobiographical Sketch and Narrative of the War Between the States (Philadelphia and London: J. B. Lippincott Co., 1912), p. 192.

<sup>54</sup> Unlike many other studies of the Chancellorsville campaign, John Bigelow's, The Campaign of Chancellorsville, a Strategical and Tactical Study (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1910)--one of the finest campaign studies ever written--fully develops the action on the Fredericksburg front.

from any enemy movement from that direction. Fortunately for Early's outnumbered Confederates, the Union troops under Major General John Sedgwick remained unaggressive until the morning of 3 May when they finally attacked.<sup>55</sup> Gordon's brigade, defending Early's right, easily repulsed a weak assault on its front, but was forced to fall back when Union soldiers executed a breakthrough and captured Marye's Hill and the adjacent heights. Early conducted a fighting retreat down Telegraph Road before standing to fight two miles to the south at a position Gordon had assumed after withdrawing. Upon discovering that the Federals did not energetically pursue him, but chose instead to move via the Plank Road toward Lee's rear at Chancellorsville, Early made plans to return to Fredericksburg the following morning. He would first seize the heights that he had been forced to abandon and then attack Sedgwick in conjunction with Confederate troops moving back on the Plank Road.<sup>56</sup>

Early's battle plan called for Gordon's brigade to lead the assault on the Fredericksburg heights. Gordon, closely supported by a second line of infantry and artillery, would attack along the Telegraph Road when all of Early's troops were ready to advance. Shortly after daybreak, Early placed Gordon's brigade in position and then moved to another portion of his line to supervise troop dispositions. With all the preparations nearly completed, Early rode back to

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55 The sizeable Union force left at Fredericksburg was not completely inactive however. When the Federals attempted to force a crossing of the Rappahannock River along Gordon's front in the pre-dawn darkness of 29 April, one of his regiments discovered the move and prevented the crossing until well after sunrise. The vigilance and good conduct of the 13th Georgia gratified its new commander greatly. Though the Federals established a number of strong positions on the Confederate side of the river, they made no further offensive moves in that area until 3 May. Gordon to wife, 30 April 1863, Gordon Family Collection, UGA; Early, Narrative of the War, pp. 193-96.

56 Early, Narrative of the War, pp. 193-211, 217-221; O.R., 25, pt. 1, pp. 796-97, 800-01, 1000-01.

accompany Gordon during the assault. When Early returned to the position where he had left Gordon, he could not find the Georgia brigade. The young brigadier, acting under a "misapprehension" of orders, was at that moment advancing without support on Lee's Hill. Although shocked that his plans for a carefully coordinated advance had been destroyed, Early quickly grasped the situation. He realized that Gordon might already be engaged, so he immediately ordered the rest of his command forward.<sup>57</sup>

Whether Gordon simply misunderstood Early's order or it had been vaguely or incorrectly worded made little difference at the time because Gordon believed he had been instructed to advance at once. Still "officially a comparative stranger" to his brigade, he spoke to his men as they prepared to attack. Seeking to arouse their fighting blood, Gordon proclaimed his intention to storm the heights in their front. When his offer to excuse anyone who did not wish to accompany him found no takers, he announced that they were all of one purpose--to take the heights. The Georgians responded to his remarks with "a prolonged and thrilling shout" and moved forward rapidly. Fortune smiled on Gordon's "serious misunderstanding" of his orders. He found Lee's Hill virtually unoccupied and easily took control of his first objective. As his men moved against Marye's Hill, they encountered a large number of the enemy, but a spirited charge aided by effective fire from the supporting artillery drove the Federals from the heights. By occupying the hills west of Fredericksburg, Early cut Sedgwick's connection with the town and isolated the Federal command. Much had been accomplished despite the premature move. Perhaps there was more truth than humor in Gordon's contention years later that Early

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57 Gordon, Reminiscences, p. 100; Early, Narrative of the War, pp. 221-23.

"playfully but earnestly" chided him after the attack that only his success had saved the Georgian from a court-martial for disobedience of orders.<sup>58</sup>

Gordon's advance, though "handsomely made," alerted the enemy to Confederate strength in the area and precluded any further surprise. Nevertheless, Early prepared to resume the offensive when he heard the sound of the Confederates attacking along Plank Road. Early faced Gordon's brigade westward and deployed it north of the Plank Road so that it occupied the right of his line. When the general advance began late in the afternoon, Gordon moved to the northwest attempting to turn the Federal's left flank. He cleared the enemy from the ridges in his front and advanced a considerable distance when darkness arrested his progress. He had driven the enemy's flank back, but found it impossible to move into the rear of Sedgwick's forces. During the evening of 4-5 May, Sedgwick withdrew his entire command across the Rappahannock. Portions of Gordon's brigade quickly moved to the river the next morning and captured a number of Federals who had failed to make their escape. When Hooker began pulling the rest of his army back across the river later in the day the

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<sup>58</sup> Early, Narrative of the War, pp. 223-24; Gordon, Reminiscences, pp. 100-01; Jubal A. Early to "Messers Editors," 11 May, 19 May 1863, Jubal Anderson Early Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.; Douglas Southall Freeman, Lee's Lieutenants: A Study in Command, 3 vols. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1942-44), 2: 629; O.R., 25, pt. 1, p. 1001. During his attack on Marye's Heights, Gordon came into possession of a horse which he called "the most superb battle-horse that it was my fortune to mount during the war." He named the horse "Marye" after the hill upon which she had been captured. The horse "was ordinarily rather sluggish . . . [B]ut when the battle opened she was absolutely transformed, . . . [catching] the ardor and enthusiasm of the men around her." In battle, nothing could frighten her, not shouting, musketry, or artillery fire. Although absolutely fearless and capable of amazing feats when under fire, "Marye" was "merely a good saddle animal" in camp--so much so that Gordon's wife often rode her. In spite of frequent exposure to intensely heavy fire, she was never wounded. Gordon, Reminiscences, pp. 101-02.

Chancellorsville-Fredericksburg drama drew to a close.<sup>59</sup>

In the aftermath of the Chancellorsville campaign, Gordon's conduct received a favorable review. On 11 May 1863, Lee reappointed Gordon brigadier general with his rank to date from 7 May. Lee also sought to return Gordon to the command of Rodes' old brigade--the one that he had served with and had temporarily commanded--on 10 May by transferring him from Early's division back to D. H. Hill's old division, now under Rodes. The move appeared to be a logical one, but it never took place. The commissioned officers in the brigade that Gordon had led into battle for the first time around Fredericksburg was so taken with the fiery young Georgian that they unanimously petitioned Lee to allow him to remain with them. Gordon, as a native Georgian, expressed his willingness to stay and lead this brigade which he felt was composed of as "superb material [as] ever filled the ranks of any command in any army." In the face of such mutual admiration, Lee decided to retain the new brigadier at his present position.<sup>60</sup>

When Lee reorganized the Army of Northern Virginia following its extensive losses at Chancellorsville, Gordon's brigade remained with Early's division as a part of II Corps. But the death of Stonewall Jackson necessitated a reshuffling of both general officers and troops. Lee increased the number of corps to three and assigned newly promoted Lieutenant General R. S. Ewell to command of the restructured II Corps. Though Lee appreciated the difficulties of undertaking another invasion of the North with a new and untried command

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<sup>59</sup> O.R., 25, pt. 1, pp. 801-02, 1001-02; Early, Narrative of the War, pp. 225-33.

<sup>60</sup> O.R., 25, pt. 1, p. 810; Douglas Southall Freeman and Grady McWhiney, eds., Lee's Dispatches (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1957), p. 94; Gordon's Service File, NA; Gordon, Reminiscences, p. 95.

system, he determined that the benefits outweighed the concomitant dangers. An invasion would move the fighting out of war-ravaged Virginia, allow the army to secure abundant provisions in Pennsylvania, seize the initiative and disrupt Federal plans for the summer, perhaps force the recall of Union troops assailing other points in the Confederacy and possibly provide impetus for the peace movement in the North. But above all else, Lee realized "[H]e had to invade the North for provisions. . . ." <sup>61</sup>

On 4 June, the II Corps under its new commander left its camps around Fredericksburg and began moving toward the Shenandoah Valley. Ewell's Corps, composed of three divisions under Major General Jubal A. Early, Major General Edward Johnson, and Major General Robert E. Rodes, spearheaded Lee's second great northward thrust. <sup>62</sup> Gordon's brigade reached Culpepper Court House on 7 June after a series of short, leisurely marches, often only eight or ten miles in length. Gordon found the marches after the first day "much more agreeable and less fatiguing," especially after a light rain settled the dust. In spite of the ease of the march and the improbability of serious action soon, Gordon's thoughts centered upon his wife who remained behind in Richmond. He missed her terribly but did not think it wise for her to follow too closely as he had no idea where or how far the army might go. Gordon implored her to write to her "big old ugly" often for he cherished her letters as "the most beautiful evidences of a wife's devotion" he had ever seen. With her loving letters to comfort him

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<sup>61</sup> Gordon, *Reminiscences*, pp. 137-40; Douglas Southall Freeman, *R. E. Lee: A Biography*, 4 vols. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1934-1935), 3: 8-19.

<sup>62</sup> Wilbur Sturtevant Nye, *Here Come the Rebels!* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1965) is a fine study of the movements of Lee's army during the month of June 1863--from the time the decision to invade the North was made up to the point that the Army of Northern Virginia concentrated at Gettysburg.

during their separation he might endure "such a cheerless jaut [sic]." <sup>63</sup>

The II Corps resumed its march on 10 June. It passed through Sperryville and Washington before crossing over the Blue Ridge Mountains at Chester Gap. Late on the evening of 12 June, after an exhausting six-hour, seventeen mile march, Ewell's corps reached Front Royal. Early the following morning, Gordon's brigade forded the Shenandoah River and moved down the Valley Turnpike toward Winchester and a Federal force of 6,000 to 8,000 under Major General Robert H. Milroy. Approximately three miles southwest of the town, near Kernstown, Early ordered Gordon to form his brigade in a line of battle to the left of the turnpike and to clear the Federals from a ridge in his front. Gordon's men advanced smartly and in conjunction with skirmishers of Brigadier General Harry Hays' brigade drove the enemy from a strong position behind a stone wall, across the fields beyond and back to Bowers' Hill and the main fortifications at Winchester. Darkness brought an end to Gordon's pursuit, but both Ewell and Early were pleased with the actions of the Georgian. Early reported that Gordon's late afternoon affair "reflected equal credit upon himself and his brigade." The corps commander styled Gordon's "rapid and skillful advance" as "one of the finest movements" he had witnessed during the war--one that "won for the troops and their gallant commander the highest commendation." His men slept on the field that evening trying to get a well-deserved rest while exposed to a drenching rain. <sup>64</sup>

Gordon's actions the following day demonstrated the tactical effectiveness of a skillfully employed diversion. At daylight on 14 June, Gordon and Hays advanced skirmishers and easily took possession of Bowers' Hill as the

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<sup>63</sup> O.R., 27, pt. 2, pp. 439, 459; Gordon to wife, 7 June 1863, Gordon Family Collection, UGA.

<sup>64</sup> O.R., 27, pt. 2, pp. 440, 450, 459-61, 463-64, 477, 491.

Federals had withdrawn their artillery and most of the infantry during the night. From atop the hill, Ewell and Early watched the enemy busily strengthening their works to the west and northwest of the town. Despite these efforts to fortify the Union position, Early determined that the key fort in the Federal defensive scheme could be attacked from a concealed position on Little North Mountain. While he marched three of his brigades under cover to the point of attack, Early left a force under Gordon on Bowers' Hill with orders "to amuse the enemy and hold him in check in front." Gordon's demonstration with skirmishers and artillery through out the afternoon allowed Early to move his men unobserved to the point of attack. His assault about a hour before sundown completely surprised the enemy "whose entire attention . . . was engrossed by Gordon." Early occupied the western-most fort which forced the Federals to fall back to their main works closer to Winchester as darkness ended the attack.<sup>65</sup>

The hill that Early captured at sunset overlooked and commanded the main Federal works. Even though he expected Milroy to evacuate during the evening, Early prepared to resume his attack the next morning. When Gordon received orders to join in the assault, he was absolutely dumfounded. His demonstration in front of the "frowning fortress" that afternoon had revealed the natural strength of the position and the abundance of defenders--both of which made a frontal assault almost suicidal. Gordon also believed that Milroy's forces could either be surrounded or forced to withdraw by Confederate maneuvering in the open country surrounding Winchester; but orders were orders and he had to obey. As he planned his attack late that night, a vision of the slaughter of his brigade as it ascended the hill came to him, leaving with him with the conviction that he had "not one chance in a thousand to live through it." With "a feeling

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65 Ibid., 27, pt. 2, pp. 440-41, 461-63, 477.

that was akin to a presentment," Gordon wrote what he believed would be his last letter to his wife and gave it to his quartermaster with instructions to deliver it to Fanny following his death the next morning. In the eerie pre-dawn darkness of 15 June, a grimly fatalistic Gordon, led his men up the long slope. Fully expecting to be engulfed in a deadly storm of lead at any moment, he moved closer. As he approached the fort, he breathed an exhaustive sigh of relief upon discovering that Early's prophecy had come to pass--the Federals had withdrawn during the night.<sup>66</sup>

When Gordon realized that the fort had been evacuated, he immediately determined to pursue the retreating Federals. He detached a small portion of his force to take possession of the abandoned work and haul down the large garrison flag still flying above the fort. After sending a staff officer to Early to report his actions, Gordon and the rest of the brigade sped down the Martinsburg pike toward Stephenson's depot where Johnson's division had moved to cut off Milroy's retreat. Though Gordon marched rapidly to the sound of the guns, he arrived too late to participate in the fight, for Johnson had already scattered Milroy's forces and captured a large number of the Federals. Further pursuit by infantry being pointless, the Georgians aided Johnson's men in rounding up the prisoners and horses.<sup>67</sup>

Gordon's brigade moved to Shepherdstown after Winchester and waited there until 22 June while the rest of the army advanced toward the Potomac. Gordon had expected to cross the river the day before, but heavy rains had swollen the Potomac and prevented passage. The postponement allowed him

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<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 27, pt. 2, p. 463; Gordon, Reminiscences, pp. 68-69.

<sup>67</sup> *O.R.*, 27, pt. 2, pp. 441-42, 463, 491; Manuscript Journal of Jedediah Hotchkiss, 15 June 1863, Jedediah Hotchkiss Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

to attend church, have dinner with a local family, and write a letter to his wife. However, the chief object of Gordon's letter was to inform Fanny that she could come to Shepherdstown. He had found a "first class family" living "in beautiful style" that insisted that he bring Fanny forward to stay with them. This prospect greatly pleased Gordon for if he were wounded, she would be much nearer to him. He also proposed purchasing "some sort of conveyance" with Captain James M. Pace of his staff so that their wives might move more freely and be closer to them. Finally, Gordon told her that he hoped to send Pace to Richmond as an escort to deliver the tremendous flag the Georgia brigade had captured at Winchester. If this plan succeeded, the captain could accompany Fanny and his own wife, who were sisters, from the capital and deliver them at Shepherdstown. All of Gordon's machinations went for naught, however, for Fanny had already left Richmond and her husband's letters were being returned to him.<sup>68</sup>

Even though most of Gordon's letters to his wife during June and July 1863 miscarried and failed to reach her at the time, their content reveals that a deeper sense of intimacy had developed between Fanny and John. Physical separation had become increasingly difficult to bear after their constant companionship during his convalescence. And when Gordon realized that none of his letters had reached Fanny, he lapsed into a deep depression.<sup>69</sup>

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68 O.R., 27, pt. 2, pp. 442-43, 464; Gordon to his wife, 21 June 1863, Gordon Family Collection, UGA.

69 As Gordon moved northward with the Army of Northern Virginia, he sent a great many letters to Fanny, but soon discovered that they were being returned to him. Fanny had already departed from Richmond and was attempting to move as close to the Confederate army as possible. The people that she had been staying with in the capital were uncertain as to how to reach her, so rather than blindly forward the General's letters, they returned them to Gordon--an act which sorely distressed the young brigadier. Gordon to wife, 23 June, 10 July 1863, Gordon Family Collection, UGA.

Travelling "in an enemy's country" surrounded by hostile faces and with no knowledge of his wife or her whereabouts--or her of his--Gordon tearfully poured out his innermost feelings in his next letter to his wife. For him to say simply that he loved her seemed "so tame" and woefully inadequate. He declared that "God only knows how I love you. Honor, reputation, money, ease and comfort could all now be gladly parted with if it purchase for me, the constant presence of my Fanny." Gordon professed his willingness to sacrifice "every other enjoyment of any description" just to be with his wife and "precious little family." This depression of spirit, common among soldiers separated from their loved ones, was exacerbated by his bitter disappointment over the return of his letters. Though distraught, Gordon sensed that Fanny might be unduly alarmed by his "unmanliness," so he quickly reassured her that his disconsolate condition was only momentary. Unable to unburden his heavy heart to anyone but her, he utilized the letter to relate his unhappiness in their separation and express his powerful love for her. Gordon's confiding of his most intimate thoughts and the depth of his feelings for Fanny reveal an extraordinary bond of love and devotion.<sup>70</sup>

In addition to this new closeness to Fanny, Gordon also exhibited an increasing spiritual awareness. Believing that only the grace of God had spared him in his earlier battles, Gordon committed his life to God with the "hope he [sic] will protect me as He has done." "My confidence . . . is pretty strong. I trust in Him. Pray that I may trust Him more and pray with faith." Gordon also cautioned his wife to be prepared to accept his death. "My life is in the hands of a wise and good God. If He takes it, it is all right." Regardless of what might happen, Gordon repeatedly prayed that he and Fanny might always have God's

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70 Gordon to wife, 23 June 1863, Gordon Family Collection, UGA.

spirit in their hearts and that they might strive to be "better and more consistent and more constant Christians." Throughout the war, Gordon found strength in this twin bastion of God and wife.<sup>71</sup>

After crossing the Potomac, Gordon's brigade continued its northward march passing through Boonsborough, Hagerstown, Ringgold, Waynesborough and halting at Greenwood, Pennsylvania on 24 June. While the division remained in camp during the following day, Early received orders to move against the town of Gettysburg. On the rainy morning of 26 June, Early's division crossed South Mountain and marched toward Gettysburg where Union troops had been reported. Determined to capture them, Early detached Gordon's brigade and a cavalry battalion from the division and sent them down the Chambersburg Pike toward Gettysburg with orders "to amuse and skirmish with the enemy." Early hoped the Georgian's demonstration would allow the rest of the division to march along a more northerly route and gain the rear and flank of the Federals. Gordon's force approached Gettysburg much sooner than Early's other brigades because he marched on a macadamized road while they struggled over muddy roads. Any hope of capturing the entire Federal force evaporated when the regiment of Pennsylvania militia fled precipitously as soon as Gordon's advance elements first came into view.<sup>72</sup> His men moved into Gettysburg unopposed and occupied the town. A thorough search of the town netted the Confederates little more than the 2,000 rations which were distributed among Gordon's brigade. The Confederates burned railroad cars and a small railroad bridge nearby, but

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<sup>71</sup> Gordon to wife, 30 April, 7 June, 23 June, 7 July, 10 July 1863, Gordon Family Collection, UGA.

<sup>72</sup> Neither Early's nor Gordon's infantry was able to pursue the fleeing 26th Regiment of Pennsylvania Militia, but their cavalry forces gave immediate pursuit and succeeded in capturing about 175 prisoners. O.R., 27, pt. 2, p. 465.

marched no further that day as the hour was late and the rain continued. During the night, Gordon received an artillery battalion and another company of cavalry to assist him in his move against York the next day.<sup>73</sup>

As the Confederate army marched through the lush valleys of Pennsylvania, the beauty and bounty of this region, untouched by war, greatly impressed Gordon. Amid this "scene of universal thrift and plenty," Gordon's men found food, especially milk and butter, to be abundant and cheap, at least at the outset. Long after the Gettysburg campaign, Gordon vividly recalled the hot breakfast and cold milk he enjoyed with a Pennsylvania Dutchman and the cool serenity of lounging in the farmer's dining room, through which a natural spring flowed. While in Pennsylvania, Gordon tried to find a number of items for his wife that had become increasingly difficult to procure in the Confederacy. His desire to accumulate "a box of articles" including "a piece of nice black silk" evidently went unfulfilled, because prior to the advance on York, he had managed to secure only a pair of shoes. Requisitioning food, supplies and money were primary reasons for invasion, but Gordon saw to it that his men closely adhered to Lee's orders protecting people and private property. He noted only a few "insignificant exceptions," one of which highlighted "adherence to the letter and neglect of the spirit" of his orders. While encamped one evening in open country where wood was at a premium, Gordon's men asked permission to use a few rails from a nearby wooden fence for their campfires. Gordon assented but stipulated that only the top layer of rails be taken. When morning revealed bare fence-posts, Gordon had no choice but to admit that his enterprising men "had gotten the better of me. . . ." Each man who had taken a rail had in fact taken

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<sup>73</sup> O.R., 27, pt. 2, pp. 443, 464-66, 491; Gordon, Reminiscences, p. 140.

only the top one--all the way down to the last layer.<sup>74</sup>

Moving by a different route in advance of the rest of the division, Gordon's force neared York by nightfall on 27 June. He and Early conferred that night and made plans for a joint assault on the town if Union forces occupied it. In the event York was undefended, Early ordered Gordon to proceed through the town and onto Wrightsville and attempt to seize intact the bridge over the Susquehanna. Later in the evening, a committee of town citizens visited Gordon and formally surrendered the town. Gordon and his command entered York the next morning amid the ringing of Sunday church bells. Having earlier found the people near the Maryland border to be "very indifferent as to the result of this war," Gordon was astonished and mortified "to see how much afraid of us" the residents of York were. His assurances of protection of life and property to the deputation the previous evening had evidently failed to convince the "terror-stricken" inhabitants.<sup>75</sup>

Gordon, riding at the head of his brigade, found it extremely difficult to move through the densely packed streets. Noticing a crowd of ladies, he turned toward them to speak some words of reassurance when "a cry of alarm came from their midst" and "young lady . . . ran from me as tho I had been a demon." Quite probably, it was the fearsome appearance of Gordon's dusty men--especially when contrasted with the attire of these crowds of church-goers--that generated much of the concern. "Begrimed . . . from head to foot with the impalpable gray powder" from their rapid marches on the macadamized pikes, the Confederates, officers and privates alike, did indeed

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<sup>74</sup> Gordon, Reminiscences, pp. 140-41, 144-47; Gordon to wife, 23 June, 7 July 1863, Gordon Family Collection, UGA; O.R., 27, pt. 3, pp. 912-13.

<sup>75</sup> O.R., 27, pt. 2, pp. 466, 491; Gordon to wife, 23 June, 7 July 1863, Gordon Family Collection; UGA; Gordon, Reminiscences, p. 142.

present a wild appearance. Nevertheless, Gordon employed his full oratorical powers and managed to persuade the concerned populace that they and their property would be protected, for his men, "though ill clad and travel-stained," were gentleman. He concluded his remarks by promising the heads of any of his soldiers "who destroyed private property, disturbed the repose of a single home, or insulted a woman."<sup>76</sup>

As Gordon moved out of the town toward Wrightsville, a little girl of about twelve rushed up to him and handed him a large bouquet of roses. He inspected the arrangement and discovered a note, "in delicate handwriting," hidden among the flowers. The tersely written, unsigned note described in great detail the Federal position at Wrightsville. It not only provided Gordon with the number and disposition of troops, but also suggested how he might turn the Union line. As he marched toward the Susquehanna River, Gordon undoubtedly read and reread the note and pondered its accuracy as well as the identity of its author. He desperately wanted to seize the huge bridge between Wrightsville and Columbia. A mile-and-a-quarter in length, this wooden superstructure built upon stone pillars served as a railroad bridge, a wagon bridge, and a towpath for a canal that crossed the river at that point. If the bridge could be captured, the Confederates could move to the eastern bank of the Susquehanna and attack Harrisburg or perhaps even Philadelphia.<sup>77</sup>

Despite the mid-day heat, Gordon's brigade marched swiftly, arriving at

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<sup>76</sup> Gordon, Reminiscences, pp. 142-43; Gordon to wife, 7 July 1863, Gordon Family Collection, UGA; John W. Daniel, "Address at Unveiling of Valentine's Recumbent Figure of Lee, Southern Historical Society Papers 11 (1883): 368; Pollard, Companions in Arms, pp. 540-41; Atlanta Constitution, 15 January 1904.

<sup>77</sup> Gordon, Reminiscences, pp. 143-44, 147; Gordon to wife, 7 July 1863, Gordon Family Collection, UGA; O.R., 27, pt. 2, p. 467.

Wrightsville in the late afternoon. Gordon surveyed the Federal position from a high ridge that the note had suggested and discovered the particulars of his "mysterious communciation" accurate in every detail. A strongly entrenched force of about 1,200 militiamen guarded the approach to the bridge. Rather than risk a frontal assault, Gordon attempted to outflank the Federals and move in behind them. He advanced a line of skirmishers against the Federal front while moving three of his regiments down a deep gorge beyond the Union flank. Finding it impossible to cut the enemy off from the bridge, he opened fire on the Union troops with his artillery battery. After only a few well-placed shots, the militiamen hurriedly retreated across the bridge. Gordon's men pursued as rapidly as possible, but were unable to seize the opposite end of the bridge because the Federals set fire to the structure "with the most inflammable materials." The head of Gordon's column reached the center of the bridge before being forced back by the flames.<sup>78</sup>

The fire quickly consumed the wooden bridge and soon threatened the entire town of Wrightsville as flames spread to an adjoining lumber yard. Gordon's earlier pleas to the residents for aid in extinguishing the fire on the bridge had gone unheeded, but as the danger to the town increased, "buckets and tubs and pails and pans innumerable came from their hiding places." Gordon formed his men in a bucket-brigade stretching from the river to the fire and back, and in this manner sought to contain the flames. In spite of "excessive fatigue" caused by their twenty-mile march and skirmish earlier in the day, Gordon's men labored long into the night before finally checking the spread of the fire. The gallant exertions of the exhausted Confederates who managed to

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<sup>78</sup> O.R., 27, pt. 2, pp. 466-67, 491-92; Gordon to wife, 7 July 1863, Gordon Family Collection, UGA; Gordon, Reminiscences, pp. 143-44, 147.

preserve most of the town were lost in the "base ingratitude" of the northern newspapers that mistakenly reported that Gordon's brigade had burned Wrightsville. The citizens of the town, however, realized that Gordon's men had "labored as earnestly and bravely to save the town as they did to save the bridge."<sup>79</sup>

One particularly grateful home-owner who had looked on anxiously as the Georgians fought the flames endangering her home sought out the brigadier that evening. When Mrs. Luther L. Rewalt learned that Gordon's brigade would depart Wrightsville early the next morning, she expressed her unwillingness to allow Gordon and his men to leave without a token of her appreciation. She insisted that the General and as many men as could be served in her dining room have breakfast with her prior to their departure. Gordon found the table so bountifully supplied, her welcome so gracious and her demeanor so calm and kind that he thought she might be a "Southern woman." Perhaps suspecting that she had penned the helpful note he had received in York, he cautiously, and in a round-about manner, inquired of her where her sympathies lay. In a firm voice, unshaken by the fact that she was surrounded by Confederates, she replied, "General Gordon, I fully comprehend you, and it is due to myself that I candidly tell you that I am a Union woman." Her husband's service in the Union army and her constant prayers for preservation of the Union would permit no misunderstanding of her position. But her strong ties to the North did not dismiss her from an obligation to the Confederates in her presence; simple courtesy dictated she show her gratitude for their saving of her home. Gordon, always an admirer of strong women, called Mrs. Rewalt "one of the most superb

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<sup>79</sup> Gordon, *Reminiscences*, pp. 147-48; Gordon to wife, 7 July 1863, Gordon Family Collection, UGA; *O.R.*, 27, pt. 2, pp. 466-67, 492.

women" that he met during the war and fondly referred to her in his lectures after the war as "the heroine of the Susquehanna."<sup>80</sup>

Wrightsville had been saved but the prized bridge had not. Both Gordon's and Early's energetic plans for a campaign east of the Susquehanna dissipated in the smoke of the burning bridge. Gordon hoped to mount his men once across the river and move on Lancaster and menace Philadelphia. That would force the Federals to dispatch a sizeable portion of the Army of the Potomac to defend the city, thereby reducing the number Lee would eventually have to face. Although Gordon would have had to clear such actions with his division commander, Early had similar intentions. With the countryside so apparently defenseless, Early wanted to move his entire division across the Susquehanna, capture Lancaster and then attack Harrisburg from the rear while Ewell and the rest of the Corps assailed the Pennsylvania capital from the west. If Federal forces threatened his detached division, Early, "in the worst contingency that might happen," would mount his division on the tremendous number of horses that could be captured on the east bank and make his escape to the west, all the while destroying transportation and communication facilities. But these grand plans ended with the burning of the bridge over the deep and wide Susquehanna. With no other means of crossing the river, Gordon marched his command back to York on 29 June and rejoined the division for the first time since 26 June. Gordon and his men had "penetrated further . . . than any other Confederate infantry into the heart of Pennsylvania."<sup>81</sup>

Even if the bridge had been saved, the Confederate advance into

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80 Gordon, Reminiscences, pp. 148-50; John Brown Gordon, "Last Days of the Confederacy," Thomas B. Reed, ed., Modern Eloquence, 15 vols. (Philadelphia: John D. Morris and Co., 1900-03), 5: 474-75.

81 Gordon, Reminiscences, pp. 147, 140; O.R., 27, pt. 2, pp. 467, 492.

Pennsylvania was at an end. Late in the evening of 28 June, while Gordon's men rested on the western bank of the Susquehanna, General Lee received startling news at his headquarters at Chambersburg. The Federal army had crossed the Potomac and was moving northward. Realizing that this unexpectedly sudden threat seriously jeopardized Confederate communication and supply lines that stretched back to Virginia, the commanding general ordered the advance on Harrisburg abandoned and called for immediate concentration of the army. On 30 June, Gordon marched his brigade from York to near Heidlersburg where he received orders to move to Cashtown the following day. While on the march the next morning, new orders arrived; instead of turning west for Cashtown, Gordon was to continue south to a new destination--Gettysburg.<sup>82</sup>

Marching at the head of Early's division, Gordon reached the Gettysburg battlefield at a most opportune time.<sup>83</sup> Rodes' division had been heavily engaged north of the town for hours and by 3:00 p.m., "affairs were in a very critical condition." A large Federal force had advanced against Rodes' left and threatened to turn that flank. Gordon immediately grasped the seriousness of the situation as he deployed his brigade on the right of the Heidlersburg Road. Though his attack had to be delivered quickly, he had to consider the condition of his men who were "much fatigued from long marches." As a result, Gordon cautiously moved his command forward, creeping to within 300 yards of a wooded hill that anchored the Union line. From there, Gordon's 1,200 Georgians

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82 O.R., 27, pt. 2, pp. 307, 316, 467-68.

83 The most comprehensive one-volume study of the Gettysburg campaign is Edwin B. Coddington's The Gettysburg Campaign: a Study in Command (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1968). Warren W. Hassler's Crisis at the Crossroads: The First Day at Gettysburg (University, Alabama: Alabama University Press, 1970) is the best work dealing exclusively with the first day of battle at Gettysburg.

swept forward with "great impetuosity" despite heavy fire. After a short but obstinate fight, Gordon's men drove the Federals back "in the greatest confusion" and "with great slaughter." Having uncovered the Union right flank, Gordon pressed on, rolling up the Federal line.<sup>84</sup>

As Gordon urged his men on, a Confederate artilleryman inquired, "General, where are your dead men?" Flushed with the fire of battle, Gordon responded, "I haven't got any, sir; the Almighty has covered my men with his shield and buckler!" This same Confederate officer vividly remembered Gordon mounted upon a magnificent solid black stallion as "the most glorious and inspiring thing" he had ever seen.<sup>85</sup> The unforgetably "splendid picture of gallantry" of Gordon "standing in his stirrups, bareheaded, hat in hand, arms extended, and, in a voice like a trumpet, exhorting his men," was "absolutely thrilling." The Federals fell back across the open fields to a low ridge just north of Gettysburg where they attempted to rally. Seeing that this second Union line extended beyond Gordon's left, Early ordered the Georgian to halt while the other brigades of the division advanced against the Federal flank. When the

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84 O.R., 27, pt. 2, pp. 445, 468-69, 492-93; Gordon to wife, 7 July 1863, Gordon Family Collection, UGA; Gordon, Reminiscences, p. 151; Robert Stiles, Four Years Under Marse Robert (New York and Washington: Neale Publishing Co., 1904), p. 210.

85 Gordon was mounted upon a beautiful horse that his men had captured after the Battle of Winchester. They presented it to their commander and christened him "Milroy." It is obvious that the Confederate artilleryman, Major Robert Stiles, observed Gordon during the early stages of the brigade's charge. Though both he and Gordon similarly described the magnificent appearance and immense proportions of the animal, Gordon remembered him as something less than the ideal battle horse. He behaved extremely well under cannon fire, but his "fear of Minie balls was absolutely uncontrollable." Gordon recalled that when Federal muskets "sent the bullets whistling around his ears, he wheeled and fled at such a rate of speed that I was powerless to check him until he had carried me more than a hundred yards to the rear." Needless to say, Gordon found "a more reliable steed" and never rode "Milroy" into battle again. Gordon, Reminiscences, pp. 102-03; Stiles, Four Years, pp. 210-11.

Confederates renewed the attack, the right of the Union XI Corps again crumpled, precipitating a hurried retreat into and through the streets of the town and onto the commanding heights to the south. Gordon's men did not enter Gettysburg because they were forced to stop and replenish their nearly exhausted ammunition supplies.<sup>86</sup>

While riding forward with his rapidly advancing men, Gordon came across the body of a severely wounded Union officer.<sup>87</sup> Having earlier seen this officer bravely trying to rally his retreating troops, Gordon dismounted and gave him a drink from his canteen. He soon discovered that he was aiding Brigadier General Francis C. Barlow, a New Yorker who commanded the division that he had just routed. Believing Barlow's wound to be fatal, Gordon had his paralyzed foe carried out of the merciless July sun and into the shade. As Gordon prepared to leave, Barlow asked him to destroy his wife's letters in his pocket and then made a final request of the Confederate. If Gordon should ever meet Mrs. Barlow, would he tell her that her husband had died willingly while serving his country and that his last thoughts were of her. Gordon promised to fulfill Barlow's dying

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<sup>86</sup> Stiles, Four Years, pp. 210-11; O.R., 27, pt. 2, pp. 445, 469; General Jubal A. Early, "Review of the Whole Discussion (of the causes of Lee's defeat at Gettysburg)," Southern Historical Society Papers 4 (July-December 1877): 254; James M'Dowell Carrington, "First Day on the Left At Gettysburg," Southern Historical Society Papers 37 (1909): 330.

<sup>87</sup> I have drawn exclusively from Gordon's account of this incident as presented in Reminiscences even though it is the least dramatic. Gordon never sought to minimize the drama of the Civil War, especially in the writing of his book, so I believe this account is closer to the reality of the situation than the others. The first published account of this story that I have located is in Southern Historical Society Papers 21 (1893): 337-39, although it states that the article, "An Incident of Gettysburg," was drawn from the New Haven Evening Register. The exact same article appeared in McClure's Magazine (June 1894: 68-70) the following year under the authorship of T. J. Mackey. The details in this account differ slightly from the one in Reminiscences as well as from another presented in Gordon's lecture, "Last Days of the Confederacy," (Modern Eloquence, 5: 476-79), but the basic story line remains the same.

request. Upon learning that Mrs. Barlow was near Gettysburg, he resolved to deliver a message to her that evening and provide safe passage for her to join her husband. Painfully reminded of his separation from Fanny, Gordon was "especially stirred by the announcement that his [Barlow's] wife was so near him." Convinced that Barlow would soon be dead, Gordon bade farewell to his prostrated opponent and rejoined his brigade.<sup>88</sup>

Barlow, however, survived and returned to duty with the Army of the Potomac later in the war. When he learned of the death of a Confederate General J. B. Gordon at the Battle of Yellow Tavern, he assumed it was the Gordon who had aided him. Thus, both men believed the other to be dead. Some fifteen years later during his second term in the Senate, Gordon received an invitation to dine with Clarkson Potter, a New York Congressman, who had also invited a former Union general named Barlow. With the host knowing nothing of the incident on the first day at Gettysburg and Gordon expecting to meet a kinsman of the Barlow he had encountered, the guests sat down at the table. Gordon inquired, "General, are you related to the Barlow who was killed at Gettysburg?" Barlow replied, "Why, I am the man sir. Are you related to the Gordon who killed me?" "I am the man, sir," responded Gordon. The startled Gordon remembered that "[N]othing short of actual resurrection from the dead could have amazed either of us more." The friendship that had begun on the field of battle at Gettysburg, now renewed, remained unbroken until Barlow's death in 1896.<sup>89</sup>

Gordon's late afternoon attack yielded magnificent results. Arriving on the battlefield after a fourteen-mile march and finding Rodes nearly

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<sup>88</sup> Gordon, Reminiscences, pp. 151-52.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid., pp. 152-53.

overwhelmed, Gordon's brigade delivered an attack "as brilliant as any charge of the war." Although he had no way of ascertaining the exact number of casualties his men had inflicted, Gordon believed the enemy's loss in killed and wounded exceeded the number he had carried into battle; Gordon's 1,200 men disabled 1,200-1,500 Yankees and captured about 1,800--all in less than an hour and with less than 380 casualties. Ewell was quoted as saying that "Gordon's brigade that evening put hors de combat a greater number of the enemy in proportion to its own numbers than any other command on either side ever did, from the beginning to the end of the war." Gordon's claim that his brigade's devastating attack "gave relief on the whole line" was certainly true for action north of Gettysburg, where all Union troops began to yield after Gordon crushed the Federal right flank.<sup>90</sup>

With the enemy falling back toward Cemetery Hill in "perfect confusion," Gordon urged immediate pursuit. His passage through Gettysburg in June had convinced him that "the army which held the heights would probably be the victor." The badly disorganized condition of the Federals led Gordon to believe that "it was only necessary for me to press forward . . . [and] [I]n less than half an hour my troops would have swept up and over those hills." Many years after the war, Gordon contended that he refused to obey orders to stop until a "fourth order of the most preemptory character" arrived; even then, he maintained he would have risked the consequences of disobedience had not Lee's instructions to avoid a major engagement accompanied the order. Gordon rode to find Ewell and impress upon him the necessity for an attack on the heights. Gordon was with the corps commander when a staff officer from Johnson's

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<sup>90</sup> Gordon to wife, 7 July 1863, Gordon Family Collection, UGA; O.R., 27, pt. 2, p. 493; Stiles, Four Years, p. 211; Early, "Causes of Gettysburg Defeat," p. 253.

division arrived and reported that General Johnson was nearing Gettysburg with his division "in prime condition" and ready to go into immediate action. "In the ardor of battle and the magnitude of the opportunity," the Georgian "broke disciplinary bounds" when he stated his brigade could attack with Johnson's division and together they could carry Cemetery Hill before nightfall. To the dismay of almost all of the surrounding officers, Ewell ignored Gordon and dispatched orders that Johnson's division continue its march to the front, then halt and await further orders. Ewell's remarks ended the discussion, and, though crestfallen, Gordon could say no more.<sup>91</sup>

A short while later, Gordon and Ewell rode together into Gettysburg. Most of the fighting had ceased, but small pockets of isolated Federals continued to resist. One such group that remained near the outskirts of town opened a "brisk fire" upon the mounted Confederates. As a number of accompanying officers fell, Gordon "heard the ominous thud of Minie ball" striking Ewell who rode beside him. The concerned brigadier anxiously asked his commander if he was hurt. The crusty Ewell who had lost a leg earlier in the war, replied "No, no, . . . I'm not hurt. But suppose that ball had struck you: we would have had the trouble of carrying off the field, sir. You see how much better fixed for a fight I am than you are. It don't hurt a bit to be shot in a wooden leg." Despite his feistiness, Ewell was not inclined to attack the heights south of Gettysburg.<sup>92</sup>

Any lingering hope that Gordon entertained about assaulting Cemetery

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91 Gordon, Reminiscences, pp. 140, 154; Henry Kyd Douglas, I Rode with Stonewall (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1940), p. 247; Carrington, "First Day at Gettysburg," p. 333; Randolph H. McKim, A Soldier's Recollections (New York: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1910), p. 175.

92 Gordon, Reminiscences, p. 157.

Hill prior to sundown vanished when new orders from Early arrived. While looking for Ewell "for the purpose of urging an immediate advance . . . in order to get possession of the hills . . .," Early received word from one of his brigade commanders stationed on the York Road, that a Federal force was advancing on the Confederate left flank. Even though he did not believe the report, Early felt compelled to guard against the possible threat. He directed Gordon to move his brigade out the York Road and to take command of both brigades. As rumors of an enemy advance from that direction continued to pour in after dark, Early retained the two brigades under Gordon in that sector.<sup>93</sup>

The ever vigilant Gordon spent much of the night on the front picket lines. The ominous sounds of Federal activity drifted down to him--the digging of entrenchments with picks and shovels, the shuffle of heavy bodies of troops marching about and the deep rumble of artillery pieces being moved.<sup>94</sup> Unquestionably, the heights were being fortified and steadily reinforced; by dawn, the Federal position, in Gordon's mind, would be virtually impregnable. Unable to suppress his anxiety any longer, Gordon rode to the headquarters of Ewell and Early at 2:00 a.m. He reported his observations and urged "a concentrated and vigorous night assault" against the heights despite the lateness of the hour. Although a night attack involved considerable risk, Gordon considered it infinitely preferable to a daylight assault which he felt would cost

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93 O.R., 27, pt. 2 p. 469; Early, Narrative of the War, p. 271; Jubal A. Early, "Report of the Gettysburg Campaign," (footnotes by Early for Southern Magazine, 1872) Southern Historical Society Papers 10 (1882): 546n.

94 It is impossible to determine exactly where Gordon was on the night of 1 July. His troops remained out on the York Road where no serious activity took place, so it is possible that Gordon roamed picket lines other than his own. Although he had wanted to attack Cemetery Hill during the late afternoon, it is quite possible that after dark Gordon patrolled the area around Culp's Hill which also was close to the position of his men.

the Confederates 10,000 men. Gordon sensed a "disposition [by his superiors] to yield to my suggestions, but other counsels finally prevailed." The attack would wait until the next day.<sup>95</sup>

For all intents and purposes, Gordon's participation in the Battle of Gettysburg had ended. On the second day, he and his brigade returned to Early and were placed in the rear of two of Early's other brigades. When these troops assaulted Cemetery Hill near sundown, Gordon moved to their original position in order to support them. His brigade did not advance up the hill, however, because Early, seeing that the troops on his right had failed to attack, determined such a move would be fruitless. Gordon's command occupied front line positions throughout 3 July, and, though exposed to artillery and sharpshooter

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95 Gordon, Reminiscences, pp. 156-57. It is difficult, if not impossible, to ascertain how much the passage of years colored Gordon's interpretation of the events at Gettysburg. Without question, he strongly urged that an attack upon Cemetery Hill be made late in the afternoon of 1 July. Douglas' mention of Gordon's readiness to join in the attack of Johnson's division is wholly consistent with Gordon's audaciously offensive spirit. Though his brigade had suffered more severely in the earlier action than the rest of Early's division, Gordon was undoubtedly capable of reorganizing his men and making the assault. Whether it would have been successful is a matter of conjecture and not under consideration here; what is at question is Gordon's insistence in Reminiscences that the "fatal mistake" of 1 July occurred when he was ordered to halt by Early and Ewell, neither of whom understood the actual situation nor appreciated the demoralized state of the Federals. Clearly, Gordon was wrong with regards to Early who was equally earnest in his insistence that the heights be taken immediately. The real issue I believe is Gordon's effort to shift any of the blame for the failure of the Army of Northern Virginia at Gettysburg away from Lee and to disperse it among his subordinates--namely Ewell on the first day and Longstreet on the second and third days. Again it is impossible to discover how much Gordon's participation in postwar controversies and the attempt to insulate Lee from critics shaped his view of the past. He made no mention in his official report of his despair over being halted (later in the war under somewhat similar conditions he did express his displeasure with a superior's decision) and that portion of his letter to his wife detailing the Battle of Gettysburg has not survived. Though Gordon lobbied fiercely for an attack on the heights on 1 July, I do not believe he was as distraught as his Reminiscences intimate. The first day at Gettysburg, in the main, had been a great Confederate success and with all of Lee's army closing in on the town, there was little reason not to believe that the next day held more of the same.

fire, was never seriously engaged. At 2:00 a.m. the following morning, Gordon and the rest of Early's division withdrew from their positions and moved west of Gettysburg as Lee attempted to shorten his line.<sup>96</sup>

The long march back to Virginia commenced on the evening of 4 July in the midst of a severe storm. During the retreat on 5 July, Gordon's brigade acted as the rearguard for the entire army. When Union pursuit threatened the Confederate rear near Fairfield, Gordon deployed a regiment as skirmishers and successfully checked the Federal advance while the army's trains moved to safety. The withdrawal continued relatively unhindered and on 14 July, Gordon and his brigade forded the Potomac near Williamsport.<sup>97</sup>

While encamped near Hagerstown on the retreat, Gordon wrote to Fanny--probably his first letter to his wife in over two weeks--to let her know that he had survived "the most terrific battle of the war." Earnestly praying for God "to fill my heart and my dear wife's with gratitude and praise," Gordon humbly gave thanks to the Lord for mercifully sparing his life while thousands had died. In a later letter, he stated that his brigade had been "greatly complimented in high quarters" and that he had "made without an effort to do it, some reputation as a commander." But he found such praise to be of little consequence. "My separation from you--the soul of my happiness on this Earth--the awful uncertainty as to the future--the seemingly endless blood shed that is to take place--the thousands of noble lives lost in the last horrid battle, all conspire to render every personal compliment and idle talk of glory as exceedingly worthless to me." Burdened with the uncertain "fate of our unhappy

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<sup>96</sup> O.R., 27, pt. 2, pp. 470-71, 481; Jubal A. Early, "Reply to General Longstreet," Southern Historical Society Papers 4 (July-December 1877): 297.

<sup>97</sup> O.R., 27, pt. 2, pp. 309, 322, 448, 471-72, 493; Gordon, Reminiscences, pp. 172-74.

country" and a possible long separation from his wife, Gordon could derive little solace from personal accolades.<sup>98</sup>

Gordon saw almost no combat during the next ten months. After the titanic struggle at Gettysburg, the two great eastern armies moved back into Virginia where they rested and regrouped. Although each undertook a number of attempts to outmaneuver the other in the final months of 1863, no serious confrontations developed.<sup>99</sup> By the end of December, both armies were securely established in their winter quarters along the Rapidan River.<sup>100</sup>

With active campaigning at an end until spring, fraternization between pickets on opposite sides of the river became common. The friendly relations between the two armies grew to proportions that alarmed both Union and Confederate officers. Gordon received instructions to put an end to such fraternization. Accordingly, he paid a number of surprise visits to his outposts where on one occasion he discovered an unusual amount of commotion. His men nervously reported that all was in order, but Gordon noticed the high weeds along the river bank shaking. He ordered the weeds broken down whereupon a scantily clad soldier emerged. "Where do you belong?" queried Gordon. The soldier answered simply, "Over yonder," motioning to the Union side of the Rapidan. When the Georgian asked him what he was doing here, he forthrightly replied, "Well General, I didn't think it was any harm to come over and see the boys just a little while." Gordon pointed out that the war had not ended and that these

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98 Gordon to wife, 7 July, 10 July 1863, Gordon Family Collection, UGA.

99 Gordon participated in all of the operations of the II Corps during November and December 1863. Although he played a very minor role at Mine Run, he filed an official report which can be found in O.R., 29, pt. 1, pp. 843-45.

100 Gordon, Reminiscences, pp. 188-91.

"boys" were the enemy, yet the unperturbed Yankee responded, "'Yes General, but we are not fighting now.'" Suppressing an impulse to laugh aloud, Gordon assumed his sternest bearing and seethed, "'I am going to teach you, sir, that we are at war. You have no rights here except as prisoner of war, and I am going to have you marched to Richmond and put you in prison.'" Gordon's horrified men immediately came to the defense of their visitor, pleading that they had invited him over and guaranteed his protection; if he were in prison, their honor would be ruined. Seeing that his threat had accomplished its purpose--frightening both his men and their "northern guest"--Gordon turned to the Yankee and inquired, "'Now sir, if I permit you to go back to your own side, will you solemnly promise, on the honor of a soldier, that \_\_\_\_.'" He never finished his sentence because the nearly naked soldier emphatically answered, "'Yes, sir,'" as he "leaped like a bull frog into the river and swam back."<sup>101</sup>

In the months of relative inactivity that followed the Pennsylvania invasion, Gordon took "an active interest in religious exercises and in the spiritual welfare of those under his charge." He frequently led prayer meetings in his brigade and, "with eloquent words and tearful eyes," made "powerful appeals to his men to come to Christ." In an impassioned letter to a high-ranking Confederate religious official, Gordon pleaded for more missionaries to be sent to the army. He felt that entirely too little attention was being paid to the spiritual needs of the soldiers primarily because there were not enough chaplains or visiting ministers. In some cases, brigades of up to 2,000 men went without even a chaplain. Gordon also chastised those "good Christians" on the home front who considered soldiers "too 'demoralized' to be

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<sup>101</sup> Ibid., pp. 110-12; Gordon, "Last Days of the Confederacy," pp. 482-83; Atlanta Constitution, 25 March 1881.

benefited by preaching." To the contrary, he believed that the ranks of the army provided a magnificent opportunity for ministers to obtain converts and undertake valuable Christian service. The great religious revival movement that swept through Lee's army in the winter and spring of 1864 revealed the truth of Gordon's observations. At a time when interest in religious gatherings was widespread, numerous traveling missionaries reported that both attendance at meetings and the number of converts in Gordon's brigade were extremely high. And as a leading Confederate chaplain later recalled, Gordon was "one of the most valuable and efficient workers" in these revival meetings.<sup>102</sup>

More important than the reputation he had earned as an "active friend and helper of his chaplains," was that of his growing standing as a military leader. As a civilian officer in an army staffed by professionals, Gordon had succeeded in impressing the commanding general with his soldierly abilities--by no means an insignificant accomplishment. On two separate occasions in early 1864, Lee spoke very highly of Gordon in letters to President Jefferson Davis. He stated in January that "[O]f the brigadiers, I think General Gordon, of Alabama, one of the best." Three months later while considering the necessity of transferring one of his division commanders, Lee reported he could better spare Jubal Early than Edward Johnson "because I might get Gordon or Hoke of that division in his place." Clearly, Lee had a high opinion of the young citizen-soldier, who less than three years earlier had entered military service as a captain in command of a company of "Raccoon Roughs." Now, Gordon might be

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102 J. William Jones, Christ in the Camp or Religion in Lee's Army (Richmond: B. F. Johnson & Co., 1887), pp. 104-05, 341-42, 348, 351, 371, 373, 374; William W. Bennett, A Narrative of the Great Revival Which Prevailed in the Southern Armies (Philadelphia: Claxton, Remsen and Haffelfinger, 1877), p. 372; Gordon, Reminiscences, pp. 229-30, 233; Gordon, "Last Days of the Confederacy," pp. 488-89; Atlanta Constitution, 19 December 1877, 15 January 1904.

ready for divisional command, if necessary. And necessity might soon become reality as spring was unfolding and the army across the Rapidan was stirring.<sup>103</sup>

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103 Jones, Christ in the Camp, p. 104; O.R., 33, pp. 1124, 1321.

### CHAPTER III

#### THE EVENING STAR OF THE CONFEDERACY, 1864-1865

The fourth of May signalled the opening of Grant's overland campaign in Virginia. Establishing his headquarters in the field, Lieutenant General Ulysses S. Grant moved with the Army of the Potomac as it began crossing the Rapidan on the night of 3-4 May. By rapid movement, Grant hoped to maneuver around Lee's right flank and bring him to battle under conditions favorable to the Union army; however, the Confederate commander discovered his opponent's move and took immediate countermeasures. He directed Ewell's II Corps and Lieutenant General Ambrose Powell Hill's III Corps to advance eastward on the Orange Turnpike and the Orange Plank Road, respectively, and strike the Union army while in the dense, overgrown Wilderness. By bringing his adversary to battle in this wooded maze, Lee hoped to minimize the two-to-one manpower advantage as well as the artillery superiority of the Union army. The fourth of May passed quietly as Gordon and his men moved from their winter quarters near Clark's Mountain down the old turnpike to Locust Grove.<sup>1</sup>

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1 Jubal Anderson Early, Autobiographical Sketch and Narrative of the War Between the States (Philadelphia and London: J. B. Lippincott Co., 1912), pp. 344-45; John B. Gordon, Reminiscences of the Civil War (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1903), pp. 236-37; U. S. War Department, The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies, 70 vols. (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1880-1901), Series I, volume 36, part 1, p. 1070; part 2, p. 951. (hereafter cited as O.R. and unless otherwise noted all references from Series I with the volume, part and page numbers being given as 36, pt. 1, p. 1070); A. A. Humphreys, The Virginia Campaign of 1864 and 1865 (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1903), pp. 18-19. Humphreys' account of the final year of the war is a first-rate work on the

The march into the Wilderness resumed early on the morning of 5 May. Lee had instructed Ewell to control his march so as to advance abreast of A. P. Hill on the Plank Road and to avoid a general engagement until Lieutenant General James Longstreet's I Corps, still far to the rear, could arrive. Despite these orders, Ewell's two advance divisions under Johnson and Rodes became heavily engaged in the early afternoon approximately three miles east of Wilderness Tavern. A spirited Federal attack on either side of the turnpike struck Ewell's troops with such speed and force that the right center fell back in confusion. Alerted to the seriousness of the conflict well before he reached the front by "the steady roll of small arms," Gordon had his brigade ready for immediate action. As he rode forward he met Ewell galloping down the road in search of reinforcements. The corps commander, fully aware of the gravity of this penetration of his lines, excitedly told his young subordinate, "General Gordon, the fate of the day depends on you, sir." Gordon, in a voice loud enough so that his troops could hear him, shouted, "These men will save it, sir."<sup>2</sup>

With that Gordon threw one of his regiments forward in a rapid counter-charge to check the Federal advance, at least momentarily. "The sheer audacity

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campaigns by a Union participant. The best study of the two-day Battle of the Wilderness is Edward Steere, The Wilderness Campaign (Harrisburg, Pennsylvania: Stackpole Co., 1960). The author does a better job of developing the Union side of the action, but that is understandable considering that few official Confederate reports of operations during the last year of the war have survived. Douglas Southall Freeman, R. E. Lee: A Biography, 4 vols. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1934-35), 3: 269n. Clifford Dowdey, Lee's Last Campaign: The Story of Lee and His Men against Grant-1864 (Boston and Toronto: Little, Brown and Co., 1960) is a fine narrative of the actions of Lee's army in the spring of 1864.

<sup>2</sup> Humphreys, Virginia Campaigns, pp. 25-26; O.R., 36, pt. 1, pp. 1070, 1076-77; Gordon Reminiscences, pp. 237-39; J. William Jones, compiler, Army of Northern Virginia Memorial Volume (Richmond: J. W. Randolph and English, 1880), p. 214; F. L. Hudgins, "38th Georgia Regiment at the Wilderness, 5th, 6th, 7th of May 1864," Confederate Veteran Papers, Duke University, Durham, North Carolina (hereafter cited as 38th Georgia, Confederate Veteran Papers, Duke).

and dash" of the single regiment's thrust bought Gordon the time he needed to wheel the rest of the brigade into line south of the turnpike at a right angle to it. As he moved his men forward into the threatening gap in Ewell's front, Gordon encountered a portion of his old command falling back in disorder. His words of encouragement as he passed—"Steady, 6th Ala."--undoubtedly brought a cheer from his old comrades as well as a renewed determination to reorganize and reenter the fray. Advancing with a deafening "rebel yell" adding to their ferocity, Gordon's men struck a victorious, yet tremendously confused and irregular Union line. Their "dashing charge" shattered the forces in their front; but as his troops pursued the retreating Federals, Gordon encountered what he styled "one of the strangest conditions ever witnessed on a battle-field."<sup>3</sup>

Despite successfully checking the Federals on his immediate front, Gordon discovered that the enemy on both of his flanks continued to advance. Faced with the prospect of total envelopment, he had to discontinue his forward movement. Quickly realizing that this "unique and alarming" situation required "very unusual tactics," Gordon halted his men and attempted to make the most of his plight. While holding his front with two regiments, the 31st and 38th Georgia, he advanced the 13th, 60th, and 61st Georgia, by the right flank and the remaining regiment, the 26th Georgia, by the left flank. In this manner, he attacked both flanks while defending his front. This method of attack, though novel, proved devastatingly effective. In conjunction with Gordon's movements the rallied troops of Rodes' division advanced, driving the Federals back and

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<sup>3</sup> Hudgins, "38th Georgia," *Confederate Veteran Papers*, Duke; Gordon, *Reminiscences*, p. 239; Steere, *Wilderness Campaign*, p. 163; *O.R.*, 36, pt. 1, pp. 610-11, 1071, 1076-77; E. M. Law, "From the Wilderness to Cold Harbor," Robert Underwood Johnson and Clarence Clough Buel, eds., *Battles and Leaders of the Civil War*, 4 vols. (New York: Thomas Yoseloff, Inc., 1956), 4: 121n.

restoring the front.<sup>4</sup> Gordon's rapid, energetic attack, made at a time of great confusion, had been delivered "just in time to prevent a serious disaster." As firing died away, the lines rested in approximately the same location as when the battle began. Gordon held this position on Ewell's right until near midnight when he received orders to withdraw and move to the extreme left of the II Corps.<sup>5</sup>

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4 The 61st Georgia became separated in its flank attack to the right and moved blindly through the undergrowth until it surprised a similarly disoriented and lost Union regiment. Utterly confused by an unseen volley from the Georgia regiment, the 7th Pennsylvania Reserves surrendered almost in toto. Steere, Wilderness Campaign, p. 172; Humphreys, Virginia Campaigns, p. 27; "A Distinguished Southern Journalist" [E. A. Pollard], The Early Life, Campaigns and Public Services of Robert E. Lee, with a Record of the Campaigns and Heroic Deeds of his Companions in Arms (New York: E. B. Treat & Co., 1871), p. 543; Hudgins, "38th Georgia," Confederate Veteran Papers, Duke.

5 Hudgins, "38th Georgia," Confederate Veteran Papers, Duke; Atlanta Constitution, 26 November 1878; Gordon, Reminiscences, pp. 239-42; Cadmus M. Wilcox, "Lee and Grant in the Wilderness," The Annals of the War (Philadelphia: Times Publishing Co., 1879), p. 492; J. W. Jones, Army of Northern Virginia Memorial Volume, p. 215; W. S. Dunlop, Lee's Sharpshooters or the Forefront of Battle (Little Rock, Arkansas: Tunnah and Pittard, 1899), pp. 388-89; Gordon to Lee, 20 December 1867, Robert Edward Lee Headquarters Papers, Virginia Historical Society, Richmond, Virginia (hereafter cited as Lee Headquarters Papers, VHS); O.R., 36, pt. 1, pp. 1070, 1077; Jones to Daniel, 3 July 1904, John Warwick Daniel MSS, Duke University, Durham, North Carolina (hereafter cited as Daniel MSS, Duke). Thomas Goode Jones, an officer on Gordon's staff and an Alabama Governor and United States judge after the war, wrote a number of letters to his close friend, John Warwick Daniel, in the months after Gordon's death in 1904. Daniel, one of Jubal Early's staff members and, at the time of this correspondence, a United States Senator from Virginia, was distressed by Gordon's criticisms of Early in Reminiscences. Unwilling to permit any injustice to be lodged against his former commander, Daniel entered into extensive correspondence in an effort to vindicate Early of Gordon's charges. Jones, a friend of both Early and Gordon, was likewise protective of Gordon's honor and his letters reveal a sincere desire to see that controversial points were properly investigated and that both men were given their just due. Jones remembered the events of 5-7 May 1864 with remarkable clarity, but, whenever possible, he corroborated his statements with O.R. or other contemporary accounts. His two long 3 July 1904 letters to Daniel—one in which he answered a number of questions by Daniel concerning the Battles of the Wilderness and Cedar Creek and the other, a "private letter," in which Jones wrote frankly and freely about points of conflict between Gordon and Early—are located in the John Warwick Daniel MSS, Duke, but copies of both of these important letters as well as other correspondence between them, can be found in the Thomas Goode Jones Collection, Alabama Department of Archives and History, Montgomery, Alabama (hereafter cited as Jones Collection, ADAH). For ease of reference, I will

Even before daylight on 6 May, Gordon had his scouts out searching for the Union flank. About dawn, his men returned and reported that his line greatly overlapped the flank of the Army of the Potomac--the Union right ended abruptly in the woodland near Gordon's line and appeared to be completely unprotected. Unwilling to believe his good fortune, Gordon dispatched another party to reconnoiter. This second group not only corroborated the first report but found that there were no supporting troops within several miles of the exposed flank. Gordon had to be certain before he could report such a tremendous opportunity to his superiors, so he undertook a personal reconnaissance. Guided by a cavalryman, he traveled almost two miles into the rear of Sedgwick's VI Corps and "found the reports correct in every particular." He even crept on his hands and knees to within hearing distance of the end of the Union line where, as far as he could see, blueclad soldiers, oblivious to their exposed condition, lazily prepared their breakfast.<sup>6</sup>

As he hurried back to his lines, Gordon's mind must have raced almost uncontrollably as he grasped the enormous potential of his "discovery." Here, lying before him was the flank of Grant's great army, totally exposed and wholly unsupported. And as if to provide additional evidence of Providence's blessing of the Confederate cause, Gordon had located a perfect staging ground for an assault in an open field four hundred yards to the north of the Union right. Presented with an opportunity "rarely equalled in any war," Gordon visualized

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hereafter cite only the ADAH collection when referring to the letters of 3 July 1904. Jones' discussions of the Civil War battles in which he participated are thorough and appear extremely accurate; as such, these letters to Daniel are an invaluable source of first-hand material dealing with the Battles of the Wilderness, Cedar Creek and the difficulties between Gordon and Early.

<sup>6</sup> Gordon, *Reminiscences*, pp. 243-44; Jones to Daniel, 3 July 1904, Jones Collection, ADAH; O.R., 36, pt. 1, p. 1077.

even greater success than that attained by Jackson's famous flank attack one year earlier on a field only a few miles away.<sup>7</sup>

In Gordon's mind, the method of attack almost planned itself. He would place his and whatever other brigades could be spared in line squarely on the flank and rear of the VI Corps. As he hit the flank, the Federals would inevitably be compelled to withdraw and as they fell back they would be easily captured by the Confederates rapidly moving into their rear. Coupled with his flank attack would be a frontal demonstration by all other Confederates in line in order to hold the Union front in place until the flank had been crushed. Then, as Gordon proceeded down the constantly receding flank of the Union army, he would continually move to his left, allowing room for the Confederate units that had faced the recently-disposed-of-Federals to fall in on his right—"thus swelling at each step of our advance the numbers, power, momentum of the Confederate forces as they swept down the line." Such an opportunity must not be permitted to slip away.<sup>8</sup>

Upon returning to his lines, Gordon immediately sent a member of his staff, Thomas G. Jones, to find either Ewell or Early and explain the situation to them. Young Jones first located the corps commander and was talking to him when Early rode up and joined the conference. Despite Jones' report that supporting troops were nowhere near the Union right, Early vigorously disagreed, contending that Major General Ambrose E. Burnside's IX Corps occupied Sedgwick's rear. Cavalry reports which he accepted but had not investigated, led Early to believe that the enemy was, in fact, moving to turn the Confederate flank; and with Burnside so near, failure by Gordon to achieve a striking success

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7 Gordon, Reminiscences, pp. 244-47; O.R., 36, pt. 1, p. 1077.

8 Gordon, Reminiscences, pp. 245-48.

would leave the Confederate flank open to a Union attack. Since Ewell possessed no ready reserves, Early reasoned that a successful Federal counter-attack would result in disaster for the II Corps, if not for all of Lee's army. Early instructed Jones "to tell Gordon to hold still, and later, they [Ewell and Early] would come over to the left and see what could be done."<sup>9</sup>

Moments later, Gordon galloped up and began to plead his own case fervently, yet some fifteen or twenty minutes of "very earnest conversation" failed to convince either Early or Ewell. Moving away, a greatly disappointed Gordon told his staff officer, "General Early, evidently didn't believe a word of what I told him of what I had seen myself." Ewell apparently concurred with his division commander, but told Gordon he would make a personal examination "as soon as other duties permitted." It was barely 9:00 a.m., so Gordon's hopes might yet be realized. Unfortunately, however, neither Early nor Ewell made their promised reconnaissance until late in the day and Gordon's repeated requests for permission to attack went unfulfilled. A virtual stalemate continued on the Confederate left.<sup>10</sup>

Early must bear a large portion of the blame for this gross oversight. Even though he had received reports from cavalry scouts that the Confederate left might be threatened and that Burnside's Corps rested in the rear of the Union right, he should not have summarily dismissed Gordon's early morning

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<sup>9</sup> Jones to Daniel, 29 February, 3 July 1904, Jones Collection, ADAH; Early, Narrative of the War, p. 348.

<sup>10</sup> Jones to Daniel, 29 February, 3 July 1904, Jones Collection, ADAH; Gordon, Reminiscences, pp. 255-56; O.R., 36, pt. 1, pp. 1071, 1077. Also see O.R., 36, pt. 2, pp. 961-62 for messages between Gordon, Ewell's headquarters, and cavalry pickets in the area. Although the index to the O.R. identifies this correspondence as Cavalry Brigadier General General J[ames] B. Gordon's, the nature of messages would indicate that they were those of the infantry J.B. Gordon.

findings as false. Early based his argument on the "domineering assumption that his intelligence reports were correct and those of Gordon were in error." Despite the fact that the Georgian had personally verified his statements and that Early had done nothing to substantiate his reports, the division commander "acted on his apprehensions." "When he disbelieved such an officer as Gordon, who reported what he knew, . . . [Early ought] to have found out for himself" exactly what the situation was.<sup>11</sup>

Both Early and Ewell had more responsibilities than Gordon, but they should not have been so heavily pressured throughout the entire day—particularly since their front was comparatively quiet with only a limited number of easily repulsed attacks—so as to prohibit any substantial investigation of Gordon's reconnaissance. The basic fundamentals of military science cried out for Early and Ewell to have considered Gordon's personal findings more seriously,

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11 Douglas Southall Freeman, *Lee's Lieutenants: A Study in Command*, 3 vols. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1942-44), 3: 443, 370; Jones to Daniel, 3 July 1904, Jones Collection, ADAH. In light of his unexplained delay in personally examining the Union right, Early's opposition to Gordon's proposed attack deserves little consideration except for the possible disaster that might have resulted from a Federal counter-attack. The Confederate army simply did not possess the number of sufficiently fresh troops to institute a large scale flanking movement. If Gordon had failed to turn the Union right, no reserves were available to bolster defenses against a counter-movement. Despite the validity of this point, Early cannot be excused from his gross inattention to Gordon's findings, especially since on the basic point of conflict between Gordon and Early—whether Burnside's Corps occupied the rear of the Union right (a point that Early insisted upon on 6 May and in his writings after the war)—the Virginian was, without question, in error. Numerous Union reports concerning the movement of the IX Corps on 6 May in the O.R. and other accounts of the battle show that three of Burnside's four divisions had passed well beyond the Union right prior to 9:00 a.m. They were moving toward the Federal center where they had been ordered to participate in the assault against the Confederate right. The other division remained in the vicinity of Germanna Ford guarding the crossing over the Rapidan and posed little or no threat to Gordon's flank attack. Quite simply, Gordon's early morning reports were entirely correct. Gordon to Lee, 20 December 1867, 6 February 1868, Lee Headquarters Papers, VHS; O.R., 36, pt. 1, pp. 18, 190, 321, 906, 927, 942, 987-88.

especially with the tremendous possibilities involved. At a time when frontal assaults were the dominant mode of offensive warfare, an enemy's exposed flank could not be ignored. Clearly, "Early had been completely deceived as to the strength and dispositions of the enemy on his front." To the detriment of Lee's army, Early's basically unfounded arguments against Gordon's proposal succeeded in swaying the commander of the II Corps. "Perplexed or weary, or hypnotized for the moment by the confident insistence of Early, he [Ewell] permitted the fateful afternoon to pass without an offensive blow."<sup>12</sup>

Gordon finally received his long-sought-after order to attack shortly before sunset. Although generally accepted that this order emerged from a conference between Lee, Ewell, Early and Gordon at II Corps headquarters late in the afternoon of 6 May, the only evidence for this meeting comes from Gordon's writings long after the war. He stated that Lee visited the left flank about 5:30 p.m. and, after learning the details of Gordon's plan, ordered the attack to be made.<sup>13</sup> In all probability, however, the passage of years substantially distorted the General's recollection of the events because it is doubtful that Gordon attended such a conference or that Lee directly issued such

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12 Freeman, R. E. Lee, 3: 297n; Freeman, Lee's Lieutenants, 3: 370.

13 Gordon contends that Lee--whose full attention throughout the morning and afternoon had necessarily been devoted to the Confederate right, especially after Longstreet's fall--finally visited the left flank about 5:30 p.m. There meeting with Ewell, Early and Gordon, he inquired whether anything could be done on Ewell's front to relieve the heavy pressure on the army's right. Gordon says he listened patiently for a few minutes but felt compelled to apprise the commanding general of Sedgwick's exposed flank. When Early renewed his argument that Burnside's Corps lay behind Sedgwick's line, Gordon again stated that he had personally ridden far behind the Union right and encountered no support whatsoever. After detailing his plan of attack, Gordon maintains that Lee immediately concurred and ordered the attack. "His words were few, but his silence and grim looks . . . revealed his thoughts almost as plainly as words could have done." Such is Gordon's account. Gordon, Reminiscences, p. 258.

an order.<sup>14</sup> Rather it is much more likely that Ewell, perhaps at the suggestion of Early, ordered the movement, for it was not generally Lee's practice to overrule the commander on the scene. During the afternoon, Ewell and/or Early probably took the time necessary to examine Gordon's 9:00 a.m. report. Only after finally verifying the brigadier's findings and possibly conferring with the commanding general did Ewell issue the attack order. He left the details of the move to Early who generally followed Gordon's plan of attack.<sup>15</sup>

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14 In correspondence with Lee shortly after the war, Gordon answered Lee's inquiry of whether they had met in the Wilderness before or after the attack of 6 May. Gordon stated, "I am positive that I conversed with you on the morning of the 7th. Do not remember having seen you [on] that flank prior to that time. Indeed I was not aware of your desire to make a movement on that flank until after the 6th. I am glad to know that such was your wish." Given the closeness to the war and the manner in which Gordon dealt with the paternal Lee, it is likely that this letter reveals a more accurate account of the events of 6 May than does Reminiscences, written almost forty years later. Douglas Southall Freeman often experienced difficulty when using Reminiscences which he characterized as "altogether charming but subject to the critique that always must be applied to the oft-told stories committed to print late in life." More specifically, Freeman was frequently perplexed "to know where General Gordon's memory ended and where his imagination began, the more so as there was never the slightest question to that splendid gentleman's desire to state the facts accurately." Thomas G. Jones echoed similar sentiments in his "private letter" to John W. Daniel when he stated that he felt sure that Gordon had not intentionally misstated anything, but with the lapse of nearly forty years, mistakes were easily made. Gordon to Lee, 20 December 1867, 6 February 1868, Lee Headquarters Papers, VHS; Lee to Gordon, 22 February 1868, John B. Gordon Papers, Gordon Family Collection, University of Georgia, Athens, Georgia (hereafter cited as Gordon Family Collection, UGA); Freeman, Lee's Lieutenants, 3: 813; Freeman, R. E. Lee, 3: 302; Jones to Daniel, 3 July 1904, Jones Collection, ADAH.

15 This scenario of Ewell and/or Early finally investigating Gordon's morning reconnaissance, and then Ewell ordering Early and his division to make the turning movement is more plausible than Gordon's account in which Lee directly orders the attack over the head of his lieutenant general. Lee had spent the entire day south on the Orange Plank Road, so it is extremely doubtful that he would instruct Ewell, who would have (or should have) been better acquainted with the situation on his front to make an attack that he opposed. So even if Lee had been present on the Confederate left at 5:30 p.m., in all probability, he would not have issued a direct order to Gordon to attack in the presence of the brigadier's superiors. In his official report, Gordon himself lends credence to the above sequence of events when he stated, "Late in the afternoon of 6 May I received orders from Major General Early to make the attack." Though it is

Early placed Gordon in charge of the actual flanking maneuver which would be made by Gordon's own brigade and that of Brigadier General Robert D. Johnston. Forming in the open field to the north, Gordon positioned his men squarely on the flank of the VI Corps and formed Johnston's brigade in a line facing the enemy's rear. As the sun reached the horizon, Gordon's force moved forward. Surprise, confusion and rout were complete. The Georgia brigade crumpled Brigadier General Alexander Shaler's flank and swept down a mile of the VI Corps front. The rapid Confederate advance carried them through Federal camps where only moments before Union soldiers had been boiling their coffee and cooking their supper. Not only was Shaler's command routed, but the adjoining brigade to the left, Brigadier General Truman Seymour's, was driven from the field. Both brigadiers were captured along with 600 of their men. The Confederates, "literally revelling in the chase," drove onward enjoying what was for many the "finest frolic" of the war. Gordon maintained that despite frequent attempts by the enemy to change front and halt his progress, "[T]he advance of my brigade was steady and uninterrupted until the approach of darkness in the dense woodland created confusion in my right two regiments." Over one-half of the mere fifty casualties that he suffered in his attack were sustained when confused Confederates, still facing the Union works, opened fire upon Gordon's right as it passed their front. By the time he straightened out the disorganization caused by the cross-fire, darkness had brought a halt

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difficult to excuse Gordon's "recollection" of a non-existent conference, his mistake does not detract from criticism of the actions of Early and Ewell. Their failure to investigate Gordon's morning report more conscientiously deprived the Army of Northern Virginia of an excellent opportunity--one with which the Union right might have been demolished, but one that would certainly have relieved the intense pressure being exerted on the Confederate right. O.R., 36, pt. 1, pp. 1071, 1077; Early, Narrative of the War, pp. 348-49.

to his advance.<sup>16</sup>

The manner in which the battle ended convinced Gordon that one more hour of daylight would have resulted in the capture of a large portion of the VI Corps. He believed "[T]he rout was complete" because his troops had crushed all opposition before them. In his official report, he boldly expressed his displeasure with his superiors' lack of aggressiveness. "I must be permitted in this connection to express the opinion that had the movement been made at an earlier hour and properly supported, each brigade being brought into action as its front was cleared, it would have resulted in a decided disaster to the whole right wing of Grant's army, if not in its entire disorganization." Although limited success of his attack cannot be disputed, in light of the confusion that beset his advance and of Federal movements to meet the threat, it appears Gordon's attack accomplished all that it was capable of achieving.<sup>17</sup>

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16 Early, Narrative of the War, pp. 348-50; Dunlop, Lee's Sharpshooters, pp. 413-15; J. W. Jones, Army of Northern Virginia Memorial Volume, pp. 238-39; Gordon to Lee, 20 December 1867, Lee Headquarters Papers, VHS; Gordon, Reminiscences, pp. 248-50; O.R., 36, pt. 1, pp. 1071, 1077-78; pt. 2, p. 966; Jones to Daniel, 29 February, 20 June, 3 July 1904, Jones Collection, ADAH; Hudgins, "38th Georgia," Confederate Veteran Papers, Duke; William W. Swan, "Battle of the Wilderness," Papers of the Military Historical Society of Massachusetts, The Wilderness Campaign, May-June 1864 (Boston: Military Historical Society of Massachusetts, 1905), pp. 161-63; Manuscript Journal of Jedediah Hotchkiss, 6 May 1864, Jedediah Hotchkiss Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C. (hereafter cited as Hotchkiss Journal, Hotchkiss Papers, LC). That portion of the Hotchkiss Journal covering the period between 10 March 1862 and 18 April 1865 has been published in Archie P. MacDonald, ed., Make me a Map of the Valley: The Civil War Journal of Stonewall Jackson's Topographer (Dallas: Southern Methodist University Press, 1973).

17 Whether or not Gordon's attack would have yielded greater results if launched at some point earlier in the day is a question warranting further investigation. Unquestionably, the attack shattered the unprotected flank, rolling up both Shaler's and Seymour's brigades and generating considerable confusion and concern in the Union army. However, as darkness fell and the Confederate lines of battle moved through the tangled Wilderness, the attack became confused. What was initially a relatively simple advance at right angles to entrenched works grew disjointed almost from the outset. In the advance, Johnston's brigade pushed too far to the left and failed to maintain contact with

Exaggerated tales of disaster and rumors of the disintegration of the right—including the capture of General Sedgwick, the seizure of the army's entire wagon train and the advance of large bodies of Confederates down the Germanna Plank Road—reached Union army headquarters almost immediately after Gordon launched his attack. Such reports undoubtedly generated considerable concern among the Union high command, but steps to counter the movement against the right were swiftly taken. Most official accounts indicate that despite the uncontrollable panic that seized the troops of Shaler and Seymour, adjoining commands and other available elements of the VI Corps rapidly established a defensive line across Gordon's path of advance. In fact, many of the officers occupying this new front reported that they met attacks after dark and successfully repulsed them.<sup>18</sup> Gordon's attack threw a large portion of the Union right into substantial confusion, but the Georgian probably underestimated the ability of Grant's army to resist a continued assault.

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the Georgia regiments. Also, the Confederate line, across whose front Gordon's assault moved, fired upon the advancing column, disorganizing its right. The density of this woodland which helped hide Gordon's movement toward the flank also contributed mightily to the disorganization which beset his attack. The almost impassable nature of the woodland that dominated the Wilderness made organized advances over any great distance impossible. According to one historian, "[A]ny prolonged advance against opposition in this wooded land sooner or later brought crippling disorganization. Troops thus disorganized were largely at the mercy of any compact column of attack whose ranks had not yet been disordered by an hour of blind fighting in the overgrown ravines." As all sense of cohesion faded, so too did the effectiveness of the assault. Even taking into account the effect of darkness, it is my opinion that Gordon's attack—as it was organized with only two attacking brigades because of the limited manpower of Lee's army—accomplished almost all it could have even if launched earlier in the day. And equally as important, as seen in the next paragraph, positive steps had been taken to resist any further movement by Gordon. Given these two factors—the confused state of the attack and Federal counter-moves—darkness, as Early maintained, may have helped mask the weakness and confusion of the attacking force. *O.R.*, 36, pt. 1, pp. 1077-78; Gordon, *Reminiscences*, pp. 250-55; Bruce Catton, *Grant Takes Command* (Boston & Toronto: Little, Brown & Co., 1968), p. 196; Early, *Narrative of the War*, pp. 349-50.

18 *O.R.*, 36, pt. 1, pp. 2, 18, 666, 719, 723, 732, 737, 742.

Although darkness ended the immediate threat to the Union flank, the effects of the attack necessitated extensive changes by the army's commander. The dusk attack had rendered his former lines untenable, so during the night, Grant drew back both the VI and V Corps lines and strengthened his right flank.<sup>19</sup>

Amid the reorganization and regrouping of commands during the course of the night, Gordon narrowly escaped capture or death. He and a courier, William Beasley, rode forward into the darkness to check on the placement of his picket-line and encountered a body of men that Gordon suspected were his troops. Annoyed by the apparent carelessness of their deployment, Gordon prepared to administer a stern rebuke when his aide whispered, "General, these are not our men, they are Yankees." Gordon replied, "Nonsense, Beasley," but the courier's sincere persistence forced him to take notice that the uniforms of the soldiers in their front did indeed appear to be blue. The two Confederates, intent on making their escape, reversed their direction and were moving away when a Union officer called upon them to halt. Willing to risk death rather than certain capture, Gordon and Beasley swung out of their saddles and clung to the

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19 Horace Porter, Campaigning With Grant (New York: Century Co., 1897), pp. 68-70; Theodore Lyman, "Addenda to the Paper by Brevet Lieutenant-Colonel Swan on the Battle of the Wilderness," Papers of the Military Historical Society of Massachusetts, The Wilderness Campaign May-June 1864 (Boston: Military Historical Society of Massachusetts, 1905), p. 170; Hazard Stevens, "The Sixth Corps in the Wilderness," Papers of the Military Historical Society of Massachusetts, The Wilderness Campaign May-June 1864, p. 202; Thomas Hyde, Following the Greek Cross (Boston & New York: Houghton, Mifflin & Co., 1895), pp. 186-87; U. S. Grant, Personal Memoirs of U. S. Grant, 2 vols. (New York: Charles L. Webster & Co., 1885), 2: 202; Humphreys, Virginia Campaigns, pp. 49-51; O.R., 36, pt. 1, p. 926; pt. 2, pp. 438, 448, 454, 455, 465. A fine example of how time lessens the impact of a shocking surprise can be seen in the manner in which Grant treated the attack. When he submitted his official report of operations for the final year of the war on 22 July 1865, he styled Gordon's attack as "a feeble attempt to turn our right flank." However, on the morning after the attack, Grant wrote Washington that "[H]ad there been daylight the enemy could have injured us very much in the confusion that prevailed. . . ." O.R., 36, pt. 1, pp. 18, 2.

sides of their horses as they made a run for safety through the surrounding Federals. Fortunately for the men on horseback the Yankees were so closely bunched that it was almost impossible to fire at the Confederates without hitting themselves. A confused and scattered Union volley missed both the riders and their horses as they galloped away into the darkness, making good their escape. What had begun as "a cautious ride to the front" ended with "a madcap ride to the rear."<sup>20</sup>

The morning of 7 May revealed to the Confederates just how shatteringly effective Gordon's attack had been. Assenting to Lee's request, Gordon joined the commanding general in a ride over the field of the previous night's action. Large numbers of haversacks, knapsacks and muskets, discarded in precipitous flight, lay strewn about the more than 400 Federal dead on the field. Years later, Gordon recalled that Lee, speaking freely as they rode about, commended him for the vigilance and skill that he had displayed the day before. Although Lee's biographer may be correct in questioning Gordon's memory of exactly what was discussed on this ride, in light of Lee's actions the following day, one indisputable fact emerges--Lee thought very highly of the young brigadier's actions in the Wilderness.<sup>21</sup>

Gordon began his march to Spotsylvania Court House--Grant's next objective after pulling away from the Wilderness front--during the evening of 7 May as a brigade commander, but when he arrived there, he commanded Early's division. His temporary elevation to divisional responsibility resulted from a

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<sup>20</sup> Gordon, Reminiscences, pp. 263-66; Pollard, Companions in Arms, p. 544; Gordon to Lee, 20 December 1867, Lee Headquarters Papers, VHS; Hudgins, "38th Georgia," Confederate Veteran Papers, Duke.

<sup>21</sup> O.R., 36, pt. 1, pp. 1077-78; Dunlop, Lee's Sharpshooters, p. 415; Gordon, Reminiscences, pp. 267-70; Freeman, R. E. Lee, 3: 302.

series of skillful and tactful command manipulations by the commanding general. A. P. Hill's illness had incapacitated him and forced Early's assignment as temporary III Corps commander. Brigadier General Harry Hays, senior brigadier in Early's division, was by regulations the officer who should have assumed command; instead, both to raise Gordon to divisional command and to add to Hays' prestige, Lee consolidated Hays' men with the Louisiana brigade of the late Brigadier General Leroy Stafford and placed it in Johnson's division. To replace Hays' brigade, Lee transferred R. D. Johnston's brigade from Rodes to Early. Douglas Southall Freeman offered an insightful assessment of these shifts in command when he stated, "[O]ld soldiers might have asked themselves whether so many changes ever had been made by Army Headquarters to give a Brigadier General a Division." With his "brilliant services" of 5 May and the vigilance and aggressiveness that he displayed the following day, Gordon's star was clearly on the rise as the armies shifted to the south.<sup>22</sup>

Arriving at Spotsylvania Court House on the afternoon of 8 May, Gordon's division assumed the role of general reserve for the II Corps. Ewell's corps occupied "an awkward and irregular salient" north of the Court House which the troops soon dubbed the "Mule Shoe." Defense of such a prominent bulge might prove difficult, but the Confederates entrenched along this line in order to take advantage of the high ground which it covered. Rodes' division manned the western face of this roughly semi-circular line and Johnson's division controlled the northern and eastern sides. Gordon placed his three brigades in the rear of these commands and established a line running approximately east and west across the salient, forming the bar of the letter A. By positioning his

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<sup>22</sup> Early, *Narrative of the War*, p. 351; *O.R.*, 36, pt. 1, pp. 1071, 1078; pt. 2, p. 974; 51, pt. 2, pp. 902-03, 890; Freeman, *Lee's Lieutenants*, 3: 391.

men nearly equidistant from all the front line works in the salient, Gordon conformed to his orders to be able to move "to support any portion of the line around the long salient which might be attacked."<sup>23</sup>

Late in the afternoon of 10 May a serious breach in Confederate lines occurred. Colonel Emory Upton of the VI Union Corps led a brilliant assault which penetrated Rodes' works. Upon hearing the sounds of the attack, Gordon rapidly moved his command toward the critical area. He deployed his leading brigade across the path of the enemy advance and ordered an immediate charge. With the help of adjoining elements of the II Corps on the right and on the left, Gordon forced the Federals out of the captured trenches and secured the front again. Lack of proper support guaranteed the eventual containment of Upton's attack, but Gordon's prompt actions provided for a rapid rectification of the Confederate line.<sup>24</sup>

Following the repulse of this attack, Gordon withdrew two of his brigades behind the incomplete line of works midway up the salient, slightly in front of the Harrison House. Fearing another attack on the northern points of the salient, he moved his other brigade—his old command, now under Colonel Clement A. Evans—to the rear of Rodes' right and Johnson's left, just in front of the McCoull House. Gordon's troops remained in these positions throughout 11 May as a hard day-long rain discouraged any major action; nevertheless, rumors

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<sup>23</sup> Freeman, Lee's Lieutenants, 3: 394; O.R., 36, pt. 1, pp. 1071-72, 1078; Gordon, Reminiscences, p. 272; Humphreys, Virginia Campaigns, pp. 66, 73-74; Gordon to Charles S. Venable, 24 November 1878, Charles Scott Venable Papers, Virginia Historical Society, Richmond, Virginia (hereafter cited as Venable Papers, VHS).

<sup>24</sup> Gordon, Reminiscences, pp. 272-73; O.R., 36, pt. 1, pp. 668, 1072, 1078; Dunlop, Lee's Sharpshooters, pp. 446-47; C.S. Venable, "The Campaign from the Wilderness to Petersburg," Southern Historical Society Papers 14 (1886): 528; Humphreys, Virginia Campaigns, pp. 83-87.

of attack at various points along the salient abounded. Late that evening he received information from Johnson that the enemy seemed to be massing on his front and that an attack at dawn appeared certain. To meet this threat, Gordon advanced Pegram's brigade, now commanded by Colonel John S. Hoffman, to support Johnson who placed the troops in the rear of his division's left flank, near Evans' brigade. As a cold drizzle continued on into the dreary pre-dawn darkness of 12 May, Gordon's men slept on their arms. Even as they tried to catch a few moments of rest, some found sleep impossible for, as one soldier remarked, "there was a nameless something in the air which told each man that a crisis was at hand."<sup>25</sup>

Just before dawn, at about 4:30 a.m., Major General Winfield S. Hancock's II Union Corps attacked Johnson's front, hitting the apex of the salient and completely crushing its defenders. Spreading quickly to the left and to the right, Hancock's men captured or disabled nearly all of Johnson's division in a matter of minutes. Resistance along the front lines "was so slight that no time was afforded for bringing into position the supporting force." Gordon, alerted by the initial firing and alarmed by the sudden silence thereafter, was "impressed with apprehension that the enemy had carried our works." He began moving up the salient without waiting for orders. Advancing at the head of his only remaining brigade, R. D. Johnston's North Carolinians, Gordon found visual observation of troops more than a few score yards ahead impossible owing to the

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25 Humphreys, *Virginia Campaigns*, p. 96; O.R., 36, pt. 1, pp. 1072, 1078, 1079-80; Gordon, *Reminiscences*, p. 274; J. Catlett Gibson, "The Battle of Spotsylvania Courthouse on May 12, 1864," *Southern Historical Society Papers* 32 (1904): 200; William W. Smith, "The Battle of Spotsylvania Courthouse, May 12, 1864," *Southern Historical Society Papers* 32 (1904): 210; Venable, "Wilderness to Petersburg Campaign, p. 529; M.S. Stringfellow, "The Bloody Angle," *Southern Historical Society Papers* 21 (1893): 245; Hotchkiss Journal, 11 May 1864, *Hotchkiss Papers*, LC; Robert Hunter, "Major-General Johnson at Spotsylvania," *Southern Historical Society Papers* 33 (1905): 336-38.

early dawn darkness, heavy mist, fog and dense undergrowth. He had moved only a short distance beyond the McCoull House when he "butted against the Federal line"; Hancock's assault had been delivered so quickly and so silently that Gordon's first indication of serious trouble came in the form of an unseen Union volley. This "sudden and unexpected blaze from Hancock's rifles" seriously wounded Johnston and drove in his advance elements.<sup>26</sup>

Although still uncertain as to what had happened at the front, Gordon moved immediately "with that splendid audacity which characterized him." He deployed Johnston's entire brigade as a long skirmish line and ordered it forward, in the hope that the utter audacity of the charge would confuse the enemy and allow him time to "find out more of the situation." The North Carolinians were almost instantly overwhelmed by the advancing Federals who overlapped both their flanks. As Johnston's men fell back, Gordon now began to perceive the true nature of the impending disaster. Lee's army had been cut in two. With an entire division hors de combat and a large portion of the Union army pouring into the void, the very existence of the Army of Northern Virginia hung in the balance. Should the Federals maintain the huge gap in the center of the Confederate line and continue to throw in reinforcements, Lee could be defeated in detail.<sup>27</sup>

The gravity of the situation forced the immediate recall of his two detached brigades. The Federals stunned by the unexpected advance of

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<sup>26</sup> Hunter, "Johnson at Spotsylvania," pp. 338-39; Humphreys, Virginia Campaigns, pp. 92-93; O.R., 36, pt. 1, pp. 335, 358-59, 1072, 1078-79, 1080; Gordon, Reminiscences, pp. 274-76; Gordon to Venable, 24 November 1878, Venable Papers, VHS; Venable, "Wilderness to Petersburg Campaign," p. 529.

<sup>27</sup> Venable, "Wilderness to Petersburg Campaign," pp. 529-30; Dunlop, Lee's Sharpshooters, p. 462; Gordon to Venable, 24 November 1878, Venable Papers, VHS; O.R., 36, pt. 1, pp. 1072, 1078-79; Humphreys, Virginia Campaigns, p. 96; Gordon, Reminiscences, pp. 276-78.

Johnston's brigade and confused by the semidarkness which concealed the weakness of Gordon's forces halted, but only momentarily. As soon as Evans' brigade rejoined him near the McCoull House, Gordon sent three regiments forward to check the enemy. This bold action of throwing forth a thin line once again bought Gordon the time he needed for Pegram's brigade to return. While his troops fell back to the works near the Harrison House in order to form a line of battle, Gordon rode forward to locate the exact position of the Federals, but was still unable to see any considerable distance due to the denseness of the fog. Only by ascertaining the direction from which the storm of bullets came could he determine the location of the enemy. A lively Union fire informed him that the Federals had moved far beyond his right and were continuing to advance.<sup>28</sup>

As he moved about, he was struck by a Minie ball which passed through the back of his coat just above his sword belt, barely missing his spine. When a concerned aide anxiously asked whether Gordon had been hit, the ramrod Georgian answered in his martial best "No, but supposed my back had been in a bow like yours? Don't you see that the bullet would have gone straight through my spine? Sit up or you'll be killed." The young aide's straightening of his posture with a sudden jerk "probably brought a smile to Gordon's soldierly face, but the imminence of disaster left no room for banter."<sup>29</sup>

Gordon quickly returned to his men and found their deployment almost

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<sup>28</sup> Gordon, Reminiscences, p. 277; Francis A. Walker, History of the Second Army Corps (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1886), p. 472; Gibson, "Spotsylvania Courthouse," p. 201; Smith, "Spotsylvania Courthouse," pp. 210-11; O.R., 36, pt. 1, p. 1079; Humphreys, Virginia Campaigns, p. 96; Dunlop, Lee's Sharpshooters, p. 462; Hunter, "Johnson at Spotsylvania," p. 339; W. W. Old, "Trees Whittled Down at the Horseshoe," Southern Historical Society Papers 33 (1905): 18.

<sup>29</sup> Stringfellow, "Bloody Angle," p. 246; Gordon, Reminiscences, p. 277; Freeman, Lee's Lieutenants, 3: 405.

completed. He then prepared himself to lead the charge which might well decide the fate of the Confederacy. Riding down his line of battle, he met General Lee whose manifest concern over the lack of information brought him to the front. Gordon explained his plan of action; the concerned commanding general readily assented and ordered him to proceed. Gordon started away to complete the dressing of his line, when he noticed Lee ride to the center of the line. With his hat in his hand, Lee obviously intended to join the division's desperate charge. Gordon swiftly dashed back, riding across Traveller's path. Sensing his commander's stern resolve and deeply concerned by the increasing intensity of fire from the approaching enemy, he appealed to that one source which could compel Lee's immediate withdrawal. With his voice pitched above the roar of battle so that all his men might hear, Gordon spoke more to them than to their commander when he proclaimed, "General Lee, this is no place for you. These men behind you are Georgians and Virginians. They have never failed you and will not fail you here. Will you boys?" Gordon's men, almost in unison, cried, "No, no, no; we'll not fail him," and took up the "Lee to the rear" chant for the second time in less than a week. With that Gordon seized Lee's bridle, turned the horse to the rear and ordered two men to take Lee back. As the men swarmed around Lee and led him away, the enemy crept to within sixty yards of the Confederate line. Gordon knowing that the "hour of destiny" had arrived, rose up in his stirrups and roared, "Forward!"<sup>30</sup>

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30 There are numerous versions of this "Lee to the rear" episode. Freeman considered W.W. Smith's account ("Spotsylvania Courthouse," p. 212) to be the most reliable owing to the author's youth and closeness to the scene. (Freeman, *R. E. Lee*, 3: 319n). I believe Freeman was correct in his judgment, especially since Gordon's 1878 letter supports essentially the same wording and sequence of events. (Gordon to Venable, 24 November 1878, Venable Papers, VHS). Other accounts may be found in Gordon, *Reminiscences*, pp. 278-80; J. William Jones, "General Lee to the Rear," *Southern Historical Society Papers* 8 (1880): 31-36; Charles S. Venable, "General Lee to the Rear," *Southern*

Gordon led his grimly determined men into "the center of a fire from hell itself." Carrying the colors and advancing at the head of his troops, Gordon was, remembered one of his soldiers, the "most superb looking soldier he ever saw." Even though his line of Evans on the left and Pegram on the right proved too short to span the width of the Mule Shoe, he drove his men onward. Inspired by Lee's presence and the Georgian's eloquent, impassioned appeal to their pride, Gordon's troops charged headlong up the right side of the salient with an almost irresistible fury. Despite desperate fighting they steadily drove back all Union forces in their front and with the aid of III Corps forced the Federals completely out of the eastern portion of the salient. Some of Gordon's men even continued their spirited advance a quarter of a mile past the original lines before halting.<sup>31</sup>

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Historical Society Papers 8 (1880): 105-110; W. W. Smith, "General Lee to the Rear," Southern Historical Society Papers 8 (1880): 562-66; Venable, "Wilderness to Petersburg Campaign," p. 530; Stringfellow, "The Bloody Angle," pp. 246-47; W. L. Goldsmith and R. D. Funkerhouse, "General Lee to the Rear," Southern Historical Society Papers 24 (1896): 79-82; Gibson, "Spotsylvania Courthouse," pp. 201-04; "Personne" [Felix Gregory DeFontaine], Marginalia: or Gleanings from an Army Notebook (Columbia, South Carolina: DeFontaine Co., 1864), pp. 229-30; John H. Worsham, One of Jackson's Foot Cavalry (New York: Neale Publishing Co., 1912), p. 214; Clement A. Evans, ed., Confederate Military History, 12 vols. (Atlanta: Confederate Publishing Co., 1899), vol. 3: Virginia by Jed. Hotchkiss, pp. 451-52. Two other accounts of the action on 12 May involving Lee and Gordon, but wrongly identified as taking place on 10 May are A. L. Long, Memoirs of Robert E. Lee (New York: J. M. Stoddert and Co., 1886), p. 338, and Henry A. White, "Lee's Wrestle with Grant in the Wilderness 1864," Papers of Military Historical Society of Massachusetts, Wilderness Campaign (Boston: Military Historical Society of Massachusetts, 1905), p. 62. Despite minor discrepancies between all of these accounts, the differences are not that important for all agree on the basic story line. My narration draws heavily from Gordon's 1878 letter but can most accurately be described as a composite sketch.

31 Dunlop, Lee's Sharpshooters, pp. 463-64; G. Moxley Sorrel, Recollections of a Confederate Staff Officer, ed. Bell Irvin Wiley (Jackson, Tennessee: McCowat-Mercer Press, 1958), p. 242; Gordon to Venable, 24 November 1878, Venable Papers, VHS; Stringfellow, "The Bloody Angle," pp. 246-50; Venable, "Wilderness to Petersburg Campaign," p. 530; Law, "Wilderness to

While Gordon struggled to gain control of the trenches to the right of the apex, other elements of the II Corps on his left fought their way up the salient and succeeded in evicting the enemy from the western and northwestern trenches. Only the east angle of the salient and a slight bend in the works a few hundred yards to the west--the west angle--remained in Union hands. Repeated assaults by both Federal and Confederate forces failed to dislodge the other from their holdings. Here at this west angle some of the most severe and brutal fighting of the war took place. This struggle in the rain and mud at the "Bloody Angle" raged throughout the day and night of 12 May and on into the early morning hours of the following day. Confederates all along the front of the salient were forced to continue their resistance until a new set of works could be constructed in the rear. Evans' and Pegram's brigades remained in line, holding the eastern face of the Mule Shoe, while Johnston's brigade and the remnants of Johnson's division, who had been placed under Gordon's command, labored on the new line. Not until 3:00 a.m., 13 May, did the exhausted Confederate troops in the salient withdraw to the new line spanning the base of the salient.<sup>32</sup>

Immediately following the titanic struggle at the "Bloody Angle," Lee took steps to reward the man whose actions "in the estimation of many [gave]

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Cold Harbor," p. 132; Gibson, "Spotsylvania Courthouse," pp. 204-05; Smith, "Spotsylvania Courthouse," pp. 212-13; Gordon, Reminiscences, pp. 280-82; O.R., 36, pt. 1, pp. 336, 1072, 1079, Early, Narrative of the War, p. 355; White, "Lee's Wrestle with Grant," p. 64; Humphreys, Virginia Campaigns, p. 96.

<sup>32</sup> Humphreys, Virginia Campaigns, pp. 96-101; Law, "Wilderness to Cold Harbor," pp. 132-34; Walker, Second Corps, pp. 466, 493; O.R., 36, pt. 1, pp. 336-37, 359-60, 1072-73, 1079, 1094; Venable, "Wilderness to Petersburg Campaign," p. 530; Smith, "Spotsylvania Courthouse," pp. 213-14; Hotchkiss Journal, 12 May 1864, Hotchkiss Papers, LC; Gordon, Reminiscences, pp. 282-86; White, "Lee's Wrestle with Grant," p. 66; Venable, "Lee to the Rear," p. 107; Hotchkiss, Virginia, pp. 452-54; Gordon to Venable, 24 November 1878, Venable Papers, VHS; John O. Casler, Four Years in the Stonewall Brigade (Girard, Kansas: Appeal Publishing Co., 1906), pp. 212-14; Hunter, "Johnson at Spotsylvania," pp. 339-40.

an additional lease of 12 months to the life of the Confederacy." On 13 May, the commanding general telegraphed President Jefferson Davis requesting Gordon's promotion to major general with the commission to date from 12 May 1864. In spite of Lee's wish to recognize Gordon's outstanding services in this distinctive manner, "lack of consideration in Richmond" resulted in his commission being dated 14 May 1864, rather than the day of his invaluable actions. Gordon's conduct on that most critical morning had indeed been brilliant. His recall and deployment of his dispersed troops was effected quickly and always toward the correct end. Rather than passively awaiting the Union assault, he boldly and aggressively led his small command into the area where it was most needed. The skillful use of Lee's attempt to lead his charge coupled with his own personal courage and "dauntless intrepidity" inspired Gordon's men to new heights of determination which enabled them to throw many of the Union forces out of the salient in only one hour's time. Gordon and his troops, though outnumbered, "performed with extraordinary valor equalizing everything else." Bold, aggressive, courageous, hard-hitting—the Georgian had truly performed well during his first days as a division commander.<sup>33</sup>

The five days following the fight at the salient—13 May to 17 May—proved uneventful, but on the morning of 18 May the Army of the Potomac renewed its offensive by again attacking over "Hell's Half Acre." Moving over

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33 John S. Lewis to General Trousdale, 13 June 1865, William Trousdale Papers, Tennessee State Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee; Gordon's Service File, Military Service Records, National Archives, Washington, D.C. (hereafter cited as Gordon's Service File, NA); Military Records of John B. Gordon, Alabama Department of Archives and History, Montgomery, Alabama (hereafter cited as Military Records of Gordon, ADAH); Gordon to Venable, 24 November 1878, Venable Papers, VHS; O.R. 51, pt. 2, p. 926; Henry Kyd Douglas, I Rode with Stonewall (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1940), p. 282; Venable, "Wilderness to Petersburg Campaign, p. 533; Captain Vaughan Sawyer, Grant's Campaign in Virginia, 1864 (New York: MacMillan Co., 1908), pp. 81-82.

the same ground where the terrible fighting of 12 May had occurred, the Federals advance soon encountered the new Confederate line which Gordon's troops had helped construct. Gordon, still temporarily in command of the survivors of Johnson's division as well as Early's division, held the right of the II Corps. His entire position was well concealed by forest, completely covered by artillery and musketry, and strongly entrenched with abatis. Consequently, when the Federals attacked, they met a withering fire and were easily and bloodily repulsed. The next day Gordon participated in Ewell's mishandled reconnaissance in force, but managed to escape without heavy casualties. He remained in command of Early's division until 21 May when A. P. Hill resumed his duties at the head of the III Corps, thus freeing Early to return to his division. Then, in order to give Gordon a command commensurate with his grade, Lee transferred Gordon's old brigade to Johnson's decimated division and placed the new major general in charge.<sup>34</sup>

While Gordon was earning his promotion in the desperate struggles around Spotsylvania Court House, his wife penned a letter which revealed a frightening understanding of the Union army's new-found tenacity. "The enemy is so obstinate. . . . He will never give up as long as he can get fresh troops to fight with." Despite increasingly gloomy reports, Fanny took heart in the realization that the "battle is not always to the strong," and continued to believe that God would deliver the Confederacy from the travails of its birth. "Surely

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<sup>34</sup> Porter, Campaigning with Grant, pp. 122-23; Gordon, Reminiscences, pp. 288-90; O.R., 36, pt. 1, pp. 337-38, 361-62, 1073, 1082-83; pt. 3, pp. 813-14; Humphreys, Virginia Campaigns, pp. 110-14; Hotchkiss Journal, 13-19 May 1864, Hotchkiss Papers, LC; Colonel W. E. Cutshaw, "The Battle near Spotsylvania Courthouse on May 18, 1864," Southern Historical Society Papers 33 (1905): 332-34; Stephen Dodson Ramseur to wife, 30 May 1864, Stephen Dodson Ramseur Papers, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, North Carolina; Douglas, I Rode with Stonewall, pp. 282-83; Early, Narrative of the War, pp. 358-59.

there are still righteous enough in the land for whose sake God will spare it. . . . May God bring her safely through, & O may He stay the flowing blood." Even as Fanny wrote, the sounds of artillery fire reached her, compelling her to lift her heart in prayer to God. Fearful for her husband's safety, she repeated her constant prayer that the Holy Spirit would always abide in John's heart and "that His protecting wings may be spread over you & around you & that in the hour of battle you may be unharmed." Fanny knew well the horrors of war. During the previous week's fighting, she had often visited with and ministered to her husband's wounded. Not only were they "extravegant [sic] in their expressions of admiration & love" for Gordon, but upon discovering that she was the wife of their commander, "they raised a tremendous shout" in her honor. In spite of the uncertainties of combat, Fanny endeavored to remain as close as possible to John as the two armies moved nearer to Richmond.<sup>35</sup>

Gordon, though constantly active during the final days of May, saw little significant action until early June at Cold Harbor. His command moved with the Army of Northern Virginia as it repeatedly countered Federal movements around its right flank—first at the North Anna River, then at Totopotomoy Creek, and finally near Cold Harbor. Following Grant's bloody repulse there, Gordon continued to hold his troops in a state of readiness, but engaged in only minor skirmishing during the next ten days as room for maneuver north of the James dwindled. Being so close to Richmond, he did, however, avail himself of every opportunity to write or to see Fanny who was boarding in the capital city. Although he deeply regretted the bad news pouring in from the Shenandoah Valley—where a Federal force under Major General David Hunter had secured

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<sup>35</sup> Fanny Gordon to husband, 15 May 1864, John B. Gordon Collection, Georgia Department of Archives and History, Atlanta, Georgia (hereafter cited as Gordon Collection, GDAH).

control of nearly the entire length of the Valley--Gordon told his wife to take heart because "[W]e will drive them back I hope in a few days." His presumption that troops would soon be detached from Lee's army to deal with this threat was borne out on 12 June when word reached Richmond that Hunter had occupied Lexington, Virginia the day before. Convinced that he must strike Hunter immediately, Lee ordered the entire II Corps to prepare to move as quickly as possible.<sup>36</sup>

Early on 13 June, Gordon and the rest of Jackson's old Corps began moving toward the Shenandoah Valley.<sup>37</sup> Lee's orders to Early, the new commander of the II Corps, were to drive Hunter back--destroying him if possible--and to continue down the Valley with a view toward menacing Washington. Marching first to Charlottesville and then moving by train to Lynchburg, Early's command arrived there too late to strike Hunter, who hastily retreated "beyond the mountains toward the Ohio." After discontinuing his rapid pursuit, Early began a slow advance down the Valley, gathering supplies and

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36 Early, Narrative of the War, pp. 361-64; Freeman, Lee's Lieutenants, 3: 496-508, 523-24; Gordon to wife, 3 June, 7 June, 8 June, 11 June 1864, Gordon Family Collection, UGA; O.R., 43, pt. 1, p. 1018; 37, pt. 1, p. 346.

37 Frank E. Vandiver's Jubal's Raid: General Early's Famous Attack on Washington in 1864 (New York, Toronto and London: McGraw-Hill Book Co., Inc., 1960) is a fine monograph detailing the movements of the II Corps as it moved to invade Maryland in June and July 1864. The Diary of Captain W.W. Old, Aide-de-Camp to General Early, 13 June 1864 to 12 August 1864, in Jubal Anderson Early Papers, Manuscripts Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C., provides a brief sketch of Early's actions during this two month period. A similarly succinct report of II Corps operations between 3 May - 14 November 1864, by Jedediah Hotchkiss, can be found in O.R., 43, pt. 1, pp. 1015-32. The best accounts of Early's Corps in 1864, however, are found in Hotchkiss Journal, Hotchkiss Papers, LC (Hotchkiss's Journal for the period 4 August - 31 December 1864 is reprinted in O.R. 43, pt. 1, pp. 567-88) and Early, Narrative of the War, pp. 371-458. Also, George E. Pond, The Shenandoah Valley in 1864 in The Army in the Civil War, vol. XI (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1882) and Edward J. Stackpole, Sheridan in the Shenandoah: Jubal Early's Nemesis (Harrisburg, Pennsylvania: Stackpole Co., 1961) are two valuable monographic studies of the 1864 campaign in the Shenandoah Valley.

preparing his men for the rigors of another northern invasion. While in the Valley, Early temporarily assigned Gordon's division to Major General John C. Breckinridge's command in order to provide him with a force befitting his rank; but the move was primarily cosmetic as Gordon continued under Early's overall command. By early July, Early's small army, including his corps and Breckinridge's so-called corps, had crossed the Potomac and moved into Maryland.<sup>38</sup>

After passing through Frederick on the morning of 9 July, Early discovered a small Union force under Major General Lew Wallace blocking his advance near Monocacy Junction. Finding the Federals "strongly posted" behind the eastern bank of the Monocacy River and uncertain as to how to proceed, he paused to reconnoiter. As Early examined the enemy's position, Brigadier General John McCausland's cavalry command forded the river about one mile below the Georgetown pike bridge and assailed the Federal left flank. This move solved Early's dilemma; he ordered Breckinridge's nearest infantry division to cross at the same ford and move to support the cavalrymen's flanking movement.<sup>39</sup>

Gordon had arrived on the Monocacy around mid-day and ordered his division "to stack arms and rest" while long range probing took place. Stretched out on a hill overlooking McCausland's action, Gordon's men were enjoying their

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<sup>38</sup> Worsham, One of Jackson's Foot Cavalry, pp. 227-28; O.R., 36, pt. 3, pp. 873-74; 37, pt. 1, pp. 346, 768; 51, pt. 2, pp. 1028-29; Gordon, Reminiscences, pp. 300-01, 309; Early, Narrative of the War, pp. 371-86; Gordon's Report, 22 July 1864, Lee Headquarters Papers, VHS. The O.R. contains only that portion of this report dealing specifically with the Battle of Monocacy, but Gordon's full report covers the two weeks prior to the battle and also relates his division's action at Robinson's Ford, probably on 18 July.

<sup>39</sup> Gordon's 22 July 1864 Report, Lee Headquarters Papers, VHS; Early, Narrative of the War, pp. 386-87; O.R., 37, pt. 1, pp. 347-48.

unique opportunity "to look at a battle" when a courier galloped up to their commander. Gordon read Early's message and immediately swung into action, ordering his division to take arms and cross the river. While his men scrambled up the Monocacy's slippery banks, he rode ahead to inspect the enemy's defensive arrangements. He found a Federal line running along a ridge some 700 yards away and a second one in the narrow valley just behind the first line. Gordon also observed that the fields through which he would have to advance were laced with "strong farm fences . . . [and] thickly studded with huge grain-stacks . . . so broad and high and close together that no line of battle could possible be maintained while he advanced through them."<sup>40</sup>

Nonetheless, after placing Evans' brigade on the right, Brigadier General Zebulon York's brigade on the left and holding Brigadier General William Terry's brigade in reserve, Gordon began his advance, moving in echelon from the right. Despite the temporary confusion wrought by heavy enemy fire and the obstacles in the fields, Gordon's men broke the Union first line and drove it back upon the second. Halting only momentarily, they again advanced and after a short, but desperate struggle succeeded in dislodging the Federals from their second position. Gordon bore witness to the sanguinary nature of the conflict in the narrow ravine when he stated in his official report that "[S]o profuse was the flow of blood from the killed and wounded of both these forces that it reddened the stream for more than 100 yards below." Still, he drove his men onward.<sup>41</sup>

As he resumed his advance, Gordon encountered a third Federal line, one longer and stronger than either of the first two. Increasingly obstinate

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<sup>40</sup> O.R., 37, pt. 1, pp. 350-51; Worsham, One of Jackson's Foot Cavalry, pp. 235-36; Gordon, Reminiscences, pp. 309-11.

<sup>41</sup> Gordon, Reminiscences, pp. 311-12; O.R., 37, pt. 1, pp. 351-52.

resistance on his front and a galling fire upon his left flank forced him to commit his reserve brigade. Terry's Virginians moved to the left and quickly disposed of the Yankees nearest the river. Despite this success on the left, Gordon's other two brigades, weakened by their previous assaults, were still unable to make any headway against the enemy line. Realizing that reinforcements were necessary, Gordon called for another brigade but learned it would not arrive for some time; so, he resolved to continue the attack with the troops at hand. He ordered Terry to change front to the right and move against the Federal right while Evans and York continued to apply pressure to the front.<sup>42</sup>

When the head of Terry's column reached the top of the hill from which they would launch their attack, they found a solitary figure awaiting them. "There was Gordon, . . . sitting on his horse as quietly as if nothing was going on, wearing his old red shirt, the sleeves pulled up a little, the only indication that he was ready for a fight." He hurried his men into position as a new Federal line advanced toward them. When the Virginians caught sight of the approaching Yankees, they surged forward yelling "'At them, boys!'" Gordon, however, restrained his troops and admonished them, "'Keep quiet, we'll have our time presently!'"<sup>43</sup>

After ordering his men to pull down a portion of a fence in his front, Gordon led them through the opening. He wanted to hold his men back until a regular battle line could be formed, but when about one hundred of them had passed through the fence, a cry rose, "'Charge them! Charge them!'" "It was useless for General Gordon to try and stop it now,—nothing but a shot through

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42 O.R., 37, pt. 1, p. 351; Worsham, One of Jackson's Foot Cavalry, p. 237.

43 Worsham, One of Jackson's Foot Cavalry, pp. 237-38.

each man could have done it." Raising a chilling "rebel yell," Gordon's frenzied men charged forward and sent the enemy reeling back. When the rest of the brigade came up and was fully deployed, Gordon pushed on. With Terry's rolling up of the Federal right flank and increased frontal pressure by Evans and York, the entire Federal line soon collapsed and the retreat degenerated into a complete rout. Cheered on and quickly joined by Confederates on the opposite side of the Monocacy, Gordon's men pursued the retreating Federals until Early sent word that no more prisoners should be taken; he simply did not know what to do with them all. For at least one of Gordon's men it was "the most exciting time I witnessed during the war."<sup>44</sup>

Gordon had won a hard-fought, brilliant victory. Fighting exclusively with his unsupported division, he had faced a major portion of Wallace's force and, in what he asserted was "one of the severest [battles] ever fought" by his troops, had routed the Federals. When Breckinridge found the Georgian after the battle, he exclaimed, "'Gordon, if you had never made a fight before, this ought to immortalize you.'" As gratifying as such personal praise may have been, Gordon was distressed by his heavy losses at Monocacy. His division disabled almost 700 Federals and captured a similar number, but at a cost of nearly 700 of their own—about one-third of Gordon's command. Numbered among the wounded Confederates were Clement Evans, the division's senior brigadier, and Gordon's brother. Eugene's severe wound near the elbow threatened the loss of his right arm as well as his life. Even more unsettling was the fall of his intensely close friend, Colonel J. H. Lamar of the 61st Georgia, whose death Gordon called "one of the saddest events to me of the war." Despite personal

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<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 238-40; *O.R.*, 37, pt. 1, pp. 348, 351-52; Early, *Narrative of the War*, p. 388.

grief, Gordon devoted himself to the task at hand. Washington lay less than forty miles to the southeast and, as a consequence of his actions on 9 July, the road to the Federal capital lay open to the invading Confederates.<sup>45</sup>

A day-and-a-half of rapid marching brought Early's army closer to the national capital than any armed Confederates had ever been before. His advance elements reached the defenses of Washington shortly after noon on 11 July. He immediately ordered a battle line formed and prepared to attack, but it soon became obvious that the oppressive heat and choking dust of his two-day forced march had taken a heavy toll. Over two-thirds of his weary men were still straggling toward the front as the afternoon slipped away. Although convinced that the city could have been taken by the Confederates who first arrived, Gordon, nonetheless, must have concurred with Early's decision to halt and reconnoiter, especially in light of the condition of his men. Gordon's division "was stretched out almost like skirmishers, and all the men did not get up until night." That evening, Early conferred with his division commanders—Breckinridge, Rodes, Ramseur and Gordon—at his headquarters in the home of Postmaster General Francis P. Blair to determine how best to proceed. A decision had to be reached quickly for other Federal forces had already begun to close in on the Confederates' rear. All agreed they had come too far and were

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45 Early, *Narrative of the War*, p. 388; Gordon to Lee, 6 February 1868, Lee Papers, VHS; Gordon to wife, 11 July 1864, Gordon Family Collection UGA; Worsham, *One of Jackson's Foot Cavalry*, p. 240; Pollard, *Companions in Arms*, p. 545; *O.R.*, 37, pt. 1, pp. 199-202, 348, 352; Gordon, *Reminiscences*, pp. 312-13. Another casualty of the Battle of Monocacy was Gordon's favorite battle-horse. Gordon deeply regretted the magnificent animal's death because it had been presented to him as a token of admiration from the men of his Georgia brigade, who bought the horse themselves. The situation at the time his horse fell deepened his distress, for he was unhorsed "in the very crisis of the battle . . . [when] a temporary halt or slight blunder might turn the scales." Fortunately, he received another horse quickly and resumed his direction of the battle. Gordon, *Reminiscences*, pp. 313, 103.

too close to the Union capital to retreat without a fight. Despite the exceedingly formidable fortifications facing them, they decided to attack at dawn.<sup>46</sup>

Daylight of 12 July, however, found the Federal works bristling with newly arrived reinforcements. Any attack, even if successful, would prove prohibitively expensive. Stripped of alternatives, Early spent the day skirmishing in front of Washington and began quietly withdrawing after sunset. Moving as swiftly in retreat as it had in advance, Early's force crossed the Potomac and reentered Virginia on 14 July. The remainder of the summer was consumed in "marching and countermarching toward every point of the compass in the Shenandoah Valley, with scarcely a day of rest, skirmishing, fighting, rushing hither and thither to meet and drive back cavalry raids."<sup>47</sup>

The seemingly unending routine of marching and fighting wore heavily upon discipline in Gordon's division. Heavy casualties, particularly in Evans' brigade, added to the problem, but, in all probability, the most important factor contributing to lax discipline grew out of the May reorganization of those units that formerly made up Johnson's division. York's Louisiana brigade incorporated what an inspector-general called "the discordant fragments of Hays' and Stafford's brigades." The fourteen Virginia regiments that had comprised three famed fighting units—Steuart's, Jones' and "Stonewall" brigades—prior to 12 May

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46 Gordon, Reminiscences, pp. 314-15; Early, Narrative of the War, pp. 389-92; Hotchkiss Journal, 10 - 11 July 1864, Hotchkiss Papers, LC; Worsham, One of Jackson's Foot Cavalry, p. 241; Gordon to wife, 11 July, 13 July 1864, Gordon Family Collection, UGA; O.R., 37, pt. 1, p. 348; 43, pt. 1, p. 1021; Douglas, I Rode with Stonewall, pp. 294-95.

47 Early, Narrative of the War, pp. 392-419; O.R., 37, pt. 1, p. 348; 43, pt. 1, p. 1021; Worsham, One of Jackson's Foot Cavalry, p. 242; Hotchkiss, Virginia, pp. 482-84; Hotchkiss Journal, 12 July - 18 September 1864, Hotchkiss Papers, LC; Douglas, I Rode with Stonewall, pp. 295-96; Gordon, Reminiscences, p. 317.

had been lumped together and placed under the command of Terry. In each case, "[B]oth officers and men bitterly object[ed] to their consolidation into one brigade," preferring to retain and refer to themselves by their old designations. Strange troops serving under strange commanders could be overcome, but the fierce pride and intense esprit de corps of the long famous brigades seriously complicated matters. Though merely the inheritor of the situation, Gordon certainly labored tirelessly to correct the problem, for even as the inspector filed his critical report, he noted improvement. But perhaps more important than the conduct of Gordon's division in camp was its performance in battle. And it was stated that in every engagement, "in spite of all defects, the division has fought with conspicuous gallantry and constant success." Even under unfavorable conditions, Gordon demanded and received the utmost from the troops he commanded.<sup>48</sup>

As summer turned to autumn, Gordon and the rest of Early's army continued maneuvering and fighting throughout the Shenandoah Valley, effectively holding the more numerous Union forces at bay.<sup>49</sup> Although generally engaged with cavalry, Gordon knew that the Federal infantry in the Valley, now under the command of Major General Philip H. Sheridan, was merely biding its time—gathering supplies, adding to its numbers, and planning its campaign—waiting to strike when certain of success. At dawn on the morning of

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<sup>48</sup> O.R., 43, pt. 1, pp. 609-10; 36, pt. 3, pp. 813-14, 873-74; Worsham, One of Jackson's Foot Cavalry, pp. 222-23.

<sup>49</sup> In a heavy skirmish near Shepherdstown on 25 August, Gordon received a wound "in the head, but gallantly dashed on, the blood streaming over him." Hotchkiss stated that Gordon's wound resulted from a saber slash. Hotchkiss Journal, 25 August 1864, Hotchkiss Papers, LC; Hotchkiss, Virginia, p. 493; "Stories Told About Immortal Gordon," newspaper clipping in John B. Gordon Folder, Atlanta Historical Society, Atlanta, Georgia (hereafter cited as Gordon Folder, AHS); "Letters of a Confederate Surgeon: Doctor Abner Embry McGarity, 1862-1865," Georgia Historical Quarterly 30 (1946): 35.

19 September, Sheridan's entire force began crossing Opequon Creek and moving on Winchester. While Ramseur's division struggled valiantly to hold Sheridan's main body at bay a few miles east of the town, Early ordered a rapid reconcentration of his dispersed command. Gordon, marching from Stephenson's Depot four miles to the north, reach the field about 10:00 a.m.; Rodes' division arrived shortly thereafter and filled in the gap between Gordon and Ramseur.<sup>50</sup>

Discovering a heavy Federal column moving to turn Ramseur's left flank, Gordon and Rodes hastily conferred and decided to launch a simultaneous charge by both divisions and outflank the flanking Federals. Scarcely had they concluded their discussion when Rodes received a mortal wound. Despite his deep grief at the fall of his comrade and friend, Gordon forced himself "to stifle sensibilities and silence the natural promptings of his heart" for the situation at hand demanded immediate action. Assuming temporary command of Rodes' men as well as his own, Gordon directed both divisions to meet the Federal advance with a charge. Although Evans' brigade--the extreme left of his line--gave way after being struck while in the act of forming, Gordon benefited from skillful artillery fire and met this emergency by feeding into line the last brigade of Rodes which had just arrived. That addition enabled him to break the Union assault and resume his charge all along the line. Gordon's and Rodes' men forced the Federals back with heavy losses and at that point, the battle appeared to be over. In fact, one of Gordon's soldiers remarked "we lay down to rest. We had been in action only about an hour and we thought we had gained an easy victory."

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<sup>50</sup> Gordon, Reminiscences, pp. 319-21; O.R., 43, pt. 1, pp. 46-47, 554-55; Early, Narrative of the War, pp. 420-21; Douglas, I Rode with Stonewall, p. 309; "Diary of Captain James M. Garnett," Southern Historical Society Papers 27 (1899): 4-5; Thomas H. Carter to John W. Daniel, 28 November 1894, Daniel MSS, Duke.

Such was not the case.<sup>51</sup>

Early's army, once fully reassembled, formed a defensive perimeter northeast of Winchester roughly in the shape of an upside-down L. But as the afternoon wore on, it became increasingly clear that Sheridan had no intention of breaking off contact and that both Confederate flanks were in danger of being turned by the more numerous and extremely aggressive Federal cavalry. Late in the day, an overwhelming force of blue horsemen swept down on Early's left and gained the rear of the bent Confederate line. Even though rapid movement by Breckinridge's troops drove the enemy cavalry back and all other commands continued to repel Union frontal assaults, "noise accomplished what force had failed to do." "Hearing the fire in the rear, and thinking they were flanked and about to be cut off," the troops all along the front lines began falling back. A short stand behind a line of breastworks on the outskirts of Winchester momentarily held the enemy back but the entire line gave way in confusion as darkness approached.<sup>52</sup>

As Gordon's troops streamed through Winchester in great disorder, the determined wife of their commander met them in the streets. Fanny had

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<sup>51</sup> Gordon, Reminiscences, pp. 321-22; "Diary of Captain Robert E. Park, of Twelfth Alabama Regiment," Southern Historical Society Papers 2 (July-December 1876): 25-26; William R. Cox, "Major General Stephen D. Ramseur," Southern Historical Society Papers 18 (1890): 248; Carter to Daniel, 19 November, 28 November 1894, Daniel MSS, Duke; Early, Narrative of the War, pp. 421-23; O.R., 43, pt. 1, pp. 47, 555; Worsham, One of Jackson's Foot Cavalry, p. 258; Wesley Merritt, "Sheridan in the Shenandoah Valley," Robert Underwood Johnson and Clarence Clough Buel, eds., Battles and Leaders of the Civil War, 4 vols. (New York: Thomas Yoseloff, Inc. 1956): 4: 507-09; "Diary of Captain Garnett," p. 5.

<sup>52</sup> Early, Narrative of the War, pp. 423-26; O.R., 43, pt. 1, pp. 47, 555, 557-58; Freeman, Lee's Lieutenants, 3: 580; Hotchkiss Journal, 19 September 1864, Hotchkiss Papers, LC; Cox, "Ramseur," p. 249; Carter to Daniel, 28 November 1894, Daniel MSS, Duke; "Diary of Captain Garnett," pp. 5-7; Gordon, Reminiscences, p. 322.

narrowly escaped capture in the morning when her carriage broke down as she hurriedly crossed a stream in flight before Federal cavalry. Only assistance from some of Rodes' men—who held off the enemy while repairing her conveyance—allowed her to reach Winchester safely. Although Early's opposition to the practice of wives following their soldier-husbands was well known, Fanny had persisted in her efforts to remain as close to John as possible. She traveled in carriages, ambulances, a "rock-a-way" or almost any means of transportation available. In fact, "it had become a tradition in the Army that when she was seen on her way to the rear, action was about to open." Early, objecting to her almost constant presence, once muttered, "I wish the Yankees would capture Mrs. Gordon and hold her till the war is over." Fanny somehow learned of the Virginian's caustic remark and took the opportunity to good naturedly tease him about it at a camp dinner. An embarrassed Early recovered momentarily and replied, "Mrs. Gordon, General Gordon is a better soldier when you are close by him than when you are away, and so hereafter, when I issue orders that officers' wives must go to the rear, you may know that you are excepted." Upon discovering Fanny's success in keeping up with the army in its movements around Winchester, Early exclaimed, "Well, I'll be \_\_\_\_\_! If my men would keep up as well as she does, I'd never issue another order against straggling."<sup>53</sup>

When Fanny found that a portion of the retreating Confederates belonged to her husband's command, "she lost her self-control, and rushed into the street, urging them to go back and meet the enemy." Believing that his wife

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<sup>53</sup> Gordon, Reminiscences, pp. 318-21; Caroline Gordon Brown to Samuel Chiles Mitchell, 24 May 1934, Samuel Chiles Mitchell Papers, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, North Carolina; Macon Daily Telegraph, 7 May 1912, (newspaper clipping in John B. Gordon Biography File, Georgia Historical Society, Savannah, Georgia [hereafter cited as Gordon File, GHS]); Freeman, Lee's Lieutenants, 3: 328.

had gone to the rear as she normally did whenever a battle appeared imminent, Gordon was indeed stunned to discover her still in Winchester—and horrified to find her in the street, struggling to rally his troops with shells and bullets flying about her. He immediately insisted that she enter the house of a friend where, though capture would be inevitable, she would, at least, be safe. But as her husband dashed on, Fanny took steps to avoid falling prisoner to the rapidly advancing Yankees. Finding that her driver had disappeared, she stopped some of Gordon's men who brought her carriage and horses to her. For the second time that day, she sped away only moments ahead of the enemy. This time, however, she joined in the general withdrawal of Early's army.<sup>54</sup>

"Drearly and silently," the dismal retreat dragged on throughout the night, stopping briefly at Newtown and then continuing to Fisher's Hill. There Early determined to make a stand and try to halt Sheridan's progress; however, the loss of over 3600 men at Winchester made it difficult for Early to maintain effectively the almost four-mile long line that he chose to occupy. Consequently, when Sheridan attacked on the afternoon of 22 September, he crushed Early's left and forced the discouraged Confederates to withdraw in disorder once again. Gordon remembered "the retreat (it is always so) was at first stubborn and slow, then rapid, then--a rout." Having sustained almost 5000 casualties and lost two major engagements in only four days, Early pressed his withdrawal well up the Valley. He did not fully stop until he had fallen back to Staunton and Waynesboro, where his "very much shattered [and] . . . very

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54 "Sketches of Stories and Family Matters," William W. Stringfield Papers, North Carolina State Archives, Raleigh, North Carolina; Douglas, I Rode with Stonewall, p. 311; Macon Daily Telegraph, 7 May 1912, Gordon File, GHS; Gordon, Reminiscences, pp. 42, 322-23; "Diary of Captain Park," pp. 28-29; Alex S. Paxton, "Sheridan's Bummers," Southern Historical Society Papers 32 (1904): 92; Atlanta Constitution, 24 June 1871.

much exhausted" troops enjoyed a period "of comparative rest and recuperation."<sup>55</sup>

Early's defeats aroused the ire of many disgruntled southerners who saw the once brightly glowing spirit of independence fading noticeably in the last half of 1864. Grumbling undoubtedly surfaced in Early's army and, in all probability, Gordon likewise questioned his commander of the past year-and-a-half. They had fought well together at Chancellorsville and during the Gettysburg campaign, but almost from the onset of campaigning in the spring of 1864, problems developed. Early's refusal to believe, let alone investigate Gordon's findings on the morning of 6 May quite possibly signalled a hardening of relations between the two men. When Early assumed temporary III Corps command and Gordon received his division at Spotsylvania Court House, the young Georgian burst upon the center stage of Lee's army, capturing the attention of many both in and out of the military. Referred to by some as "the Stonewall Jackson of this [Lee's] army," Gordon, with his youthful dash and fiercely offensive spirit, supplanted his superior in the eyes and hearts of many Confederates--a fact which no doubt grated upon the normally ill-tempered Early. Problems multiplied once they left the directing hand of Lee. After Winchester, Gordon criticized Early's apparent overconfidence which resulted in the delayed recall of the widely dispersed Confederate forces on the morning of 19 September. He also noted his commander's failure to protect the army's left flank at Fisher's Hill which again led to disaster. If, in fact, Gordon entertained serious doubts about

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<sup>55</sup> Gordon, Reminiscences, pp. 324-27; Hotchkiss Journal, 20-22 September 1864, Hotchkiss Papers, LC; O.R., 43, pt. 1, pp. 48, 555-56; 557-58; Early, Narrative of the War, pp. 429-30. Numerous Federal reports following the Battle of Winchester mistakenly stated that Gordon had been mortally wounded during the action on 19 September. O.R., 39, pt. 2, p. 423; 43, pt. 1, p. 25; 43, pt. 2, pp. 110, 118, 123-25, 137, 138, 153.

Early as an independent commander, actions in October would settle the issue.<sup>56</sup>

Buoyed by reinforcements from Lee's army and expressions of confidence from the commanding general, Early resolved to strike a blow at Sheridan if possible. By early October, when it began moving back down the Valley, Early's force had been augmented by the arrival of Major General Joseph B. Kershaw's fine South Carolina infantry division plus cavalry and artillery units. Early returned to Fisher's Hill on 13 October and found Sheridan's army encamped north of Cedar Creek between Strasburg and Middletown. Faced with the prospect of falling back "for want of provisions and forage" or of attacking immediately, Early undertook reconnaissance to see if either of the enemy's flanks could be turned. He sent Brigadier General John Pegram to investigate the Union right and dispatched Gordon to the Confederate signal station at the end of Massanutton Mountain to examine Sheridan's left.<sup>57</sup>

Accompanied by members of his division and Captain Jedediah Hotchkiss, Gordon spent much of 17 October scaling the exceedingly rugged mountain. Once atop "Three Top Mountain," he found that his observation post provided him with a magnificent view of the Federal army spread out below him. "Not only the general outlines of Sheridan's breastworks, but every parapet where his heavy guns were mounted, and every piece of artillery, every wagon and tent and supporting line of troops, were in easy range of vision." Sheridan obviously considered his left flank--anchored on the north fork of the Shenandoah

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<sup>56</sup> Millard Kessler Bushong, Old Jube: A Biography of General Jubal A. Early (Boyce, Virginia: Carr Publishing Co., Inc., 1955), pp. 243-46; Richmond Enquirer, 17 May 1864; Gordon, Reminiscences, pp. 319-20, 330, 326.

<sup>57</sup> O.R., 43, pt. 2, pp. 878-81, 891-92; Early, Narrative of the War, pp. 433-38; Jones to Father, 21 October 1864, Jones Collection, ADAH; Hotchkiss Journal, 17 October 1864, Hotchkiss Papers, LC; Douglas, I Rode with Stonewall, p. 316; Gordon, Reminiscences, pp. 330-333.

River and protected by the apparently impassable Massanutton--secure and safe from attack for he had taken few steps to safeguard it; however, the vulnerability of the virtually unprotected Federal left leaped out at the Confederates. Gordon and Hotchkiss immediately realized the golden opportunity lying before them and quickly formulated a plan of attack before beginning their arduous descent to inform Early of their findings.<sup>58</sup>

Hotchkiss presented the plan to Early that evening and Gordon confirmed their findings when he conferred with his commander the following morning. Convinced beyond all doubt that adoption of his plan "would guarantee the destruction of Sheridan's army," Gordon offered to assume full responsibility if the attack failed. Though aware of the tremendous potential of the plan, Early first had to be sure of its practicality; accordingly, he sent Gordon and Hotchkiss out again to ascertain if a suitable route around the mountain existed. Once they located a narrow path running between the river and the foot of the mountain, Early completely accepted the plan and prepared for action.<sup>59</sup>

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58 Gordon, Reminiscences, pp. 333-35; Hotchkiss Journal, 17 October 1864, Hotchkiss Papers, LC; Gabriel Wharton, "Battle of Cedar Creek," in Early Papers, LC; O.R., 43, pt. 1, p. 1030; 46, pt. 2, pp. 385-86.

59 Hotchkiss Journal, 17-18 October 1864, Hotchkiss Papers, LC; Gordon, Reminiscences, pp. 335-36; Jones to Father, 21 October 1864, Jones Collection, ADAH, Gordon to Jones, 11 June 1902, Jones Collection, ADAH; Early, Narrative of the War, pp. 439-40; O.R., 43, pt. 1, p. 561.

In writings after the war, both Early and Gordon claimed to have planned the attack and, like so many other minor points, their conflicting statements served to fuel postwar controversies. In truth, both could claim credit. Hotchkiss, in his journal, recorded that "General Gordon and myself fixed upon a plan of attack to suggest to General Early, which we discussed fully as we came back. General Gordon was to propose it to General Early." Physically unable to climb Three Top Mountain, Early had to rely upon "the eyes and reports of others;" yet, even though the origin of the plan came from his subordinates, Early could justifiably take credit. As commander of all the Confederate forces, he had to make the final decision and dispositions as well as bear full responsibility for the outcome of the attack. Early himself stated, "I was not likely to permit any other to plan a battle for me . . . [Y]et I was always willing to receive and adopt valuable suggestions from any of my officers."

He called all of his division commanders together on the afternoon of 18 October and carefully detailed each man's responsibility in the following morning's assault. Early entrusted the entire II Corps to Gordon who was to direct the major thrust of the attack. He would lead his three divisions around the foot of the Massanutton after dark, deploy them on Sheridan's flank and rear, attack just before daylight and drive the Federals back toward Belle Grove. Kershaw was to attack the enemy's front and left as soon as Gordon struck the flank and then join with the Georgian in pushing the Federals across the Valley Pike. Wharton's division would move up the pike, gain control of the bridge over Cedar Creek and then take whatever position in line that circumstances dictated. Early directed the cavalry to occupy the enemy's horse, protect the army's flanks and operate against the Federal rear. With everything set, the Confederates departed Early's headquarters to prepare their individual commands for the attack. "All were very sanguine of success, believing the attack would be a surprise. . . ." On the eve of this battle, most of the

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Though others seriously questioned his receptiveness to subordinates' suggestions, Early appears to have accepted Gordon's advice and planned the battle of Cedar Creek accordingly. Perhaps the best analysis of the controversy came from Thomas G. Jones after the death of both Early and Gordon. He stated that Early "was responsible for the plan, & he held on & would not turn back" even in the face of some troubling Federal movements on the day preceding the attack. "It is no impugment of Early's glory, that he knowing he would have to move on one flank or the other, sent his best officers to look, and then after hearing them, determined which he would adopt. If the plan were adopted on Sheridan's left, the details of it must necessarily be shaped largely by what was seen from there." In sum, Gordon proposed the plan of attack; Early adopted it and implemented it. Hotchkiss Journal 17-18 October 1864, Hotchkiss Papers, LC; Gordon, *Reminiscences*, p. 356; Jones to Daniel, 3 July 1904, Jones Collection, ADAH; Douglas, *I Rode with Stonewall*, p. 33; Pollard, *Companions in Arms*, p. 477; Jubal Anderson Early, *A Memoir of the Last Year of the War for Independence in the Confederate States of America, Containing an Account of the Operations of His Commands in the Years of 1864 and 1865* (New Orleans: Blelock and Co., 1867), p. 93n. Much of Early's *Narrative of the War* is based upon this *Memoir*. Although there are some differences between the 1867 work and the larger 1912 book--such as the omission of the above quotation--the charges concerning the Battle of Cedar Creek are not of great significance.

veterans in Early's army probably shared thoughts similar to those of one of Gordon's staff officers. "Tomorrow is the 19th of October just one month from the defeat at Winchester. If by God's kindness we can whip Sheridan, it will be the greatest thing of the war."<sup>60</sup>

Gordon's command, faced with the longest and most circuitous march, began its move at 8:00 p.m. After crossing the river near Fisher's Hill, his men spent most of the night working their way around the mountain along the precarious path which often forced them to move in single file. Stripped of all unnecessary accouterments that might arouse attention, "the long gray line like a giant serpent glided noiselessly along the dim pathway above the precipice." Having wisely posted guides at every fork along the route in order to prevent any mishap, Gordon reached Bowman's Ford without serious incident about an hour before the time of attack. Waiting in the darkness within sight and hearing distance of Federal pickets stationed in the middle of the river, Gordon found the situation "unspeakably impressive. Everything conspired to make the conditions both thrilling and weird."<sup>61</sup>

While the II Corps anxiously lay in wait for the attack to begin, Gordon probably mulled over his most recent letter from his wife. Fanny had been forced to remain in Staunton when the army resumed its march down the Valley

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60 Early, Narrative of the War, pp. 440-42; Wharton, "Cedar Creek," Early Papers, LC; Hotchkiss Journal, 18 October 1864, Hotchkiss Papers, LC; Thomas H. Carter to Samuel J. C. Moore, 15 October 1864, Samuel J. C. Moore Papers, Virginia Historical Society, Richmond, Virginia (hereafter cited as Moore Papers, VHS); O.R., 43, pt. 1, pp. 1030-31; Jones to Eugene C. Gordon, 18 October 1864, Jones Collection, ADAH.

61 O.R., 43, pt. 1, pp. 561, 598, 1031; Samuel D. Buck, "Battle of Cedar Creek, Va., Oct. 19th, 1864," Southern Historical Society Papers 30 (1902): 105; Hotchkiss Journal, 18 October 1864, Hotchkiss Papers, LC; Wharton, "Cedar Creek," Early Papers, LC; Jones to Father, 21 October 1864, Jones Collection, ADAH; Early, Narrative of the War, pp. 442-43; Gordon, Reminiscences, pp. 336-37.

because she was now entering her second or third month of pregnancy. Although she realized that her figure would soon reveal their "secret," her modesty led her to write, "I can't bear the idea of anybody's knowing but you." Fanny had been able to correspond with John almost everyday, but letters proved increasingly poor substitutes for physical contact as separation grew exceedingly difficult for her to contend with. His wife's longing for comfort and concern for his unborn child undoubtedly weighed upon Gordon. However, the approaching battle demanded his fullest attention. The tense moments of anticipation finally gave way to the appointed hour, at which time accompanying cavalry units advanced and brushed aside the Federals at the ford. The horsemen dashed off in a futile attempt to capture Sheridan while Gordon's infantry crossed the river without opposition for the second time that evening. Once on the opposite bank, Gordon rapidly pushed his men northward approximately one-and-a-quarter miles where he deployed them squarely upon the Federal flank.<sup>62</sup>

As quickly as Evans' (his own division) and Ramseur's divisions could be wheeled into line, Gordon attacked. Hitting the flank and rear of Sheridan's army, he completely surprised the sleeping Federals. "Thrown into the wildest confusion and terror by Kershaw's simultaneous assault in front," the VIII Union Corps stampeded into and through the camps of the adjoining XIX Corps. Confusion and disorder prevailed as the two surprised Union corps broke and fled without offering any real resistance. In a remarkably short period of time, two-thirds of Sheridan's army was routed and driven from the field. In addition, most of the Union artillery also fell into Gordon's hands. Only the veteran VI Corps

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<sup>62</sup> Gordon, Reminiscences, pp. 337-39; Fanny Gordon to husband, 16 October 1864, Gordon Collection, GDAH; Jones to Father, 21 October 1864, Jones Collection, ADAH; O.R., 43, pt. 1, p. 598; Hotchkiss Journal, 18 October 1864, Hotchkiss Papers, LC.

remained intact and even it had withdrawn northward to a new position west of Middletown. While Gordon reorganized—bringing Pegram's division into line—and prepared to push on against the VI Corps, Colonel Thomas H. Carter brought the guns of the II Corps into action. The artilleryman exclaimed to Gordon, "General, you will need no infantry. With enfilade fire from my batteries I will destroy that corps in twenty minutes." Carter's heavy and extremely effective bombardment forced the Federals to fall back again, this time forming a line northwest of Middletown. Believing that the destruction of Sheridan's army was within his grasp, Gordon ordered his "three Divisions of Infantry and 39 pieces of Artillery to move rapidly down the Pike, mass on the enemy's left, and by one grand charge, sweep the 6th Corps to four winds."<sup>63</sup>

While Gordon completed preparations for this final advance, Early, aglow with the ecstasy of victory, joined him on the battlefield. Riding up to the Georgian, he declared "'Just one month ago, to-day General, we were going the other way. I wonder what they will make of this Brigadier General in the regular army, now.'" (An allusion to the fact that Sheridan had received this promotion after Winchester and Fisher's Hill.) Confident that he had won a glorious victory, Early asked Gordon to point out the VI Corps' exact location as fog, mist and battle-smoke continued to obscure his field of vision. Gordon pinpointed the enemy's new position and explained the steps he had taken to press the attack and destroy the VI Corps. To Gordon's surprise, "Early said in substance, 'It will

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<sup>63</sup> Gordon, Reminiscences, pp. 339-41; Buck, "Cedar Creek," pp. 105-06; O.R., 43, pt. 1, pp. 561-62, 598-99, 1031; Early, Narrative of the War, pp. 443-45; A. L. Long, "General Early's Valley Campaign," Southern Historical Society Papers 18 (1890): 89; Hotchkiss Journal, 19 October 1864, Hotchkiss Papers, LC; Carter to Daniel, 19 November 1894, Daniel MSS, Duke; Cox, "Ramseur," p. 253; Carter to Moore, 15 October 1889, Moore Papers, VHS; Pollard, Companions in Arms, pp. 545-46; Jones to Father, 21 October 1864, Jones Collection, ADAH.

go to the rear with the rest. They are all trying to get away now.' Gordon said he thought not, and that it [the VI Corps] was in the best place we could get at it for attack, where it was." Early, for whatever reasons, refused to be swayed by his division commander and held fast to his belief that the VI Corps was acting as a rear guard, merely covering the retreat of the army. Although Gordon persisted in arguing for a continuation of the attack, Early ignored his pleas for a final, massive assault. The conversation ended with Early instructing Gordon, "General, you had better look after your division."<sup>64</sup>

Years later, Gordon remembered that at that moment "[M]y heart went into my boots. Visions of the fatal halt on the first day at Gettysburg, and of the whole day's hesitation to permit an assault on Grant's exposed flank on the 6th of May in the Wilderness, rose before me." Gordon bitterly recalled that the "concentration was stopped; the blow was not delivered. We halted, we hesitated, we dallied. . . ." Having reverted back to divisional command once

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64 Jones to Father, 21 October 1864; Jones to Daniel, 3 July 1904, Jones Collection, ADAH; Pollard, Companions in Arms, p. 546.

Although Gordon and Early may have met more than once during the morning of 19 October, this conversation occurred after the VIII Corps and XIX Corps had been driven from the field and most likely after the VI Corps had withdrawn to its last position northwest of Middletown. Gordon related the meeting as follows:

"Well, Gordon, this is glory enough for one day. This is the 19th. Precisely one month ago to-day we were going in the opposite direction." Gordon replied, "It is very well so far, general; but we have one more blow to strike, and then there will not be left an organized company of infantry in Sheridan's army." As Gordon explained his dispositions and the need for pressing the attack, Early exclaimed, "No use in that; they will all go directly." Dumbfounded, Gordon answered "That is the Sixth Corps, general. It will not go unless we drive it from the field." Unmoved by his subordinate's arguments, Early reiterated, "Yes, it will go too, directly."

Although Freeman's assertion that Gordon's account "scarcely can have been reported with literal accuracy" is probably correct, it is my opinion that the essence of the conversation remains clear. Gordon wanted to push the attack vigorously; Early, for reasons known only to himself, decided not to continue the immediate assault upon the VI Corps. Gordon, Reminiscences, p. 341; Freeman, Lee's Lieutenants, 3: 603-04.

Early arrived on the field, Gordon, under orders, moved his men to the left of the Confederate line. There he remained as Early's army spent most of the afternoon "firing a few shots here, attacking with a brigade or a division there . . . " but in the main, the Confederates "waited—waited for weary hours."<sup>65</sup>

Early's decision not to attack the VI Corps with his entire force deeply disturbed Gordon, but the situation that developed on his front signalled a new alarm. The Federals, seeing that vigorous pursuit had been abandoned, began to rally behind the VI Corps and with their ever-growing numbers and Sheridan's return prepared to assume the offensive. As the afternoon wore on, Gordon received increasingly ominous reports that both enemy cavalry and infantry were massing on his front and flank. Alert to the great danger, he sent several urgent messages to Early informing him of the situation on the left and appealing for

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65 Gordon, Reminiscences, pp. 341-44. Although Early stated that he sent orders to Gordon to press the attack against the VI Corps, it is impossible to ascertain when, or if, these orders were issued. If such instructions were dispatched, it would appear that they were never delivered because a member of Early's staff, Lieutenant Mann Page, somehow determined on his own that Gordon's division was in no condition to move forward. Early's narrative—which suggests that the orders were issued prior to Carter's artillery bombardment—adds to the confusion and difficulty of reconciling the differences with the O.R. and Reminiscences. Gordon's assertion that he never received any order to this effect rings true, particularly in light of his steadfast condemnation of Early for "the fatal halt at Cedar Creek." In a chapter by the same title, Gordon supplied abundant documentation from both Union and Confederate officers to support his contention that Early's decision to suspend the attack, and not the "bad conduct" of the men, resulted in the disaster at Cedar Creek. Gordon and his men "were not only urgently anxious to advance, but were astounded at any halt whatever." Without question, Early stopped the attack during the morning; however, at sometime in the afternoon, he ordered his left forward to probe the VI Corps position. Skirmishers made this move but fell back when they discovered the enemy's defenses were too strong. Early's forces made no full-scale assault after the initial attack had been halted. Early, Narrative of the War, pp. 445-47; O.R., 43, pt. 1, pp. 562, 599; Carter to Moore, 15 October 1889, Moore Papers, VHS; Gordon, Reminiscences, pp. 344-45, 354-63, 364-65; Jones to Daniel, 3 July 1904, Jones Collection, ADAH; Freeman, Lee's Lieutenants, 3: 606 and n.

assistance. Early, believing the right to be in much greater danger, seemed to attach little importance to Gordon's report; nevertheless, he sent some artillery to the left telling Gordon that the Federal activity on his front was "only a demonstration in order to cover a retreat." He added that Gordon "must show a fierce front to the enemy, and hold on" for the Yankees would retire once darkness came. Even late in the afternoon, Early seems to have remained convinced that the enemy planned to retire after nightfall. Gordon welcomed the artillery but its arrival forced him to weaken his already thin lines by pulling troops out of line to support the guns. Seriously troubled by the gaps along his front, Gordon rode over to Early's headquarters and voiced his concern. His appeals were to no avail, so Gordon galloped back to the Confederate left just as Sheridan's rallied forces began attacking his line.<sup>66</sup>

Outflanked and grossly outnumbered, Gordon's division fell back. Effective covering fire by the artillery enabled Gordon to make a brief stand, but it proved only temporary for his division was soon fleeing to the rear. Almost as quickly as word of the retreat on the left spread down the line, adjoining divisions began to pull back. Despite immense exertions by officers to halt their men, the withdrawal rapidly became a rout. And the rout turned into a stampede as panic swept through the ranks when Federal cavalry descended upon the disintegrating left. Attempts to rally small bodies of men and check the seemingly ceaseless pursuit "or at least delay it long enough to enable the shattered and rapidly retreating fragments [of Early's army] to escape" proved fruitless.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Jones to Father, 21 October 1864; Jones to Daniel, 3 July, 25 December 1904, Jones Collection, ADAH; Gordon, Reminiscences, pp. 345-47.

<sup>67</sup> Gordon, Reminiscences, pp. 347-48; Carter to Moore, 15 October 1889, Moore Papers, VHS; Early, Narrative of the War, pp. 448-50; Hotchkiss

While engaged in one of these delaying actions well after dark, Gordon barely escaped capture by the pressing Union cavalry. Finding his hastily drawn position outflanked and about to be overwhelmed, he realized that his only avenue of escape lay down the steep banks of Cedar Creek. "Wheeling my horse to the dismal bank, I drove my spurs into his flanks, and he plunged downward and tumbled headlong in one direction, sending me in another." Though temporarily knocked unconscious, Gordon was able to recover his senses and mount his similarly dazed horse and make good his escape in the darkness. "Lonely, thoughtful and sad," Gordon rode throughout the night, wondering how in the same day "a most brilliant victory [had been] converted into one of the most complete and ruinous routs of the entire war."<sup>68</sup>

Gordon had plenty of time to reflect upon the disaster at Cedar Creek, for Sheridan's victory there effectively ended serious campaigning in the Shenandoah Valley. The Confederates retreated all the way to New Market before the army finally halted and began to reorganize. On 21 October, Early supplied Lee with a detailed account of his army's actions two days earlier. In it, Early stated that after great success in the early morning, many of his men stopped to plunder enemy camps. Their actions compelled him to suspend his attack and try to hold what he had gained. When the rallied enemy attacked late

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Journal, 19 October 1864, Hotchkiss Papers, LC; Wharton, "Cedar Creek," Early Papers, LC; Jones to Daniel, 3 July, 25 December 1904, Jones Collection, ADAH; Jones to Father, 21 October 1864, Jones Collection, ADAH; O.R., 42, pt. 1, pp. 864-65; 43, pt. 1, pp. 562-63, 599-60; Bryan Grimes, Extracts of Letters of Major General Bryan Grimes to his Wife. Written while in Active Service in the Army of Northern Virginia, together with some personal recollections of the war written by him after its close. Compiled by Pulaski Cowper. (Raleigh, North Carolina: Edwards, Broughton and Co., 1883), pp. 77-78.

68 Gordon, Reminiscences, pp. 348-51.

in the afternoon and drove the left back, Early reported that "an insane idea of being flanked" seized his other troops and turned the withdrawal into a rout "as thorough and disgraceful as ever happened to our army." He succinctly concluded, "We had within our grasp a glorious victory, and lost it by the unaccountable propensity of our men for plunder . . . and the subsequent panic of those who had kept their places. . . ." In this official report he expressed his willingness to resign, but Early unmistakably sought to place the blame for his defeat upon the officers and men under his command.<sup>69</sup>

In the immediate aftermath of the disaster at Cedar Creek, relations between Early and Gordon—never very cordial after leaving the Richmond front—grew increasingly sour.<sup>70</sup> Several days after the battle, Gordon received word that Early had stated that even though the Georgian was a good fighter, "he had stopped in the midst of success to look after plunder." He reiterated this thought shortly thereafter in an address to his army—a "severe censure and reprimand" in which he denounced his command for plundering and bad conduct--when he referred to "'[T]he officer who pauses in the career of victory' to stop a sutter's [sic] wagon, & c." Early, having accepted a distorted version of an incident on the battlefield involving Gordon and a headquarters wagon, evidently intended his comments as a slap at his subordinate.<sup>71</sup> He also charged Gordon

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69 Hotchkiss Journal, 19-20 October 1864, Hotchkiss Papers, LC; Early, Narrative of the War, p. 450; O.R., 43, pt. 1, pp. 562-64, 1031.

70 The only sources thus far uncovered which shed any light upon the details and depth of the developing conflict between Gordon and Early are the letters of Thomas G. Jones to John W. Daniel. In his "private letter" of 3 July 1904 and a 25 December 1904 missive, Gordon's former staff officer dealt at length with the dispute. As an intimate of Gordon and an admiring friend of Early, he moved between the two while the swirl of controversy increased. At Hotchkiss' suggestion, he worked to correct the misunderstandings and resolve the differences between the generals.

71 The text of Early's 22 October 1864 "dressing-down" of his command

with inspiring an unsigned letter which appeared in the Richmond Enquirer soon after the action. Even though Gordon knew nothing of either the writing or the publication of this detailed account of Cedar Creek, he apparently endured his commander's snide insinuations in relative silence until he learned the contents of Early's official report from a friend in the War Department.<sup>72</sup> Charges that he had attacked late and that he had lost control of his division due to excessive plundering were too much for Gordon to bear.<sup>73</sup>

Incensed by these allegations, Gordon confronted Early on 29 October. Hotchkiss recorded the "meeting" as a "contention between Generals Gordon and Early about the battle of Cedar Creek & c." "A very 'fierce interview'" ensued in which both men spoke quite freely and often heatedly. Though the exact nature of the discussion is unknown, it would seem that all the "strongly converted points" between Gordon and Early grew from a similar source--the commander's

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can be found in Edward A. Pollard, The Last Year of the War (New York: Charles B. Richardson, 1866), pp. 112-14. The passage in the address referred to is "The officer who pauses in the career of victory to place a guard over a sutler's wagon, for his private use, is as bad as the soldier who halts to secure for himself the abandoned clothing or money of a flying foe; and they both soil the honor of the army, and the blood of their country for a paltry price." Gordon had stopped a black-covered wagon that resembled an ammunition wagon shortly after the initial attack early in the morning. Fearing that it was carrying munitions away from the front, he instructed the driver to halt. The wagon, however, proved to be another officer's headquarters wagon so Gordon allowed it to move on. Obviously, a grossly exaggerated account of this incident reached Early, who "for a while, believed it, quite strongly." Jones to Daniel, 3 July, 25 December 1904, Jones Collection, ADAH.

72 The detailed nature of this lengthy letter suggested that only a participant in Gordon's flank attack could have penned it. In fact, Captain Frank Muskoe, a II Corps signal officer, had written it as a private letter to a friend who signed it with a non de plume and published it. Gordon had no knowledge of the letter until Early's charges reached him. Jones to Daniel, 3 July, 25 December 1904, Jones Collection, ADAH.

73 Jones to Daniel, 3 July, 25 December 1904, Jones Collection, ADAH; Early, Narrative of the War, p. 451; Carter to Daniel, 19 November 1894, Daniel MSS, Duke.

attempt to pin the defeat on everyone but himself. His insistence that he had wanted to press the attack but had been prevented from doing so by the plundering of his men forced Gordon to protest and swept the Georgian into the center of the controversy. Some unauthorized looting unquestionably took place, however, substantial evidence exists that the stragglers and plunderers "were not sufficient enough to prevent a vigorous and victorious pursuit."<sup>74</sup>

In all probability, Early, at least until the early afternoon, sincerely believed that his morning success had so shattered the two Union corps that Sheridan's entire army would be forced to retreat. That belief does not in any way excuse his failure to press onward and conduct an energetic pursuit if at all possible. Even though his men were tired from their night march to the field and their dawn assault, Early should have either pushed the attack home or broken off contact. Once he suspended the attack, the Virginian committed an almost equally grievous error by maintaining his thinly stretched line in the open country around Middleton rather than retiring to a more defensible position. He compounded this mistake in the afternoon by refusing to take adequate steps to meet the gathering storm on his left.

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74 Hotchkiss Journal, 29 October 1864, Hotchkiss Papers, LC; Jones to Daniel, 3 July, 25 December 1904, Jones Collection, ADAH; Carter to Daniel, 19 November 1894, Daniel MSS, Duke; Gordon, Reminiscences, pp. 352-72.

It is indeed unfortunate that Gordon's official report of the Battle of Cedar Creek has never surfaced. Gordon wrote to Lee shortly after the war and stated that he had been unable to find his account of the battle, but would continue to search. It is possible that he later located the report and sent it to his former commander because Gordon expressed surprise at its omission from the published O.R. Discovering the "unexpected and unexplained absence" of his report, he endeavored to vindicate the men of Early's army in Reminiscences. Believing that Early's charges of bad conduct and plundering "so directly, so vitally concerns the reputation, the honor, the character of Southern soldiers . . . as to demand the most exhaustive examination," Gordon devoted much of his discussion of the battle to disproving Early's criticisms. Gordon to Lee, 6 February 1868, Lee Headquarters Papers, VHS; Gordon, Reminiscences, pp. 332-33, 354-56, 360, 363-72.

Even Early realized his critical mistake, for he supplies the most incriminating piece of evidence to that effect. His instructions to Hotchkiss, who departed for Richmond shortly after the battle to report on affairs in the Valley, showed an almost child-like fear of fatherly rebuke. He told the engineer "not to tell Lee that we ought to have advanced in the morning at Middletown, for, said he, we ought to have done so." Early also provided the most succinct evaluation of the battle when he stated, "'The Yankees got whipped and we got scared.'" Less cryptic, but equally illuminating are the comments of II Corps artilleryman, Thomas Carter. Though he criticized Early for allowing Sheridan time to recover and assume the offensive, he wrote, "It is true, as I believe, the Fickle Goddess proffered him [Early] as a miracle almost, an opportunity at Cedar Creek such as she gives only to one man in millions, and but once in a life to the one so favored; it was so dazzling as to blind, and he passed it by." In light of these and numerous other statements plus the human penchant for covering up one's mistakes, Early's aggressively defensive behavior after Cedar Creek can best be described as an effort to justify his decision to halt by shifting the onus for defeat elsewhere.<sup>75</sup>

Few, if any, of the major points of controversy between the Gordon and Early were adequately resolved at the time. Gordon considered asking for a court of inquiry to clear both himself and his men, but dismissed the thought because of the harmful effect such open and bitter dissension between generals would have on the already sagging Confederate morale. Similarly, he rejected the option of seeking a transfer to another department on account of his attachment to the men under his command. Despite his severe disillusionment

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<sup>75</sup> Hotchkiss Journal, 23 October, 19 October 1864, Hotchkiss Papers, LC; Carter to Moore, 15 October 1889, Moore Papers, VHS.

with Early, Gordon resigned himself to continued service under the irascible Virginian; nevertheless, Early's conduct at Cedar Creek and in the days that followed the battle unquestionably confirmed the worst of Gordon's suspicions about his commander.<sup>76</sup>

Seven more weeks of minor skirmishing with Federal cavalry in the Valley came to an end for Gordon early in December when he received orders to return to the Army of Northern Virginia. On 8 December, Gordon's and Pegram's divisions departed from Waynesboro, moving by train to Richmond and then on to Petersburg. Less than one week later, Rodes' old division, now under Brigadier General Bryan Grimes, also left the Valley and joined Gordon on the Petersburg front. With Early remaining in the Shenandoah under orders from Lee, Gordon assumed command of these three divisions. Though serving as commander of the II Corps, Gordon did not receive promotion to lieutenant general because Early might return to Lee's army and resume his old position; nonetheless, Gordon shouldered the responsibilities and exercised the authority of a corps commander--a position he held until the war's end.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> Although he remained with Early only a little over a month, Gordon appears to have served his commander faithfully. Indeed, Jones recalled that even with their immense differences, he "never heard him [Gordon] talk slightly or insultingly of Early, even in the last days." He could not remember the details, but Jones believed that Gordon and Early later reconciled and "resumed their former relations, without regard to their different views about the battle." In light of their occasional post-war correspondence--though by no means overly friendly--it would seem that both were convinced "that there were no differences between them which effected the honor of either." Jones to Daniel, 3 July, 25 December 1904, Jones Collection, ADAH.

<sup>77</sup> Gordon, Reminiscences, pp. 373-74; Hotchkiss Journal, 8-9, 14 December 1864, Hotchkiss Papers, LC; Grimes, Letters to his Wife, pp. 92-93; Humphreys, Virginia Campaigns, p. 308; Douglas, I Rode with Stonewall, p. 321; O.R., 43, pt. 1, pp. 582-87; pt. 2, pp. 765, 772, 780, 911, 938; 42, pt. 3, pp. 1272, 1285, 1362-65; 46, pt. 2, p. 1271.

Gordon, by virtue of his lengthy command of the II Corps, has frequently been referred to as a lieutenant general, but it is extremely doubtful that he was ever officially elevated to that rank. His signature as a major general at Appomattox provides the most convincing evidence to that effect. After the

Upon reaching Petersburg, Gordon moved to the extreme right of Lee's army and occupied a position near Burgess' Mill along Hatcher's Run. There his corps suffered through the final winter of the war while struggling to protect the Southside Railroad. As Grant's intention to seize this vital supply and communication line became increasingly evident, Lee urged the new II Corps commander to "be more than usually vigilant in guarding our right flank." Gordon succeeded in maintaining the security of the railroad, but the physical condition of the army continued to grow more desperate each day. Food supplies, generally of poor quality anyway, were frequently cut until many Confederate soldiers were forced to subsist on less than half rations. With hunger gnawing at the strength of his men and the cold of winter sapping their spirit, Gordon noted the alarming increase in the number of desertions, which by the end of February, 1865, had reduced the strength of his II Corps to barely 8,000 officers and men. He felt that the Confederate Congress dealt a particularly devastating blow to army morale during that month by refusing to pass a measure to arm slaves. Having found that his command decidedly favored the voluntary enlistment of blacks as soldiers, Gordon reported that such an act

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war, Gordon often spoke of a conference with Secretary of War John C. Breckinridge in early 1865 in which Gordon's former commander notified him that he had been promoted. Also, Alexander H. Stephens told Gordon that he had seen the Georgian's commission as lieutenant general on Jefferson Davis' desk. If such a recommendation did in fact reach the President, he probably never acted upon it during the final confusing days of the Confederacy. Despite this oversight, Gordon served as a lieutenant general in every sense of the position. Gordon to Charles Colcock Jones, 28 July 1875, Georgia Portfolio II, Duke University, Durham, North Carolina; Gordon to Charles Edgeworth Jones, 26 July 1894, Charles Edgeworth Jones Collection, Duke University, Durham, North Carolina (hereafter cited as C. E. Jones Collection, Duke); newspaper clipping, unbound scrapbook, C. E. Jones Collection, Duke; Gordon to M. J. Wright, 13 August 1892, Marcus Joseph Wright Papers, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, North Carolina; Gordon's Service File, NA; Caroline Lewis Gordon, "De Gin'ral an' Miss Fanny," Gordon Family Collection, UGA; Atlanta Constitution, 14 January 1904.

would greatly bolster the men's spirits, plus provide the army with numerous badly needed reinforcements. He also wrote that defeat of the bill produced despondency within the ranks, further increasing the swell of desertions. Despite this growing spectre of doom, Gordon was not yet ready to admit defeat.<sup>78</sup>

With Longstreet north of the James and A. P. Hill frequently indisposed, Gordon came to occupy "a special place" in dealings with his commander during the depressing winter months. In an army where military training was vital not only to survival but to promotion as well, Gordon had risen rapidly. In spite of his lack of formal schooling in the science of war, he had displayed a boldness, vigilance, aggressiveness, and sound military sense that not only captured the public's attention, but deeply impressed the army's commander. Thus by virtue of "his temperament and propinquity to Lee," and, most importantly, his steady growth as a soldier, "Gordon became," in the opinion of the Virginian's biographer, "Lee's principal confidant—as far as any man ever enjoyed that status." As a result, when the military outlook grew exceedingly bleak in the

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<sup>78</sup> O.R., 46, pt. 2, p. 134, 1270-71; pt. 1, pp. 388-89; 51, pt. 2, p. 1063; Pollard, Last Year, pp. 175-77; Gordon, Reminiscences, pp. 376-85; R. E. Lee to Gordon, 27 December 1864, 21 January 1865, Gordon Family Collection, UGA; Freeman, R. E. Lee, 4: 529-45; Gordon to "Major," 26 February 1865, Gordon Family Collection, UGA; Henry W. Thomas, History of the Doles-Cook Brigade (Atlanta: Franklin Printing and Publishing Co., 1903), p. 36; Freeman, Lee's Lieutenants, 3: 619-24; John B. Gordon, "Last Days of the Confederacy," Rossiter Johnson, ed., Campfire and Battlefield (New York: Fairfax Press, 1978), p. 485. Gordon dictated this article to Henry W. Grady who prepared and published it originally in the Philadelphia Times about 1875. A portion of this account was reprinted in the Atlanta Constitution on 10 April 1885. The article is quite similar to that portion of the Reminiscences dealing with the last month of the war and also relates some of the incidents found in Gordon's famous lecture of the same title. To avoid confusion, this article will be referred to as "Confederacy's Last Days" and the lecture will be cited as "Last Days of the Confederacy."

early days of March, Lee turned to his youngest corps commander.<sup>79</sup>

Summoned to Lee's headquarters very late on the night of 3 March, Gordon found his troubled leader all alone, gazing pensively into the fireplace and wearing "a look of painful depression on his face." Gordon obviously knew that the army was in "desperate straits," but he did not fully realize how critical the situation had become until struck by "the gravity of the commander's bearing." After Gordon had examined a multitude of reports which painted a distressing picture of the extreme depravation pervading much of the army, Lee asked him for a candid opinion of what "was best to do--or what duty to the army and our people required" of them. Cognizant of Grant's ability to bring some 280,000 well-supplied troops to bear upon Lee and Johnston's 65,000 weakened Confederates, Gordon respectfully stated that he saw only three options and he listed them in the order he thought they should be tried--first, negotiate with the enemy and secure the best terms possible; second, abandon the army's present lines, march rapidly to Johnston's command in North Carolina and attack Sherman before he could unite with Grant; and third, strike Grant at once. Lee, in complete agreement with his subordinate's assessment, devoted the remainder of the night to what Gordon remembered as a long "intensely absorbing, and in many ways harrowing" discussion in which they examined each of the alternatives in detail. Lee did not state explicitly which course he preferred, but Gordon came away from the conference with the impression that the paternal Virginian "thought immediate steps should be taken to secure peace." Events during the following days, however, clearly demonstrated the improbability of obtaining a satisfactory negotiated peace as well as the unwillingness of Confederate officials to evacuate Richmond and Petersburg until absolutely

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79 Freeman, Lee's Lieutenants, 3: 628.

necessary. Consequently, Lee decided he must attack; and to that end, he ordered Gordon to study the enemy lines around Petersburg.<sup>80</sup>

The fortifications and obstructions all along the Union front were "as perfect as human ingenuity and labor could devise," but Gordon, after more than a week of extensive investigation, concluded that Fort Stedman offered "the most inviting point for attack." Built upon Hare's Hill, the fort lay less than two hundred yards from the opposing Confederate lines along Colquitt's Salient—"so close that you could almost see the whites of the Yankees' eyes." Given the proximity of Fort Stedman to his trenches and the belief that his men could silently disable Federal pickets before they could sound an alarm, Gordon felt that a surprise night or pre-dawn attack on the fort could succeed. After the enemies pickets had been silenced, fifty axemen would rush forward and rapidly chop a number of passageways through the formidable Federal abatis and chevaux de frise protecting the front lines. Then aided by 300 men carrying empty muskets with fixed bayonets, these axemen would push on into the fort, overwhelm its unprepared defenders and quickly expand into the trenches to the right and to the left.<sup>81</sup>

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80 Gordon, Reminiscences, pp. 385-97; Gordon, "Confederacy's Last Days," pp. 485-87; Gordon to General Lewis, 21 August 1886, William Gaston Lewis Papers, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, North Carolina (hereafter cited as Lewis Papers, UNC).

81 Gordon to General Lewis, 21 August 1886, Lewis Papers, UNC; Thomas, Doles-Cook Brigade, pp. 38-39; Gordon, Reminiscences, pp. 397-403; O.R., 46, pt. 1, pp. 173, 316; Thomas G. Jones, "Last Days of the Army of Northern Virginia," Southern Historical Society Papers 21 (1893): 69; John F. Hartranft, "The Recapture of Fort Stedman," Robert Underwood Johnson and Clarence Clough Buel, eds., Battles and Leaders of the Civil War, 4 vols. (New York: Thomas Yoseloff, Inc., 1956), 4: 584; James A. Walker, "Gordon's Assault on Fort Stedman," Southern Historical Society Papers 31 (1903): pp. 19-23; Douglas, I Rode with Stonewall, p. 328; Grimes, Letters to his Wife, p. 98; Jefferson Davis, The Rise and Fall of the Confederate Government, 2 vols. (New York: D. Appleton and Co., 1881), 2: 650-51. Gordon's 16 October 1880 letter to the former president of the Confederacy detailing the assault on Fort Stedman is published in Davis, Confederate Government, 2: 650-54.

But for Gordon, the "purpose of the movement was not simply the capture of Fort Stedman and the breastworks flanking it," rather, he planned for a total breakthrough. In order to reach Grant's rear and turn on his flanks, Gordon specially selected three columns of one hundred men each to follow upon the heels of the leading elements of the assault force. Once Stedman fell, these sharpshooters, posing as the Federal defenders of the fort, would "flee" toward the rear and, in the darkness, pass through the line of supporting infantry by invoking the names of Union officers known to be serving on that front. In this manner, the three columns could advance approximately one mile into the rear, move behind the line of hills there, seize the three forts that Gordon believed commanded the main line of defense, and turn their guns upon the Federal rear. To employ this captured artillery most efficiently, Gordon arranged for Confederate artillerymen to accompany the advance elements of the attack. As the main body of infantry poured into the breach and moved forward as well as against both exposed flanks, Confederate cavalry would proceed against the Union rear, seriously disrupting communications and destroying supplies. If all went as planned, the Federal military railroad link to the west would be severed. And with his army thus divided, Grant would be forced to abandon, or at least curtail, a substantial portion of his lines--either of which actions might allow Lee the opportunity to slip away and unite with Johnston.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> Davis, Confederate Government, 2: 652-53; Walker, "Gordon's Assault," pp. 23, 30; Jones, "Last Days," pp. 69-70; Gordon, Reminiscences, pp. 403-05; Gordon to General Lewis, 21 August 1886, Lewis Papers, UNC; Robert M. Stribling, Gettysburg Campaign and Campaigns of 1864 and 1865 in Virginia (Petersburg, Virginia: Franklin Press Co., 1905), p. 298; Thomas, Doles-Cook Brigade, p. 38; Douglas Southall Freeman and Grady McWhiney, eds., Lee's Dispatches (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1957), pp. 342-43; Gordon's Report, 11 April 1865, Lee Headquarters Papers, VHS.

A number of very helpful but relatively unused studies of Civil War battles can be found at the headquarters of the various national military battlefield parks. At the Petersburg National Battlefield, two such studies of

Gordon began moving his corps into the trenches surrounding Petersburg during the middle of March. From deserters and prisoners, he soon learned the names of Federal commanders on his front and, with Lee's assistance, secured guides who were familiar with the terrain around Fort Stedman to lead his three storming columns. Despite proceeding slowly and cautiously in order to insure the utmost secrecy, Gordon had completed most of his preparations by 23 March when he met with Lee for the last time prior to the assault. Both men fully appreciated the desperateness of the proposed attack, but as the plan "seemed to give more promise of good results than any other hitherto suggested," the commanding general placed nearly one-half of his army at Gordon's disposal.<sup>83</sup>

Most of the following night was spent moving and concentrating troops in the rear of Colquitt's Salient, plus quietly removing the Confederate obstructions fronting their lines. To minimize confusion during the first stages of the attack, Gordon had strips of white cloth distributed among all of the leading elements. With these identifying markers tied across their chests, the Confederates could differentiate between friend and foe in the darkness. And as the hour of attack approached, Gordon visited with his shock troops. He told them that if they succeeded in capturing the three rear forts, he would see that each man received a thirty-day furlough as well as a silver medal. "Standing there in the night, with

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action on 25 March 1865 are available. William H. Hodgkins, The Battle of Fort Stedman (Boston: privately printed, 1889) is a credible account—including a valuable map—by an officer on the staff of the Union commander in charge of the Fort Stedman front. [Edward] Steere, A Study of the Battle of Fort Stedman, March 25, 1865, prepared under the direction of the Petersburg National Military Park (n.p., 1933) is also informative in piecing together the details of Gordon's assault.

<sup>83</sup> Gordon's 11 April 1865 Report, Lee Headquarters Papers, VHS; Gordon to General Lewis, 21 August 1886, Lewis Papers, UNC; Hotchkiss Journal, 21 March 1865, Hotchkiss Papers, LC; Gordon, Reminiscences, pp. 405-06; Davis, Confederate Government, 2: 651-52.

the awful task and eternity staring us in the face," one of the participants remembered well Gordon's "stirring and impressive speech."<sup>84</sup>

At 4:00 a.m. on 25 March, all was in readiness. Gordon, standing atop his breastworks, was supervising the removal of some scattered debris in his front when a Union picket, alerted by the activity, called out, "What are you doing over there, Johnny? What is that noise? Answer quick or I'll shoot." As visions of disaster—"an alarm, picket firing, an awakened enemy, a repulsed charge"—flashed through Gordon's mind, a quick-witted private by his side answered, "Never mind, Yank. Lie down and go to sleep. We are just gathering a little corn. You know rations are mighty short over here." The Federal, evidently satisfied, replied, "All right, Johnny; go ahead and get your corn. I'll not shoot at you while you are drawing your rations." Moments later when the last troublesome obstacles had been cleared away, Gordon ordered this same soldier to fire his rifle as a signal for the attack to commence. The conscience-struck private hesitated though. Unwilling to abuse the magnanimity of his generous counterpart who would have allowed him to search for food on the ground between the opposing lines, the Confederate called out, "Hello Yank! Wake up; we are going to shell the woods. Look out; we are coming." With that, he fired a single shot and the assault began.<sup>85</sup>

The attack in its initial stages could scarcely have proceeded more smoothly. Gordon's pickets quickly overwhelmed the Union sentinels, thereby

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<sup>84</sup> Davis, Confederate Government, 2: 653; Gordon's 11 April 1865 Report, Lee Headquarters Papers VHS; Hotchkiss to Gordon, 28 April 1893, Hotchkiss Papers, LC; Gordon, Reminiscences, pp. 406-07; Thomas, Doles-Cook Brigade, pp. 39-41; Captain J. P. Carson, "Fort Steadman's Fall," Confederate Veteran, 22 (1904): 461; Walker, "Gordon's Assault," pp. 24-25.

<sup>85</sup> Walker, "Gordon's Assault," p. 24; Gordon, Reminiscences, pp. 407-410; Gordon, "Confederacy's Last Days," pp. 488-89.

allowing his axemen to cut their way through the menacing obstructions in front of Fort Stedman almost without opposition.<sup>86</sup> In the pre-dawn darkness, surprise was complete--the fort fell and four to five hundred feet of trenches on either side were seized. Gordon's troops sudden dash also captured nine pieces of artillery and mortars plus more than 500 prisoners. But problems began to develop as dawn approached. Although the three columns of "fleeing Confederates" had successfully penetrated the ranks of the Federal infantry supports and reached the rear, they were unable to locate let alone capture the three key forts. As a result, when daylight arrived and the surrounding Federals realized the limited extent of the breach in their lines, they were able to contain the attack and bring reinforcements to bear upon the Confederates. Murderous artillery fire and concentrated small arms fire broke several attempts by Gordon's men to seize adjoining forts and expand their holdings. By 7:30 a.m., heavy Federal reinforcements had counterattacked and successfully cordoned off a small area around Fort Stedman. With all available Federal batteries pouring a "consuming fire on both flanks and front," Gordon saw the futility of continued occupation of his toehold in Union lines. He notified Lee of the situation and soon received orders to suspend the attack, whereupon he withdrew his men about 8:00 a.m. Most of Gordon's casualties occurred during the evacuation of Fort Stedman and the return across no-man's land. A vicious Union crossfire

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86 A number of Federal reports complained that the Confederates used an additional ruse to overwhelm their pickets. By taking advantage of a recent order encouraging Confederate deserters to bring their weapons with them, whole squads of pretended deserters penetrated Union lines. Then when Gordon's storming columns followed closely, the prisoners turned and overpowered their captors. Confederate accounts of the battle, however, make no mention of employing such a tactic. *O.R.*, 46, pt. 1, pp. 317, 320; Grant, *Personal Memoirs*, 2: 432; George L. Kilmer, "Gordon's Attack at Fort Stedman," Robert Underwood Johnson and Clarence Clough Buel, eds., *Battles and Leaders of the Civil War*, 4 vols. (New York: Thomas Yoseloff, Inc., 1956), 4: 580.

which swept the open ground between lines proved so deadly that many of Gordon's men surrendered rather than face the almost certain death "running the gauntlet" back to the Confederate trenches. Gordon's effort to break Grant's hold upon Petersburg had failed.<sup>87</sup>

Union forces along other portions of the long Confederate line launched attacks that afternoon, but Gordon's immediate front remained relatively quiet. With a lull prevailing, Gordon requested and obtained a flag of truce to remove his dead and wounded who had fallen in or near the enemy works. Confederate losses in the assault upon Fort Stedman approached 3,500 men, including 1,900 prisoners. Gordon himself sustained a flesh wound in the leg while recrossing the open area between the opposing lines. He must have been bitterly disappointed by the failure of his attack, especially in light of its initial brilliant success. In his mind, the failure to occupy the three forts in the rear prevented him from executing a breakthrough and thus severely limited the assault's potential.<sup>88</sup>

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87 Kilmer, "Gordon's Attack on Stedman," pp. 580-83; Gordon, Reminiscences, pp. 410-12; Gordon to Lewis, 21 August 1886, Lewis Papers, UNC; Stribling, Gettysburg and 1864-65 Virginia Campaigns, pp. 298-99; Walker, "Gordon's Assault," pp. 25-29; Jones, "Last Days," pp. 70-73; Gordon's 11 April 1865 Report, Lee Headquarters Papers, VHS; Thomas, Doles-Cook Brigade, pp. 36, 40-42; Carson, "Fort Steadman's Fall," pp. 461-62; R. D. Funkhouser, "Fort Steadman—'So Near and Yet So Far,'" Confederate Veteran 19 (1911): 217-18; Gordon, "Confederacy's Last Days," pp. 489-91; Hartranft, "Recapture of Fort Stedman," pp. 585-89; O.R., 46, pt. 1, pp. 173, 316-19, 320-21, 322-24, 331-32, 382-83, 391; pt. 3, pp. 109-110; Freeman and McWhiney, Lee's Dispatches, pp. 344-47; Humphreys, Virginia Campaigns, pp. 317-21; Davis, Confederate Government, 2: 653-54.

88 Gordon was correct in believing that his inability to drive deep into the enemy rear and to carry the forts commanding the Federal main line doomed his assault. Although doubts concerning the actual existence of these forts have occasionally been raised, it appears quite certain that two of the redoubts were not only where Gordon thought they were, but that they served as active Union artillery batteries as well. (In R. E. Lee in 1935, D. S. Freeman stated that the forts did not exist, but additional research for Lee's Lieutenants convinced him of the veracity of Gordon's observation.) And though unoccupied at the outset of the attack, the third fort (a former Confederate battery in the 1864 "Dimmock Line") was soon manned and used effectively by Federal artillery in repulsing

Although Gordon placed a large portion of the blame for his defeat upon his guides' inability to locate the forts and the non-arrival of supporting troops, it is doubtful that this desperate attack could have yielded significant results. The Confederates were simply too weak and the Federals too strong.<sup>89</sup>

It is indeed difficult to assess with any certainty Gordon's responsibility for the defeat. Without question, his failure to appreciate both the difficulties in locating the forts in the darkness and the destructive power of artillery fire from the carefully engineered Federal works contributed substantially to his repulse. And even though Gordon's unfamiliarity with the Petersburg front (for he had not returned from the Valley until December and then he had occupied a position far to the west) helps explain his errors, it does not excuse them. Nevertheless, one must be careful in criticizing Gordon too harshly for the Battle of Fort Stedman. By March of 1865, the Army of Northern Virginia was a

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Gordon's attack. O. F. Northington, Jr. (Superintendent of Petersburg National Military Park) to D. S. Freeman, 4 December 1943, Petersburg National Battlefield Headquarters, Petersburg, Virginia; Freeman, R. E. Lee, 4: 18; Freeman, Lee's Lieutenants, 3: 653.

89 Freeman, Lee's Lieutenants, 3: 650-51; O.R., 46, pt. 1, pp. 51, 318, 321; pt. 3, pp. 152, 153, 156, 157; Brevet Colonel J. L. Van Buren to Gordon, 25 March 1865, Gordon Family Collection, UGA; Stribling, Gettysburg and 1864-65 Virginia Campaigns, pp. 304-05; Gordon to General Lewis, 21 August 1886, Lewis Papers, UNC; W. Gordon McCabe, "Defence of Petersburg," Southern Historical Society Papers 2 (July-December 1876): 300; Jones, "Last Days," pp. 73-74; Douglas, I Rode with Stonewall, p. 329; Gordon, Reminiscences, pp. 411-13.

In his report to General Lee two days after the surrender of the Army of Northern Virginia, Gordon stated the "effort failed for want of proper guides and a knowledge of the ground upon which the officers selected for this purpose." Years later, he also maintained that the non-arrival of reinforcements from Longstreet's corps prevented him from carrying out his plan. The failure of these troops to arrive and participate in the assault was probably of little consequence because in addition to knowing the evening before that Longstreet's men would probably not reach him in time, Gordon, on the morning of the attack, was unable to use all the troops that were then at his disposal. Simply put, he never expanded the breach of the Federal front sufficiently to allow for full deployment of the forces at hand. Gordon's 11 April 1865 Report, Lee Headquarters Papers, VHS; Davis, Confederate Government, 2: 653-54; Gordon, Reminiscences, pp. 411-13.

mere shadow of its former self as physical depravation and attrition had combined to rob the army of efficiency at all levels of command. Douglas Southall Freeman observed, "[P]erhaps, in the misery of a dying cause, the usual care of competent soldier's [Gordon and others] weakened," and thus Gordon's mistakes may well have been shared by all. And as Gordon later remarked, despite the hazardous nature of the assault, "it seemed necessary to do more than sit quietly waiting for General Grant's to move upon our right, while each day was diminshing our strength by disease and death." Gordon's own description of the battle as "the expiring struggle of the Confederate giant, whose strength was nearly exhausted and whose limbs were heavily shackled by the most onerous conditions" is quite possibly the best assessment of his assault on 25 March.<sup>90</sup>

In the days following the defeat at Fort Stedman, Gordon's physical and mental powers were supremely tested as the ever-worsening situation of the Army of Northern Virginia afforded him little opportunity to rest. While intensifying its pressure on Confederate front lines, the Federal army continued to push westward toward the Southside Railroad. This increasing threat to Lee's right compelled Gordon to extend his already precariously thin line two miles further as adjoining troops slipped westward. The necessity of occupying a more-than-six mile front with less than 5,500 men reduced the II Corps to little more than a long line of skirmishers. Forced to keep more than one-half of his entire command constantly on duty, Gordon painfully noted the alarming decrease in efficiency of both officers and men as physical exhaustion set in.<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> Davis, Confederate Government, 2: 654; Gordon, Reminiscences, p. 412; Freeman, Lee's Lieutenants, 3: 652-54.

<sup>91</sup> Gordon, Reminiscences, pp. 415-17; Gordon's 11 April 1865 Report, Lee Headquarters Papers, VHS.

On 1 April Union cavalry and infantry overwhelmed Confederate forces at Five Forks, thereby turning Lee's right flank and rendering the Petersburg lines untenable. Grant, realizing that this success would compel Lee to retreat, launched numerous heavy attacks against the Richmond-Petersburg line the following day. The II Corps front, stretching from the Appomattox River to Fort Gregg, was broken at several points, but Gordon's skillful counterattacks—made exclusively with his troops for there were no reserves whatsoever—had restored most of his line when he received a fateful message from Lee. Petersburg must be abandoned! Gordon's orders to hold his position at all costs until nightfall so that all other commands might be withdrawn prevented the II Corps from slipping away from its lines until well into the night of 2-3 April. After crossing the Appomattox and firing the bridges, Gordon's weary men set out on a circuitous march that they hoped would lead them to Joe Johnston in North Carolina. Evacuation from Petersburg proved particularly distressing for Gordon as he was forced to leave his wife behind. Having given birth to their third son the day before and being in no condition to travel, Fanny had to remain in the city and face the uncertainty of occupation by Union forces while her husband fled the beleaguered city.<sup>92</sup>

For the next four days, Gordon's command served as the rearguard of the retreating army. Though hunger and exhaustion worked their hardships upon Lee's veterans, the first three days passed with relatively little interference by

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<sup>92</sup> Gordon's 11 April 1865 Report, Lee Headquarters Papers, VHS; J. L. Chamberlain, "The Last Salute of the Army of Northern Virginia," Southern Historical Society Papers 32 (1904): 356; Humphreys, Virginia Campaigns, pp. 366-72; O.R., 46, pt. 1, pp. 54-55, 1061-63, 1263-65; pt. 3, pp. 1378, 1379; Jones, "Last Days," pp. 74-77; Gordon, Reminiscences, pp. 417-23, 454-55; Douglas, I Rode with Stonewall, pp. 330-31; Gordon, "Confederacy's Last Days," pp. 491-92; John Brown Gordon, "Last Days of the Confederacy," Thomas B. Reed, ed., Modern Eloquence, 15 vols. (Philadelphia: John D. Morris and Co., 1900-03), 5: 487-88.

the enemy;<sup>93</sup> however, 6 April witnessed the devastating effectiveness of vigorous pursuit by a numerically superior foe. For nearly the entire length of its fourteen-mile march from Amelia Springs to Sayler's Creek, the II Corps fought to hold the closely pursuing Federal infantry at bay. Skillfully using his artillery and the surrounding terrain, Gordon continually formed this three divisions in successive lines and repeatedly withdrew the rearmost command through the lines of the other two in an effort to safeguard the army's wagon trains. Gordon's men trudged "on and on, hour after hour, from hilltop to hilltop, . . . alternately forming, fighting, and retreating, making one almost continuous battle." While Gordon had his hands full fighting to protect the army's rear, Ewell—who commanded the infantry unit in front of the wagons guarded by the II Corps—diverted the army's wagon train from the main route and on to a more secure northerly road. For some unexplained reason, he failed to notify Gordon of the change, so that when the rearguard came to the fork in the road, it continued to follow the wagons as it had done the entire day. This oversight

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93 On 5 April, one of Gordon's scouts recognized two young men dressed in Confederate cavalry uniforms as Union scouts. A thorough search of these "Jessie scouts" uncovered an important message from Grant to Major General E. C. Ord—one which detailed marching orders for the following days and clearly showed Federal infantry already blocked Lee's chosen path of retreat—hidden in the lining of one of the men's boots. Gordon told his captives that he had no choice but to adhere to the rules of war and have them shot as spies the next morning. Despite this pronouncement, Gordon had no intention of executing them with the end of the war in sight. So when he informed the commanding general of the captured dispatch, Gordon also included a recommendation that the spies' lives be spared. Lee assented and the Yankees remained with the II Corps until after the surrender. Gordon, *Reminiscences*, pp. 424-28; Jones, "Last Days," pp. 97-98; Gordon, "Confederacy's Last Days," p. 493; T. M. R. Talcott, "From Petersburg to Appomattox," *Southern Historical Society Papers* 32 (1904): 69.

Lee's response to Gordon concerning the intercepted Union orders is located in *O.R.* 46, pt. 3, p. 1387. Gordon believed that the original copy of this penciled order, dated 6 April, 4:00 a.m., had been lost when his home was destroyed in 1899, but somehow it survived and can be found in the Gordon Family Collection, UGA.

uncovered Ewell's rear and led to well-chronicled debacle at Sayler's Creek.<sup>94</sup>

At the same time as Ewell and adjoining commands were being isolated and overwhelmed, Union forces continued to strike at Gordon's column as it neared another crossing of the stream. The maddeningly slow movement of the wagons and increased pressure by the pursuing enemy forced Gordon "to make a determined stand or abandon the train." Despite his men's efforts "to push the ponderous wagon-trains through the bog, out of which the starved teams were unable to drag them," many of the heaviest wagons had to be left for Gordon's troops were fighting for their very lives. Both flanks were in danger of being turned and artillery ammunition was nearly exhausted when Gordon reported his critical situation to Lee. He had fought all day, lost heavily and still was pressed closely. "I fear that a portion of the train will be lost as my force is quite reduced and insufficient for its protection. So far I have been able to protect them but without assistance can scarcely hope to do so much longer." There would be no assistance for the men of the II Corps however. Gordon managed to repulse two major attacks before intense pressure on three sides finally broke his line around sundown and sent his men fleeing in confusion.<sup>95</sup>

The disasters of 6 April almost completely shattered what remained of

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94 Gordon, Reminiscences, pp. 423-24; Jones, "Last Days," p. 81; Humphreys, Virginia Campaigns, pp. 379-81; O.R., 46, pt. 1, pp. 651-52, 1107-08, 1265-66, 1283-84, 1289-90, 1294-95, 1296-98, 1302; pt. 3, p. 600; Gordon's 11 April 1865 Report, Lee Headquarters Papers, VHS. Christopher M. Calkins, Thirty-Six Hours Before Appomattox, April 6 and 7, 1865 (n.p., 1980) is a thoroughly documented account of the Battle[s] of Sayler's Creek and of the actions of the following day.

95 O.R., 46, pt. 1, pp. 673-74, 681-82, 712, 779-80, 1266; pt. 3, p. 600; Humphreys, Virginia Campaigns, p. 381; Jones, "Last Days," pp. 81-82; Thomas, Doles-Cook Brigade, pp. 43-44; Grimes, Letters to his Wife, pp. 113-14; Gordon, Reminiscences, pp. 429-30; Gordon to R. E. Lee, 6 April 1865, Lee Headquarters Papers, VHS; Carlton McCarthy, Detailed Minutiae of Soldier Life in the Army of Northern Virginia, 1861-1865 (Richmond: B. F. Johnson Publishing Co., 1882), pp. 131-42; Gordon's 11 April 1865 Report, Lee Headquarters Papers, VHS.

the old command structure of the Army of Northern Virginia. The army had been reduced to two skeleton corps under Gordon and Longstreet and probably numbered less than 12,000 reliable muskets. Gordon rallied his survivors in the darkness following the Battle of Sayler's Creek and rejoined the main body of infantry. In the hasty reorganization that night and the following day, the scattered remnants of the commands of Anderson, Pickett, Bushrod Johnson, and Wise were assigned to Gordon's decimated corps. On 7 April for the first time since leaving Petersburg, Gordon relinquished rearguard responsibilities, but found little rest as the march continued and action forced frequent deployment. Extraordinarily fine marching and little Federal interference the following day enabled Gordon to reach the village of Appomattox Court House before coming to a halt.<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> Gordon's 11 April 1865 Report, Lee Headquarters Papers, VHS; O.R., 46, pt. 1, pp. 1266, 1290-91, 1292; Freeman, R. E. Lee, 4: 93; Grimes, Letters to his Wife, pp. 116-17; Gordon to C. C. Jones, 28 July 1875, Georgia Portfolio II, Duke University, Durham, North Carolina.

Confusion surrounds the circumstances which prompted Brigadier General William N. Pendleton's meeting with Lee on the afternoon of 8 April in which he broached the possibility of surrender. Pendleton contends that Gordon conferred with a number of other officers on 7 April and concluded that the army's situation was hopeless, thus rendering further bloodshed senseless. According to the artillerymen, Gordon met with him shortly thereafter and suggested that he present these views to Longstreet and then to the commanding general in order to distribute the burden of decision for surrender. Gordon, on the other hand, makes little mention of the affair, but states clearly that he did not attend the first conference with the other general officers. Although it is impossible to determine whether Gordon was in fact part of the initial council, it is not necessarily a question of the veracity of participants, as some have maintained. Freeman attempted to reconcile the two conflicting statements when he wrote, "At an early stage of the informal exchanges, John B. Gordon, who had not shared the first conversation, suggested to Pendleton that Longstreet be informed before the matter was presented to Lee." Susan P. Lee, Memoirs of William Nelson Pendleton (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott Co., 1893), pp. 401-02; 26 March 1870 memo of conversation with General Pendleton about surrender of Appomattox, Richard Launcelot Maury Papers, Duke University, Durham, North Carolina; Gordon, Reminiscences, pp. 433-34; James Longstreet, From Manassas to Appomattox (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott, Co., 1896), pp. 620-21; Long, Memoirs of Robert E. Lee, pp. 416-17; Morris Schaff, The Sunset of the Confederacy (Boston: John W. Luce & Co., 1912), pp. 140-44; Freeman, Lee's Lieutenants, 3: 719-22; Freeman, R. E. Lee, 4: 109-110.

Late that evening Gordon was summoned to Lee's headquarters where he conferred with Lee, Longstreet and Major General Fitzhugh Lee about the fate of their commands--all that remained of the army. After learning of Lee's correspondence with Grant and that Federal forces quite probably blocked the route of retreat, Gordon realized that this could be the last council of war. Years later he recalled this meeting around a low-burning fire as one which "no tongue or pen will ever be able to describe the unutterable anguish of Lee's commanders as they looked into the clouded face of their beloved leader and sought to draw from it some ray of hope." Lee and his lieutenants, in spite of the hopelessness of their cause, made a decision in the finest tradition of the Army of Northern Virginia--attack and attempt to cut their way out. Fitz Lee's cavalry, closely followed by Gordon's infantry, would move at daylight while Longstreet brought up the rear. If the advance encountered only cavalry, they were to drive the Federal horsemen away and open a path for the rest of the army; if, however, they found heavy infantry supports, . . . . After riding away from the conference, Gordon realized that he had not received any specific instructions as to where he should stop and camp the next evening, so he sent a staff officer back to the commanding general. Lee's facetious response--"Tell General Gordon that I should be glad for him to halt just beyond the Tennessee line"--probably brought a smile to Gordon's scarred face, for the Tennessee-Virginia border lay almost two hundred miles away.<sup>97</sup>

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97 Although Gordon stated that Pendleton attended this final council of war, his account of the conference is the only one which places the artillery chief there. Gordon, Reminiscences, pp. 434-36; Gordon, "Last Days of the Confederacy," p. 489; O.R., 46, pt. 1, pp. 1266, 1303; Jones, "Last Days," p. 83; Gordon, "Confederacy's Last Days," p. 493; James Longstreet, From Manassas to Appomattox, p. 623; Long, Memoirs of Robert E. Lee, p. 420; Gordon to Bryan Grimes, 6 May 1872, Bryan Grimes Papers, North Carolina State Archives, Raleigh, North Carolina (hereafter cited as Grimes Papers, NCSA); Gordon to E. P. Alexander, 27 March 1888, Edward Porter Alexander Collection, Southern

At daybreak, Gordon's westward advance from Appomattox Court House reached newly constructed Federal breastworks. Neither he nor Fitz Lee could determine whether cavalry or infantry lay across their path, so Bryan Grimes, one of Gordon's division commanders, offered to attack. Gordon assented and placed his entire corps in line with the cavalry on his right. Gordon's men attacked, carrying the temporary Union works and capturing two pieces of artillery plus a number of prisoners who turned out to be cavalry. The success proved short-lived, however, for rapidly arriving infantry supports halted the advance and soon threatened to surround and crush Gordon's beleaguered veterans, now less than 2,000. "The appearance of these large bodies of the Enemy's Infantry & the impossibility of Gen. Longstreet's moving up" convinced Gordon that "these circumstances rendered resistance for any positive advantage useless & the loss of life by our brave men of no avail." Gordon notified Lee that infantry, not only cavalry, blocked his retreat and grimly added, "I have fought my corps to a frazzle, and I fear I can do nothing unless I am heavily supported by Longstreet's corps." And then as privately agreed upon at the previous evening's conference, he alerted Fitz Lee of the imminent possibility of a truce, thereby allowing the cavalymen to leave the field before being surrendered. Gordon's troops continued "furiously fighting in nearly every direction" until word from Lee arrived. A flag of truce now existed between Lee and Grant.<sup>98</sup>

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Historical Collection, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, North Carolina (hereafter cited as Alexander Papers, UNC); Atlanta Constitution, 9 April, 10 April 1885.

All of the messages between Lee and Grant during 7 - 9 April can be found in O.R., 46, pt. 1, pp. 56-58.

<sup>98</sup> O.R., 46, pt. 1, pp. 1109-10, 1162-63, 1266, 1303-04; Gordon's 11 April 1865 Report, Lee Headquarters Papers, VHS; Gordon to Grimes, 6 May 1872, Grimes Papers, NCSA; Grimes, Letters to his Wife, pp. 117-22 (this account is also found in Bryan Grimes, "Appomattox Echo," Southern Historical Society Papers 27 (1899): 93-96); J. W. Jones, Army of Northern Virginia

Gordon took immediate steps to insure a temporary cessation of hostilities on his front. He drafted a simple note—"General Gordon has received notice from General Lee of a flag of truce, stopping the battle"—and instructed Colonel Green Peyton to deliver it to Major General E. C. Ord, the Union commander that Gordon believed was attacking his command. When he learned that the II Corps did not have a flag of truce and that his staff officer had no handkerchief, Gordon told Peyton to tear up his shirt and use it as a white flag. As if to delay the inevitable as long as possible, the colonel replied, "General, I have on a flannel shirt, and I see you have; I don't believe there is a white shirt in the whole army." Thoroughly exasperated, Gordon thundered, "Get something, sir; get something and go!" With that, Peyton shrank away, found "a rag of some sort" and rode off to find the Federal commander.<sup>99</sup>

Although unable to locate Ord, Peyton found Sheridan and soon returned with a Union officer "of strikingly picturesque appearance." This superb horseman with long flowing hair galloped up to Gordon and proclaimed, "I am General Custer, and bear a message to you from General Sheridan. The general desires me to present to you his compliments, and to demand the immediate and unconditional surrender of all the troops under your command." Gordon stiffened and replied, "You will please, general, return my compliments to General Sheridan, and say to him that I shall not surrender my command." The

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Memorial Volume, pp. 19-20; Jones, "Last Days," pp. 84-86; Gordon to E. P. Alexander, 27 March 1888, Alexander Papers, UNC; Walter A. Montgomery, "Appomattox and the Return Home," Walter Clark, ed., Histories of the Several Regiments and Battalions from North Carolina in the Great War 1861-1865; Written by Members of the Respective Commands, 5 vols. (Raleigh: E. M. Uzzell, 1901), 5: 259-60; Longstreet, From Manassas to Appomattox, pp. 623-27; Long, Memoirs of Robert E. Lee, pp. 420-22; Gordon, Reminiscences, pp. 436-38.

<sup>99</sup> Gordon, Reminiscences, pp. 438-39; Gordon, "Confederacy's Last Days," p. 493; Gordon to E. P. Alexander, 27 March 1888, Alexander Papers, UNC; Gordon, "Last Days of the Confederacy," p. 490.

brash Federal cavalryman informed the Confederate that if he showed any hesitation in surrendering, he would be annihilated within an hour. Gordon bristled at this bald threat, but calmly stated that he had nothing else to add to his earlier note and "if General Sheridan decided to continue the fighting in the face of the flag of truce, the responsibility for the blood shed would be his and not mine." Having failed to intimidate the Georgian, Custer rode off in the company of one of Gordon's staff.<sup>100</sup>

A short while later, another Federal under a white flag approached Gordon's line. In front of "a mounted escort almost as large as one of Fitz Lee's regiments" rode Gordon's nemesis in the Shenandoah Valley, Phil Sheridan. As the diminutive commander of the Union cavalry came within easy range of the sharpshooters who had gathered around him, the Georgian physically had to restrain one of his marksmen, "a half-witted fellow," from shooting Sheridan. Gordon chided the private for even thinking about firing at a man under a flag of truce, but the unrepentant Confederate protested, "Well, general, let him stay on his own side." The discussion between Gordon and Sheridan closely paralleled that with Custer because no official word of the temporary truce had arrived from Union headquarters; however, when Gordon showed him Lee's note, Sheridan immediately suggested a cease-fire and the withdrawal of both forces to less exposed positions while they waited for word of the conference between Lee and Grant. Both commanders, after dispatching their staff officers to see that firing all along the line ceased, dismounted and conversed privately.<sup>101</sup>

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<sup>100</sup> Gordon, "Last Days of the Confederacy," pp. 490-91; Gordon, Reminiscences, pp. 439, 440; Gordon to E. P. Alexander, 27 March 1888, Alexander Papers, UNC.

<sup>101</sup> Gordon to E. P. Alexander, 27 March 1888, Alexander Papers, UNC; O.R., 46, pt. 1, p. 1110; Gordon, "Confederacy's Last Days," p. 493; Gordon, "Last Days of the Confederacy," p. 491; Gordon, Reminiscences, pp. 439-41.

Gordon found his adversary neither agreeable nor polite. Sheridan's "style of conversation and general bearing," though never overtly offensive, certainly rankled Gordon. The Federal opened by saying, "We have met before, I believe, at Winchester and Cedar Creek in the Valley." Gordon acknowledged his presence there, but Sheridan snidely pressed the matter. "I had the pleasure of receiving some artillery from your Government, consigned to me through your commander, General Early." Detecting "in his manner a slight tinge of exultation," Gordon countered, "That is true; and I have this morning received from your government artillery consigned to me through General Sheridan." The Union cavalry leader evidently knew nothing of Gordon's early morning captures for he started to object, but the matter was abruptly dropped when firing resumed on the Confederate left. Both commanders rose quickly, at which point Gordon realized that he had forgotten to notify an isolated brigade far to his left. He immediately sought a member of his staff to deliver the cease-fire order but as none were available, Gordon had to borrow one of Sheridan's staff. Ironically, a Union captain protected by a ragged Confederate private bore Gordon's final combat order to his troops. Not long thereafter, word of the meeting between Lee and Grant arrived—the Army of Northern Virginia had surrendered!<sup>102</sup>

The end had come, but Gordon's soldierly responsibilities continued. As one of three Confederate commissioners appointed by Lee to finalize the details of the surrender agreement, Gordon spent much of 10 April in conference with Longstreet, Brigadier General William N. Pendleton, and their three Federal counterparts. He remembered long afterwards the "[M]arked consideration and

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<sup>102</sup> Gordon, *Reminiscences*, pp. 441-42; Gordon to Major W. W. Parker, 18 December 1893, *Munford-Ellis Papers*, Duke University, Durham, North Carolina.

courtesy . . . [shown] by the victorious Federals, from the commanding generals to the privates in the ranks." The spirit of generosity and cooperation obviously impressed him because one Union officer recalled that Gordon "rose to his feet and made quite a speech, during which he said that . . . he considered his personal honor (with emphasis) required him to give the most liberal interpretation to every question which came up for decision." After completion of the document, Gordon devoted himself to writing a detailed report of the actions of his corps since the assault on Fort Stedman and to preparing his command for the surrender procession that must inevitably follow.<sup>103</sup>

The morning of 12 April, "a chill gray morning, depressing to the senses," wore heavily on Gordon. What had been a brilliantly glowing star in 1861 was now no more than a faintly burning ember. The Confederacy, the dream of an independent nation, was in its death throes. Despite his understandable depression, Gordon gathered his men together for their march to the formal surrender. The II Corps had been assigned the leading position in the surrender column and Gordon would ride at its head. Had the final order of march been arranged to honor those who had fought the hardest and the best during the last year of the war, first place would have rightly gone to Gordon. As he rode with his famous corps, Gordon, with "his chin drooped to his breast," appeared to one Federal "downhearted and dejected . . . almost beyond description." However, when he reached the drawn-up Union forces, a bugle sounded and the entire Federal line shifted from "order arms" to "carry arms," presenting their former foes with a marching salute. Gordon, startled by the "machine like snap of

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<sup>103</sup> O.R., 46, pt. 3, pp. 666-67, 685-86; John Gibbon, "Personal Recollections of Appomattox," Century Magazine, April 1902, p. 941; "Paroles of the Army of Northern Virginia," Southern Historical Society Papers 15 (1887): 185; Gordon, Reminiscences, pp. 443, 452; Atlanta Constitution, 9 April, 10 April, 31 July 1885.

arms," looked up and immediately realized the significance of the Federal gesture. He

instantly assumed the finest attitude of a soldier. He wheeled his horse . . . , touching him gently with the spur, so that the animal slightly reared, and as he wheeled, horse and rider made one motion, the horse's head swung down with a graceful bow, and General Gordon dropped his swordpoint to his toe in salutation. By word of mouth General Gordon sent back orders to the rear that his own troops take the same position of the manual in the march past as did . . . [the Federal] line. That was done, and a truly imposing sight was the mutual salutation and farewell.

Honor answered honor, salute answered salute as the Army of Northern Virginia marched out of existence and passed into the pages of history.<sup>104</sup>

With the painful surrender process complete, Gordon rode among the shattered remnants of his corps. In an eloquent address, he bade an emotional farewell to the men who had served him so well under such trying conditions. Gordon reminded them of their heroic achievements, of their great sufferings and of their selfless devotion to duty. More pointedly, however, he urged them to return to their homes in peace, to adhere to their paroles, to obey the laws, to aid in rebuilding the South and to join hands with "the brave and magnanimous soldiers of the Union army" in reuniting the country. As Gordon watched his veterans sullenly file away, his thoughts undoubtedly turned back to Petersburg and the wife and new baby boy he had left there when the retreat began. Questions of what lay beyond his immediate return to his family must have been genuinely unfathomable for the thirty-three year old Georgian. Four years of total commitment to the cause of southern independence had come to an end and with his brilliant military career now concluded, Gordon faced an uncertain,

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<sup>104</sup> Gordon, *Reminiscences*, pp. 444-48; Freeman, *Lee's Lieutenants*, 3: 745-46; Gordon, "Last Days of the Confederacy," p. 493; Chamberlain, "Last Salute," pp. 361-63; Joshua Lawrence Chamberlain, *The Passing of the Armies* (New York and London: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1915), pp. 258-62.

troubled future.<sup>105</sup>

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105 Although there is some confusion as to when Gordon delivered his farewell address--whether on 10, 11 or 12 April--it is quite possible that he spoke to various groups at different times. And in all probability, he did address the remnants of his corps following the stacking of arms and furling of flags. Henry Kyd Douglas, who listened to Gordon's speech, stated that he knew of "no other General in the army who would have attempted to make a speech to the troops at that time, or to whom they would have listened with as much patience and pleasure." McCarthy, Detailed Minutiae, pp. 154-55; "A Private Soldier," "Reminiscences of Lee and Gordon at Appomattox Courthouse," Southern Historical Society Papers 8 (1880): 39; Douglas, I Rode with Stonewall, pp. 333-34; Montgomery, "Appomattox," 5: 263; Gordon, Reminiscences, pp. 448-50.

## CHAPTER IV

### IN SEARCH OF A LIVELIHOOD

Following the formal surrender of the Army of Northern Virginia on 12 April, Gordon began retracing his steps back to the wife and baby boy he had left behind ten days earlier. Riding on horseback with parole in hand, Gordon shared the road back to Petersburg with Elihu Washburne, a northern congressman who had been present at Appomattox. Washburne highly commended the Georgian on the reconciliatory nature of his farewell address and assured him that the victorious North would deal generously with the defeated Confederates. As an intimate friend and adviser of Abraham Lincoln, he stated emphatically that the president desired, above all else, rapid restoration of the Union. Lincoln would permit "no prosecutions and no discriminations" in his efforts to reestablish a normal relationship with the South as quickly as possible. Whatever optimism Gordon may have gleaned from these conversations with Washburne proved short-lived, however, for shortly after parting with him, Gordon learned of the assassination of Lincoln. From the outset, it was obvious that the road to reunion would not be a smooth one.<sup>1</sup>

Yet of more immediate concern for Gordon was the safety of his family in Petersburg. When ordered to withdraw from the city on 2 April, Gordon had been forced to leave behind his critically ill wife, who only hours before had

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<sup>1</sup> John B. Gordon, Reminiscences of the Civil War (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1903), pp. 450-52, 457.

given birth to their third son, John B. Gordon, Jr. His understandable anxiety over Fanny's condition and that of his son had prompted him to telegraph her twice while enroute. He informed her that he was well and would soon return. Immediately upon reaching Petersburg on 14 April, Gordon made his way through the rubble of the city to the home of J. Pinckney Williamson where he had left Fanny. He found wife and child improving in health and completely undisturbed by the occupying Federals. In his absence, "some knightly soldier with a blue uniform" had considerably placed an armed guard around her home and prevented any intrusion. Gordon always credited General Grant with this magnanimous gesture which he deeply appreciated.<sup>2</sup>

While waiting for Fanny to recover, Gordon prepared for the arduous journey back to Georgia. With all of his Confederate script "somewhat below par," he struggled to raise enough greenbacks to avoid making the trip south on foot. He had sold one of his finest horses to a Union officer at Appomattox, but still found himself considerably short of funds. Consequently, Gordon asked Williamson's assistance in selling two artillery horses that he had retained after the surrender. He hoped, by selling these animals, to gain the \$300 that he believed he needed to make the trip. Williamson located a buyer for the horses at the agreed price, but only managed to obtain a thirty-day promissory note. This arrangement forced him to utilize the services of a "curbstone broker," who exchanged the note for cash, less his ten percent discount. In any event, having

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<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 454; Gordon to wife, 12 April, 13 April 1865, John B. Gordon Papers, Gordon Family Collection, University of Georgia, Athens, Georgia (hereafter cited as Gordon Family Collection, UGA); John Brown Gordon, "Last Days of The Confederacy," Thomas B. Reed, ed., *Modern Eloquence*, 15 vols. (Philadelphia: John D. Morris and Company, 1900-03); 5: 488; Gordon's Service File, Military Service Records, National Archives, Washington, D.C.; J. Pinckney Williamson, "Ye Olden Times," *History of Petersburg* (Petersburg, Virginia: Frank A. Owen, 1906), p. 67; Caroline Lewis Gordon, "De Gin'ral an' Miss Fanny," Gordon Family Collection, UGA..

secured these additional funds, Gordon and his family began the long homeward trek. Accompanied by Captain and Mrs. James M. Pace and their family, the Gordons made the torturous journey "over broken railroads and in such dilapidated conveyances as had been left in the track of the armies." Despite the difficulties, they safely reached their home state around the end of April.<sup>3</sup>

In Georgia, Gordon and his family proceeded to the home of his parents in Columbus. The Reverend Gordon and his wife had been forced to move there when opposing armies battled near their Jackson County, Tennessee home in 1863. While contemplating his uncertain future, Gordon must have reflected back upon his military career. As a soldier, Gordon knew few peers. His rise from captain to corps commander was unmatched in the Army of Northern Virginia. Only five Confederate soldiers rose to corps command without the benefit of previous military instruction; and of those, only the Georgian failed to receive his deserved promotion to lieutenant general. Gordon, in spite of or perhaps because of his lack of formal military training, brought a "certain freshness, a boldness, a freedom, an originality" that underlay his meteoric rise. On all of his battlefields, he displayed the sound military sense of a natural soldier. Although never tested by independent command, "his fearlessness and eagerness to assail the enemy . . . made him one of the most conspicuous and popular commanders. . . ." Most southerners would have concurred with Thomas Carter's assessment of the General. The artilleryman believed that few, if any, of Lee's lieutenants were "so singularly fitted for attack;" it was as if "the Creator moulded him for the risk of the onset and put in him that subtle magnetic influence over his men that strikes 'the electric chain wherewith we

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<sup>3</sup> Williamson, "Ye Olden Time," p. 67; Gordon Reminiscences, pp. 103-04, 454.

are darkly bound."<sup>4</sup>

A "soldier's soldier," Gordon possessed a rare combination of talents that set him apart from other military men. His "voice and mien united to produce an almost unparalleled effect;" his outstanding oratorical abilities along with his physical and moral courage often combined to inspire his men to almost inconceivable heights of valor and feats of endurance; his martial appearance led one of his soldiers to remark, "He's most the prettiest thing you ever did see on a field of fight. It'd put fight into a whipped chicken just to look at him." Another remembered Gordon as "the most gallant man I ever saw on a Battlefield. He had a way of putting things to the men that was irresistible, and he showed the men, at all times, that he shrank from nothing in battle on account of himself." Without any doubt, "it was the ringing name of John Gordon that most frequently thrilled the public ear" during the last year of the war. Idolized by the men he commanded, Gordon emerged from the war second only to Lee in distinction and belovedness, particularly in Georgia. Despite the ending of what may have been the most significant chapter of his life, the reputation that he earned while "wearing the grey" would significantly influence almost every aspect of his life during the next forty years. At war's end, he was one of the most popular men in the South. In little more than a decade, he would be the most well known and respected southerner.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Sarah Harriet Butts, compiler, The Mothers of Some Distinguished Georgians (New York: J. J. Little and Co., 1902), p. 2; Douglas Southall Freeman, Lee's Lieutenants: A Study in Command, 3 vols. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1942-44), 3: xxxiv; John S. Wise, The End of an Era (Boston and New York: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1900), p. 339; Thomas H. Carter to John W. Daniel, 19 November 1894, John Warwick Daniel MSS, Duke University, Durham, North Carolina; Thomas H. Carter to Samuel J. C. Moore, 15 October 1889, Samuel J. C. Moore Papers, Virginia Historical Society, Richmond, Virginia.

<sup>5</sup> Lucian Lamar Knight, Reminiscences of Famous Georgians, 2 vols. (Atlanta: Franklin-Turner Co., 1907-08), 1: 338; Robert Stiles, Four Years under

Yet what endeared Gordon to the people of his native state and section--his distinguished record during the War Between The States--also seriously clouded his future. Shortly after the capture and imprisonment of Jefferson Davis, northern officials indicted the former Confederate president on charges of treason and initiated proceedings against other high ranking Confederate civilian and military officers. Immediately upon the heels of the threat of legal action, Gordon received an additional shock. The new president of the United States, Andrew Johnson, issued his Proclamation of Amnesty on 29 May 1865 in which he offered a full pardon to southerners who would swear an oath of allegiance to the United States. However, in this same proclamation, Johnson excluded certain classes of former Confederates, including all military figures above the rank of colonel. These individuals were prevented from taking such an oath unless they had personally applied to Johnson for individual pardons. And until pardoned by the president and restored to full citizenship, Gordon and other former Confederates could neither vote nor hold office.<sup>6</sup>

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Marse Robert (New York and Washington: Neale Publishing Co., 1904), p. 212; John H. Worsham, One of Jackson's Foot Cavalry (New York: Neale Publishing Co., 1912), p. 228; Issac W. Avery, The History of the State of Georgia From 1850 to 1881 (New York: Brown and Derby, 1881), p. 323.

<sup>6</sup> Dunbar Rowland, ed., Jefferson Davis: Constitutionalist, His Letters, Papers and Speeches (Jackson, Mississippi: Mississippi Department of Archives and History, 1923), 7: 139-42; Charles M. Blackford, "The Trials and Trial of Jefferson Davis," Southern Historical Society Papers 29 (1901): 59; C. Mildred Thompson, Reconstruction in Georgia, Economic, Social, Political, 1865-1872 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1915), p. 144; Edwin C. Woolley, The Reconstruction of Georgia (New York: Columbia University Press, 1901), p. 12; U. S. War Department, The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies, 70 vols. (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1880-1901), Series II, volume 8, pp. 578-80.

Although numerous efforts were afoot in the North to indict the civilian and military leaders of the Confederacy, few progressed much beyond the indictment stage. In May 1868, a grand jury in the Circuit Court of the United States for the District of Virginia indicted Gordon for levying war against the United States. Though named as a co-conspirator, along with Davis, R. E. Lee and some twenty other former Confederates, he was never at that late date in

Faced with the "prospect of the ills embraced in the exception to the Benefit of the Amnesty" and fearful of imprisonment or even execution, Gordon considered leaving the country. Before seeking official permission from United States authorities to relocate abroad, he sought the assistance of Fanny's uncle, John Sutherland Lewis. In a mid-June 1865 letter to an old congressional colleague, General William Trousdale of Tennessee, Lewis asked his friend for letters of introduction for Gordon "to the Monarch, or some persons of the highest position" in Brazil. With these letters in hand, Gordon would not be viewed as an adventurer when he arrived in the South American country. So despite later claims to the contrary, Gordon evidently seriously contemplated emigration. But as the fear and uncertainty following the surrender gradually gave way in the last half of 1865 to a tentative confidence and relative stability, he abandoned such thoughts and decided to remain in Georgia.<sup>7</sup>

Once reasonably confident of immunity from prosecution on charges of treason, Gordon began the difficult task of searching for a new livelihood. He still retained his interest in coal mines located in the northwestern tip of Georgia, but extensive fighting in that region had seriously damaged the facilities and forced the mines to close. Lacking the capital necessary to rebuild the railroads and inclined planes which would enable the mines to return to productivity, Gordon had to look elsewhere. The imposition of martial law in Georgia, under which the Federal army displaced all civil authority, shattered any immediate hopes of reestablishing a law practice. Nevertheless, near the

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any real danger of being tried or convicted. Rowland, Jefferson Davis, 7: 179-95; Blackford, "Trial of Davis," pp. 75-80.

<sup>7</sup> John Sutherland Lewis to General Trousdale, 13 June 1865, William Trousdale Papers, Tennessee State Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee; Gordon, Reminiscences, p. 448; Atlanta Constitution, 28 May 1872.

end of the summer of 1865, Gordon moved his family from Columbus to the more centrally located Atlanta where he had practiced law in the 1850s. While in Atlanta, Gordon applied to President Johnson for a presidential pardon on 15 September 1865. He signed an oath of allegiance and sent a letter to Johnson asking for removal of the political disabilities resulting from his participation in the war. Restored to full citizenship shortly thereafter, Gordon redoubled his efforts to find a new way of making a living.<sup>8</sup>

The abundant forests of Georgia, one of the few sources of wealth in the state relatively untouched by the war, soon attracted his attention. In the immediate postwar period, the prospect of "[C]utting lumber with small sawmills," according to one southern historian, "afforded an easy road to setting up a modest business." Recognizing this economic opportunity, Gordon traveled to Savannah in November 1865 with thoughts of developing a kindling trade with the North. He hoped to take advantage of the state's vast pine reserves by cutting the trees down to a manageable size and then shipping them by water to New York where the bundles of wood would command a much higher price than in Georgia. For whatever reasons, Gordon never followed through on these plans in Savannah, but late in 1865, he became involved in another timber-related enterprise in Brunswick, Georgia, eighty miles to the south along the coast. Gordon entered into a partnership with George Shorter of Brunswick. After securing financial backing from unknown sources, they built two large saw mills near the Brunswick Railroad and established a lumber business which was

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<sup>8</sup> Gordon to Barlow, 29 January, 7 April, 21 September 1868, Samuel Latham Mitchill Barlow Papers, Huntington Library, San Marino, California (hereafter cited as Barlow Papers, Huntington); Allen P. Tankersley, "Basil Hallam Overby, Champion of Prohibition in Ante-Bellum Georgia," Georgia Historical Quarterly 31 (1947): 17; Woolley, Reconstruction in Georgia, pp. 10-15; Amnesty Records, United States State Department, National Archives, Washington, D. C.

eventually capitalized at between \$80,000 and \$90,000. Gordon, Shorter and Company evidently enjoyed substantial success during its first year of operation because by the end of 1866, a leading southern journal reported that all mills around Brunswick had "orders already in hand [that] cannot be filled for two years." And with Gordon as "the pioneer, and . . . the ruling spirit in this gigantic enterprise at Brunswick," it appeared many more mills would be erected in the near future. In addition to his own interests, Gordon also managed a number of other saw mills in the area, including those belonging to his friend, Samuel L. M. Barlow of New York.<sup>9</sup>

Although business prospects appeared quite promising on the coast, Gordon found relations between the races particularly strained. Along the

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9 E. Merton Coulter, The South During Reconstruction, 1865-1877 (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1947), pp. 270-71; Willard Range, A Century of Georgia Agriculture, 1850-1950 (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1954), pp. 155-56; DeBow's Review, 35 (August 1866): 201; Jeremy Kilmer to E. P. Alexander, 4 November 1865, Edward Porter Alexander Papers, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, North Carolina; U. S. Congress, Testimony Taken by the Joint Select Committee to Inquire into the Condition of Affairs in the Late Insurrectionary States, Georgia, vol. 1, House of Representatives, 42d Cong., 2d sess., Report No. 22, pt. 6, pp. 304-05 (Gordon's testimony hereafter cited as KKK Report); Gordon to Barlow, 26 January, 4 January 1869(8), Barlow Papers, Huntington; Gordon to Finney, 26 January 1868, Barlow Papers, Huntington; Atlanta Daily Intelligencer, 20 January 1866.

It is difficult if not impossible to determine from whom Gordon and Shorter received the money necessary to establish and operate their mills. Gordon's writings leave no substantial clues whatsoever. Rebecca L. Felton, a lady who would become the General's most persistent and vocal critic, years later maintained that he borrowed thousands from a southern cleric using stock in his coal mines to secure the loan. Then when the lumber business failed, she claimed Gordon welshed on his debt and left the clergyman holding worthless coal company stock. Gordon vehemently denied these charges. He asserted that he borrowed only \$300 from Bishop Richard Wilmer of Alabama and that he satisfied that debt shortly thereafter. Mrs. William H. Felton, My Memoirs of Georgia Politics (Atlanta: Index Printing Company, 1911), pp. 488, 493-94, 505-06; A. H. Stephens to Mrs. Felton, 26 June 1880, Rebecca Latimer Felton Collection, University of Georgia, Athens, Georgia. See also Atlanta Constitution, 8 March 1879.

coastal belt, including the Sea Islands, blacks often outnumbered whites by eight or ten to one and, in the wake of the war, Negro troops frequently served as the occupation force. Gordon, as he later reported to a congressional committee, discovered that "a very bad state of feeling between those negro troops and the citizens" of Brunswick already existed when he arrived in late 1865. Black soldiers, Gordon argued, revelled in verbally abusing former Confederate soldiers and physically intimidating them by forcing the whites off of the sidewalks when encountered on the streets. In his opinion, the attitude of these troops contributed markedly to making the general black population "very obnoxious," which heightened tensions and alarmed whites all along the coast. Citizens of Brunswick and nearby Darien became so concerned about the state of affairs that they prevailed upon Gordon to go to the regional Federal headquarters in Savannah and request the removal of the colored troops. While in Savannah, Gordon met General Grant who was in the midst of his inspection tour of the South. As he travelled for three days with Grant through Georgia, Gordon attempted to impress upon the Federal commander the seriousness of the volatile situation on the coast. He stressed the remarkable forbearance with which he contended whites had endured the insults and indignities of the occupying black troops. But at the same time, Gordon made it abundantly clear that the patience of the whites was wearing thin. "Things had come to such a pass," he asserted, "that they might soon be beyond endurance, and that very certainly there would be bloodshed unless these negro troops were removed." Convinced by Gordon of the potential for violence, the Union general ordered the removal of all black forces from that area of the coast. And as soon as white units replaced the black commands, troubles subsided.<sup>10</sup>

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10 KKK Report, pp. 304-05, 309-10, 319.

Gordon strove in other ways to eliminate racial tensions by improving relations between the two races in Georgia and in the South. In 1866, he and other members of the white community liberally contributed money and materials to efforts by blacks to build a church and school house in Brunswick. When trustees of the Brunswick colored school asked for his opinions on black education, Gordon advised them "to educate themselves and their children, to be industrious, save money and purchase houses, and thus make themselves respectable as property holders, and intelligent people." He added, "With submission to the laws, industry and economy, with union among yourselves, and courtesy and confidence toward the whites, you will reach these ends, and constitute an important element in the community." Gordon also advocated full protection of their rights under the law and pledged the cooperation of whites in black efforts at self-improvement. To that end, he supported pro rata distribution of Glynn County funds for separate educational facilities and introduced a resolution to form a committee to solicit aid for education from northerners. Gordon reiterated this notion of white support at an educational convention when he endorsed "education of the negro population at the hands of our people, by direct taxation, putting the whites and blacks in that respect upon the same footing." On another occasion, he asserted, "I am in favor of extending, by every possible means, every aid toward the moral and intellectual advancement of the colored race." Compelled to live with one another in the same country, Gordon repeatedly stressed the common interests of blacks and whites. In his opinion, "Acquaintance, past association, in many instances mutual gratification and affection, as well as the mutual dependence of daily business relations, all conspire[d] to bind" the two races together. Obviously, Gordon sought social harmony, but it seems clear that he was genuinely concerned with

black education as well.<sup>11</sup>

Although he recognized the necessity for cooperation between the races, Gordon clearly did not believe in racial equality. In a September 1868 speech in Charleston, South Carolina, the Georgian took the opportunity to speak directly to the colored section in the audience. "If you are disposed to live in peace with the white people, they extend to you the hand of friendship," but Gordon also issued an ominous warning, "if you attempt to inaugurate a war of races you will be exterminated. The Saxon race was never created by Almighty God to be ruled by the African." Gordon frequently railed against Republican efforts to make "a recently survive race the political superiors of the educated classes of the South." In his mind, it was "heaven's unalterable decree" that "in all times and ages the white man has been God's chosen vessel and the superior race." The attempt to alter God's plans--or as he put it to confer "upon the ignorant and vicious, rights,(?) or rather to place weapons in their hands to destroy the liberty and inalienable rights of the intelligent and virtuous"--could have disastrous consequences. Gordon contended that if the "carpet-bagger" element--those whites who agitated and enflamed southern blacks--were removed and blacks and whites in the South were left to themselves, there would be no conflict. Whites in Georgia, he asserted, particularly needed the black, for "the negro is the proper laborer for our State; . . . we understand him and he understands us." Gordon may have been more benign in his approach to race relations than many southerners, but he certainly did not accept blacks as equals.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid., pp. 305, 307-08, 320, 340, 345; Savannah Daily News and Herald, 10 April, 11 April 1868; New York Times, 30 April 1867.

For additional evidence of Gordon's emphasis on education for blacks, particularly those with whom he was intimately associated, see Black Gordons File, Gordon Family Collection, UGA.

<sup>12</sup> Columbus Weekly Sun, 29 September 1868, quoted in Alan Conway, The Reconstruction of Georgia (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press,

Despite his efforts to cultivate favorable relations between the races, Gordon met with frustration on his own rice plantation, which he had acquired sometime after his arrival on the coast. Violence broke out during the planting season of 1867 when black laborers refused to plant the rice in the manner that the overseer instructed. Preferring to cultivate the rice in their own particular way, the blacks armed themselves with guns, hoes, and other farm implements, threatened the overseer's life, and drove him away. The imminence of violence throughout the coastal region grew so great that Federal troops had to be called out in order to quell the disturbance. Outbreaks like the one on his plantation undoubtedly contributed to Gordon's willingness to leave the Georgia coast, but more than likely, it was his failing business fortunes that convinced him to look elsewhere for a new livelihood.<sup>13</sup>

Gordon's lumber business, though initially successful, fell upon hard times in 1867. The reasons for the failure of the Gordon, Shorter and Company mills are uncertain, but their collapse appears to have been only part of a larger regional problem. As Gordon later explained, the tremendous fluctuation in lumber prices--falling on one occasion by fifty percent in a single week--contributed mightily to his economic distress. By the end of that year, many mills along the coast around Brunswick "had broken down utterly" and had been forced to liquidate their assets by sheriff's sales. The Gordon, Shorter and Company mills fell victim to these public auctions. Estimating his losses in excess of \$12,000, Gordon suffered heavily. Burdened by this large debt and haunted by the fear of declaring bankruptcy, Gordon struggled in the years that

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1966), p. 172; *Atlanta Constitution*, 19 June, 27 August 1868, 21 September 1872; *KKK Report*, pp. 306-08, 321, 334-35, 339, 341, 346.

13 *KKK Report*, pp. 305-06.

followed to repay his old debts from the mills and probably from his plantation as well. Often "utterly prostrated," he complained to a friend that he felt bonded by "an endless slavery to debt." Despite occasionally spectacular success, Gordon's consistent failures in the business world generally kept him financially insecure. The nightmare of serious debt reoccurred throughout the rest of his life.<sup>14</sup>

Stripped of available cash and without visible means of meeting his staggering debts, Gordon sought to avoid bankruptcy by inducing his creditors to take as payment stock in the mines of the Castle Rock Coal Company of Georgia. Although the stock had no present market value and the mines remained under lease, Gordon stressed their prewar productivity and prosperity. He claimed that the company owned 5,000 acres of "probably the best coal lands in the South," and if the mines could be returned to production, he asserted that they would "prove the best property in southern country." Gordon successfully persuaded a number of creditors to accept this coal stock, though at a discount, but he remained hard pressed to ward off bankruptcy. With prospects for relief from financial distress at an end in Brunswick, Gordon, near the end of 1867, moved his family back to Atlanta.<sup>15</sup>

"Struggling against adversity" imposed by his severe losses on the coast, Gordon also found himself "sorely perplexed" about how to handle his current

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14 Gordon to A. C. Holt, 19 April 1871, Alexander Hamilton Stephens Papers I, Emory University, Atlanta, Georgia (hereafter cited as Stephens Papers, Emory); James Gaston Towery, "The Gubernatorial Campaign of 1886," (M.A. thesis, Emory University, 1945), pp. 64-65; Gordon to Finney, 26 January 1868, Barlow Papers, Huntington; Gordon to Barlow, 26 January, 29 January, 7 April, 21 September, 19 October 1868, 4 January 1869(8), 12 June 1869, Barlow Papers, Huntington.

15 Gordon to Barlow, 29 January, 7 April, 21 September, 19 October 1868, Barlow Papers, Huntington; Gordon to A. C. Holt, 19 April 1871, Stephens Papers, Emory; KKK Report, p. 304.

expenses. In looking for something that might bring him some ready cash, he considered working as an agent "for one or two Locomotive Establishments." Such a position would enable him to utilize contacts among his friends involved in various railroading ventures. However, Gordon soon discovered that his reputation as a military leader was of much greater value than he might have imagined. In late 1867 or early 1868, two different companies, vitally interested in the South, offered him important positions. He accepted both--the presidency of the Atlanta branch of the Southern Life Insurance Company and the vice-presidency of the publishing firm of Richardson and Company. Even so, Gordon had barely become involved with these enterprises when he received another more compelling call for his services. Its source and its immediacy demanded prompt action. Faced with a political situation that seemed to offer little more than substitution of Republican control for military occupation, native white Georgians appealed to Gordon.<sup>16</sup>

Passage of the Reconstruction Act of 2 March 1867, had begun anew the governmental reconstruction of the South. By early March of the following year, Georgia had conducted another registration of voters--this one including blacks and disqualifying more whites under the terms of the Fourteenth Amendment--and drafted a new constitution more in line with Republican dictates. It provided for repudiation of all Confederate debt, cancellation of most state debts incurred prior to 1 January 1865, immediate establishment of a free public school system for both white and black children in Georgia, and conferred suffrage upon blacks via ratification of the Fourteenth Amendment. All that remained for Georgia to end military occupation and resume its normal

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<sup>16</sup> Gordon to Barlow, 26 January, 29 January, 30 January 1868, Barlow Papers, Huntington.

place in the Union seemed to be the ratification of the constitution and election of state and congressional officers. Accordingly, Major General George G. Meade, military governor of the Third District, which included Georgia, Alabama, and Florida, called for a four-day state election to be held between 20 and 23 April. Georgia Republicans quickly selected Rufus B. Bullock as their standard bearer, but Democrats, or Conservatives as they were also known, experienced considerably more difficulty in choosing their candidate. The Democratic Committee's first two choices, Judges Augustus Reese and David Irwin, were declared ineligible by Meade under the office-holding terms of the Fourteenth Amendment because prior to the war they had both sworn oaths to the Constitution. As a result of Meade's actions, Georgia Democrats turned to a political novice. The man they called upon was "the Hero of Appomattox"--John B. Gordon.<sup>17</sup>

Although he had never held political office, Gordon was by no means ignorant of Georgia politics. He had been vitally involved in the events of the secession crisis in both Alabama and Georgia and had been urged to run for an office in the Confederate Congress when incapacitated during the winter of 1862-63. Only one year after the war, friends had "strongly urged" him to seek the nomination for governor of Georgia. He declined the honor, yet took the opportunity to offer advice to his fellow southerners on the political climate of

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17 Kenneth Coleman, ed., *A History of Georgia* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1977), pp. 210-13; Thompson, *Reconstruction in Georgia*, pp. 171-201; Charles G. Bloom, "The Georgia Election of April, 1868: A Re-examination of the Politics of Georgia Reconstruction," (M.A. thesis, University of Chicago, 1963), pp. 30-34; U. S. Army, Department of the South, *Report of Major General Meade's Military Operations and Administration of Civil Affairs in the Third Military District and Department of the South for the year 1868, with Accompanying Documents*, Senate Documents, 41st Cong., 2d sess. (hereafter cited as *Meade's Report*); Knight, *Reminiscences of Famous Georgians*, 1: 319.

the nation. "'Let us demonstrate to these enemies to truth, to principle and sound policy' (the Radicals of the North)" that the same southerners who had fought the war "'are most reliable in their observances of plighted faith and truest to the principles of the constitution.'" Also in 1866, he had presided over a meeting at Blackshear, Georgia, called to select delegates to the National Union Convention in Philadelphia. In his address, he stressed the paramount importance of this meeting of moderates from all parts of the country. Unless a determined stand against Radical hate and tyranny could be made, he argued, equality between the states would be destroyed, and with it, the South and liberty for all would be lost. Gordon bitterly castigated those Republicans whom he called Radicals, "that pusillanimous battalion of warriors who, lest they should be engulfed in it, gazed at the red tide of war from afar, and who, now that we have surrendered, are incapable of magnanimity to a brave and honorable and fallen foe." He urged the audience to send "our best and wisest--our representative men"--so that the Radicals' "wicked and selfish designs against constitutional Government and against liberty" could be thwarted. Selected as a delegate to the August convention, he attended the Philadelphia meeting, but did not play a prominent role. Perfectly in keeping with the conciliatory posture he had first taken at Appomattox, Gordon continued the struggle to eradicate the obstacles to national reconciliation. And in his mind, the Democratic party offered the best means of reuniting the former warring sections.<sup>18</sup>

As early as 1 February 1868, while the constitutional convention debated the new constitution, Gordon's name had been bantered about as a gubernatorial

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18 "A Distinguished Southern Journalist" [E. A. Pollard], The Early Life, Campaigns and Public Services of Robert E. Lee, with a Record of the Campaigns and Heroic Deeds of his Companions in Arms (New York: E. B. Treat and Co., 1871), pp. 547-48; New York Times, 12 July, 5 August, 10 August 1866; Avery, History of Georgia, p. 358; Atlanta Constitution, 8 June 1880.

candidate. A Republican paper declared that it would "take . . strong man to beat . . . a man of Gordon's popularity." The same paper later speculated that even though Gordon had no plans to run for governor, it did not see how the Democracy could get along without him. And when Meade ruled that both Reese and Irwin could not hold a public office, the Democratic committee officials turned to Gordon. He had confided to a friend only weeks before his selection as the Democratic candidate, "I am too poor to give much time to politics;" nevertheless, Gordon accepted the nomination. Still, in his acceptance speech, he asserted that only "the peculiar circumstances" surrounding his nomination and the political situation in Georgia persuaded him to make the race.<sup>19</sup>

The gubernatorial contest between Bullock and Gordon lasted just over two weeks, but it proved to be "a bitter and vituperative campaign." Democratic newspapers and conservative leaders immediately accepted Gordon and rallied behind him. When Meade issued a statement authorizing Gordon's eligibility and laid to rest lingering fears that the General might yet be prevented from running, the battle began in earnest. Democrats appealed to "men of all parties, names and faith to unite" behind "that gallant man whose name should be a tower of strength." Gordon concentrated upon the "aggressions of radicalism, the character of the men composing that party," and particularly denounced the "infamous constitution." He urged his fellow Georgians to reject the new constitution because it was being foisted upon them. Focusing upon the more objectional measures of the document, he cautioned, "Have nothing to do with them, like the fabled tree of India, they have already filled the air with poison . . . [and] are dethroning all that is wise and good, and enthroning all

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<sup>19</sup> Atlanta Daily New Era, 1 February, 18 February, 6 March, 5 April 1868; Savannah Daily News and Herald, 10 April 1868; Gordon to Barlow, 29 January 1868, Barlow Papers, Huntington.

that is ignorant and bad!" This general Democratic policy of calling for the defeat of the constitution and for the election of Gordon placed Georgia Democrats in the throes of dilemma with no real hope of resolution. Rejection of the constitution would prevent reestablishment of a civil government, thereby nullifying a Gordon victory and insuring a continuation of military occupation. Gordon would have done well to heed the advice of one prominent Georgian who urged adoption of the constitution. "If the Radicals retain power, it [the constitution] is the best we can get--if the Dem'ts get in, we can make it what we desire." Nevertheless, Gordon persisted in his opposition to the constitution. The heated campaign wound to a close when balloting commenced on 20 April.<sup>20</sup>

Charges of fraud and violence surfaced immediately with both parties vigorously condemning the practices of their opponent. On the final day of the election, Gordon expressed his conviction that the Radicals would win because they had "the entire management" and controlled the black vote. He referred to the election as "farcial for the reason that any negro can vote, upon his oath that he had registered in another county and had been in the county ten days." He believed the Republicans had made full use of the black population by passing them from county to county during the four days of the election. However, in truth, neither side had a monopoly on election irregularities. Republicans abused their control of electoral machinery and Democrats "widely employed the weapons of economic coercion and outright terrorism." The combination of these excesses render a definitive assessment of the fairness of the election

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20 Coleman, History of Georgia, p. 213; Meade's Report, pp. 65-68; Augusta Daily Constitutionalist, 7 April, 8 April 1868; Atlanta Daily New Era, 7 April, 10 April 1868; Avery, History of Georgia, pp. 383-84; Athens Southern Watchman, 8 April, 15 April 1868; Gordon to B. C. Yancey, 12 April 1868, Benjamin C. Yancey Papers, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, North Carolina (hereafter cited as Yancey Papers, UNC); Thompson, Reconstruction in Georgia, p. 202.

virtually impossible. Regardless of the irregularities, the official results reported that Gordon lost by 7171 votes--83,527 to 76,356--but Georgia voters did approve the new constitution by a vote of 88,172 to 70,200. A student of this contest concluded that the large differential between the two votes probably meant that some moderate Republicans, though they preferred Gordon to Bullock, still favored adoption of the constitution. Despite his belief that "wholesale fraud" had been employed to steal the election from him, Gordon accepted the outcome. With little to show for his first venture into politics except the experience gained, Gordon shifted his attention back to the business endeavors that he had become involved with just prior to the gubernatorial campaign.<sup>21</sup>

Gordon's association with the Southern Life Insurance Company provided him with an excellent opportunity to capitalize on the name he made for himself during the war. When the Memphis-based Southern Life decided to open an office in Atlanta in 1867 or 1868, Gordon was named president of that branch. Obviously, his selection could not have been justified on the basis of any proven business acumen; rather, it was clearly Gordon's military fame that earned him the position. His name would act as a magnet attracting business and inspiring confidence. Just as the Memphis company had prospered, so too did the Atlanta branch flourish under Gordon's direction. Unlike many other former Confederates who were only nominally involved with the companies they headed, Gordon appears to have taken an active role in the management of the Southern Life Insurance Company. His able leadership and steadfast defense of the

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<sup>21</sup> Thompson, Reconstruction in Georgia, pp. 204-08; Gordon to Barlow, 23 April 1868, Barlow Papers, Huntington; August Daily Constitutionalist, 21 April, 23 April 1868; Bloom, "April 1868 Election," pp. 41, 86; Coleman, History of Georgia, p. 213.

company in the face of northern attacks enabled the Southern to grow rapidly. Reflecting upon its first year of operation, Gordon reported that the company had gained ground but not as rapidly as he had hoped because, for him, the insurance business represented much more than just a source of income. Gordon realized that as his business increased, the tremendous drain of capital away from the South and to the North would be effectively slowed. Perhaps in time, it would even be stopped. And as more and more money remained at home--in the South--vital funds would be available for developing southern business and industry. Thus, the Southern Life Insurance Company afforded Gordon the opportunity to advance his own economic well-being as well as to promote the interests of the South. Or as one historian noted, "Gordon was thus another of those statesman, so prominent in his day, who combined a laudable desire to advance the common weal with large personal ambitions."<sup>22</sup>

As operations expanded in the following years, the Southern Life Insurance Company came under increasingly hostile attack from northern journals. These assaults compelled Gordon to defend the integrity of the company. In March 1869, he took bitter exception to one particular sixteen-line article in Insurance Times which, he maintained, contained twelve "wilful, malignant unmitigated falsehoods." Gordon refuted a variety of charges--that the company was not a southern one, that it was not doing much business, and that it had both refused and failed to pay losses. He argued that the Southern Life Insurance Company was "as safe an institution, as solidly founded, and as

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<sup>22</sup> Coutler, South During Reconstruction, pp. 197-98; Atlanta Constitution, 22 June, 16 August 1868, 28 March 1869; Savannah Daily News and Herald, 18 May 1868; Athens Southern Watchman, 27 May 1868; Atlanta Daily New Era, 24 May 1868; Gordon to Yancey, 12 April, 26 December 1868, Yancey Papers, UNC; Alex Mathews Arnett, The Populist Movement in Georgia: A View of the "Agrarian Crusade" in the Light of Solid-South Politics (New York: Columbia University Press, 1922), p. 29.

honestly managed as any in the United States." The Atlanta Constitution echoed similar sentiments in August 1869. The newspaper highly recommended the Southern to its readers, declaring that it "is fully entitled to the complete confidence of the people, for its solvency, and able and honest management."<sup>23</sup>

In an effort to make the company more attractive, Gordon attempted to induce Robert E. Lee to join the Southern by offering him the presidency. Although Lee responded that he would derive great pleasure from once again associating with the many former Confederates then involved with the company, he declined the offer. "I feel that I ought not abandon the position I hold at Washington College at this time or as long as I can be of service to it," he wrote. Another attempt to persuade Lee to reconsider met with similar rejection as the Virginian preferred "to continue in the simple path" he had chosen.<sup>24</sup>

Despite Lee's refusal, along with persistent attacks upon the honesty of the company's officers and increasing financial pressures in the country, the Southern continued to prosper. In April 1871, the Atlanta Constitution praised the company's officers as "men of the great ability and number among them names that are dear to the Southern people." Indeed, with Benjamin H. Hill, Wade Hampton, Robert Toombs, Alexander H. Stephens, Benjamin C. Yancey, C. H. Phinzy, A. Austell, William C. Morris, Alfred H. Colquitt, H. V. M. Miller involved as officers, directors and stockholders, the Southern broadly appealed to Georgians and prospered. The paper also hailed the company's successful operation "with pleasure, for being a home interest, its success stimulates the

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<sup>23</sup> Atlanta Constitution, 26 March, 28 March, 7 August, 5 November 1869.

<sup>24</sup> Lee to Gordon, 14 December 1869, Robert Edward Lee Letterbooks, Virginia Historical Society, Richmond, Virginia (original located in Gordon Family Collection, UGA); Lee to Gordon, 1 March 1870, Gordon Family Collection, UGA.

progress of all other home interests." Two months later, a patient and thorough examination of the books of the Atlanta branch revealed "that the business of the Company has been conducted by the officers with economy and fidelity, and that our former confidence in the great success of the Company and its ability to furnish to policy-holders as perfect security as any in the country, has been strengthened." These were words of high praise for the young company under Gordon's management.<sup>25</sup>

The Southern Life Insurance Company, in addition to its standard life insurance practices, also published a weekly agricultural journal. The Plantation, uniquely subtitled Devoted to the Interest of Agriculture, Rural Economy, and the Benefits of Life Insurance, was distributed free of charge to the Southern's policy-holders. Serving "life insurance and agriculture with equal zeal," Plantation was both well received as a trade magazine and popular as an agricultural journal. Editors of the Atlanta Constitution testified, "We know of no agricultural periodical in which more taste is displayed in the make-up, or whose columns display more marked ability." Moreover, the journal provided an additional forum for Gordon and other southerners to air their views on any number of subjects. Gordon frequently utilized the pages of Plantation to answer what he considered the malicious accusations and puerile attacks by northern insurance companies on southern insurance ventures. He also heartily extolled the virtue and profitability of investments in the South. In fact, by emphasizing the wisdom of life insurance as a means of providing for one's

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<sup>25</sup> Atlanta Constitution, 2 November 1870, 9 April, 28 May, 2 July 1871. See also Gordon to Southern Stockholders, 23 May 1870, Yancey Papers, UNC; 23 May 1870 statement of confidence, *ibid.* For statements of the continued prosperity of the Southern Life Insurance Company in the mid-1870s, see Atlanta Constitution, 12 July 1872, 23 March, 12 August, 14 September 1873, 6 September 1874.

family after death, many of the journal's articles were specifically tailored to those individuals who had been financially devastated by the war.<sup>26</sup>

Recognizing the value of the journal, Gordon joined in expanding it into a larger scheme. In July 1871, Gordon, B. C. Yancey and W. C. Morris formed the Plantation Publishing Company, a co-partnership for the purpose of printing, book-binding and issuing Plantation. As a publishing firm, it solicited all sorts of printing jobs and maintained its weekly issue of Plantation, for which it received \$300 a month from the Southern Life Insurance Company. In July 1872, when the insurance company's contract with the Plantation Publishing Company expired, Plantation changed from a free service for policy-holders to strictly a subscription periodical. The format of the journal also changed substantially in the fall of 1872 when the sixteen-page weekly, costing \$3.00 per year, was replaced by a fifty page magazine, published monthly at \$1.50 per annum. Although Plantation continued to receive hearty endorsements, mismanagement and internal conflicts--particularly among later partners and Yancey--led to its rapid decline. During his association with the publishing firm, Gordon never became deeply involved with its operations; instead he left direction and control of the company to its president, Yancey. He severed his association with Plantation in October 1873 when the Plantation Publishing Company dissolved. In spite of the dissolution of the firm, Gordon continued to direct the affairs of the prosperous Southern Life Insurance Company.<sup>27</sup>

Gordon remained devoted to his insurance business and his vision of the

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<sup>26</sup> Coulter, South During Reconstruction, p. 198; Atlanta Constitution, 7 July 1871, 7 June 1872.

<sup>27</sup> 6 May 1871 Announcement, Yancey Papers, UNC; 4 July 1871 Contract of Copartnership, ibid.; 4 October 1871 Notice, ibid.; 12 June 1872 Testimony of E. D. L. Mobley, ibid.; C. R. Handleiter to Yancey, 8 July 1872, ibid.; Atlanta Constitution, 7 June, 17 October 1872, 31 October 1873.

benefits it held for the South, but the work that gratified him most centered around efforts to provide southern schools and colleges with "unsectional, unpolitical and unpartisan" books. Early in 1868, the Georgian accepted the vice-presidency of the New York-based publishing house, Richardson and Company. When this firm soon expanded and became known as the University Publishing Company, Gordon retained his position as vice-president. The company rapidly grew into "the most ambitious and best known" publishing house involved in the southern book business. Its primary purpose was to furnish the South with "a series of school books divested of the injurious reflections upon the Southern people and Southern history, which were usually found in Northern elementary works." Accordingly, its most noteworthy publications were part of the Southern University Series of School-Books, or as it was later known, the University Series of School-Books. In essence, the University Publishing Company sought "to create a non-partisan school literature" and to rid the nation, and especially the South, of obnoxious works which sowed "the seeds of the religion of sectional hate." It was absolutely essential for Gordon that southerners steadfastly resist all efforts "to destroy the self-respect and character of Southern youth by teaching them . . . that they are descendants of rebels and traitors to the Constitution of the country." The South's heritage had to be preserved and the motives that prompted southerners to go to war in 1861 must not be disparaged. Believing there could be no more noble, or vitally important charge, Gordon would devote much of his life to insuring precisely these ends.<sup>28</sup>

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28 University Series of School-Books Broadside, Yancey Papers, UNC; Gordon to Barlow, 30 January 1868, Barlow Papers, Huntington; Coulter, South During Reconstruction, p. 329; Atlanta Constitution, 1 June, 24 June, 29 June, 14 July 1871; Charles S. Venable to F. W. M. Holliday, 23 May 1878, Frederick W. M. Holliday Papers, Duke University, Durham, North Carolina (hereafter cited as Holliday Papers, Duke).

From the moment he joined the University Publishing Company, when as a friend of his put it, "three-fourths of the States were in the hands of . . . [the South's] worst enemies," Gordon labored tirelessly on its behalf. This publishing venture, similar to the Southern Life Insurance Company, afforded Gordon the opportunity to recoup some of his financial losses while at the same time supplying what he termed "a long felt want in the South." Working "with his characteristic energy and ability," Gordon in the late 1860s and early 1870s addressed audiences throughout the South, penned countless letters--both public and private--and wrote numerous articles for newspapers and journals in which he repeatedly stressed that the South must educate itself. He pleaded for southerners to remain united and ever-vigilant in their effort "to rid themselves of literary bondage to the North in the school room." The importance of this action could not be overemphasized because as Gordon implored, "Our self respect, our civilization, the character and manhood of our children demand the introduction of . . . good Southern books into our schools." Gordon clearly had more in mind more than merely a historical defense of the South, for the scope of the southern textbook series quickly broadened and encompassed a wide variety of subjects.<sup>29</sup>

The University Series of School-Books strove to provide books "of the highest order of scholastic and mechanical merits." In order to secure such works, the company contracted with several of the most outstanding southern

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<sup>29</sup> Venable to Holliday, 23 May 1878, Holliday Papers, Duke; Gordon to P. G. T. Beauregard, 10 May 1872, John Brown Gordon Papers, Duke University, Durham, North Carolina; Gordon to R. D. Arnold, 22 September 1873, Keith Morton Read Collection, University of Georgia, Athens, Georgia; Gordon to Charles Herbst, 24 July 1871, Charles Herbst Collection, Kentucky Historical Society, Frankfort, Kentucky; Atlanta Constitution, 12 November 1870, 26 June, 14 July, 12 August 1871; R. E. Lee to Gordon, 30 December 1867, Gordon Family Collection, UGA; Gordon to Barlow, 30 January 1868, Barlow Papers, Huntington.

scholars to write its textbooks. Among "the ablest and most honored educators of the South" who contributed to the series were Charles S. Venable in arithmetic, Commodore Matthew F. Maury in geography, George F. Holmes in readers, spellers, grammars, and history, Basil L. Gildersleeve in Latin, Schele de Vere in French and John and Joseph LeConte in science. This distinguished group of authors produced a series of texts E. Merton Coulter found "as noteworthy and respectable as any in the country." The fine quality of many of the books led not only to their widespread use in the South, but to adoption in many northern schools as well.<sup>30</sup>

Nevertheless, the University Publishing Company encountered many of the same severe criticisms that had been leveled against the Southern Life Insurance Company. Enemies of the University Publishing Company--often styled as the "'Educational Ku Klux'" by leading southern journals--assailed it from almost every conceivable angle--questioning its purpose and management, assaulting the motives and integrity of its officers, ridiculing the quality of the books, and impugning the ability of the authors. Criticized on one hand as a southern attempt to introduce strictly sectional books--like many northern firms were in fact doing--the University Publishing Company also endured claims that it was a northern firm attempting to impose itself on the South. Gordon, just as he did with the Southern Life Insurance Company, shouldered much of the responsibility for combating what he viewed as the "unscrupulous assaults" on his company and the "virulent opposition" it encountered. He urged his readers not to be diverted by the utterly unwarranted attacks upon the company's

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<sup>30</sup> Venable to Holliday, 23 May 1878, Holliday Papers, Duke; University Series Broadside, Yancey Papers, UNC; Gordon to Barlow, 30 January 1868, Barlow Papers, Huntington; Coulter, South During Reconstruction, pp. 329-30; Atlanta Constitution, 29 June 1871.

honest efforts to publish and distribute "a just, unsectional and elevated school literature." Gordon pointed out that the University Publishing Company, though primarily concerned with southern education, also sought "to improve, to purify, to ennoble and to nationalize, the elementary works by which American children are to be educated." In addition to concentrating on the unbiased nature of the company's books, Gordon also took great pains to defend the southern character of the firm. Even though the company utilized the services of a New York publishing house, he explained that financial considerations alone explained that seemingly strange situation. As soon as a southern manufacturer could supply similar services at comparable prices, Gordon assured the public that operations would be shifted to the South because, as he asserted, "the purpose of the Company [is] to aid, in every way in its power, in the advancement of Southern interests."<sup>31</sup>

With Gordon as "its champion and friend," the University Publishing Company successfully furnished many southern children with a series of fine textbooks. Indeed, one historian has written that "[G]enerations of Southerners developed a debt of gratitude to these men" who wrote the texts. Even though this publishing project would eventually fail on account of its inability to attract investors, Gordon took great pride in his contribution to developing and disseminating these school books. By helping provide an alternative to the numerous textbooks which explicitly and implicitly denigrated southerners' role in American history, he assisted fellow southerners in their struggle to hold fast to their past. His devotion to national reconciliation would eventually emerge as the predominant theme in his postwar career; however, Gordon also

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<sup>31</sup> "Gen. Gordon's Reply to Certain Widely Circulated Slanders," 27 April 1872, Yancey Papers, UNC; *Atlanta Constitution*, 29 June, 14 July, 25 July 1871; University Series Broadside, Yancey Papers, UNC.

labored with an unmatched zeal to preserve the heritage of his section and to defend southern participation in the Civil War. He steadfastly averred that southerners before and during the war were guided by the same sincerity of purpose and purity of motive that had animated their northern brethren.<sup>32</sup>

Having committed himself to several businesses which enabled him to serve his state and section, Gordon made Atlanta his permanent residence. In the late 1860s, he purchased land in Kirkwood, a sparsely populated community four miles outside of the capital city. There in 1869 in a dense woodland along the Central of Georgia Railroad, Gordon carved out his beautiful and beloved "Sutherland" estate. Built upon a hill, his home provided a superb view of the surrounding countryside. The two-story white mansion, distinguished by its eight massive Ionic columns, became a local landmark. Its exceptionally high ceilings, spacious rooms, tall French windows, and elegant, ornate furnishings set Gordon's home apart from virtually every other Atlanta residence. "Sutherland" also became one of the premier social centers as the Gordons soon established themselves as gracious and generous hosts. On the estate encompassing over 200 acres, Gordon also planted countless varieties of trees, shrubs, and plants and raised various forms of livestock. John and Fanny loved "Sutherland" so deeply that when it burned near the end of the century, they rebuilt an almost exact replica of the original. "Sutherland" not only served as a source of pride for Gordon, but, more importantly, provided a warm, comfortable refuge for him as increasing responsibilities kept him away from home more and more.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Venable to Holliday, 23 May 1878, Holliday Papers, Duke; Coulter, South During Reconstruction, pp. 329-30; Atlanta Constitution, 14 July 1871.

<sup>33</sup> Gordon, "De Gin'ral an' Miss Fanny," Gordon Family Collection, UGA; Atlanta Constitution, 22 June 1899, 12 January 1904; Atlanta Journal, 16 March

Beyond his energetic promotion of southern business and educational interests, Gordon also lent his support to efforts by southern whites to maintain their social order. Specifically, when whites in the South felt threatened during congressional reconstruction by the Republican-led movement to provide blacks with social, economic and political equality, Gordon endorsed restriction and control of the freedman. There is little doubt that the General became involved with the Ku Klux Klan because he was often referred to as the Grand Dragon of the Klan in Georgia. Still, it is virtually impossible to penetrate the shroud of secrecy surrounding his association with the Klan. Most of what is known about his role in the organization is contained in his testimony before a joint select congressional committee in July 1871. Yet, despite grilling the Georgian for five hours on the condition of affairs in his native state, the committee, in the main, learned few specifics.<sup>34</sup>

When asked directly what he knew of illegal organizations known as the Ku Klux, Gordon denied all knowledge of any combination by that name, except what he had read in the papers or heard second-hand. He did, however, reveal

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1924, 16 January 1927, 21 February 1937, 11 October 1942; Paul W. Miller, ed., Atlanta: Capital of the South (New York: Oliver Durrell, Inc., 1949), pp. 218-19; Hugh H. Gordon, Jr., A Letter to My Sons About Their Forebearers (privately published), Gordon Family Collection, UGA. The real estate records of DeKalb County are full of transactions whereby Gordon both added to as well as sold portions of the Kirkwood property. See especially Real Estate Deeds and Mortgages, DeKalb County, Superior Court, Decatur, Georgia. Photographs of "Sutherland" and its interior can be found in Gordon Family Collection, UGA and Atlanta Historical Society, Atlanta, Georgia.

<sup>34</sup> Thompson, Reconstruction in Georgia, p. 382; Stanley F. Horn, Invisible Empire: The Story of the Ku Klux Klan, 1867-1871 (Montclair, New Jersey: Patterson Smith, 1969), pp. 170-72; Susan Lawrence Davis, Authentic History, of the Ku Klux Klan 1865-1877 (New York: American Library Service, 1924), p. 228; Allen W. Trelease, White Terror: The Ku Klux Klan Conspiracy and Southern Reconstruction (New York: Harper and Row, 1971), pp. 20, 74; KKK Report, p. 304; New York Times, 28 July 1871; Atlanta Constitution, 23 July, 30 July 1871.

his association with a secret organization whose sole purpose he maintained was the preservation of peace. Approached by some of Georgia's most respected men, Gordon stated that he joined this "brotherhood of property-holders, the peaceable, law-abiding citizens of the State, for self-protection" from the threat posed by what he considered the largely ignorant black population. Although he asserted that he had personally "never entertained toward the negro race anything but the very kindest feelings," Gordon again explained that it was the influx of "carpet-baggers" and their seditious influence upon blacks that forced whites in the South to act. The introduction of this "class of men whose object seemed to be to stir up strife among the people, and to create animosity," in his opinion, disrupted the normally harmonious relations between the races. Organizing blacks into Union or Loyal Leagues, these unprincipled whites attempted to convince the former slaves that their interests "were in direct conflict with those of the white men at the South. . . ." Gordon also blamed these "carpet-baggers" for reinforcing the commonly-held notion among blacks that all of the lands in the South really belonged to the freedman, and not to the whites.<sup>35</sup>

Apprehensive that such incendiary preachings might well incite blacks to violence, Gordon contended that native white southerners had little choice but to act on their own. They formed a "peace police organization" to protect themselves, their families and their property from outrage. "We would have preferred death," he asserted, "rather than have to submitted to what we supposed was coming upon us." Facing what they saw as the "entire organization of the black race on the one hand, and the entire disorganization of the white race on the other hand," Gordon testified that the whites of Georgia acted

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35 KKK Report, pp. 306-10, 320-21, 339, 341, 345.

"purely in self defense, to repel the attack in case we should be attacked." He did not deny the possibility that abuses and outrages may have taken place in Georgia, but he stated that any attempt at intimidation by native whites paled in comparison with that used by Republicans who forced blacks to vote their party ticket. Individuals of all parties and all colors throughout Georgia occasionally resorted to violence, but Gordon maintained that no crimes had been committed by the association of which he spoke. Although it is remotely possible that Gordon was unaware of the threats and violence southern whites frequently employed against southern black, it is highly unlikely. A much more plausible explanation is that Gordon simply "looked the other way," and countenanced occasional excesses as the price that had to be paid if social peace--peace determined exclusively by southern whites--was to be regained and preserved.<sup>36</sup>

Even though Gordon styled his association as "purely a peace police--a law-abiding concern"--he explained that native whites felt compelled to remain in the shadows because any attempt at public organization would be misconstrued by Federal authorities as a move antagonistic to the government. To the contrary, according to Gordon, "the organization was in entire accord with what we believed to be the spirit of the white soldiers of the United States," that being "to maintain the peace, and keep down . . . anything that would tend to produce a war of races." Gordon even asserted that his organization would have gladly united with Federal troops to quell racial disorders, but, as he pointed out, "we apprehended that the sympathy of the entire Government would be against us." So as long as anarchy prevailed and "drumhead court-martials" supplied the only law, he believed formation of a self-defense association was imperative. Gordon made that point unmistakably

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36 *Ibid.*, pp. 308-10, 321, 325, 329, 341-44.

clear.

I want it distinctly understood that this organization was intended, by peaceable means, not by violence, to prevent a collision of the races. We did not want to have in our State a war of races--to have property and our lives destroyed. We feared the peril to our women and children. We felt that we must have some means of bringing to bear in an emergency a sufficient moral force in any particular neighborhood . . . to suppress anything of that sort by the power of influence and of numbers, and, in case of absolute necessity, by actual force.

To bear out his contentions, Gordon noted that once civil courts were reestablished and "a general protection" extended to all, the necessity for this protective body ceased and the organization disbanded. But he also added that it was generally understood among the organization's members that if similarly disruptive circumstances again arose, they would reunite to meet the threat.<sup>37</sup>

The committee often pressed Gordon for details about the structure, membership, and leadership of the organization, but his masterfully vague responses only further frustrated the congressmen. Despite persistent verbal prodding, Gordon refused to provide the committee with specifics. Pointed questions on the workings of the organization--oaths, disguises, signs, chain of command, means of control and mobilization--were met by repeated professions of ignorance or forgetfulness. Yet, even in his evasiveness, Gordon testified that if anyone in Georgia would have known the details of the organization, he would have been the one. "Nobody knows anything more about it than I do; I think I know all about it." Statements to this effect only strengthened the committee's resolve to determine if Gordon did, in fact, preside over the Klan in Georgia. Nevertheless, he continued to deny the existence of a central authority capable of supervising all of the organization's movements because, in his opinion, such a tightly controlled, well-structured system had never been perfected.

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid., pp. 308-10, 324-325.

The organization "was a very temporary thing," he explained, and it had passed from the Georgia scene some two years earlier. Asked about the possibility that it might still be operating and why local units reported to him, he simply answered that his frequent correspondence with former soldiers and constant travel throughout the state made it "almost impossible for the organization to have existed recently without my knowledge." Unconvinced by Gordon's denials of the existence of a "general head," the committee vigorously pressed him to elaborate on his position. Gordon at first refused to state what position he held, but when compelled to present a more definite answer, he replied, "I was spoken to as the chief of the State. I said very emphatically that upon that line I could be called on if it was necessary. But the organization never was perfected, and I never heard anything about it after that time." This was the closest he came to admitting his leadership of the Georgia Klan.<sup>38</sup>

Unquestionably, Gordon occupied a prominent position within the Klan. The origin of the Klan in Georgia is generally dated to the first public reference to it in an Atlanta newspaper in March 1868. That is when the recognized Grand Wizard of the Klan "coincidentally" visited Atlanta on insurance business. Even if Nathan Bedford Forrest had come to Atlanta to discuss insurance matters, it is quite likely that he conferred with the new president of the Atlanta branch of the Southern Life Insurance Company on matters other than insurance. One student of the Klan, personally acquainted with Gordon, wrote that he first learned of the Ku Klux Klan when visiting his brother, Eugene, in Athens, Alabama in the fall of 1866. This same authority reported that Gordon began organizing in Georgia shortly thereafter and as leader of the Georgia Klan,

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38 Ibid., pp. 321-26, 341-42.

frequently conferred with national Klan headquarters and actually directed the whole organization when Forrest's health failed.<sup>39</sup>

Again, it is exceedingly difficult to develop Gordon's exact role in the Klan, but given the nature of his testimony, his almost constant travel throughout Georgia and the South, and his desire to maintain peace and social order, one can conclude with reasonable certainty that Gordon was at least titular head of the Georgia Ku Klux Klan. With equal confidence, it can be stated that Gordon probably had little knowledge of and little or no control over the local klavens of the organization. Although it is doubtful that he would have condoned the violence so often employed by Klan members, he would not have questioned it when he felt it was justified. In this sense, then, Gordon typified the upper levels of southern society in that he would do what had to be done to preserve social order and peace, but he hoped it could be accomplished without violence.<sup>40</sup>

Gordon's testimony reveals much more than merely his racial views. Indeed, he articulated the sense of betrayal that he and many other southerners felt about the actions of the Federal government in the years following the war. The considerate treatment of the southerners by the Union army at Appomattox Court House, argued Gordon, "led our people to feel that a liberal, generous, magnanimous policy would be pursued toward them." Even though these Confederates who surrendered to Grant had no written pledge, except that in their paroles, the Georgian interpreted the magnanimity of the victors as a moral obligation to respect the "rights which we have inherited--which belonged

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<sup>39</sup> Horn, Invisible Empire, pp. 170-72; Atlanta Intelligencer, 14 March 1868; Davis, Authentic History, pp. 227-30.

<sup>40</sup> Trelease, White Terror, pp. 74-79.

to us as citizens of the country." Instead of pursuing Grant's liberal lead and restoring the South to its normal relations, Gordon maintained the government had adopted a vindictive policy bent on humiliating and humbling the South. Disfranchisement, prohibitions on office-holding for many of the most respected whites in the South, and the concomitant elevation of former slaves to political equality--or in some cases dominance--inflamed southerners. "The burning of Atlanta and all the devastation through Georgia never created," in Gordon's mind, "a tithe of the animosity that has been created by this sort of treatment of our people." Had southerners been dealt with in the same spirit that existed at Appomattox, Gordon insisted that most of the postwar difficulties could have been avoided.<sup>41</sup>

In addition to charges of "bad faith," Gordon again related his conviction that southern actions which lead to war could not be construed as treasonous. For him, the war resulted from "a conflict of theories, a honest difference of opinions as to our rights under the General Government." He maintained that southerners, convinced of the constitutionality of secession, attempted to leave the Union, "boldly, fairly and squarely, staking our lives upon the issue." Just like their northern counterparts, they wholeheartedly believed in the correctness of their cause. For Gordon, four years of bloody combat had not only resolved the issue, but also vindicated the sincerity of both sides' efforts. "We had fought the contest; we had been defeated; and we thought that ought to be the last of it." Rather than simply acknowledging the resolution of the conflict and the southerners' sincerity of purpose, Gordon contended that the government had impugned their honor, stripped them of their rights, and, in essence, said to most whites in the South that they were unworthy of citizenship. Understandably

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41 KKK Report, pp. 316, 318-19, 332-33, 342-44.

alienated and outraged, white southerners expressed their indignation. Although Gordon found no sentiment whatsoever in Georgia for again taking up arms against the government, he sadly concluded that southerners' "affection for the Government, in virtue of old associations . . . has been diminished by the course which has been pursued toward them."<sup>42</sup>

Gordon's obvious dissatisfaction with relations between the South and the national government in the midst of Radical Reconstruction fueled his desire to work for the removal of the Federal troops still garrisoned in his section. In spite of his defeat in the April 1868 gubernatorial contest, Gordon remained active in politics. His refusal to enter the race for the United States Senate seat two months later disappointed many. But one Georgia newspaper astutely commented that even though Gordon would greatly honor any position he might be called to, "he can afford, however, to wait and bide his time." His keen interest in both Georgia and national politics prompted correspondence both in and out of state. Trying to generate enthusiasm for the 1868 fall elections, Gordon struggled to overcome what he viewed as the depression afflicting many southerners who felt nothing "we may say or do, is of real importance in the approaching presidential election." He preferred a candidate with "a first rate war record," but assured a northern Democrat that the South would loyally support any candidate that the northern wing of the party nominated. Gordon also attempted to put the central issue clearly in focus. "The South can't afford to go into the contest with the sole object of saving honor." Of far greater importance, "We must get rid of Military Government without bringing upon us a worse one."<sup>43</sup>

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42 *Ibid.*, pp. 316, 332-34, 342-43.

43 *Atlanta Constitution*, 19 June 1868; Gordon to Barlow, 29 January, 6 April, 23 April, 19 May, 5 June 1868, Barlow Papers, Huntington.

After attending the National Democratic Convention in New York in the summer as a Georgia elector-at-large, Gordon devoted much of the fall to stumping the state on behalf of Democratic standard bearer, Horatio Seymour. At mass meetings throughout the state, he scored the Republicans, stressed the need for peaceful forbearance and self control, and urged southerners "not to visit upon the heads of the unfortunate and deluded negro the sins of the bad white men. . . ." Gordon's efforts helped the Democrats carry the state in November, but the resounding national triumph of U. S. Grant meant continued Republican control of the executive branch of government.<sup>44</sup>

Gordon never lost touch with Georgia politics during the next three years even though he devoted the bulk of his time to developing his business enterprises. His involvement with the Southern Life Insurance Company, the University Publishing Company, and the Plantation Publishing Company exerted tremendous pressure upon him as he tried to promote all three at once. In May 1872, his concerned wife urged him to slow down and allow others to share the responsibility. Fanny called his heavy load "the most tremendous elephant that ever a man had to deal with;" nevertheless, Gordon persisted in labors and soon took on an additional burden. When confronted by "the peculiar political situation" surrounding the presidential election of 1872, Gordon again moved to the forefront of Georgia and southern politics. Horace Greeley's nomination by the liberal wing of the Republican party presented the Democratic party, and particularly southern Democrats, with a vexing problem. If the Democratic National Convention selected a candidate other than Greeley, many of the Liberal Republicans might be driven back into the Republican fold. If, on the

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<sup>44</sup> Atlanta Constitution, 24 July, 1 August, 5 August, 14 August, 18 August, 27 August, 6 September, 22 September, 30 September 1868; Avery, History of Georgia, p. 390.

other hand, the Democrats endorsed Greeley as their own candidate, they might jeopardize the principles of the party by placing a man with such an anti-Democratic past at its head. The Democratic party in Georgia fractured precisely along these lines as many older, well established antebellum politicians refused to accept Greeley. Gordon, on the other hand, took the lead in supporting Greeley once the national Democratic party nominated the New Yorker. Gordon clearly understood the dilemma and struggled to remind members of his party of the priorities involved. For him, the removal of troops from the South and full restoration of home rule were the paramount objectives. These could only be accomplished if the Republican party remained disunited. Although his impulses dictated "a Democratic ticket, a Democratic fight under Democratic banners, even though we might not win a Democratic victory," Gordon realized the folly of pursuing a course of action that would almost certainly result in the triumph of Grant and Radicalism. Given this alternative, he saw no choice whatsoever.<sup>45</sup>

Greeley was as he claimed--a Republican--but Gordon believed "that all southern Democrats can support him as a Republican without lowering their banners or staining their honors, and without any abandonment of principle." Though admitting that Greeley's record could neither be defended nor ignored, Gordon cautioned Democrats not to "confuse ends with ways and means" when dealing "with the stern inexorable present." Principles themselves could remain inviolate even though the methods for securing them changed. A temporary

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45 Atlanta Constitution, 4 August, 8 November 1871, 14 May, 15 June, 24 August 1872; Gordon to Bryan Grimes, 6 May 1872, Bryan Grimes Papers, North Carolina State Archives, Raleigh, North Carolina; Fanny to John, 10 May 1872, Gordon Family Collection, UGA; Gordon to Barlow, 22 August 1872, Barlow Papers, Huntington; Gordon to W. L. Broun, 3 December 1872, William Leroy Broun Papers, Auburn University, Auburn, Alabama.

alliance between Liberal Republicans and Democrats to defeat "the arch enemies of justice and of freedom," he stressed, would sacrifice neither personal nor party principles. Removal of political disabilities from many of the South's leading citizens, the peaceable overthrow of military supported governments still existing in the South, and ouster of "the enemies of the Constitution and of good government" might all be accomplished with a Greeley victory, and thus hasten the eventual triumph of Democratic principles. Gordon made no attempt to paint Greeley as the ideal candidate, but he carefully pointed out that the Liberal Republicans at least proposed "to shake hands across the bloody chasm"--a chasm which Grant and the Radicals would work to keep wide open. For all who would listen, he boldly proclaimed, "I'm willing to shake hands." And as such, Gordon firmly established himself among the New Departure Democrats. He was willing to accept most of the political changes wrought by the war, and get on with the business of rebuilding the South.<sup>46</sup>

Gordon, just as he had done in 1868, attended the Democratic convention in Baltimore and then went on the stump in Georgia, where he campaigned vigorously for the Liberal Republican-Democratic ticket. At some point during the late summer, Gordon met with Greeley and received assurances that, if victorious, the New Yorker would not turn his back on those who had helped elect him. In essence, Greeley promised that he would recognize southern Democrats when making appointments and assembling his cabinet. Gordon not only spoke often in his native state but travelled into the North on Greeley's behalf. In Indiana, where he made his first speech north of the Ohio River, his remarks were so well received that one prominent Democrat declared, "If General Gordon

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46 Atlanta Constitution, 15 June, 24 August 1872.

will make a dozen such speeches at prominent points in Indiana we will carry the State for Hendricks and Greeley BY FORTY THOUSAND MAJORITY." Despite such claims, Gordon's efforts went for naught as Grant retained his presidency and virtually assured continued military occupation in portions of the South.<sup>47</sup>

Even as he canvassed the state during the fall of 1872, calls for sending Gordon to the United States Senate were heard. By early November, it became obvious that friends of the General would press for his nomination when the General Assembly met in January 1873. They believed that his election would serve to unite the Georgia Democracy that had suffered under the effects of the presidential election. Accordingly, they began working in all sections of the state for him. Gordon also began to take an active role by writing letters to numerous prominent Georgians soliciting their support. So as 1872 drew to a close and the number of candidates for the Senate seat increased almost daily, the contest appeared to take on the proportions of a struggle between generations. On one side were many of Georgia's older politicians, men who had been prominent in antebellum southern politics and who had opposed the Liberal Republican-Democratic fusion behind Greeley. On the other side were men of the younger generation, like Gordon, who had made their reputations either in or since the war. As the opposing forces gathered for battle, Alexander H. Stephens, one of Georgia's most respected leaders, privately wrote, "Georgia is now really in the crisis of her fate. Events incalculable in their consequences will depend upon this senatorial election." And in the midst of the swirling

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<sup>47</sup> Atlanta Constitution, 16 August, 22 August, 24 August, 25 August, 3 September, 5 September, 21 September 1872; New York Times, 4 September, 6 September, 8 September 1872; Avery, History of Georgia, pp. 501-02; "Gordon's First Speech North of the Ohio," Confederate Veteran 12 (April 1904): 183-84.

turbulence of this crisis, Gordon was inexorably drawn to its center.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Atlanta Constitution, 29 October, 7 November, 20 November, 22 November, 7 December, 29 December 1872, 8 January 1873; Gordon to A. R. Lawton, 28 October, 6 November 1872, Alexander Robert Lawton Papers, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, North Carolina; Gordon to L. N. Trammell, 6 November 1872, L. N. Trammell Papers, Emory University, Atlanta, Georgia; Gordon to H. V. Johnson, 11 November 1872, Herschel Vespasian Johnson Papers, Duke University, Durham, North Carolina (hereafter cited as H. V. Johnson Papers, Duke); Gordon to J. H. Hewitt, 26 November 1872, John Hill Hewitt Papers, Emory University, Atlanta, Georgia; Alexander H. Stephens to H. V. Johnson, 29 December 1872, H. V. Johnson Papers, Duke.



JOHN BROWN GORDON:  
SOLDIER, SOUTHERNER, AMERICAN  
VOLUME II

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the  
Louisiana State University and  
Agricultural and Mechanical College  
in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy

in

The Department of History

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August 1983

## CHAPTER V

### SOUTHERN SPOKESMAN

The contest for Georgia's United States Senate seat recalled "the days of old" as the "old-war horses" gathered to meet the challenge of the younger generation. Alexander H. Stephens, Herschel V. Johnson, Henry L. Benning, and H. V. M. Miller, all spokesmen from the antebellum period, came to Atlanta to engage the emerging voices of "Young America," like Gordon, Benjamin H. Hill and Herbert Fielder. Supporters of Gordon, attempting to straddle the apparent generational conflict, portrayed their nominee as the ideal candidate behind whom Georgia Democrats could unite. Moreover, they maintained that Gordon could best serve the state's interests in the Senate. They argued that the steadfast opposition of the "Old Guard" to Greeley's nomination—particularly that of Stephens—even after endorsement by the national Democratic party seemed certain to detract from their national influence. Gordon's boosters also contended that B. H. Hill, the General's most serious opposition among the younger men, similarly could wield little power because of this inconsistent political course. Only Gordon, "fresh and free from all political treachery," could go to Washington unencumbered by burdensome political baggage.<sup>1</sup>

The call for casting aside the old leadership in favor of "new men,

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<sup>1</sup> Atlanta Constitution, 29 December 1872, 8 January, 14 January, 16 January, 19 January 1873; Atlanta Daily Herald, quoted in *ibid.*, 29 December 1872; Issac W. Avery, History of the State of Georgia from 1850 to 1881 (New York: Brown and Derby, 1881), pp. 501-02.

against whom no political prejudices exist" appeared frequently throughout the short campaign. One letter to the editors of an Atlanta newspaper declared that the entire country would benefit if all older politicians were summarily dropped and replaced by the thousands of young men who had fought in the war. These tested veterans, according to the correspondent, had "learned more of human nature, of the management and wants of the government in that four year struggle and calamity than they would have learned in a lifetime of peace and prosperity." And of this new, war-tempered breed, many considered Gordon the most gifted and most representative man in the state. "Gordon is young, vigorous, brilliant and popular," wrote one Georgian. "He has a hold upon the affection and confidence of the people of Georgia that nothing can shake." In addition to possessing an "eminently pure" war record, he had also demonstrated his political sagacity with his well-reasoned support of Greeley in the fall presidential election. His forward position not only "made him many friends all through the West" but also evinced a keen awareness of the problems confronting the South plus "a mind fertile enough to devise and suggest a remedy."<sup>2</sup>

Although most of the senatorial aspirants were well qualified to serve Georgia, it was Gordon's relative inexperience that made him a particularly attractive candidate. Unfettered by old alliances and biases, he could grapple with the practical political questions of the day "without bitterness, without prejudice, and without enmity." Or as one newspaper proclaimed, since Gordon "belonged to the new era which began in 1861, . . . he can go into the Senate free from political prejudices of years, but full of the traditions of his people." Despite the abundance of usual campaign rhetoric, this positive

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<sup>2</sup> Atlanta Constitution, 7 November, 12 November, 22 November, 3 December, 7 December 1872, 8 January, 14 January, 16 January, 19 January 1873; Atlanta Daily Herald, quoted in ibid., 29 December 1872.

point concerning Gordon's qualifications for the office seems unmistakably correct. His deep-seated respect for the traditions of his native state and section would permit him to work effectively at healing the wounds still festering from the war while at the same time maintaining the honor and interests of the South.<sup>3</sup>

As the election approached, many political observers believed that Gordon commanded the most widespread support. His extensive letter-writing, especially to newly-elected members of the General Assembly, garnered for him a large number of first ballot pledges. Zealous efforts by his supporters in all parts of the state also greatly enhanced his prospects. Indeed, the organized effort on his behalf proved so effective that accusations of political manipulation began to surface. H. V. Johnson, despairing of both his and A. H. Stephens' chances of success, gloomily predicted an "unequal contest with a ring formed to elevate General Gordon and control legislation and animated by no principles save those of personal aggrandisement." This was the first time that cries of an "Atlanta ring" working to control Georgia politics arose in connection with Gordon, but it was only the beginning of a storm of protest that would rage throughout his political career. At this point, specifics concerning the leadership of this "machine" centered in Atlanta are vague, but without question a large majority of the so-called "pawns" of the ring were the former Confederate soldiers—those veterans who idolized Gordon, or as one politician styled him, "the gallant boy who bore their flag so proudly." Given his magnetic appeal grounded in his war record and the increasing willingness to elevate young men of the war generation to positions of authority, it appeared likely

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<sup>3</sup> Atlanta Constitution, 8 January, 14 January, 16 January, 19 January 1873; Atlanta Daily Herald, quoted in ibid., 29 December 1872.

to many that Gordon would win.<sup>4</sup>

The General Assembly began balloting on 21 January. Gordon, as anticipated, won a plurality in both houses on the first ballot, receiving a combined total of ninety-three votes, Stephens fifty-six, Hill thirty, Fielder eighteen and Amos T. Akerman, a Republican, twelve. With none of the candidates possessing a majority in either house, the Legislature suspended balloting and adjourned until the following day. At noon on 22 January, the Senate and the House reassembled in joint session for the purpose of electing a Senator. The first three ballots failed to produce a winner and witnessed only minor shifts in voting patterns--a slight decline in Gordon's votes, a somewhat greater increase in Stephens' strength, and a gradual erosion of Fielder's support. On the fifth ballot, however, as Fielder dropped out of the contest, Gordon began a surge that carried over into the succeeding ballot. When results of the sixth vote were first announced Gordon's total stood at 101 votes, still six votes short of a clear majority. Then "amid as wild an excitement as ever existed in a deliberative body," members began to change their votes as Hill's support disintergrated. Almost indescribable confusion prevailed, but following a recount, Gordon emerged from "the torrent of confusing changes" triumphant with 112 votes. Against "an unparalleled array of competitors, the most popular, gifted and veteran public leaders in Georgia," Gordon had won his first triumph on the political field of battle. As a chronicler of Georgia history

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4 Atlanta Constitution, 28 December 1872, 8 January, 21 January 1873; H. V. Johnson to A. H. Stephens, 9 December, 27 December 1872, 1 January 1873, Alexander Hamilton Stephens Papers, Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Washington, D. C. (hereafter cited as Stephens Papers, LC); A. H. Stephens to H. V. Johnson, 29 December 1872, Herschel Vespasian Johnson Papers, Duke University, Durham, North Carolina; J. Henley Smith to A. H. Stephens, 3 January 1873, Stephens Papers, LC; Avery, History of Georgia, p. 390.

observed, none could "withstand the plumed knight of Appomattox."<sup>5</sup>

Even though Gordon's victory represented a significant step in the "changing of the guard" and consequently a transformation of Georgia politics, it also exerted a more immediate and dramatic impact upon his own life. In a very short period of time, he had to arrange for the management of both his business and personal affairs in Georgia as well as complete preparations for his move to Washington. But Gordon's election proved to be of far greater importance than perhaps even he realized at the time. It provided him with his first national platform from which he could both preach his message of reconciliation and actively work at reuniting the former warring sections. Gordon would go to the Senate with this mission in mind, but southerners could still rest assured that he would safeguard and promote their interests. He was, one Georgian believed, "one of a very few of those men, like Washington, and Lee, and Stonewall Jackson, that you can shut your eyes and go it blind on."<sup>6</sup>

The special session of the 43rd Congress assembled on 4 March 1873, but Gordon did not occupy his Senate seat until the eleventh. He was appointed to the standing committees on Commerce and on Education and Labor and to a select committee on Levees on the Mississippi River. During this short three-week session, Gordon made no notable contributions; nevertheless, he served as the central figure in a relatively minor, though highly symbolic gesture of national reunification. On 25 March, the day before Congress adjourned, Vice

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<sup>5</sup> Avery, History of Georgia, pp. 505-06; Journal of the House of Representatives of the State of Georgia, 1873, pp. 134-36, 144-56; Journal of the Senate of the State of Georgia, 1873, pp. 96-97, 104; Atlanta Constitution, 22 January, 23 January, 24 January 1873; Lucian Lamar Knight, ed., Reminiscences of Famous Georgians, Embracing Episodes and Incidents in the Lives of the Great Men of State, 2 vols. (Atlanta: Franklin-Turner Co., 1907-1908), 2: 873.

<sup>6</sup> Atlanta Constitution, 14 January 1873.

President Henry Wilson called upon the Georgian to preside over the Senate for a short time. Gordon thus became the first former Confederate since the war to be so honored. On the following day, Gordon visited the White House, where he obtained a promise from President Grant to remove those federal officers in Georgia who had secured their nominations through fraud or corruption. In a sense, these two minor, but significant incidents typified the dual allegiances under which Gordon would labor for the remainder of his life. Although many other forces would be instrumental in determining his actions, it was these often conflicting responsibilities—Gordon as a southerner and Gordon as an American—that most prominently shaped and molded his life in the postwar period.<sup>7</sup>

Wherever Gordon travelled, even at this stage of his public career, he carried these twin responsibilities with him. In May 1873 in Charleston, South Carolina, Gordon assured his hosts that he would not rest until the state had been relieved of Republican domination and military occupation. Almost within the same breath, however, he spoke of his sincere hope for the future. He longed for the day when passions would fade, sectional prejudices would be put aside and there would be "genuine peace and co-operation for good government all over the country." By the fall of 1873, even northern newspapers were beginning to recognize the articulate Georgian. The New York Herald regarded him as "the leader of the new and young class of democratic States' rights politicians that have sprung up in the South since the close of the war." Furthermore, despite his congressional inexperience, the paper found that he "is looked upon as the

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<sup>7</sup> Congressional Record, 43d Cong., special sess., 1, 38, 48; Atlanta Daily Herald, 26 March, 27 March 1873; Atlanta Constitution, 26 March, 27 March; 1 April 1873; Gordon to H. P. Farrow, 14 April, 3 May 1873, Henry P. Farrow Papers, University of Georgia, Athens, Georgia (hereafter cited as Farrow Papers, UGA); H. P. Farrow to Gordon, 18 April, 7 May 1873, Farrow Papers, UGA.

representative Southerner, not only of Georgia, but of this entire section in the United States Senate."<sup>8</sup>

When Congress reconvened in December 1873, Gordon did not immediately assert himself. At the outset, he contented himself with introducing minor bills, resolutions, and memorials intended to relieve or aid the citizens and businesses of Georgia. Gordon also presented a number of petitions to remove political disabilities from those southerners still disfranchised as a result of their participation in the war. In the years that followed, Gordon would lead the fight for restoration of full citizenship to all former Confederates. Soon after the Christmas recess, Gordon began to take an active role in Senate affairs. On 8 January 1874, he spoke at length for the first time when he urged rejection of a bill concerning salaries of federal officers and officials. He found the retroactive nature of the "Salary Grab" bill repugnant to public sentiment, but what particularly troubled him was the gross inequity existing between civilian and military salaries. In the debate over official salaries that followed, Gordon sought to reduce military salaries that, he contended, had grown exorbitant since the war. For Gordon, remuneration for military officers of all grades should never exceed that of a United States Senator or the Chief Justice.<sup>9</sup>

Although Gordon's remarks on official salaries focused generally upon economy in government and specifically upon "the relative dignity of the different departments" of the national government, some congressmen misinterpreted, or chose to misinterpret their thrust. "Greatly surprised and not a little pained" by the failure of a number of Senators to accept his "disclaimer

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<sup>8</sup> Atlanta Constitution, 14 May, 15 May 1873; New York Herald, quoted in ibid., 12 September 1873.

<sup>9</sup> Congressional Record, 43d Cong., 1st sess., 479-81, 572 -73.

of any intention to disparage" the soldiers of the Federal army, Gordon felt compelled to answer Republican accusations regarding the spirit of his comments. Even though he had been extraordinarily careful in selecting his words, he reluctantly admitted that "the passions of the past and the prejudices engendered by the war" had obviously not yet sufficiently subsided to allow a representative of the South to discuss frankly such matters without fear of misapprehension. His immense respect for the soldiers in blue who had treated the defeated Confederates at Appomattox so generously would permit no misunderstanding—either unconscious or intentional—of his sentiments. Rather than casting aspersions upon a military calling, Gordon stated that he had only the utmost respect for all true soldiers and their profession. Indeed, he took this opportunity to declare "in the most public manner, here at the capital of the nation . . . that had the questions which have so disturbed the country been left to the soldiers of the two armies after the surrender we should have had less ill-will between the sections."<sup>10</sup>

In this, his initial sortie onto the Senate floor, Gordon staked out an advanced position from which he would not retreat. Despite attempts by Radical Republican congressmen to twist his arguments, Gordon did not allow them to draw him into partisan controversy. Meeting their innuendos and attacks with moderation and forbearance, Gordon from the outset created a favorable impression. For him, the war was over and both sides, particularly the men in uniform, could take pride in their causes and their actions. Now was the time to join hands in rebuilding a stronger, more united country. Unfortunately for Gordon and the nation, many of his congressional colleagues were not so willing to bury the bitterness of the war.

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10 Ibid., 573.

Gordon delivered his first major speech on 20 January 1874 when he argued against a bill proposing return to specie payments. With the severe economic dislocations of the Panic of 1873 as a backdrop, Gordon discussed the financial question as it related to the country's agricultural interests, which he stated "are the foundations of all other interests." He began by declaring that when farming ceased to be profitable, when non-producers absorbed the profits from cultivation of the soil, and when wealth increasingly concentrated in the hands of a few, "then there is a fundamental evil, a radical wrong, either in the financial system or the legislative polity, or both, of such agricultural country." After briefly considering the various reasons generally cited for the Panic and the most commonly proposed remedies, Gordon pointedly asked the question facing Congress. "Shall we constrict; or shall we give the country more currency?" Personal experience and his own historical research convinced him that the latter offered "the shortest, surest, easiest, and best" way to relieve the country's financial woes. By no means a stout advocate of inflation, Gordon nevertheless found inflation infinitely preferable to insufficiency. "Cheap money is the one thing needful for the agricultural and productive interest of the country."<sup>11</sup>

High interest rates had left agriculture prostrate, particularly in the South which Gordon asserted "is even poorer to-day than she was the day Lee surrendered. . . ." He agreed that the end of slavery and the subsequent disorganization of labor significantly contributed to the South's plight, but he steadfastly held that the constricted money supply and high interest rates—generally hovering around twenty percent—were the primary reasons for

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11 Congressional Record, 43d Cong., 1st sess., Appendix, 12-15.

financial distress.<sup>12</sup> "Give us the means, give us a sufficiency of circulation to make interest cheap, and we will diversify our labor. Give us the means, and we will seize upon all the advantages nature has given us . . . Give us the means." Even though an increase in the circulating medium could not cure all ills, he maintained that it would go a long way toward alleviating the heavy burdens under which farmers of the South and West labored. Gordon also cautioned his colleagues to heed the "already ominous . . . murmurs of discontent" arising among agricultural interests. "In their right to regulate wrong by the ballot the producers, despising party lines and party associations, will, sooner or later, rid the country of a system which, by its discriminations, but perpetuates their bondage to poverty." In this Gordon anticipated the nation's agrarian revolt of the 1890s, a movement which would threaten even his own political future.<sup>13</sup>

Gordon's maiden effort, according to one Georgia writer, "made a profound impression upon the whole country." Many Senators of both parties "warmly congratulated" him on his treatment of the financial question. Even Republican Oliver P. Morton--arch-enemy of the South and soon-to-be frequent tormentor of Gordon--called it "the ablest effort made on the subject." One of Georgia's Washington correspondents reported that "Gordon's graceful delivery, his enthusiasm, his courteous bearing, and the line of argument pursued by him, all combined to make it an impressive and telling effort." In spite of its favorable reception, Gordon's argument proved insufficient because the Senate eventually passed the Specie Resumption bill. Nevertheless, in this and ensuing

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<sup>12</sup> For business and financial conditions in the South that Gordon spoke of, see E. Merton Coulter, The South During Reconstruction (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1947), pp. 190-95.

<sup>13</sup> Congressional Record, 43d Cong., 1st sess., 834, 1676, Appendix, 15-17.

debates, Gordon proved himself as an intelligent, forceful speaker, particularly on financial matters. During the next six years, many of his major speeches both in and out of Congress would deal with the nation's economy. But even at this early juncture, Gordon was "working up a fine reputation in the Senate." His ability and labors so impressed the Republican New York Times that it pronounced him "the ablest man from the South, in either House of Congress." Clearly, by the end of the session, Gordon had established himself. Regarded by some as "the coming man of the South," some even mentioned him as a possible national Democratic vice presidential candidate in the elections still two years away.<sup>14</sup>

Rumors also began circulating during the summer of 1874 that Gordon planned to associate with President Grant and endorse the Republican's attempt at a third term. Realizing that his personal friendship with Grant was being misconstrued by some as a political endorsement, Gordon took immediate steps to quash such pernicious rumors. In a number of letters to various southern newspaper editors, Gordon stated in unequivocal terms that nothing could ever persuade him to forsake the principles of the Democratic party. He had no intention of backing "any other than a purely Democratic candidate, with a

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14 Avery, History of Georgia, p. 559; Atlanta Constitution, 21 January, 25 January, 25 February 1874; Calhoun Times, quoted in ibid., 2 April 1874; Wilmington Star, quoted in ibid., 5 April 1874.

Gordon became involved in what was probably his first "senatorial unpleasantness" when he and Senator George E. Spencer of Alabama clashed in the closing moments of the session. Gordon evidently called up a bill—one which Spencer adamantly opposed—to remove political disabilities from John Forsyth of Alabama. Passage of the measure infuriated Spencer who claimed that Gordon "had violated the customary rules of courtesy" by presenting and passing the bill during his absence. Spencer greeted Gordon's efforts "to conciliate and explain away the matter" with a brusque promise to "make this a personal matter." Tempers flared, but nothing else resulted from the confrontation. Congressional Record, 43d Cong., 1st sess., 5412, 5427-29; Chicago Tribune, quoted in Atlanta Constitution, 28 June 1874.

Democratic platform." Even if he could advocate a third term for any man, under no conditions whatsoever would he support Grant--a man "whose success would continue in power, for four years longer, the party whose pitiless measures have brought sorrow and ruin to our people and irreparable damage to our free institutions." As the Baltimore Gazette pointed out, Gordon's unmistakable declaration of principles put "the slander at rest, at once and forever." It is absolutely inconceivable that Gordon, even in the interest of speeding national reconciliation along, ever entertained any thoughts whatsoever of switching parties or of endorsing Grant for president.<sup>15</sup>

With this incident behind him, Gordon devoted himself to extensive campaigning in his native state. In the fall elections, Democrats won overwhelmingly in Georgia and for the first time since the war captured a majority in the national House of Representatives. The ending of complete Republican control of Congress understandably heartened Gordon as well as most of his fellow southerners. At a massive rally of Fulton County Democrats two nights after the election, a deeply-moved, but ebullient Gordon likened the Democratic victory to deliverance by Almighty God. In his moment of rejoicing he boldly forecast the demise of the Republican party and predicted the end of federal support for southern governments composed of "carpet-baggers, scalawags, theives and usurpers." He stated the triumph over the Republicans meant a return to home rule and everything that attended it--white Democrats would control their own affairs, particularly the race question, without the ominous spectre of federal bayonets. Yet, even in the midst of their great celebration, Gordon urged his fellow Georgians "to remember the prudence and

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<sup>15</sup> Atlanta Constitution, 14 July, 17 July, 29 July, 2 August 1874; New York Herald, quoted in ibid., 19 July 1874; Baltimore Gazette, quoted in ibid., 31 July, 2 August 1874.

forebearance which has marked your course in the past." "We want in rejoicing no vulgar personalities, no startling expletives, no bullying threats;" rather the South, Gordon contended, must continue its acquiescence to the laws of the Constitution--no matter how bad or unjust, until they were repealed--its "support of all rightful authority" and its assistance to all men who struggled to restore harmony between the sections.<sup>16</sup>

Obviously, Gordon was a bit premature in his declaration of an end to Republican rule of the South. Even though the changing temper of the times seemed to indicate an increasing unwillingness to use the military to buttress Republican governments still standing in the South, South Carolina, Louisiana and Florida remained in the hands of the Republicans. Between 1875 and 1877, Gordon devoted the bulk of his energies to restoring southern home rule by overthrowing the federally supported Republican regimes in the South. And it was around this question of the use of troops in the South that afforded Gordon the opportunity to make his greatest speech and in doing so enhance his position as spokesman for the South.

In the almost two years that he had served in the Senate, Gordon had scrupulously refrained from confronting Republican congressmen when they launched their frequent, vitriolic harangues against the South.<sup>17</sup> Northern

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<sup>16</sup> Atlanta Constitution, 6 November 1874. For Gordon's heavy schedule of speaking engagements, see ibid., September - November 1874.

<sup>17</sup> No attempt will be made in this study to assess critically the conduct or the motives of the Radical Republicans, but one observation is worthy of mention. An examination of Gordon's senatorial career highlights the Radicals' repeated and persistent efforts to divert Senate debate away from the questions at hand--regardless of what they may have been--and into a "discussion" of sectional issues--including the war, the South's culpability, and the condition of affairs in the postwar South. Radicals bitterly assailed the South by often employing this tactic, but especially at times when former Confederates, like Gordon, rose to speak.

Radicals—among whom the most outspoken Senators were Oliver P. Morton, Roscoe Conkling and George F. Edmunds—repeatedly assailed southern whites, whom they often referred to as traitors, murderers and barbarians. In January 1875, during an extended debate over the use of federal troops in Louisiana, Radicals again unfurled and vengefully "waved the bloody shirt." Edmunds, harping upon the southern proclivity to violence and intimidation, openly implied that southern whites were little more than thugs or assassins. Furthermore, he made specific reference to "our southern brothers, who it seems have not yet forgotten the old manners and ways of semi-barbarous times." Morton continued the assault by asserting that murder had become so commonplace in the South that an unparalleled system of lying and false reporting had been established to cover the outrages committed by southern Democrats. Warning northern Democrats that a political union with southerners required acquiescence to murder and intimidation, Morton thundered, "you cannot handle pitch without being defiled." One indignant northern Democrat, Senator Allen G. Thurman of Ohio, stood to challenge these Radical assertions that he had heard so often before. He endeavored to keep the discussion focused upon, what was for him, the real issue at question—that intervention by the army in Louisiana "to determine who are the rightful members of a state legislative and to organize it not by the law but by the bayonet" was clearly in violation of the Constitution—but the hour grew late and the debate ended abruptly with adjournment. Gordon had once again sat in silence while Morton, Edmunds and Thurman—all northerners—heatedly discussed southern affairs. For Gordon, the time had come. He and his section had passively endured too much too long; the South must respond.<sup>18</sup>

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18 Congressional Record, 43d Cong., 2d sess., 247-52.

When the Senate resumed its consideration of the Louisiana question on 6 January, Gordon rose to reply to what he styled "the charges . . . [and] gratuitous insults offered to the white people of the South." Bristling with indignation and a long-suppressed urge to reply to Radical assaults upon his section, Gordon struggled to conceal the outrage he undoubtedly felt. Carefully measuring his words, Gordon professed a desire to avoid such partisan disputes because "I felt that my duty to the people I represent required that I should suffer in silence the insults which Senators on the other side of this Chamber deemed themselves authorized to utter here." But on this occasion, the Radicals had gone too far.

When the people of my section are held up to the gaze of the civilized world as murderers, assassins, and semi-barbarians, I feel that further silence will subject them to a more cruel misconstruction than can be extorted from any perversion, however gross and unjust, of my utterances here. And if my voice now betrays, as I fear it does, undue excitement, it is not the excitement of anger, but that of a man aggrieved at the unjust assaults upon the reputation of his people, conscious that they deserve a vindication which he feels himself inadequate to make.

Saddened and shocked by the existence of so much "hate and vindictiveness and of the spirit of vengeance," Gordon expressed his fear that republican government in American was at an end if the Radicals accurately reflected the sentiments of most northerners. Gordon believed, such was not the case; rather, he remained convinced "that an overwhelmingly majority of the American people, North and South, East and West, utterly abhor the spirit of animosity, of hate, and oppression manifested in this debate."<sup>19</sup>

Having reaffirmed his conviction that most Americans wished to bury the sectional bitterness of the past and to foster a more fraternal feeling between sections, Gordon proceeded to defend the honor and integrity of

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 269-70.

southern whites. He flatly denied charges that murder had become "an everyday occurrence in the South" and that innocent blood flowed in the streets. Murder and outbreaks of violence did take place, but Gordon protested that "these rare and isolated instances" did not justify Radical accusations. He declared "that wherever in the Southern States people of intelligence, integrity, and honesty have control of public affairs, property and life and rights, political and personal, are as secure as in . . . any State of Union." Then, echoing sentiments he had earlier expressed before the Ku Klux Committee, Gordon asserted that southerners had exhibited remarkable forbearance in the face of the overthrow of state governments, of usurpation of constitutionally-guaranteed rights, of military occupation, of social disruption, and of incitement of the black population by a class of men who wanted neither peace nor harmony; however, he questioned how long the people of his section could endure such treatment. Indeed, he proclaimed "that no people in the history of the world have ever been so misunderstood, so misjudged, and so cruelly maligned" as the people he represented.<sup>20</sup>

During the course of his speech, he verbally sparred with Edmunds and even though tempers flared, Gordon refused to be led astray from his defense of the South or drawn into a controversy about the war. If, as he declared, Edmunds and others desired fuel to feed the fires of sectional animosity, they would have to look elsewhere.

I am heartily sick of all this stirring up of bad passions. I was sent here for no such purpose. Nothing was further from my anticipation than that I should ever be forced into such a conflict. I came here with my heart full of good-will to all men of all sections of this country . . . I have not lost faith in the right and in the American people . . . Fraternity and good-will shall be restored to our divided country, and, despite efforts to prevent

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20 Ibid., 270-72.

it, shall grow and strengthen until its final consummation in a united people, united to build up a common country and not to desolate one portion for the benefit of the other.

Despite "a deep and broad gulf between the sentiments of the people and the spirit of hate" often evident on the floor of the Senate, Gordon concluded "that the day of better feeling is dawning."<sup>21</sup>

Gordon's masterful speech "was the first time anything like an elaborate vindication of the South had been made by a Southern man" since the war. His eloquent defense of his fellow white southerners captivated the galleries, who frequently interrupted the Georgian with ringing outbursts of applause. Even Edmunds commented on the marked effect of the speech when he cynically observed that he must wait to speak until "the solemnity that has fallen upon us on account of the sermon of the Senator from Georgia shall have been sufficiently relieved." The most impressive aspect of the speech, even above its moderate tenor, was the spirit of nationalism which prevailed it. Although obviously aggrieved by the verbal assaults upon southern whites, Gordon remained firmly committed to national pacification and to reconciliation of the former warring sections. This commitment allowed him to respond to Radical charges forcefully and to defend his section ably without resorting to the bitter partisan polemic generally employed by Radical Republicans. True, some southerners might have wished that Gordon had been even more outspoken in his defense of the South, but as one newspaper observed, "his judgment was superior to his personal feelings." Pacification and reconciliation had to triumph over anger and alienation.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 271-74.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 272; Avery, History of Georgia, p. 559; Atlanta Constitution, 9 January, 13 January 1875; Louisville Courier-Journal, quoted in ibid., 9 January 1875.

Still, Gordon must have been troubled by the potentially disruptive effect his verbal battle with Edmunds could have on the nation. On the following day, he sought to extinguish the smoldering embers of sectional hatred that his words and actions may have rekindled by boldly apologizing to the Vermont Republican in the Senate. He did not in any sense whatsoever back away from his defense of the South, but he did publicly profess his "sincere regrets" for uttering anything during their harsh exchange which could be considered as a personal assault. "Believing that under the impulse of the moment [he had] done injustice" to his fellow Senator, Gordon explained that he meant no disrespect. Edmunds graciously thanked the Georgian "for the handsome way" he had apologized and expressed his own regrets for any perceived impugning of Gordon's character or personal conduct. Moderate, reconciliatory gestures such as this did not go unnoticed in the North.<sup>23</sup>

Despite a sincere desire to hold passions in check, Gordon was not always successful in overriding his own sense of outrage and indignation. When on 13 January, Senator John A. Logan accused him of "uttering denunciatory sentences against the republicans and against the Government of the United States," Gordon instantly erupted. He angrily shot back, defying "the Senator to find one solitary word in any utterance of mine against the Government of the United States or against any man in authority except the miserable people who are plundering mine." Gordon then challenged the former Union general to make good the charge or withdraw it, whereupon Logan qualified his accusations and prevented further development of the incident. Deeply imbued with the

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<sup>23</sup> Congressional Record, 43d Cong., 2d sess., 301; Atlanta Constitution, 4 February 1875; S. L. M. Barlow to T. F. Bayard, 4 February 1875, Thomas Francis Bayard Collection, Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Washington, D. C. (hereafter cited as Bayard Collection, LC).

traditions of the South, Gordon on this occasion and on all others when he perceived a personal affront, displayed a particular sensitivity to matters of personal honor. He refrained from questioning a man's word or impugning his character unless circumstances warranted such actions. By the same token, Gordon also expected similar consideration from all other honorable men. He rarely laid down the gauntlet before his opponent, but when proffered to him, he unhesitatingly picked it up. It was this fierce sense of pride that compelled Gordon to respond to all challenges to his personal honor—be they real or imagined.<sup>24</sup>

When in January 1875, he determined that he could aggressively defend his section without damaging its efforts to regain complete control of local affairs, Gordon served notice that he would regard all future attacks upon the South as personal assaults. In doing so, he assumed the role of spokesman for the South—a responsibility he could not and would not take lightly. It was a part for which he was eminently qualified. Gordon's defense of the honor and integrity of southern whites unquestionably won him their confidence. Whenever Republicans assailed the South, Gordon could be counted upon to rise to its defense. Southerners could trust him to safeguard and foster their interests in the national forum.

But of equal if not greater importance was the establishment and recognition of Gordon as a southerner with whom northerners could confidently deal. Keenly attuned to the sentiments of his native section, he would accurately represent the feelings of most white southerners when matters of national importance were discussed. Moreover, with his sincere desire to bury the passions of the past and his steadfast commitment to a stronger, more united

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24 Congressional Record, 43d Cong., 2d sess., 424.

country, Gordon could also be counted upon to have first reflected these sectional views through the prism of nationalism before airing them in the Senate. He would do what he believed best for his section, but within the parameters of a nationalism which embraced the North and the South. Thus, in addition to becoming a spokesman both for and of the South, Gordon emerged as a national statesman as well.

An obvious manifestation of his national reputation came almost immediately. Answering a call from the New Hampshire Democratic Executive Committee to make speeches on behalf of the party, Gordon and L. Q. C. Lamar, United States Representative from Mississippi and a relative of Gordon, travelled to the Granite State in March 1875. Their purpose was to solicit Democratic votes in the upcoming election, but even more, they wanted to present to northerners their views of the true conditions under which the South still labored. Earlier, in April 1874, Lamar had delivered an eloquent eulogy of Charles Sumner of Massachusetts, a long time bitter foe of the South, in the House of Representatives. In a private letter to a close friend, he explained his seemingly strange action as an attempt "to speak to the North on the condition and status of the Southern people." Lamar, like Gordon, realized soon after he arrived in Washington that what southern congressmen were saying in Congress "never reached the masses of the North." Despite their efforts to correct Republican misrepresentations and distortions about the South, they were simply not being heard. Lamar believed that Sumner's death provided him with a unique "occasion on which they [northerners] would listen and listen with something of a feeling of sympathy . . . especially among those classes who have never given us a hearing." Gordon, who shared Lamar's view of the situation, undertook this speaking tour with much the same purpose in

mind.<sup>25</sup>

In their speeches in New Hampshire, the two southerners stressed that, in their opinion, peace and harmony between races existed wherever local control had been returned to whites. They dismissed as political hate-mongering the Republicans' portrait of a violent and murderous South. Although pleased with their opportunity to speak directly to at least a small portion of the northern public, Gordon and Lamar's political impact proved minimal. Republicans increased their overall majority in the state, but the Democrats did manage to gain one additional congressman—a result which many credited to the two southern Democrats. Perhaps overstating their effect, the Washington City Herald reported, "If the sincere and eloquent words of these honest and earnest men, pleading for peace and good will between the sections, could have been listened to by every voter in the Granite State, the result might have been as we firmly believe, an overwhelming conservative triumph."<sup>26</sup>

Gordon and Lamar stopped in Boston on their return trip to Washington. Though fatigued by their travels and labors, they consented to speak informally to the members of the Marshfield Club of that city. Speaking to this solidly-Yankee club dedicated to the constitutional principles espoused by Daniel Webster, Gordon again recited the ills still visited upon the South. He concluded, however, on a note designed to warm all the commercial hearts in attendance when he emphatically stated that once real peace between the sections had been

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25 Edward Mayes, Lucius Q. C. Lamar: His Life, Times, and Speeches, 1825-1893 (Nashville: Publishing House of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, 1896), p. 217; Atlanta Constitution, 5 March 1875; L. Q. C. Lamar to C. C. Clay, 5 September 1874, Clement Claiborne Clay Papers, Duke University, Durham, North Carolina.

26 Mayes, L. Q. C. Lamar, pp. 217-23; Atlanta Constitution, 12 March 1875; Boston Advertiser, quoted in ibid., 12 March 1875.

attained, the South "would again turn towards the north the golden currents of commerce." Both his and Lamar's remarks were warmly received and often greeted by enthusiastic applause. "The pleasant gathering" ended only when the southerners were compelled to leave in order to meet their train.<sup>27</sup>

Gordon, despite the broad nonpartisan position he adopted when speaking to northern or national audiences, chose a vastly different approach when addressing his fellow southerners. Where in Congress he refrained from pointedly attacking the Republican party, he often delivered withering assaults upon the opposing party when canvassing the South. While campaigning for Lamar in Mississippi in the fall of 1875, Gordon spoke at great length on the "fruits" that ten years of Republican misrule had borne—"a violated constitution, broken laws, the overthrow of long and wisely established local self-government, the squandering of public revenue, and the prostitution of a brave and generous army to partisan purposes." He also roundly denounced the carpet-bagger element still present in the South which, he maintained, persisted in its efforts to turn the races against each other. During the course of his tour, Gordon often spoke directly to those blacks in attendance. In traditional southern manner, he told them that white southerners, not transplanted Yankees, had their best interests at heart. Gordon's speeches contributed in part to the resounding Democratic victory in November which swept the Republicans out of office and enabled the Democrats to gain a majority in both chambers of the state legislature. But as was common in all southern states still dominated by Radical regimes, fraud and violence proved more effective means of displacing the Republicans than mere rhetoric. Nevertheless, while Mississippi rejoiced, it did

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<sup>27</sup> Atlanta Constitution, 12 March, 16 March 1875; New York Herald, quoted in ibid., 16 March 1875; Mayes, L. Q. C. Lamar, pp. 223-24.

not forget the Georgian whose "clarion tones" during the "time of need" aroused Mississippians "in their struggles against a wicked and unscrupulous government." As one newspaper gratefully reported, Gordon "has endeared himself to the people of Mississippi in ties that will never be broken."<sup>28</sup>

Gordon continued his criticism of the Republican party in February 1876 when he discussed national politics in a speech in Atlanta. Having been called home—in all probability to deal with the desperate financial problems that had beset the Southern Life Insurance Company—he took the opportunity to address the Georgia general assembly and emphasize the importance of the upcoming presidential election. He again dwelt upon the incompetency, the corruption, and the tyranny, which he asserted, characterized Republican control of the national government. To retain in power a party whose "exhibitions of insatiate vengeance, of unconquerable prejudice and of undying hate" had prevented sectional reconciliation would, in Gordon's words, "surely endanger, if it does not destroy, the governments of these states [of the South], and of consequence, your liberties under them."<sup>29</sup>

Believing that the prospects of a Democratic victory in the fall extremely favorable, Gordon also urged southerners to remain calm and to refrain from any inflammatory statements which might cause apprehension among their friends in the North. "Wild and unreasoning declarations"—like those recently uttered by the unreconstructed Robert Toombs who announced his desire "'to put the nigger where he will never be heard from again'"—had to be avoided or else northern apprehensions concerning the South would prohibit an

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<sup>28</sup> Mayes, L. Q. C. Lamar, pp. 259-60; Atlanta Constitution, 29 August, 3 September, 12 September, 2 November 1875; Holly Springs Reporter, quoted in ibid., 9 November 1875.

<sup>29</sup> Atlanta Constitution, 18 February 1876.

overthrow of the Republicans. He stressed that silence, even in the face of repeated partisan attacks upon the South, would prove to be the wisest policy. Only "when our self-respect and the cause of truth demands that the South shall answer" would he respond in the Senate. If the South followed this rule of thumb and supported a high-principled platform as well as a qualified candidate, he believed that a Democrat would soon occupy the White House.<sup>30</sup>

But before Gordon could wholeheartedly devote himself to the fall elections, he had to resume his duties in the Senate. Almost immediately upon his return to Washington, Gordon introduced a revenue bill that he had been working on for sometime. In the wake of scandals such as the "Whiskey Ring," he sought to amend the laws relating to the whiskey tax and, more importantly, to establish a nonpartisan excise corps to collect revenues more efficiently. His own "thorough investigation of the systems of this and other countries" convinced him that upwards of \$1,000,000,000 in taxes had been lost since the war to dishonest distillers and corrupt government officials. The central flaw in the system, Gordon maintained, was that the collection process remained in the hands of untrained, inexperienced officers whose only qualifications were allegiance to the party in power and the benefits they could bestow upon that party. As long as these partisan-appointed officials controlled the system, the revenue service would continue as "the shame of the people and the disgrace of the country." Utilizing Great Britain's custom system as a model, Gordon proposed creating "a corps of excise exalted above the exigences of party supremacy and removed from the temptations of party support." Appointment of officers for life or good behavior would separate the revenue service from partisan politics. Although Gordon stated, "it would be almost impossible for any

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30 Ibid.

party to do worse," he stopped short of blaming all the evils of the present system upon the Republicans; rather he contended that the potential for abuse had become so great that even the Democrats might succumb to the temptation to use government funds to perpetuate themselves in power. So for Gordon, civil service reform offered the best solution.<sup>31</sup>

Despite Gordon's disclaimer of any partisan purpose in the introduction of his bill and his specific plea that both Democrats and Republicans "rise above party considerations in order that we may obtain honesty at least in the collection of our revenues," Republicans immediately branded the Georgian's proposal "a party speech for party purposes." They again resorted to their commonly employed tactic of diverting discussion of almost any measure into a partisan debate which always managed to return to the war and the passions it engendered. Morton agreed in substance with Gordon's assertion that a sense of demoralization had beset the nation after the war, but he laid the blame for such a state of affairs upon the southerners who had precipitated the conflict. Similarly, he dismissed Gordon's right to propose remedies for the whiskey frauds by declaring that "those who made the war are perhaps the last persons who have a right to complain of its consequences." Morton also distorted the Georgian's remarks, claiming that Gordon had stated that only bad men belonged to the Republican party whereas the Democratic party was composed exclusively of good men. Defending his party against the misperceived and mis construed indictment, the senator from Indiana chastised Gordon. He asserted that the mere presence of former rebels in the Senate clearly demonstrated the

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31 Ibid., 29 February, 2 March 1876; Avery, History of Georgia, p. 560; Gordon to Manton Marble, 12 March 1876, Manton Marble Papers, Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Washington, D. C. (hereafter cited as Marble Papers, LC); Congressional Record, 44th Cong., 1st sess., 1502, 1579-81.

magnanimity of the Republican party. Senator John Sherman continued the Radical onslaught, but devoted at least a portion of his diatribe to criticising the practicality of Gordon's proposition—one which he labeled "totally impractical and totally absurd." Nevertheless, he, like Morton, assailed Gordon primarily for the partisanship exhibited in his speech.<sup>32</sup>

In the face of this unwarranted abuse, Gordon, as on other occasions, expressed his profound amazement at Republican tactics. His honest attempt to address a grievous wrong in government had once again been met with a "high-sounding bombast about anti-republicanism" designed exclusively to provoke partisan debate and to conceal the magnitude of the whisky frauds. Sadly, he asked, "Has it come to this, that whenever a southern Senator makes reference to crime perpetuated against the Government, he is to be insulted with the reminder that he sits here by the clemency of the republican party, and must, therefore, refrain from all reference to their delinquencies?" Gordon's fellow Democrat from Virginia, Robert E. Withers, answered him moments later when he sternly rebuked the Radicals for their diversionary tactics and their tiresome professions of sufferance. "When the beneficiary is constantly taunted with it [the magnanimity and clemency of the Republican party], [it] ceases to be a benefit." The time when southerners in Congress would passively endure Republican abuse had most definitely passed away.<sup>33</sup>

Despite Gordon's refusal to be drawn into a "passionate discussion of those war issues . . . which [he hoped] have been buried never to be resurrected," the Republicans managed to turn the debate away from the issue at hand. Their temporary success at distracting the Senate from an extended

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32 Congressional Record, 44th Cong., 1st sess., 1580-86.

33 Ibid., 1586-88.

discussion of his reform proposal did not prevent Gordon's speech from creating "a genuine sensation." One correspondent believed the address "attracted more attention than any speech . . . since the war." Gordon's call for civil service reform elicited a wide variety of responses, however, most of the nation's leading newspapers reacted favorably. The New York Tribune's assessment of the speech and the ensuing debate accurately reflected the true situation. In spite of the "great display of that partisan rancor which breaks out in Congress nowadays upon the most trivial provocation," Gordon's speech was "not a political harangue," but a suggestion for a badly needed reform. Gordon may have won "new laurels" for his reform efforts, but he had little time to enjoy them.<sup>34</sup>

The extraordinary length of the first session of the Forty-fourth Congress—December 1875 to August 1876—occupied much of Gordon's attention during 1876, but the desperate financial condition of the Southern Life Insurance Company also exacted heavy demands upon his time and energy. Almost a decade of steady growth and prosperity came to an end in late 1875 or early 1876 when overextension on the part of the parent company forced the life insurance enterprise into bankruptcy. In a February public letter to the people of Georgia, Gordon explained that the Memphis-based parent company had committed a grievous error two years earlier when it absorbed the Carolina Life Insurance Company. Acting upon the advice of "the wisest counsels," Southern officials took on the "live" policies of the Carolina and what they believed were the necessary assets to secure those policies. However, when creditors of the Carolina brought suit against the Southern and succeeded in enjoining use of its

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<sup>34</sup> Atlanta Constitution, 12 March, 14 March, 15 March, 17 March, 18 March, 26 March, 3 August 1876; New York Herald, quoted in ibid., 30 July 1876; New York Tribune, 10 March, 14 March 1876.

assets, it became shockingly apparent that the contract between the two firms did not protect the Southern from certain devastating claims. "In order to save the assets from utter sacrifice" and possibly provide time for working out a compromise measure, the Southern filed for bankruptcy.<sup>35</sup>

Although Gordon attempted to explain the failure as an honest mistake on the part of the Memphis directors, he also took great pains to point out that the operation of the Atlanta branch in no way contributed to the company's collapse. "Had it been possible, under the charter, to separate from the company," Gordon asserted that "this department would not have suffered from these complications." With justifiable pride, he spoke of "the economy and care" which characterized the Atlanta branch and which would have led the department to even greater success had not "unexpected calamity" befallen the parent company. Despite the soundness of his office, Gordon informed his policy-holders that it would be impossible to return any portion of the money paid in premiums. He vowed to do every thing possible to relieve the effects of the disaster, but he candidly expressed his skepticism about the company's survival. Hopes that the Southern Life Insurance Company might reach a

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<sup>35</sup> Atlanta Constitution, 20 February 1876. When the Southern Life Insurance Company took "over the live business" from the ailing Carolina Life in August 1873, the Southern became one of the largest life insurance companies in the South. Although the entire company continued to prosper during the next years, the success of the Atlanta branch appears to have exceeded that of all other departments. Even after Gordon was forced by his senatorial duties to devote less time to its operations, the Southern "enjoyed the confidence and a full share of the patronage" of Georgia's residents. As late as 31 July 1875, the Atlanta Constitution resoundingly endorsed the life insurance company as "Conservative in management, economical in expenditure, careful in selecting risks, prompt in settlements and equitable in all its dealings." But with its inability to free the Carolina's assets and the drastic increase in deaths as a result of the epidemics of cholera and yellow fever, the Southern Life Insurance Company was rapidly overwhelmed in 1876. Atlanta Constitution, 10 August, 12 August, 14 September, 21 November 1873, 6 September 1874, 31 July 1875, 12 March 1876, 8 March 1879.

compromise with creditors which would enable it to resume business soon dissipated completely and the failure proved to be "a very bad one."<sup>36</sup>

The collapse of the Southern Life Insurance Company added to Gordon's enduring financial woes. Having decided at the beginning of the 1875-76 session to take a house in Georgetown rather than rent or live out of a hotel, Gordon assumed this added financial burden just prior to the Southern Life Insurance Company debacle. The expense of maintaining two homes, one near the nation's capital and another in Georgia threatened to overwhelm him. By May, Gordon found himself in immediate need of \$5,000. He wrote to Barlow in New York apprising him of his fiscal embarrassment and seeking the names of parties who might consent to a one or two-year loan which he would secure with his house and property in Kirkwood. Although Gordon received a number of offers, he refused them because he felt they might put him in a compromising position. As the summer dragged on, Gordon again wrote that he would "be in a bad way if the session adjourns soon unless I secure help." How Gordon managed to meet his financial crisis is unknown, but his distress in this instance was symptomatic of his chronic and often serious financial difficulties.<sup>37</sup>

As if his congressional responsibilities and financial burdens were not enough to tax his resources, Gordon also became heavily involved in the affairs of the national Democratic party. Realizing that Democratic prospects for capturing the White House appeared brighter than at any time since 1856, he devoted much of his attention to the upcoming fall elections. Gordon himself

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<sup>36</sup> Atlanta Constitution, 20 February, 12 March 1876; Charlotte Observer, quoted in ibid., 12 March 1876.

<sup>37</sup> Atlanta Constitution, 1 December, 4 December, 28 December 1875; Gordon to Samuel L. M. Barlow, 19 May, 31 May, 10 July 1876, Samuel Latham Mitchill Barlow Papers, Huntington Library, San Marino, California (hereafter cited as Barlow Papers, Huntington).

probably preferred Thomas F. Bayard of Delaware, but in a letter to a Georgia delegate to the national convention, he stressed the necessity of selecting an honest man who could carry the key northern states. In order to insure such a selection, he urged the South to go to the convention unpledged and to choose a standard-bearer only after extensive discussion with northern Democrats who could better assess the relative strengths of the various candidates in the North. When Samuel J. Tilden of New York received the nomination, Gordon assured northern Democrats that even though southern party members had some reservations about the New Yorker, they would rally behind him. Gordon probably would have liked to begin actively campaigning for Tilden immediately upon the heels of the congressional adjournment in August, but worn down by his exhaustive pace during 1876, he chose to return to Georgia for a period of much "needed rest and recreation." By mid-September, however, he was back on the stump.<sup>38</sup>

Gordon spoke frequently at many points in the South in a six-week period prior to the election, but he concentrated upon South Carolina, one of the three states still under Republican control. As the November elections approached, Gordon seemed to become even more committed than ever to restoring home rule to Georgia's sister state and to removing the federal troops garrisoned there. He wrote a lengthy letter to the New York Tribune in which he attempted to correct misrepresentations about affairs in South Carolina that had reached the North. Even though most South Carolinians were wholeheartedly committed to ousting the present "corrupt and irresponsible State Government," Gordon

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<sup>38</sup> Atlanta Constitution, 30 May, 15 August, 19 August 1876; Augusta Chronicle, quoted in ibid., 30 August 1876; New York Times, 2 June 1876; Gordon to Barlow, 31 May, 7 June, 10 July 1876, Barlow Papers, Huntington; Gordon to T. F. Bayard, 8 June 1875, Bayard Collection, LC.

observed that they were going about it peacefully. He dismissed reports of violence and intimidation of blacks as politically motivated distortions intended to alarm the North and perpetuate the Republican party in power. Gordon also advised the people of South Carolina to remain calm even as their day of deliverance neared: "Stand by! Stand firm! Keep the peace! Under no stress of circumstances offer resistance to law, right or wrong. Keep the peace always; but while you do that, vote for Tilden and reform; and Hampton and home rule, and in one brief week you shall see this grand old commonwealth rise from the pit of degradation proud, grand and free." During the succeeding months, Gordon himself would have to heed his own advice as the electoral controversy deepened.<sup>39</sup>

When it became apparent that South Carolina's voting returns would be contested, Gordon, like numerous other national politicians who descended upon the states of South Carolina, Louisiana and Florida, hurried to Columbia to monitor the canvass by the state returning board. Gordon labored tirelessly amid the confusion and excitement that abounded in South Carolina. He investigated returns, conferred with local leaders and corresponded extensively with national figures and northern newspapers in an effort to promote the Democratic cause in the Palmetto State.<sup>40</sup> In a 27 November letter to President Grant, Gordon and

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<sup>39</sup> Atlanta Constitution, 23 September, 26 September, 2 November 1876; Charleston News and Courier, quoted in ibid., 2 November 1876; New York Tribune, 2 November 1876.

<sup>40</sup> Although it is impossible to determine the exact nature of Gordon's actions behind the scenes, it is certain that national Democratic leaders looked to him for information concerning their cause in South Carolina. In October-November 1876, the New York Tribune published a series of cipher dispatches between Democratic managers--among them Smith Weed, Manton Marble, and William T. Pelton, Tilden's private secretary--and persons in Columbia. In their attempt to uncover a massive conspiracy to "purchase" the election in South Carolina, the editors of the Tribune accused Gordon of sending and receiving a number of these telegrams in an effort to secure money which would be used to

Bradley T. Johnson, another southern "visiting statesman" in South Carolina, protested incumbent Governor Daniel H. Chamberlain's request for federal troops. They asserted that "[T]here is not the remotest of disturbance of the peace by the Democrats." Gordon also wrote numerous letters to the editor of the New York Tribune attempting to inform the people of the North of what he considered the true state of affairs in South Carolina. Even after soldiers initially denied admittance to some of the newly elected Democratic state legislators and then later, after allowing them to enter, expelled them from the State House, Gordon insisted that South Carolinians remained peaceful and content to protest "in the law abiding, liberty-loving spirit of the American people." When he left Columbia on 2 December, the Atlanta Constitution regarded his departure as "an omen that the democrats in South Carolina will have fair play."<sup>41</sup>

While at home in Kirkwood for a few days preparing for his return to Washington and the new congressional session, Gordon granted an interview on

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buy the returning board. Gordon adamantly denied the charges and stated he had never sent any dispatches in code. No evidence of illegality on Gordon's part has ever been unearthed, but the heavy volume of correspondence between Gordon and Columbia and Democrats in New York clearly shows that Gordon was deeply involved in South Carolina affairs. And, as a Georgia Republican astutely observed, even "if it were found that Genl Gordon was in a conspiracy to bribe the returning board of South Carolina to falsify the vote, in favor of the Democratic party, his popularity would be thereby increased." New York Tribune, 26 November-30 November 1878; Atlanta Constitution, 23 November 1878, 1 February 1879; Amos Akerman to W. H. Felton, 21 December 1878, Rebecca Latimer Felton Collection, University of Georgia, Athens, Georgia (hereafter cited as Felton Collection, UGA); House Miscellaneous Documents, 45th Cong., 3d sess., No. 31, vol. IV, reports on a congressional investigation into such charges that attempts were made to buy the election in South Carolina.

<sup>41</sup> New York Tribune, 29 December, 1 December 1876; Atlanta Constitution, 15 November, 23 November, 28 November, 29 November, 1 December, 3 December 1876; Gordon and Bradley T. Johnson to U. S. Grant, 27 November 1876, Ulysses S. Grant Papers, Hayes Memorial Library, Fremont, Ohio; Francis Butler Simkins, South Carolina During Reconstruction (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1932), pp. 514-25.

the political situation to an Atlanta newspaper reporter. Although he was unquestionably aware of the violence, intimidation, and outright fraud that dominated the election, Gordon expressed his "conviction" that the Democrats had "honestly and peacefully" carried the South Carolina. With equal certainty, he declared that the Republicans intended to defraud the Democrats of their victory if the administration in Washington could be convinced to "give the coveted support of troops even to the disgraceful end of this melancholy farce." Gordon also revealed that he had been approached by parties, who claimed intimacy with the present administration, with an offer to recognize Democratic claims to state offices if he and his fellow Democrats would cease their efforts to carry the state for Tilden. As attractive as the bargain may have been, Gordon reported that South Carolina Democrats rejected it, believing they had triumphed in both the state and national elections. He feared, however, that unless the magnitude of the developing Republican conspiracy could be conveyed to the honest inhabitants of the North—Republicans and Democrats alike—South Carolina would be lost, and with it the causes of liberty and truth. Thus in Gordon's mind, the result of the national contest, as well as South Carolina's, "depends entirely upon public opinion" and "how far the northern people mean to see this conspiracy go without arresting it, and how much of a protest they mean to make against the overthrow of republican government." Though not overly optimistic about the outcome, Gordon set out by train for Washington; however, at the suggestion of Tilden's private secretary, he abruptly interrupted his journey north and returned to Columbia for a few days. While there he sent yet another letter to the New York Tribune, this one pointedly rebutting Chamberlain's charges of violence and disorder in South Carolina.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Atlanta Constitution, 5 December, 7 December, 10 December 1876; New York Tribune, 11 December 1876.

Once back in Washington, Gordon continued his efforts on behalf of South Carolina as well as becoming involved in the larger, national electoral controversy. On 29 December, he submitted a resolution in the Senate declaring that the Hampton government represented the legitimate, lawful government of South Carolina. Moreover, as rumors of armed resistance to the inauguration of Hayes surfaced—despite repeated expressions of confidence on the part of leaders of both parties that the disputed election could be peacefully resolved—Gordon addressed such fears. In an interview, he stated that southerners would not resort to violence "unless the integrity of their states should be threatened." Whether that meant continued military support of Republican governments in the South, Gordon did not spell out, but he did declare that "it would take a great deal to get them to fight again." He contended that history witnessed few other examples of a people "so sick of war as the people of the south."<sup>43</sup>

For Gordon, the gnawing fear that the Democrats "were being robbed of our victory by our own supineness" loomed more ominously than the threat of violence. To help prevent such an occurrence, he travelled from Washington to New York twice in late December expressly to confer with the party's candidate. Although he came away from a 23 December dinner party conference with Tilden and other prominent Democrats with "a very good impression," he felt compelled to impress further upon the New Yorker the need for action. Returning to New York near the end of the year, Gordon maintained that he spoke for the South when he declared the southern Democrats were of one mind, believing that Tilden had been fairly and constitutionally elected and only gross illegality could count him out. To insure Tilden's rightful inauguration, Gordon stressed that

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<sup>43</sup> Congressional Record, 44th Cong., 2d sess., 388-89; Chicago Inter-Ocean, quoted in Atlanta Constitution, 22 December 1876.

Democrats must let the country know "through speeches, resolutions, the press and mass meetings" that they would persist in their efforts to inaugurate duly elected officials. "If we announce by our silence beforehand that we intend to acquiesce in any outrage they [the Republicans] may perpetrate," he warned, "we only invite aggression from them and prepare our own friends for a degrading submission." In other words, unless the Democratic party took a bold stance—one which demonstrated its determination to resist efforts to force Hayes' inauguration--Gordon feared that "the more daring leaders of the Republican party" would "ruthlessly proceed to carry out their purposes." Despite Gordon's warnings, as well as those of other southern Democrats, Tilden continued his passive approach to the electoral controversy.<sup>44</sup>

As it became increasingly clear that Tilden would not deviate from his chosen course, Gordon realized that the presidency might be slipping away from the Democrats. In a January letter to Barlow, he again emphasized the critical necessity of firmly confronting Republican "aggressions," but concluded by agreeing "that any compromise is better than an ignominious surrender of the Government to Hayes and his advisors at Washington." He may have been referring to the establishment of an electoral commission which materialized at the end of the month. However, it is quite probable that Gordon, even at this early date, seriously began examining his alternatives. He never placed much faith in a special electoral commission; instead, he believed that each house of Congress should independently determine the validity of the disputed votes. Even though Gordon knew that the deadlock would probably continue—as

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<sup>44</sup> Gordon to Barlow, 2 January 1877, Barlow Papers, Huntington; Atlanta Constitution, 30 December 1876; August Belmont to Manton Marble, 24 December 1876, Marble Papers, LC; Perry Belmont to T. F. Bayard, 31 December 1876, Bayard Collection, LC; New York Tribune, 8 January 1877.

partisan politics would preclude any objective evaluation—he considered the prospect, as he styled it, of "making some decent republican acting president" until a new election could be held in November far less objectionable than Hayes' immediate inauguration. But in the event of Tilden's defeat, Gordon determined to try to salvage what he could for the South, namely the removal of troops and reestablishment of self-government.<sup>45</sup>

By late February, a Democratic defeat appeared certain. The proceedings of the Electoral Commission definitely indicated that Hayes would be awarded all of the disputed votes and thus elected President. Distraught Democrats, primarily those from the North, began threatening to filibuster in the House of Representatives until after the scheduled day of inauguration. This move could delay the electoral count and, quite possibly, throw the country into a crisis. Gordon and other southerners realized that the time for action had come.

Although the details of both the political and economic compromises of 1876-1877 are reasonably well known and well documented, Gordon's role during the pre-inaugural turmoil has received only passing mention. Despite being ill much of February, Gordon constantly labored in the shadows, particularly when the filibuster threat reached its height. On 26 February at the request of Representative John Young Brown of Kentucky, he met with Charles Foster of Ohio, one of Hayes' closest advisors, in a House committee room. There Gordon and Brown asked for written statements from Foster regarding Hayes' plans for the South if he were elected president. On the following day, Foster presented Brown with two similarly worded statements—one signed only by himself and a

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<sup>45</sup> Gordon to Barlow, 2 January 1877, Barlow Papers, Huntington; T. Harry Williams, ed., Hayes: The Diary of a President, 1875-1881 (New York: David McKay Co., 1964), pp. 52-53; Atlanta Constitution, 27 February 1877.

second containing the signature of Stanley Matthews as well as his own.<sup>46</sup> Both written pledges assured the southerners that Hayes would adopt "such a policy as will as give to the people of South Carolina and Louisiana the right to control their own affairs in their own way." Although the letters made no mention of the withdrawal of troops, Gordon later stated "it was of course understood that this would follow." In their most basic form, these letters, though general in character, pledged the new Republican administration to restore home rule to the South.<sup>47</sup>

These written statements and the verbal pledges secured at the more famous Wormley Hotel Conference in no way personally committed Hayes to abide by their terms. Yet, they clearly demonstrated the president-elect's unwillingness to retain troops in the South to support questionable Republican governments.<sup>48</sup> If, as his most intimate advisors pledged, he withdrew the

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46 The reason for the two such similarly-worded pledges was that Foster wrote one and Matthews the other. When Foster presented his own unsigned letter to Brown in the House that morning, the Kentuckian made some corrections. About an hour later, Foster returned with a slightly "fuller and stronger" statement written and signed by both he and Matthews. Brown, at that time, also prevailed upon Foster to sign the original letter. John Young Brown's account in Louisville Courier-Journal, quoted in Atlanta Constitution, 31 March 1877.

47 Ibid.; Congressional Record, 44th Cong., 2d sess., 107, 1137; Atlanta Constitution, 8 February, 27 February, 28 March-31 March 1877; Cincinnati Enquirer, quoted in ibid., 31 March 1877; New York Tribune, 26 March-29 March 1877; Jno. Ellis to T. F. Bayard, 27 February 1877, Bayard Collection, LC; House Miscellaneous Document, 45th Cong., 3d sess., vol. III: 624; John Young Brown to J. D. Head, 9 December 1878, Felton Collection, UGA; H. J. Eckenrode, Rutherford B. Hayes, Statesman of Reunion (New York: Dodd, Meade and Co., 1930) pp. 216-21.

48 Most studies of the electoral controversy have treated its resolution as a political compromise. These works range from Paul L. Haworth, The Hayes-Tilden Election (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill Co., 1906) to Keith Ian Polakoff, The Politics of Inertia: The Election of 1876 and the End of Reconstruction (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1973). C. Vann Woodward, Reunion and Reaction: The Compromise of 1877 and the End of Reconstruction (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1951) uncovered a 'secondary

troops and allowed the Democrats to assume control of the governments of South Carolina and Louisiana, then Hayes, in real terms, offered much more to the southerners than Tilden. The Democratic candidate would unquestionably bring a rapid, albeit possibly temporary, end to federal occupation of the South, but this action on Tilden's part would not be as meaningful or significant as that of his Republican counterpart. Removal of the troops and reestablishment of local control by the party that initiated and administered Reconstruction would be tantamount to declaring an end to that process. Republicans would be unable to use the ending of Reconstruction as a campaign issue against the Democrats.

Gordon undoubtedly realized this. Firmly convinced that the people of the South desired above all else the restoration of home rule and an end to military occupation, he had devoted much of his energies both in Georgia and in the Senate to securing these ends. It stands to reason that during the final days of the struggle Gordon would remain in the forefront of the battle. Although the evidence for a second—a more important economic—compromise is convincing, I believe the political compromise in which Gordon played a role lay much closer to the hearts of southerners. As such, it was more significant because it specifically addressed the present, not the future. Gordon's machinations during the winter of 1876-77 were exclusively devoted to and helped bring about an end to the painful Reconstruction process.

Gordon could take solace in the knowledge that his actions seemed certain to hasten the redemption of South Carolina and Louisiana, but he must have looked on with disgust as the inauguration of Hayes drew near. He believed

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compromise in which, he contends, economic considerations played the major role. Although the existence of these additional discussions cannot be disputed, one can argue whether Woodward's economic compromise—which primarily dealt with future considerations—was as important as the political compromise which focused on immediate concerns.

and remained convinced that Tilden would have been elected by the House without resort to unconventional means had the Democratic party "but presented an unbroken front to the republicans." Instead, "the uncertain policy of the democrats, the reported divisions in the ranks and their alledged willingness to submit to any usurpation" so encouraged the Republicans that the electoral commission proved necessary, and with it the eventual victory of Hayes. In Gordon's mind then, Tilden and the Democrats "lost by want of action prior to the passage of the electoral bill." Although dismayed by the imminent Republican triumph, Gordon foresaw a future fraught with even greater peril. He anticipated that the Hayes administration would make "herculean efforts to capture southern democrats and debauch the southern party" by claiming credit for the recognition of Democratic governments in Louisiana and South Carolina. This "most horrible result"--division of the southern Democratic party and inauguration of a "deadly struggle" for the black vote--appeared less palatable to Gordon than the possibility of another four years of Republican "fradulent and usurpatory administration." And four more years it would be because on 5 March, Rutherford B. Hayes became president.<sup>49</sup>

Publication near the end of March of the details of Gordon and Brown's dealings with the Republicans brought forth immediate criticism, both in the North and the South. In an interview with the Cincinnati Enquirer, the paper that "broke" the story, Gordon explained his actions as an attempt "to try a little bull-doing on Foster." During the following weeks, he constantly maintained that in spite of his inability to prevent completion of the count, he felt compelled to act in some manner because of his "responsibility of protecting, as far as he could, the government of Governor Hampton and the people of South

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<sup>49</sup> Atlanta Constitution, 27 February, 20 April 1877.

Carolina." And even though Gordon denied concluding a bargain with the Republicans to work for defeat of the filibuster once he received the proper assurances, it seems reasonable to assume that the threat, either explicit or implicit, to delay the count at least until after inauguration day must have contributed significantly to Foster and Matthews' decision to provide written pledges. If this was the case, Gordon in fact played for stakes with cards he did not hold. He bargained for something he fervently desired, home rule for South Carolina and Louisiana, by offering something he never really possessed, the ability to control the actions of representatives in the House. Again, despite denials by all parties involved, it appeared almost certain that a deal—or agreement if one prefers—was made during the final days of February. But as one Georgia newspaper stated, it was one which "secure[d] half a loaf when they [Gordon and Brown] could not apparently get more." Skillful bluffing, Gordon believed, had helped him win important gains.<sup>50</sup>

Gordon's actions were roundly criticized by some in his native state. In a letter published in the Atlanta Constitution on 7 April, "Citizen" chastised Gordon and Brown because "they sold us too cheap." Branding the two Democrats as "very unfortunante and unskillful traders," "Citizen" accused them of foolishly bargaining away four years of Democratic administration in return for mere promises to remove troops from the South. Instead of properly supporting Tilden whose election would have guaranteed such action, Gordon and Brown entered into a deal—or as he mockingly stated it, a "VERY CAPITAL UNDERSTANDING"—whereby they worked to end the filibuster and allow the count to continue, and ultimately elect Hayes. Thus "Citizen" alledged that

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 27 March, 30 March, 31 March, 20 April 1877; Cincinnati Enquirer, quoted in ibid., 31 March 1877; New York Tribune, 26 March, 27 March 1877.

Gordon and Brown bore the responsibility for Tilden's defeat. Defenders of the General and his actions immediately replied. On the following day, "Truth" labeled the attack "venomous" and malicious" in that it attempted to place the blame for breaking the filibuster upon Gordon, and to a lesser degree Brown, when in fact every southern senator and representative except one adopted the same course. "Truth" concluded that when Gordon realized that Hayes' election had become "a foregone conclusion," he "secured the only alleviation of the outrage" by getting all that he could under the circumstances: "He rendered certain the redemption of Carolina and Louisiana."<sup>51</sup>

The dispute dragged on for almost a month, during which time Joseph E. Brown eventually revealed himself as "Citizen."<sup>52</sup> His criticisms of Gordon, probably motivated by jealousy and resentment of Gordon's immense popularity and his own corresponding fall from grace, deeply offended the General. In the main, however, Gordon managed to remain apart from the controversy. Only when he consented to publication of a private letter in which he explained his compromise course did Gordon personally enter the fray. Shocked by the efforts being made in Georgia to make him "in some way responsible for the defeat of Mr. Tilden's inauguration," Gordon sought to correct the record. "No greater wrong or outrage was ever perpetrated upon any man in public life," he proclaimed. Not being a member of the House nor having a vote on the count, Gordon disclaimed any responsibility for completion of the count as well as denying any attempt to influence anyone's vote. He had opposed the electoral

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51 Atlanta Constitution, 7 April, 8 April 1877. Examples of criticism of Gordon and praise of Brown can be found in Felix Hargrett Collection, Joseph Emerson Brown Papers, University of Georgia, Athens, Georgia.

52 The controversy raged in the pages of the Atlanta Constitution between 7 April and 6 May. The key issues are 7 April, 8 April, 15 April, 20 April, 22 April, 2 May, 6 May 1877.

bill from the moment of its suggestion, but once it became law he resolved to stand by it in good faith and resist all dilatory motions. Even though he repelled all charges that he "made any bargain of any sort" as "basely false in every syllable and in every sense," Gordon again repeated that once he saw that Tilden's case was "hopelessly lost," he determined to do everything in his power "to save from the wreck, local self-government in South Carolina and Louisiana, which was the great end of our endeavors in the last campaign." Willing to stand or fall on his record, he announced, "[I]f that be treason to principle, to party or to country, let my personal enemies make the most of it." Although Joe Brown and a few others persisted in their criticism, the vast majority of Georgia Democrats either acquiesced in or praised Gordon's actions. And most would probably have echoed B. H. Hill's thoughts that it was "a pity that such a patriotic record as he [Gordon] made on principle and for the peace of the country should be smirched by even the smell of a trade."<sup>53</sup>

In South Carolina, universal and unqualified praise greeted Gordon's actions. Following the inauguration of Hayes, Gordon met almost daily with either the president or members of his cabinet in an effort to press for the prompt withdrawal of troops. Even before redemption, a South Carolina newspaper warmly praised Gordon as the man who throughout the state's struggle "has made it the business of his political life to secure justice and peace for South Carolina." When the troops were finally ordered out of South Carolina on 2 April, Gordon proudly declared, "Day breaks at last. South Carolina is free."

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<sup>53</sup> Joseph H. Parks, Joseph E. Brown of Georgia (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1977), pp. 492-95; Atlanta Constitution, 27 March, 31 March, 20 April 1877; New Orleans Democrat, quoted in ibid., 10 May 1877; Gordon to L. N. Trammell, 14 April 1877, L. N. Trammell Papers, Emory University, Atlanta Georgia (hereafter cited as Trammell Papers, Emory); B. H. Hill to Doctor Felton, 13 April 1877, Felton Collection, UGA.

Eight days later, Governor-elect Wade Hampton wired Gordon, "Perfect peace prevails. The troops are withdrawn, and Chamberlain surrenders South Carolina. Thank you."<sup>54</sup>

Gordon's efforts on behalf of Georgia's sister state were not lost in the joy of triumph. Numerous letters of thanks and profound gratitude for the man who wrote that he considered the "liberation of South Carolina . . . dearer to me than any other matter in my public life" poured in in the wake of restoration of home rule. Friends of the General insistently prevailed upon him to name his daughter, born on the day federal troops received orders to leave South Carolina, Carolina because of his services to the state. Gordon and Fanny assented to the request even though their eldest daughter already bore the name Caroline. A more "visible and tangible evidence" of the love and appreciation with which the people of South Carolina regarded Gordon came later in the year when the women of Columbia presented him with a magnificent silver service bought by funds raised through popular subscription. On each of the six pieces of the service was engraved the following inscription: "Presented to General John B. Gordon of Georgia By some of his many friends in South Carolina In grateful remembrance of his sympathy and aid In restoring to their State the rights of Self-Government 1876-1877." As in Mississippi, Gordon's assistance to South Carolina "in the time of her distress and humiliation" eternally endeared him to its inhabitants.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Atlanta Constitution, 20 March, 21 March, 3 April, 11 April, 10 November 1877; Charleston News and Courier, quoted in ibid., 14 March 1877; Gordon to Paul H. Hayne, 20 March 1877, Paul Hamilton Hayne Collection, Duke University, Durham, North Carolina.

<sup>55</sup> Atlanta Constitution, 4 April, 15 April; Charleston News and Courier, quoted in ibid., 15 April 1877; Gordon to Mrs. Grace Elmore, 28 November 1877, Franklin Harper Elmore Collection, South Caroliniana Library, Columbia, South Carolina; Caroline Lewis Gordon, "De Gin'ral an' Miss Fanny" John Brown Gordon

Even while deeply involved in the behind-the-scenes actions which culminated with the resolution of the electoral controversy, Gordon continued to serve in his official senatorial capacity. In January 1877, he introduced a bill to create a sinking fund for the liquidation of government bonds advanced to the Central Pacific Railroad Company of California, to the Western Pacific Railroad Company and to the Union Pacific Railroad Company under the transcontinental railroad act of 1 July 1862. Although the bill received little support from his fellow senators, Gordon's proposal plus his steadfast opposition to the counter-proposal that was eventually enacted would later subject him to charges of corruption.<sup>56</sup> In addition to his common practice of introducing bills to remove political disabilities from the few still encumbered southerners, Gordon also lobbied for the release of a large number of North Georgians charged with the illicit sale and distribution of spirituous liquors. Despite the evidence of gross abuse of the revenue laws in Georgia, he managed to convince President Grant that governmental clemency toward these small offenders—many of whom Gordon felt were not guilty—would "relieve the innocent from oppressive litigation, without demoralizing the revenue service and prove to be judicious and wholesome." Georgians naturally lauded Gordon's "generous interest in the welfare of his constituents," but at least one newspaper, however grudgingly,

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Papers, Gordon Family Collection, University of Georgia, Athens, Georgia (hereafter cited as Gordon Family Collection, UGA).

The handles of the pieces the ornate silver service were carved in such a way as to resemble the trunk of a palmetto tree, with its overlapping bark. Also, the cover of each piece was crowned by a solid gold miniature palmetto tree. A monogram in raised gold bearing the initials J.B.G. was on the opposite side of the above inscription. And to symbolize the bond between the sister states, the box which held the service was made of Georgia walnut and Carolina palmetto. Although it was divided among the various branches of Gordon's family after his death—and has not been reassembled—a picture of the complete silver service can be found in Gordon Family Collection, UGA.

<sup>56</sup> See Chapter VII

also praised the outgoing president for "one of the few debts of gratitude" Georgians owed him.<sup>57</sup>

Gordon quickly came to occupy a favorable position with the new Republican administration that assumed the reins of government in March 1877. His refusal to resist Hayes' inauguration, his almost constant contact with the administration while working on behalf of South Carolina, and his backing of Hayes' cabinet nominees convinced many presidential advisors that the Georgian was a man with whom they could work. Hayes himself recorded his belief that only "the resolute support of the Southern Senators like Gordon, Lamar, and Hill" prevented formidable opposition to his cabinet appointees. And Gordon, despite his earlier fears that Hayes and the Republicans might make substantial inroads in the South, viewed the president in a more positive light. He believed Hayes would strive to eliminate "the Southern questions from American politics, by giving to the South all her rights of local self-government." And as these rights included complete control of domestic affairs as well as appointment of southerners to federal positions, Gordon chose to remain in Washington well after Congress adjourned. In frequent conferences with administration officials, he constantly pressed for immediate withdrawal of troops in the South, for unqualified restoration of home rule, and for selection of "good men" for southern offices.<sup>58</sup>

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57 Congressional Record, 44th Cong., 2d sess., 589, 615; Gordon to H. P. Farrow, 3 March 1877, Farrow Papers, UGA; Attorney General Alphonso Taft to Gordon, 4 March 1877, Trammell Papers, Emory; Atlanta Constitution, 3 March, 7 March, 8 March, 9 March 1877.

58 Atlanta Constitution, 8 March, 20 March, 25 March, 16 May 1877, 25 January 1878; Charleston News and Courier, quoted in ibid., 21 March, 15 April 1877; New York World, quoted in ibid., 16 May 1877; New York Tribune, 30 March, 24 April 1877; New York Herald, quoted in ibid., 27 April 1877; Williams, Hayes, p. 81.

Gordon did not return to Georgia until mid-May when he sought a period of rest following his strenuous exertions in South Carolina and in the nation's capital. As relaxing as his respite may have been, it was violently interrupted in August when his youngest daughter, Carolina, died. The infant's death left the Gordon family nearly prostrated with grief. A convention assembled during the summer of 1877 to write a new state constitution, but Gordon played virtually no part in the constitution-making process. He explained that his "protracted and very painful domestic affliction" prevented him from maintaining the close contact with the convention that he desired. Gordon may not have really emerged from his depression until late September when he and other prominent Georgians entertained President Hayes in Atlanta on his tour of the South. During the course of after dinner remarks, Gordon issued a new challenge to the North "to compete with the south in devotion to the constitution and to the union of the states under the constitution." Then expressing his hope that all of the obstacles which had held the two sections apart since the war would quickly be removed, Gordon extended "a cordial support in all rightful constitutional measures" to his former military foe.<sup>59</sup>

Following his return to the Senate in October, Gordon continued his close relationship with the Hayes administration. Some observers even considered Gordon "the recognized official leader of the administration" during the fight over New York custom nominations. Though perhaps overstated, Gordon's closeness to and frequent support of the Hayes wing of the Republican party

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<sup>59</sup> Atlanta Constitution, 12 May, 16 May, 28 August, 25 September 1877; Gordon, "De Gin'ral an' Miss Fanny," Gordon Family Collection, UGA; Gordon to James P. Hambleton, 20 August 1877, James Pinkney Hambleton Papers, Emory University, Atlanta, Georgia (hereafter cited as Hambleton Papers, Emory); Fanny Gordon to Mrs. Felton, 27 August 1877, Felton Collection, UGA.

earned him the undying enmity of the Stalwart Republicans, particularly of Roscoe Conkling, already a long-time nemesis. In an executive session of the Senate on 14 December, Gordon and Conkling exchanged verbal blows that convinced many that the two would meet in a duel. Gordon chose to interpret a rather flippant remark by the New Yorker as an attempt by the Republican to give orders to the Vice President. Conkling vehemently denied such intent and announced that anyone who placed such construction upon his words distorted the truth. Ever mindful of his personal honor, Gordon immediately responded. A heated exchange took place during which the Georgian stated in effect that the matter would be settled elsewhere. To many, this "sharp altercation" carried them back to an earlier time when impugnation of one's honor frequently resulted in violence. Soon after the Senate opened its doors late that afternoon, rumors of a duel swept through Washington.<sup>60</sup>

Close friends of both of the participants, however, quickly began working on a compromise. While Gordon withdrew to a private conference with fellow southerners and refused to comment on the matter, he did allow Senators Matt W. Ransom and Joseph E. McDonald to represent him in discussions with Conkling's "seconds," Senators Hannibal Hamlin and Timothy O. Howe. Secret conversations between these men that night and the next morning effected an arrangement acceptable to both Gordon and Conkling, though neither corresponded with the other. In essence, the statement explained that the harsh words by both Gordon and Conkling during the previous day's session were "the outgrowth of misapprehension." Consequently, "whatever was felt to be unkind

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<sup>60</sup> Atlanta Constitution, 15 December-20 December 1877, 9 January, 25 January, 20 April 1878; New York Times, 15 December, 16 December 1877; New York Tribune, 15 December, 16 December 1877; Eckenrode, R. B. Hayes, pp. 270-75.

and offensive in the remarks of either should be treated as if never uttered, and . . . are mutually and simultaneously withdrawn." The Senate, behind doors closed specifically for consideration of this matter, accepted this unique statement and ordered it entered into the Congressional Record.<sup>61</sup>

Despite its peaceful resolution, the incident nonetheless demonstrated a number of salient points. Where, in the past, Gordon had generally avoided such confrontations and ignored similar slaps, he appeared less inclined to tolerate them now. In the wake of his vigorous support of Hayes' customs house nominations and their subsequent defeat at the hands of Conkling, Gordon quite probably harbored a grudge and may have been waiting to spring upon the Republican. So when Conkling routinely called for a continuation of the Senate's calendar, Gordon lashed out. His outburst, though probably motivated by a blow to his pride, may have been a manifestation of his increasing sense of political security as well. Confident of his home base and of his position in the national Democratic party, Gordon had also managed to establish a comfortable working relationship with the present Republican administration. Abundantly secure in his political status, Gordon displayed less willingness to suppress his impulses when matters of pride were involved. And yet, even in the face of his momentary loss of control, Gordon quickly recovered and through the efforts of go-betweens brought an immediate end to the incident and the passions and sectional feelings it engendered. His pride may have gotten him into trouble but his commitment to national reconciliation guided him out.

The excitement surrounding the tiff in the Senate had hardly subsided

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61 Alfred R. Conkling, The Life and Letters of Roscoe Conkling (New York: Charles L. Webster and Co., 1889), pp. 560-62; New York Times, 16 December, 24 December 1877; New York Tribune, 17 December, 18 December 1877; Congressional Record, 45th Cong., 2d sess., 237; Mayes, L. Q. C. Lamar, p. 379.

when reports that Gordon might accept a commission to go to Europe as an agent on behalf of southern business surfaced. L. Q. C. Lamar had earlier informed him that the latest reports from Europe indicated a desire on the part of European capital to turn away from northern and western investments. Although eager to invest in southern cotton, European capitalists, according to Lamar, still feared the unsettled conditions in the South, particularly "political perturbations and the supposed liability of our Southern communities to arbitrary interference of Federal authority." If a respected public man from the South could go to Europe and provide the necessary assurances of opportunity and stability, Lamar believed that capital would immediately begin to flow into the South. Many considered Gordon to be that man. Although little is known of this proposition, Gordon evidently expressed his willingness to go to Europe the next year if so commissioned by "Boards of Trade and businessmen of the South." He offered to act without compensation, save the simple defraying of his expenses. The mission with Gordon as the special agent did not materialize at this time, but southerners did not forget the idea. Six years later when again soliciting foreign capital, he was selected as the man who could best induce and encourage investment from Europe.<sup>62</sup>

Gordon's desire to cement commercial as well as political and emotional bonds between the sections carried him north again in 1878. Late in April, he headed a delegation of southern congressmen that visited Boston at the invitation of the city's Commercial Club. As "the acknowledged representative and spokesman of the company," Gordon acted as principal speaker when the Bostonians feted the southerners. He informed his hosts that the delegation had come not only as friends and countrymen but as observers of northern industry as

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62 New York Times, 13 December, 21 December 1877.

well. In that sense, he served notice that "we of the south intend to enter the race with you" because the development of a business and industrial rivalry between the North and the South would benefit the material interests of the nation as a whole. And in the same vein, Gordon again pleaded for the complete eradication of sectional animosity, and in its place the establishment of a commitment to a new sense of national unity. True, a terrible internecine war had been fought, but it had been, as he maintained, a conflict of constitutional theories and "in another sense a war over slavery." Both issues, however, had indisputably been settled with the defeat of the Confederate armies. Whereas Union and Confederate soldiers alike had proven the strength of their convictions during the war by offering their lives on the battlefield, Gordon contended that another standard of loyalty now existed—one where citizens of all sections would compete to see who could best serve the interests of the whole country. He concluded his hopeful assessment of the nation's future by proclaiming to his enthusiastic audience that the "causes that divided us are gone, and gone forever. The interests which now unite us will unite us for ever."<sup>63</sup>

While Gordon earnestly promoted national unity in Boston, political factionalism at home forced him to devote much of his energy during the fall of the year to affairs in his home state. The Conservative Democrats or New Departure Democrats had dominated Georgia politics from the time they seized control from the Republicans, but the "germs of insurgency and independency" spread quickly. This emerging Independent Movement was centered in Georgia's northern counties where Unionist sentiment remained strong even during the

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<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 30 April 1878; *Atlanta Constitution*, 28 April, 30 April, 3 May, 7 May 1878; Gordon to Barlow, 21 April 1878, Barlow Papers, Huntington; E. H. Watson to Mrs. Gordon, 11 May 1878, John Brown Gordon Papers, Emory University, Atlanta, Georgia.

Civil War. Protests against single-party control of the state in this region with "a long-standing tradition of opposition to the political leadership of the black belt" took tangible form in 1874. Doctor William H. Felton of Bartow County, running as a Independent, won a seat in Congress from the Seventh Congressional District, a fourteen-county district in northwestern Georgia. Felton became the major spokesman for insurgents who split from the Democratic Party because they believed it no longer served the best interests of the people. The Independents argued that the Georgia Democracy was controlled by political "rings" which used the party to consolidate their hold on the state and to further their own selfish ends.<sup>64</sup>

Felton's victory and the growing strength of the Independent Movement deeply troubled the regular Democrats, so that in 1878, they determined to make an all-out effort to crush the insurgents. The resulting campaign proved to be one of the most bitterly contested off-year elections in Georgia history. To help defeat the Independents, the Democratic party prevailed upon the man most considered the most prominent Georgian. Gordon promptly answered the call. During the fall of 1878, he campaigned extensively on behalf the regular Democratic party, but especially hard in the "Bloody Seventh," where Gordon N. Lester opposed Doctor Felton. This was not the first time he had taken to the stump in opposition to Felton. In 1874, Mrs. Rebecca Latimer Felton, hearing that Gordon would speak in the Seventh, wrote to the General inquiring as to his plans. His evasive reply that previous commitments in south Georgia would

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64 E. Merton Coulter, A Short History of Georgia (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1933), pp. 363-65; Kenneth Coleman, ed., A History of Georgia (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1977), pp. 216-20; Judson Clements Ward, Jr., "Georgia Under the Bourbon Democrats, 1872-1890," (Ph.D. dissertation, University of North Carolina, 1947), pp. 73-74. See also George L. Jones, "William H. Felton and the Independent Democratic Movement in Georgia, 1870-1890," (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Georgia, 1971).

probably prevent any campaigning in her husband's district coupled with his appearance at a mass meeting in the Seventh exactly one week later provoked the combative Mrs. Felton. This incident was the opening act of a long and bitter political drama involving the General and the lady.<sup>65</sup>

College-educated and exceptionally articulate, Mrs. Felton was truly a unique individual. At eighteen, she married William H. Felton, a physician and licensed Methodist minister twelve years her senior. The early years of her marriage were devoted to raising a family, but when her husband entered politics, she avidly joined his fight against the Democratic party. She had no intention of remaining apart from the fray even though contemporary attitudes dictated that politics be left to the men. At the outset, Mrs. Felton labored in the background; nevertheless, she was soon acknowledged as his campaign manager and press secretary. Her pen became her most powerful and indefatigable weapon as she wrote countless speeches and letters for the Doctor. Unquestionably, Gordon's apparent duplicity in 1874 angered her, but relations between the Gordons and Feltons seemed to have remained cordial until 1878. In August of the preceding year, Mrs. Felton, who had endured the heartbreak of the death of several of her own children, sent a very touching letter to Fanny after learning of baby Carolina's death. And correspondence between the General and the Doctor did not evince any of the bitter animosity that would

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<sup>65</sup> Ward, "Georgia Under the Bourbons," pp. 95-105; John E. Talmadge, Rebecca Latimer Felton: Nine Stormy Decades (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1966), pp. 40-41; Gordon to Mrs. Felton, 24 October 1874, Felton Collection, UGA; Gordon to Doctor Hambleton, 9 October 1874, Hambleton Papers, Emory; Mrs. William H. Felton, My Memoirs of Georgia Politics (Atlanta: Index Printing Co., 1911), pp. 150-52; Atlanta Constitution, 29 September, 3 October, 8 October, 17 October, 31 October, 1 November, 2 November, 3 November, 7 November 1878.

later characterize their relationship.<sup>66</sup>

But as the 1878 election neared and Gordon increased his efforts against the Doctor, the Feltons' antipathy intensified. The General earnestly pleaded for party loyalty by reminding the voters that "party organization was the means of our rescue; party dissension would insure our overthrow." Believing that Independents were "uniting with the worst elements of the Rad. [Radical Republican] party & threatening us [Democrats] with the loss of our state," Gordon enlisted the talents of other prominent Democratic Senators. He called upon Lamar of Mississippi and Ransom of North Carolina to speak at Democratic rallies and help destroy Independentism in Georgia. Gordon also employed the particularly effective tactic of appealing to the sentiments of Georgians by drawing attention to the Doctor's failure to enter the Confederate military during the war. And at the same time while parading back and forth on numerous campaign stages with "his fine head held high, his scarred face alive with the joy of battle," Gordon often accentuated the Democratic candidate's contribution to the war as "he lifted Lester's empty sleeve and smiled down at the tumult." One can almost see the livid, enraged Mrs. Felton glaring back at the beaming General. The lavish praise by regular Democratic organs of Gordon's willingness to "throw himself into the breach . . . at this critical juncture to come to the rescue of the party of peace, property and safety" undoubtedly compounded her anger. While criticizing some other prominent

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66 John E. Talmadge, "Rebecca Latimer Felton," in Horace Montgomery, ed., Georgians in Profile (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1958), pp. 277-302; Josephine Bone Floyd, "Rebecca Latimer Felton, Political Independent," Georgia Historical Quarterly 30 (March 1946): 14-34; Talmadge, Felton, passim; Fanny Gordon to Mrs. Felton, 27 August 1877, Felton Collection, UGA; Gordon to Doctor Felton, 25 February 1876, Felton Collection, UGA; Gordon to Dr. Felton, 29 April 1877, Doctor William Harrell Felton and Mrs. Rebecca A. Latimer Felton Collection, University of Georgia, Athens, Georgia (hereafter cited as W. H. Felton and R.A.L. Felton Collection, UGA).

Democrats for refusing to enter the contest in the Seventh, the Atlanta Constitution glowingly reported on his wholehearted efforts in the interest of the "true democracy." Nevertheless, in spite of Gordon's heavy speaking schedule and the immense pressures brought to bear on them, Felton and another Independent won congressional seats.<sup>67</sup>

Immediately upon the heels of the early November contests, Gordon faced his own battle as he sought a second term as United States Senator. Although prospects for his reelection appeared very bright, Gordon had been cautioning his supporters for over a year to not be misled: "I don't want too great confidence in my success to create apathy on the part of my friends." Recent "threats of vengeance" from Independents and warnings that "they would 'beat him for the senate,'" may have given Gordon cause for concern, but almost all of Georgia's newspapers confidently predicted an easy victory for the General, perhaps by the largest majority ever received by a senatorial candidate. That was exactly what happened on 19 November 1878 when the Georgia General Assembly met and reelected Gordon by a nearly unanimous vote.<sup>68</sup>

In a magnificent speech at the state capitol on the night after the election, Gordon humbly thanked his fellow citizens for their expression of

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<sup>67</sup> Talmadge, Felton, pp. 51-55; Atlanta Constitution, 29 September, 3 October, 17 October, 7 November 1878; Willie D. Halsell, ed., "Some Correspondence Between Lucius Q. C. Lamar and John B. Gordon," Georgia Historical Quarterly 28 (March 1944): 46-47; Gordon to Ransom, 7 October 1878, Matt W. Ransom Papers, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, North Carolina.

<sup>68</sup> Atlanta Constitution, 17 October, 23 October, 12 November, 19 November, 20 November 1878; Gordon to L. N. Trammell, 14 September 1877, Trammell Papers, Emory; New York Tribune, 20 November 1878; Journal of the House of Representatives of the State of Georgia, 1878, pp. 143-45; Journal of the Senate of the State of Georgia, 1878, pp. 86-87.

confidence in him. Somberly reflecting upon his almost six-year struggle against Republican opponents in the Senate, he tried to relate the grave burdens of responsibility that he had borne while in their service. "No man but those who served you then can ever know the agony of that awful suspense nor fully appreciate the dangers that surrounded your liberties." Even now, at a time when much of the deep-seated sectional hatred had abated, Gordon cautioned his listeners that the danger persisted. Radical Republicans, he insisted, "seize again the faded bloody shirt, plunge it in the chronic crimson vat, run it up the party staff and fly it as the symbol of a new civilization and a 'restored union.'"<sup>69</sup>

As disturbing as these renewed efforts "to reopen the wounds that were healing and to revive the passions that were dying" were to Gordon, he found the increasing rift in the ranks of the Democratic party in Georgia even more alarming. Any attempt at establishing a third party could only work to the detriment of the Democratic party by allowing the Republicans to "rush through the breach and seize the governments, state and federal." Gordon's plea for unity to the Democratic cause--rooted in the belief that there were and could only be two real national parties and thus only two viable alternatives--took on an almost evangelistic tenor. Speaking directly to the men who had so bitterly berated both him and his party only days earlier, Gordon stressed that despite their differences, the Independents and the Democrats must work within the confines of the organized Democracy. Only the Democratic party, Gordon asserted, served as the true repository of the ideals and principles upon which America had been built; the Republican party, on the other hand, had been "conceived in passion, born of fanaticism and baptized in blood." As he neared

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69 Atlanta Constitution, 22 November 1878.

the end of his speech, he whipped the audience into a frenzy by dramatically reaffirming that it had been the Democratic party that had state by state redeemed the South from Republican tyranny. And it would be, he concluded, the Democratic party that would continue to fight for the principles of true democracy.<sup>70</sup>

Despite overwhelmingly favorable response to his speech by both state and national newspapers, Gordon's appeal for an end to party disloyalty and for a return of the insurgents to the Democratic party fell upon deaf ears in much of northern Georgia. Although Doctor Felton had retained his congressional seat by a comfortable margin, his wife was not content merely to bask in the glory of victory; rather she launched a vengeful assault upon the Georgia senator who had campaigned so intensely against her husband. And as Mrs. Felton's biographer observed, "[F]ate could not have harassed Gordon with a more formidable opponent: a lady who insisted on being considered a lady even while she was employing all the bare-knuckled tactics of a belligerent man." Mrs. Felton opposed and hated many prominent Georgians but "none so long and wholeheartedly" as Gordon. His active political opposition to her husband served as the genesis for her resentment; however, it was the Confederate hero's emotional appeal to Georgians to vote against a man who had failed to support the Confederate cause that earned him the lady's ever-lasting enmity. "She could never put from her mind," wrote her biographer, "the picture of Gordon smiling triumphantly from the platform while the 'Rebel yell' echoed around him." Mrs. Felton's contemptuousness of Gordon's business failures only reinforced her belief that the General was "at best, . . . a charlatan with

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<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

limited capabilities." Gordon truly had an enemy with whom he had to reckon.<sup>71</sup>

Gordon tried to ignore Mrs. Felton's barbs because of the difficult position an attack upon a southern woman would place him, but she proved exceedingly difficult to avoid as her efforts to destroy his reputation reached frenetic proportions. In a series of letters to newspapers in early 1879, she launched a sustained and bitterly personal attack upon Gordon. She dwelt upon the failure of his various business ventures which she claimed defrauded numerous Georgians of their investments; she accused him of borrowing money from a southern bishop and using worthless securities as collateral; she charged him with using convict labor for personal gain and of housing the prisoners in a camp which she called "a disgrace to civilization;" and she alledged that Gordon had enriched himself while in the Senate through political and financial corruption. Mrs. Felton reiterated all of these denunciations in a February letter in which she replied to charges that Independents in the Seventh had solicited funds from the Republican party in the last election. Although Anderson W. Reese, correspondent of the Macon Telegraph, made the accusation, she ignored him as the author and assailed Gordon as "the master in this attack." And as was her habit, she chided Gordon and other "shifty politicians" for their "resolve to attack women."<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 22 November, 23 November 1878; New York Tribune, 22 November 1878; Talmadge, Felton, pp. 55-57.

<sup>72</sup> Talmadge, Felton, pp. 56-59; Atlanta Constitution, 25 February, 28 February 1879. The January-March 1879 issues of the Cartersville Free Press, the Felton's newspaper, printed numerous letters and articles by Mrs. Felton attacking Gordon on these and other points. The single greatest repository of anti-Gordon material can be found in the Felton Collection, UGA, particularly in the scrapbooks Mrs. Felton scrupulously maintained. The smaller, accompanying W. H. Felton and R. A. L. Felton Collection provides additional letters from other Georgians who bore grudges against Gordon for various reasons. For more information on the 1879 clash, see Felton, Memoirs, pp. 479-96.

Gordon usually allowed Democratic newspapers and his friends to act in his defense, but by March 1879, he felt compelled to respond personally to the charges. He did so in a forceful letter to the Augusta Chronicle and Constitutionalist in which he maintained that he had not entered the canvass in the Seventh by choice, rather at the behest of the Democratic party. He positively asserted that he "made no assaults upon Doctor Felton's character" until "wanton and reckless" slanders "made it proper for me to repel them." In addition to denying all of Mrs. Felton's charges, Gordon also adopted her tactics by dismissing her as the true slanderer and—wisely though unfairly—concentrated on her husband as "the author and circulator of the calumnies" heaped upon him. Employing some of the most bitter invective he ever issued for publication, Gordon assailed Felton for hiding "behind his wife, his grey hairs and the robes of a minister of Christ." Felton had proven himself, in Gordon's words, "false to his people in the war; false to the political organization which served his people in peace; false to the teachings of Him who he professes to follow; [and had become] begrimed with a wicked and corrupt alliance with the enemies of his party, section and people." Gordon recognized that he had used extremely "strong words," but he concluded that for the sake of his children and the people who had elected him, he must publicly denounce "these foul and atrocious calumnies" in such a manner as to leave no question.<sup>73</sup>

By making the Doctor the object of his attack Gordon managed to cut Mrs. Felton out of the public portion of the controversy and as neither man wished to persist in violently assailing the other, the feud soon faded from the public's eye. The hatred it engendered, however, lived on long afterwards.

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<sup>73</sup> Atlanta Constitution, 26 February, 28 February, 8 March, 9 March, 10 March 1879.

Little material of a personal nature which would provide a definitive answer as to how Gordon regarded Mrs. Felton has survived. Nevertheless, he must have detested the woman. With her violent intrusion into what almost everyone considered the masculine arena of politics, she, in Gordon's mind, forfeited her immunity from attack as well as the abiding admiration and respect he always entertained for women. And yet, in spite of her unlady-like actions, Mrs. Felton insisted that she be treated with full deference due her sex. This woman and her peculiar penchant would trouble Gordon for the remainder of his life. Up until her death in 1930, she seized every opportunity to assail him on any grounds whatsoever. Much of My Memoirs of Georgia Politics, her autobiography published in 1911, was devoted to her unrelenting obsession to expose Gordon and to chip away at his popularity. With efforts such as this to harry the General even beyond the grave, Gordon indeed had a formidable opponent.<sup>74</sup>

During the course of his controversy with the Feltons, Gordon remained in Washington where he had taken on new responsibilities. Democratic victories in the fall of 1878 enabled Gordon's party to gain control of the United States Senate and with it, the chairmanships of the various Senate committees. As senior Democrat on the Committee on Commerce, Gordon was elevated to its head. Despite his advancement, Gordon accomplished little of note in 1879 because of a severe attack of inflammatory rheumatism. In fact, Gordon became so "very desperately sick" during the last two weeks of March that Fanny thought he would die. One visitor to Gordon's bedside reported that the

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<sup>74</sup> Talmadge, Felton, pp. 55-56. Following this bitter fight in 1879, Mrs. Felton began collecting material she deemed damaging to the General. Her efforts filled numerous scrapbooks and provided the basis for much of her memoir. In fact, almost one-third of the book touches upon Gordon's actions or Mrs. Felton's accusations against him. Felton, Memoirs, p. 631, passim.

interest felt over his condition was "something phenomenal," as he received over 200 cards in one day. Gordon did not entirely recover until near the end of April. Although generally robust and vital, Gordon, as he grew older, experienced considerable problems with his health. Undoubtedly, his wounds and immense physical exertions during the war contributed to his increasingly more frequent periods of painful debility.<sup>75</sup>

Following "a long, pleasant summer of domestic and farm life at his home near Atlanta," Gordon resumed his efforts at national reconciliation. In interviews with a number of northern newspapers in late 1879, Gordon advised southern members of Congress not to be lured into partisan debates which he felt had damaged the Democratic cause in the last session. Continued "indulgence of excited oratory and the discussion of sectional issues" would only detract from national pacification and in the process harm the South. Gordon told southerners that "silent contempt" was the best way to meet Republican charges. "When the people of the north see that we endure all that they [the Republicans] can say without reply and are only here for the purpose of attending to the business of legislation, they [northerners at large] will take us for what we really are and trust us." The Philadelphia Times concurred with Gordon and heartily praised his continued "efforts in behalf of the peace that is based upon mutual good will, a thorough acceptance of the results of the war and the national sentiment, which is the natural outgrowth of these conditions."<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> Atlanta Constitution, 8 March, 18 March, 19 March, 20 March, 25 March, 2 April, 3 April, 10 April, 23 April 1879; Congressional Record, 46th Cong., 1st sess., 1, 136; 2d sess., 19.

<sup>76</sup> New York Journal of Commerce, quoted in Atlanta Constitution, 16 October 1879; Baltimore Sun, quoted in ibid., 4 December 1879; Baltimore Gazette, quoted in ibid., 4 December 1879; Philadelphia Times, quoted in ibid., 5 December 1879.

Although Gordon steadfastly worked "to prevent the keeping alive of sectional anomosities, [and] the stirring up of sectional strife," he became embroiled in an acerbic dispute with his own Georgia delegation in early 1880. Rumors of a developing rift between Gordon and Alexander H. Stephens over the appointment of a supervisor of the census for the first district of Georgia surfaced in January. In what quickly became "a personal conflict," Gordon violently opposed Stephens'—and Doctor Felton's—nominee, Thomas J. Simmons, "on the ground of utter incompetency and bitter malignity to the best people of the state, branding them as . . . as 'secesh traitors.'" During a private three-hour meeting between the Senate committee on the census and the Georgia congressional delegation to consider Simmons' nomination, "an exceedingly spirited, and at times very personal, colloquy" between Gordon and Stephens took place. Gordon exploded when Stephens, who had earlier charged that the General's negligence had resulted in the defeat of a Georgia river and harbor appropriation bill, accused him of favoring a Republican, former Marshall Thomas Smyth, for the census supervisor's job. Gordon later explained that "my indignation was so great that I used to you [Stephens] language which, in view of your age and our long established friendship, I deeply regret." Although letters of apology were exchanged, the Gordon-Stephens feud continued, eventually attracting national attention. Most Georgians, dismayed by the profitless war between two of their most respected representatives, probably concurred with the sentiments of the Macon Herald: "Private controversies should be fought out in private. Besides all this, these gentlemen were not sent to Washington to wage war on each other; and the fact is worthy of their consideration."<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> Atlanta Constitution, 27 January, 5 February, 7 February, 8 February, 10 March, 14 March, 19 March, 20 March, 25 April, 27 April 1880;

Disputes such as this one, though probably as much Gordon's fault as Stephens', may very well have begun to sour Gordon on politics. In his seven years in the Senate he had achieved much. Beyond the personal reputation he had earned as a southern spokesman, he had also established himself as a strong proponent of national reconciliation. More tangibly, he had played a major role in bringing Reconstruction to an end and restoring self-government to all the states of the South. It is quite probable that the Senate no longer held the attraction it once had for Gordon; perhaps he had accomplished all that he could at the present time. And like a good general who regroups his forces following a successful campaign in anticipation of the next one, Gordon looked to the future. He had successfully met the tremendous challenges that had confronted him both in his military and political careers, but he could only look back upon a record of disappointment and failure as a businessman. Given these feelings and his disgruntlement with politics, or at least with affairs like the Stephens' conflict and the bitter contests against the Independents, Gordon began to look for a new challenge beyond the Senate.

Just as the Gordon-Stephens controversy retreated from the headlines, a shocking announcement that came "like a bolt out of the blue" reached Georgia. On 19 May 1880, unheralded by rumor and totally unexpected, Georgians learned that Gordon had resigned from the Senate. He had tendered his resignation in a 15 May letter to Governor Alfred H. Colquitt. Having been in public service, either in war or in politics, almost constantly for nearly twenty years, Gordon

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Philadelphia Times, quoted in ibid., 5 December 1879; Macon Telegraph, quoted in ibid., 25 April 1880; New York Times, 12 February, 15 February, 12 April 1880. In addition to the specific dates cited, almost every issue of the Atlanta Constitution between February-April 1880 made some mention of the controversy. Numerous letters dealing with the Gordon-Stephens' imbroglio in February can be found in Stephens Papers, LC. See also Felton, Memoirs, pp. 297-301.

explained that he was "simply carrying out a long cherished desire to retire from public life." Now that the rights of self government and full representation had been restored to all southern states, Gordon felt "free therefore to consult my inclinations and the imperative interests of my family, without the least detriment to the public service." Despite Colquitt's appeal to Gordon to withdraw his resignation or at least delay it until the Georgia general assembly met, the General, "though anxious to oblige," replied, "I feel constrained to decline." Reluctantly, Colquitt accepted his decision. Gordon was leaving the Senate.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> Atlanta Constitution, 20 May 1880; Colquitt to Gordon, 18 May, 20 May 1880, Governor's Letterbooks, Alfred Holt Colquitt, 22 January 1877 - 6 April 1881, Georgia Department of Archives and History, Atlanta, Georgia.

## CHAPTER VI

### A BREATH OF SCANDAL

Gordon's unexpected resignation profoundly shocked and saddened people in all sections of the country. National newspapers, unstinting in their praise of Gordon's senatorial services both to his state and to the nation, universally lamented his decision to leave the national forum. The St. Louis Post Dispatch acknowledged that Gordon's desperate financial plight was well known and declared that a "senatorship with \$6,000 a year and a family means poverty in Washington." Recognizing that such a paltry sum forced many Senators to lead a "dog's life," the Boston Post expressed surprise "that his example is not more frequently followed." Praise of the Georgian also cut across party lines as the New York Tribune recalled "few parallels in the history of the senate" where a man retired at the peak of his power and respect. This Republican paper, often a severe critic of Gordon's, nevertheless noted that Republicans and Democrats alike respected and trusted the Georgian whose "fairness and moderation . . . made him personally one of the most influential members of the Senate." The Baltimore Gazette knew of "no man in public life who in so short a space of time has made a deeper or broader impression upon national affairs." And in probably the most glowing tribute to Gordon, the Washington Post expressed its deep regret at the loss of a man whose "mere presence has been so serviceable in bringing about a constantly improving feeling" between the former warring sections. The Post added that it had "yet to read or hear of the northern man who has met him who does not heartily respect him, and who

does not, and as a consequence, entertain a higher respect for the people whom he represents."<sup>1</sup>

Although Georgia newspapers echoed similar expressions of disappointment and praise, their comments had barely reached print when a second, even more unexpected jolt rocked the citizens of the state. On the same day that Gordon's letter of resignation was published, Georgians learned that Governor Alfred H. Colquitt had appointed former governor Joseph E. Brown--the same man who less than a decade earlier had been a prominent figure in the Republican party--to succeed Gordon in the Senate. Outrage and indignation instantly replaced the surprise and regret that had greeted Gordon's announcement. This 20 May appointment of the thoroughly detested Brown shook Georgia to its very political core. It had, in the words of one contemporary, "something like the effect that the explosion of a powder magazine would have in a fortification." Gordon's resignation coupled with Colquitt's selection of Brown spawned a political whirlwind of "more sudden and uncontrollable fury" than Georgia had ever before witnessed.<sup>2</sup>

First reports from Washington concerning Gordon's decision to step down cited the same reasons that he had given in his letter of resignation, namely his desire to leave public life and the necessity of devoting himself to some full-time, more lucrative business enterprise. Henry W. Grady, correspondent of the Atlanta Constitution, reported from Washington that even though the General

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1 Quoted in Atlanta Constitution, 23 May, 25 May 1880; New York Tribune, 21 May 1880. The daily issues of this Democratic organ during the last days of May are laced with favorable editorials from numerous newspapers throughout the country. See also John B. Gordon Papers, Gordon Family Collection, University of Georgia, Athens, Georgia.

2 Atlanta Constitution, 21 May 1880; Issac W. Avery, History of the State of Georgia from 1850 to 1881 (New York: Brown and Derby, 1881), p. 558.

had "several flattering offers," he would do nothing until he had "a few weeks of rest." Georgia editorials written upon first learning of Gordon's resignation praised their native son for his brilliant record of service on the state's behalf. Having defended Georgia's liberty first on the battlefield and then in the Senate, Gordon could, now, in one Atlanta paper's opinion, lay "off a toga that is as stainless as the sword he surrendered at Appomattox." However, the announcement of Joe Brown's appointment as Georgia's interim Senator cast a wholly different light upon Gordon's action. Rumors immediately began to circulate that Gordon would assume the presidency of Brown's Western and Atlantic Railroad. For many Georgians, all the elements of a corrupt bargain appeared to be present--Brown, using his money and influence to assist Gordon in business and Colquitt in politics, gained a seat in the Senate; Colquitt, anticipating immense difficulty in retaining his gubernatorial chair in the fall elections, secured the support of two influential Georgians; and Gordon, desiring to leave politics in order to make money, obtained the prominent business position he had long sought. Cries of "bargain," "sale," "trade," and the "calumny of understanding between the three" reverberated from virtually every section of Georgia.<sup>3</sup>

Obviously, the lightening rod of the political storm which swept over the state was Colquitt's appointment of Brown to Gordon's vacated Senate seat. Although Brown had risen meteorically in prewar politics and ably led the state as governor during the Civil War, his immediate acceptance of Republican rule and ready conversion to that party earned him the everlasting enmity of most white Georgians, especially Democrats. Commenting upon Brown's remarkable

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<sup>3</sup> Atlanta Constitution, 20 May - 23 May 1880; Avery, History of Georgia, pp. 558-59.

political career, one Georgia historian styled him, "first in secession, first in reconstruction, and very nearly first in the restoration of Democratic home rule." In spite of his reconversion to the Democratic party in the early 1870s, Joe Brown remained probably the most widely detested native-born public figure in all of Georgia. His brilliant success in various postwar business endeavors brought him immense wealth, but all of his money could not buy him the political vindication that he sought from the people of Georgia. Without a helping hand, Brown had virtually no chance of again holding high political office. But now, as the result of the resignation of Gordon and Colquitt's appointment, Brown was politically resurrected.<sup>4</sup>

Reaction to the resignation-appointment, though varied, was swift and forceful. Although some papers, like the Atlanta Constitution, recognized Brown "as a proper appointment and as good as could have been made," numerous other newspapers in the state immediately unleashed a withering assault upon all of the involved parties. Brown, as might be expected, bore the brunt of the tirade. Characterized by the Savannah Record as "venal, mercenary, mediocre, vindictive, ever veering his sails to suit the wind," Brown was denounced not only

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4 Joseph H. Parks, Joseph E. Brown of Georgia (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1977), pp. 19-506; C. Mildred Thompson, Reconstruction in Georgia: Economic, Social, Political, 1865-1872 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1915), p. 223; Avery, History of Georgia, p. 563.

Parks contends that it "is doubtful that Brown really wanted to go to Washington as a Senator, leaving behind all his business interests, yet he thought the honor due him." I feel, on the other hand, his desire for vindication at the hands of the same voters who had savagely opposed and condemned him since the war was much stronger than Parks contends. More than merely believing the Senate post was an honor he had earned, Brown desperately yearned to emerge from under the dark cloud of political ostracism that shadowed him at all times in the postwar period. In light of the complex railroad dealings in which he was involved in May 1880, it is unlikely he would have accepted Colquitt's offer had he not truly wished to return to public life. Parks, Brown, p. 518; Avery, History of Georgia, p. 563; Louise Biles Hill, Joseph E. Brown and the Confederacy (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1939), p. 311.

for his prior political transgressions but also for his apparent central role in the current controversy. Colquitt also came under intense fire for his alleged complicity in the "Senatorial deformity." At a large public meeting, residents of Columbus adopted resolutions severely condemning the governor for "the shameful and disgraceful manner" in which he had foisted Brown upon the people. Most Georgians conceded Gordon's right to resign, but like the Columbus Enquirer, found "the rewarding of Brown, the bitter pill" Colquitt had given them, outrageous and unpalatable. "Base and treacherous conduct," "eternal infamy," and "a stench in the nostrils of honest men" but a few of the blistering epithets showered upon Brown and Colquitt by Georgians who felt betrayed by the apparent conspiracy.<sup>5</sup>

Gordon, of course, did not escape his share of abuse. Unless he could provide a more complete and more satisfactory explanation for his sudden retirement, the Columbus Times believed that he deserved even greater censure than Colquitt. Criticism of Gordon took two general forms. The first, and most damaging, charged him with willingly and purposefully exchanging his Senate seat for railroad favors from Brown. If this proved to be the case, Gordon would forever forfeit his special place in Georgians' hearts. But the second, more commonly adopted course of criticism, and the one taken by the Atlanta Daily Post, pictured Gordon "more as the unfortunate victim of an unholy conspiracy

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<sup>5</sup> Atlanta Constitution, 21 May 1880; Savannah Record, 24 May 1880, quoted in Parks, Brown, p. 510; Columbus Enquirer, quoted in Atlanta Constitution, 21 May 1880; Avery, History of Georgia, pp. 560-61.

Throughout the entire controversy, the Constitution denied any wrongdoing on his or Colquitt's or Brown's part and stood as the most vocal defender of Gordon. On 25 May, it delivered a blistering editorial castigating those who were impugning Gordon's motives and denouncing his actions. The paper incredulously inquired how could and why would residents of Gordon's own native state strive to assassinate the character of "a senator who is too poor to maintain his family and meet the demands made upon him with the salary of his office."

than as the architect of his own misfortune." That paper further speculated that Gordon, having become "[F]inancially involved beyond hope of disenthralment . . . listened to the words of the seducer [obviously Brown] and bartered his position, if not his honor, for personal gain." Many Georgians probably concurred with a similar proposition put forth in a letter to the editors of the Constitution that Gordon as well as Colquitt had "been made the dupes of the artful and sagacious arch-political traitor, Joseph E. Brown." The former governor, according to Pro Bono Publico's letter, used his immense wealth and influence, both in railroading and in politics, as "a mighty lever" to secure the position of United States Senator that he so greatly desired. Realizing that election to the post was impossible, Brown offered financial assistance to Gordon and political support to Colquitt, the benefits of which neither could resist. Regardless of the varied forms the condemnations of Gordon, Brown, and Colquitt took, the swell of protest assumed frightening proportions within a matter of days.<sup>6</sup>

Public outrage grew so intense that all of the aggrieved parties felt compelled to respond to the grave allegations being leveled against them. Colquitt's and Brown's accounts of their involvement in the resignation-appointment process were published only three days after the announcement of Gordon's decision. Colquitt indignantly denounced rumors of a bargain or understanding between Gordon, Brown and himself as "utterly, wantonly false" and branded any one who made such accusations as "a liar or a thief." He explained his swift selection of Brown by revealing that he had known

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<sup>6</sup> Columbus Times, quoted in Atlanta Constitution, 22 May 1880; Atlanta Daily Post, 23 May 1880, clipping in Felton Scrapbooks, Scrapbook #17, p. 51, Rebecca L. Felton Collection, University of Georgia, Athens, Georgia (hereafter cited as Felton Collection, UGA); Atlanta Constitution, 25 May, 26 May 1880.

for several months that Gordon wanted to resign. This knowledge had allowed him "to look about for a successor" before Gordon actually stepped down. Convinced that the former governor was "the fittest appointment," Colquitt approached him about the Senate post. According to the governor, Brown initially refused the offer, urging instead that he redouble his efforts to dissuade Gordon from resigning; however, when certain that Gordon's decision was final, Brown reconsidered and accepted the appointment, an act which "surprised and gratified" the governor. As that was the extent of his role in the controversy, Colquitt declared that he had "nothing but loathing and contempt for the man who hints of corruption or questionable methods."<sup>7</sup>

Brown, in a separate interview, similarly denied the charge of a prearranged understanding, calling it "an infamous falsehood." His explanation substantiated the governor's account in every detail. According to Brown, there was never even the suggestion of "any bargain or understanding or condition" at any time before or after he accepted the Senate offer. "I was simply urged to take the place, and finally agreed. There never had been the slightest hint of a condition." Brown also denied any contact whatsoever, either in person, by mail or telegraph, or through an intermediary, with Gordon about anything vaguely related to the matter at hand. He flatly rejected the notion of considering Gordon to replace him as president of the Western and Atlantic Railroad. To the contrary, Brown reported that the only suggestions that he had received in this connection were from stockholders who strongly urged him to continue as head of the road. Like Colquitt, he concluded by emphasizing that the strength or force of his denial of all charges could not possibly be overexaggerated.<sup>8</sup>

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7 Atlanta Constitution, 23 May 1880.

8 Ibid.

A full-fledged explanation by Gordon of his actions was not immediately forthcoming as he remained in Washington attending to Senate business until his successor arrived.<sup>9</sup> Nevertheless, Georgians learned through additional articles by Grady that Gordon had already received a number of attractive offers. The first came from one of his old soldiers, T. Egenton Hogg, who wanted the General to move to Oregon and take charge of his large railroad and mining interests there. Another proposal offered to make Gordon president of the Great Southern Railway of Florida, but Grady maintained that Gordon had yet to accept any position whatsoever. And in an effort to quash rumors to that effect, Grady stated positively that Gordon had not been and would not be offered the presidency of the Western and Atlantic Railroad. In the same issue of the Constitution that carried Grady's report, Gordon authorized the paper "in the strongest sense to deny in his name that there was any trade or suspicion of a trade." Early dispatches reporting that Gordon would soon return home from Washington correctly reflected his desire "to discuss face to face with the people the issues" that had grown out of his resignation; however, his wife's serious illness forced him to postpone the trip until she improved. But as the rumblings of discontent in Georgia grew audible even to Gordon in the nation's capital and Fanny's condition worsened, it became apparent that he had to comment directly

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9 On 26 May, when Gordon presented Brown's credentials to the Senate, Senator Edmunds, without objecting to Brown's right to the office, inquired about when the Georgia senatorial vacancy actually occurred. Even though Gordon had sent in his resignation on 15 May, he had continued to serve in the Senate until Brown arrived. Under the laws of the Constitution, Edmunds wondered if Colquitt had the right to appoint a successor because technically no vacancy actually existed. If, on the other hand, Gordon's letter of resignation effectively terminated his commission, then he had sat in the senate without any real constitutional authority to do so. Evidently, Edmunds was not harassing the Georgians for he appeared more puzzled than anything else; nonetheless, he raised an interesting constitutional question. Congressional Record, 46th Cong., 2d sess., 3792.

on the charges being leveled against him. Consequently, on 25 May, he granted an interview to Charles Howard Williams of the Constitution.<sup>10</sup>

Apprised that universal regret and surprise had greeted his resignation, Gordon corrected the journalist stating that the surprise was far from universal. "Many of my intimate friends have known of my disinclination for public life and of my purpose to resign for a long time." Although he reiterated his ardent love for the South and his willingness to bear almost any hardship on behalf of its people, Gordon explained that he longed for the quietude of domestic life more than the honors of political life. He also expressed fear that his health, which had twice broken under the "constant work and trials" of the Senate, might again fail and leave his family financially distraught. "The case is this: I love my home and family, and am forced to neglect the one and do injustice the other as long as I remain in public life." "Pressing and increasing pecuniary demands . . . and my decreasing ability to meet them" further convinced him that he had little choice but to seek a more remunerative position.<sup>11</sup>

When asked about the suddenness of his resignation, Gordon explained that the nature of his business arrangements simply would not allow him to continue at his Senate post until the end of the session. Although he did not expand upon these business considerations, he did inform the interviewer that he had accepted a position as general counsel with the Louisville and Nashville Railroad Company. Gordon carefully pointed out that this offer from H. Victor Newcomb, president of the railroad, "was the consequence and not the cause" of his resignation, in that he had already resigned in order to take another job. But when Newcomb learned of his resignation and tendered him a position which

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10 Atlanta Constitution, 23 May, 27 May, 28 May, 30 May 1880.

11 Ibid., 27 May 1880.

would not carry him far away from home, Gordon stated that he accepted the less lucrative offer so that he might remain in Georgia. Responding to claims that he had deserted his post while the South remained in danger, Gordon asserted that the exact opposite was true. With the South fully restored and his greatest goal in political life thereby accomplished, he predicted that he might be of even greater service to his section as a private citizen. Gordon assured Williams that in spite of his resignation, he would remain active in public affairs, particularly "on all proper occasions to restore good will between the sections and advance the cause of good government in the state and the union." At the close of the interview, Gordon emphatically denied all charges of a trade between Brown and himself, not only denouncing the accusation as "a base calumny and falsehood in all its length and breadth and depth" but also labeling it preposterous because Brown had nothing to offer him.<sup>12</sup>

Several letters to the editors of the Constitution supported Gordon's contentions. A correspondent from the Augusta Chronicle wrote that Gordon had personally informed him three months earlier of his desire to retire from public life. Gordon's father also told residents of Georgia that during a visit in March, his son had confessed, "'Pa, I am tired of public life. I crave the peace and quietude of my own home and home affairs; besides, I can't save up any money out of my salary; and this idea of dying and leaving my family without a competency troubles me no little.'" Zachariah Gordon's only surprise was that his son's resignation had not come sooner. A letter from "Observer" revealed that Gordon in a private conversation in January had expressed his disappointment with public life and his haunting fear of "premature breaking down, physically and mentally." So even though Gordon's resignation caught

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

most Georgians off guard, he had obviously spoken of his desire to retire from public service on a number of earlier occasions.<sup>13</sup>

Gordon personally took his case to the people of Georgia on 4 June. On the evening following his return to Atlanta, he delivered a stirring public address at DeGives Opera House. Looking, in the opinion of the Atlanta Constitution, "more erect, more soldierly, more graceful, more commanding" than at any other time in his life, Gordon strode to center stage amid "a storm of applause which fairly shook the building." After briefly recounting his twenty years of service to Georgia, both in the military and in politics, Gordon proudly proclaimed his conviction "that no word or act of mind has ever been quoted by political foes to your detriment." In spite of his devotion to what he considered the best interests of the people of the state, Gordon admitted that he had made a number of enemies in Georgia who would never be satisfied with any explanation he might give for any of his actions. He mockingly dismissed most of the rumors surrounding his resignation before turning to the charge that he, Brown, and Colquitt had been party to a corrupt deal. Displaying a sense of righteous indignation, he announced that "if my life, if my character, if my record as it stands now completed, in war and in peace, in public and private, does not answer that [charge], [then] it will go unanswered forever so far as I am concerned." Despite his willingness to stand on his record, Gordon continued; he did so, however, not on his own behalf, but rather, as he contended, in the interest of the "cause of truth and justice" and with the purpose of exonerating his friend, Governor Colquitt, of all charges of impropriety.<sup>14</sup>

Gordon proceeded to elaborate upon the reasons for his resignation that

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13 Ibid., 22 May, 26 May, 27 May 1880. See also 3 September 1880.

14 Ibid., 4 June, 8 June 1880.

he had earlier cited. Having "long since decided to retire from public life," Gordon explained he "had only waited for time and opportunity to do so consistent with my own honor and your interests." Both preconditions were satisfied early in 1880. Convinced that southern rights and liberties had been safely secured, he accepted the offer from Colonel Hogg to join him in his enterprises in Oregon. Hogg guaranteed him compensation that more than doubled his salary as a Senator, and also promised business opportunities that would enable him "to accumulate a fortune in a comparatively brief space." Gordon asserted that he had every intention of holding his Senate seat until Congress adjourned and the Georgia general assembly could convene in regular session, but on 1 May, he received a letter from Hogg pressing him for an immediate decision. Gordon determined that the few additional weeks he might spend in the Senate would not materially benefit Georgia or the South, but they would work a great hardship upon him. Faced with the prospect of losing this lucrative opportunity as well as another which he was negotiating in the interest of his sons, Gordon decided to resign.<sup>15</sup>

The other business venture that the General spoke of involved his long term negotiations with the Bowker Fertilizer Company of Boston and New York. Keenly interested in southern agriculture, Gordon resolved "to do whatever I thought would benefit that interest, and, at the same time, furnish my sons, who are now growing up, a legitimate business." Consequently, Gordon reported that during the previous year he had sought to induce large fertilizer manufacturers to locate in the South, but failing in that, concluded an agreement with the Boston firm to supply high-grade fertilizer for Georgia. As the fertilizing business was still in its infancy in the South, Gordon proposed to "get in on the ground floor." He would sit as president of the southern branch of the firm,

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 8 June 1880.

while leaving the actual operation of the agency to his sons. Having probably first become acquainted with the Bowker Fertilizer Company on his visits to Boston, Gordon hoped to undertake operations to enrich himself as well as provide a badly needed product for southern farmers.<sup>16</sup>

So it was these two business ventures, though most prominently the Oregon offer, that Gordon maintained convinced him to step down as Georgia's Senator. As he had explained earlier, it was not until he had sent in his resignation and was conferring with Hogg in New York that he learned of Newcomb's offer, one which he accepted because it allowed him to remain close to home. According to Gordon, this account, verified by letters from Hogg and Newcomb and substantiated by the stories of Colquitt and Brown, was the whole truth of the matter.<sup>17</sup>

In addition to detailing his own actions, Gordon also defended Colquitt's selection of his successor. He admitted that most Georgians would have preferred almost any other man than Brown, but Gordon also recognized that present political conditions made Brown the best possible choice. The former governor's greatest source of political strength in Georgia lay in precisely the same sections of the state where Independents most seriously threatened the Democratic party. In Gordon's opinion, "the hardy yeomenry of the mountains dissatisfied and ready to break with the organization" might well desist from their independent course now that one of their favorites had been recognized and honored by the Democracy. Moreover, Gordon believed that the time had come either to "cease hostility to Governor Brown or cease to ask his time and talents and money for the benefits of our party." Even though he and Brown had never

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16 Ibid., 4 June 1880.

17 Ibid., 8 June 1880.

been on friendly terms, Gordon acknowledged that during the past decade the former governor had provided invaluable, unfaltering service to the Democratic party, both on the state and national levels. All things considered, Gordon concluded that Colquitt's--and therefore by implication his own--handling of the resignation-appointment process was beyond reproach.<sup>18</sup>

The Constitution immediately proclaimed Gordon's address "one of the noblest speeches" ever to grace its columns and euphorically declared that it would effectively "dispel every vestige of the clouds that have been conjured about the names of Gordon and Colquitt, and let in the sunshine." And as the speech circulated through Georgia, the Atlanta paper also predicted that "it will confirm not only the title that Gordon wears undisputed as the best loved of Georgians, but will add to his fame as an orator and statesman." Other papers, like the Savannah News, believing that their staunch support of the former Senator and governor throughout the controversy had been vindicated, proudly announced that the "breath of slander cannot tarnish the bright escutcheon of such true men as Gordon and Colquitt." Although such assessments probably reflected the predominant sentiment in Georgia where the intense furor attending the controversy had begun to abate by mid-June, questions concerning Gordon's resignation persisted. Certainly the vast majority of Georgians stood solidly behind their beloved "Hero of Appomattox;" but had they known all the details of the negotiations surrounding his resignation, their support may well have been less enthusiastic.<sup>19</sup>

Despite steadfast denials of any prearrangements by Gordon, Colquitt and Brown, recently uncovered material casts a new light on the

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18 Ibid.,

19 Ibid.; Savannah News, quoted in ibid., 16 June 1880.

resignation-appointment. The central figure or middle man in these additional behind-the-scenes machinations appears to have been the brilliant and ambitious Henry W. Grady, aspiring spokesman for an industrialized South. Grady, convinced that railroads were essential to the economic betterment of the South, undertook a special assignment early in 1880. He travelled to various transportation centers so that he might observe first-hand the workings of major railroads. Perhaps envisioning Atlanta as the railroad hub of the Southeast, Grady hoped to lure additional lines into Georgia, especially into Atlanta. Accordingly, he spent much of his time in the company of H. Victor Newcomb, soon-to-be president of the massive L and N railroad system. Newcomb, the thirty-six year old son of a former L and N chief executive, ascended to the company's presidency in March 1880. Well respected for his financial expertise, he had been vitally involved in formulating the railroad's policy for years. Although he would mysteriously resign after only eight months in office--and never again occupy such a prominent position--Newcomb's energetic, brilliant leadership tremendously expanded the L and N network.<sup>20</sup>

Fascinated by the remarkable abilities of this young railroad magnate whom he styled "the Napoleon of the railroad world," Grady rapidly developed a hearty respect and admiration for Newcomb. The feeling was obviously mutual as Newcomb offered the newspaperman a job as his private secretary, but Grady declined so that he might remain in journalism. During their months of travel together, Grady met numerous influential men in all parts of the country. While in New York, Gordon introduced the ambitious editor to Cyrus W. Field, one of

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<sup>20</sup> Raymond B. Nixon, Henry W. Grady: Spokesman of the New South (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1943), pp. 166-68; Maury Klein, History of the Louisville & Nashville Railroad (New York: MacMillan Co., 1972), pp. 85-86, 126, 150-51, 167-70.

the city's most prominent brokers. Field's decision in May to loan \$20,000 to Grady in order to purchase one-quarter interest in the Atlanta Constitution was probably influenced by Newcomb's offer to help the young Georgian in repaying the loan by guiding him in stock speculation. The ties between Grady and Newcomb were obviously well established by early May when the emerging "spokesman of the New South" became part-owner of the Constitution.<sup>21</sup>

Newcomb, like Grady, wanted to develop railroad interests in Georgia. He labored incessantly to gain control of or establish a favorable working relationships with many of Georgia's railroads. One of the roads which the L and N sought to control was Brown's Western and Atlantic, whose 138 miles of track served as the only direct link between Chattanooga and Atlanta. A major competitor of the L and N in the Southeast was Edwin W. "King" Cole's Nashville, Chattanooga and St. Louis Railroad. When rumors surfaced in late 1879 that Cole had gained control of the Western and Atlantic and in early 1880 that Cole and Brown together had leased the Central of Georgia—running from Atlanta to Savannah—Newcomb reacted decisively to meet the threat to the L and N's plans. Maneuvering with dazzling speed and finesse, he quietly undercut Cole by purchasing controlling interest in the "King's" road. Although hopeful that his coup had netted him control of the W and A as well as a favorable relationship with the Central of Georgia, Newcomb quickly learned that the earlier rumors were just that. Undismayed, he persisted in his attempt to erect a united railway system that would link Chattanooga and Savannah on the coast. A major part of his plans involved the strategic W and A.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Nixon, Grady, pp. 167-69; Joel Chandler Harris, Life of Henry W. Grady, including his Writings and Speeches (New York: Cassell Publishing Co., 1890), pp. 77, 608. See also Atlanta Constitution, 12 August 1880.

<sup>22</sup> Klein, History of the L & N, pp. 153-57; Parks, Brown, pp. 507-08; Nixon, Grady, pp. 166-68; John F. Stover, The Railroads of the South 1865-1900:

During the course of his efforts, Newcomb acquired ownership of the charter of the Georgia Western Railroad. This charter called for the building of a railroad from Atlanta to Birmingham into and through the rich and relatively untapped coal and iron fields of northeast Alabama. It also included a provision granting "trackage rights" over a portion of the Western and Atlantic. Newcomb effectively used this acquisition of the Georgia Western charter--which would later take on particular significance for Grady and Gordon--as a point of leverage in his discussions with competing Georgia railroad presidents during the following months. Finally, in early April, 1880, after a week of conferences, it was announced that the Western and Atlantic and other Georgia railroads had merged into a combination headed by Newcomb. It is impossible to unravel the intricacies of these complicated railroad dealings because most of the negotiations were carried on in secret. Nevertheless, during the first five months of 1880 while Newcomb skillfully maneuvered his way into Georgia, Grady was often by the side of the man he described as "the Moses that leads Atlanta out of bondage."<sup>23</sup>

At some point prior to the middle of May, Grady entered directly into negotiations between Newcomb and Brown. Utilizing a railroad friend, Grady delivered an apparently personally devised code to Brown which afforded all of the involved parties the use of the telegraph and the speedy communication it offered while still maintaining the utmost secrecy.<sup>24</sup> Although it is impossible

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A Study in Finance and Control (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1955), pp. 224-27.

<sup>23</sup> Klein, History of the L & N, pp. 157-63; Nixon, Grady, p. 168; Avery, History of Georgia, p. 635; Stover, Railroads of the South, p. 227.

<sup>24</sup> This code was passed on from Grady to Brown via W. H. Pittman of the Nashville, Chattanooga, and St. Louis Railway. On the back of the undated envelope, Brown wrote "private papers," "Grady," "Newcomb," "Brown," and "the

to determine exactly when Grady first brought Gordon into the secret discussions, it is clear that by 15 May the General's name figured prominently in the negotiations. On that date while in New York, Grady sent his first—or at least the earliest one that has survived—telegram to Brown in Atlanta. The translated message read:

Gordon will send in resignation certain. Newcomb highly pleased with Brown's assurances & anxious to do all wanted. He would like you to make Ravill vice prest if agreeable to you with no increase in duties while you hold senatorship. He wants all roads be interested in pool Gordon's salary & will fix at twenty thousand if your road will pay three to five thousand. Please do this. It fixes everything precisely as wanted. Answer.<sup>25</sup>

Although Brown's answer has not survived, Grady sent a second telegram to Brown on 17 May, which when decoded reads:

Everything is fixed. Gordon's resignation sent in to Colquitt & Newcomb agrees that Brown shall hold presidency and senatorship but says in adjusting Gordon's salary four thousand should come from Brown's road. He begs that Brown come to New York on tomorrow's train as he wishes to have conference with him for better understanding standing. He is anxious. Can't Brown come. Newcomb says Brown must guarantee that Cole who is bitterly opposed to him shall not have charge of road while Brown is in Washington. Answer tonight.<sup>26</sup>

Brown's deciphered reply of the same date reads:

Brown cannot come to New York. Important engagement in Nashville Thursday prevents. General manager under Brown's instruction will control in his absence. Vice President will have nothing to do with it. Brown cannot speak positively about four thousand. Directors under rules control that. He will urge three

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envelope did not pass through the mails." This telegram as well as all the others involved in the negotiations surrounding the resignation-appointment are located in Joseph Emerson Brown Papers, Felix Hargrett Collection, University of Georgia, Athens, Georgia (hereafter cited as Hargrett Collection, UGA). Copies of the originals and the deciphered messages (typescript) can also be found in the Joseph E. Brown Papers, Atlanta Historical Society, Atlanta, Georgia.

25 Grady to Brown, 15 May 1880, Hargrett Collection, UGA.

26 Grady to Brown, 17 May 1880, ibid.

thousand. Thinks that would be certain. He wants to meet Newcomb soon. When could he come here or meet Brown at some other agreed point.<sup>27</sup>

Although a number of other telegrams—both in cipher and in plain English—between Grady and Brown, and Brown and a representative of Newcomb were sent on 18 and 19 May, only one other bore any real reference to Gordon's salary. Angered by Newcomb's insistence that he come immediately to New York to confer, Brown angrily replied (not in code):

I have twice stated I cannot come to New York. After the assurances I have given, if distrust is shown by delays I shall decline to go to Washington and confine myself to my duties here. In that case we will assume no part of the salary of any one. I have acted frankly and in good faith with the most ready intentions and can say no more.<sup>28</sup>

The content of these and other telegraphic messages between 15-19 May plus the fact that many were sent in code clearly indicates that deals were being negotiated at the time of Gordon's resignation. The major focus of the correspondence between Brown and Newcomb (or his representative) through Grady appears to have centered around railroad matters. The precise nature of these railroad dealings is difficult to discern because of the complicated and secretive maneuverings of the two railroad men. Despite the complex nature of the negotiations between Newcomb and Brown, it is clear that Gordon's salary with the L and N railroad provided a major point of discussion. The suggested annual figure was \$20,000, of which \$3,000 to \$5,000 would come from Brown's Western and Atlantic. As such, this point poses one of the most intriguing questions surrounding the correspondence. Why would Brown's road provide funds for the employee of another railroad? One contemporary, who did not know

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27 Brown to Grady, 17 May 1880, ibid.

28 Brown to Grady, 19 May 1880, ibid.

conclusively of their existence but nevertheless suspected that deals had been made, believed Gordon would act as general counsel for both the L and N and the W and A. Such an arrangement may have been the case, but a more likely explanation, gleaned from the text of the telegrams, is that all of the roads involved in the recent agreement would each contribute a portion to his salary. Even so, it is entirely possible that Brown's road did not contribute at all because when announced, Gordon's annual salary was only \$14,000. Although a definitive answer to this question as well as an exact determination of Gordon's salary appears impossible to determine, it is obvious that details vitally important to the General's future were being negotiated by Grady.<sup>29</sup>

Grady, as the central figure in these discussions, may have been the "prime mover" who introduced Gordon into the behind-the-scenes transactions. As a multi-talented man of vision, Grady had rapidly established the contacts he needed to realize many of the ambitions he had for Georgia and for himself. In this manner, he may well have been the single ingredient that drew Gordon, Newcomb and Brown together. A plausible scenario reads like this: Grady as friend and admirer of all three men was privy to each man's private aspirations and desires. Having travelled extensively in Newcomb's company, Grady knew of the railroadman's displeasure at learning that in spite of the April 1880 merger, Joe Brown still retained firm control of the W and A because of technicalities in its charter.<sup>30</sup> Cognizant of the strategic importance of the W and A, Newcomb

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29 Atlanta Constitution, 26 May 1880.

30 According to Brown's biographer, Newcomb's intense desire to confer with Brown in New York stemmed from the discovery that despite purchasing majority interest in the W and A, the L and N had virtually no control of the road. Brown would later explain before a railroad investigatory committee that no matter who owned the company's shares, "only the original lessees could sit at board meetings and participate in the management of the road." Parks, Brown, pp. 517-18.

really wished to oust Brown as its head but was willing to settle with getting him out of Georgia. Brown, on the other hand, was exceedingly wary of Newcomb's covetous designs; nonetheless, he longed for political favor that has eluded him for almost fifteen years. Gordon, far removed from and perhaps even unaware of these railroad considerations, had already informed Grady that he would leave the Senate in search of the financial security he had never known.

Recognizing an opportunity whereby all three parties plus himself might be satisfied, Grady began to deal. Knowing that Gordon preferred to remain in the South, he informed Newcomb of the General's desire to resign and his need for a remunerative job. He also mentioned that since the Georgia Western charter had lost its tactical value to the L and N in light of the April 1880 merger, why not offer the charter to Gordon as an inducement to join with the L and N. If Gordon stepped down and Brown could be persuaded to replace him in the Senate, then Newcomb would secure a great deal because he was convinced that he could outmaneuver the former governor once Brown moved to Washington. For Newcomb, the proposition appeared even more attractive for three additional reasons: the L and N could draw upon Gordon's tremendous popularity as it sought to expand in Georgia; the Georgia Western charter that had earlier served its purpose could now be used for additional benefit; and Gordon's salary could be spread among the other railroads, or shared at least with Brown's road. Brown also liked the arrangement because it offered him the chance for political vindication that he may have abandoned hope of ever again achieving. Firmly convinced that he could maintain control of the W and A and ward off all assaults regardless of Newcomb's brilliance, he was more than willing to pay part of Gordon's salary providing Newcomb's terms were not so demanding as to delay his replacement of Gordon while Congress was still

assembled. Even though less than a month remained in the current session, Brown was confident that he could reestablish himself as an able representative in the minds of Georgia's legislators, who would have the opportunity to vote on his continued service in the fall. Gordon too saw an ideal opportunity to realize long delayed goals. Having already decided to resign, he could now bow out of politics and step into a business situation which immediately more than doubled his Senate salary and also provided the potential for much greater wealth. That potential, of course, lay in eventually building the Georgia Western railroad, a project permanently ensconced in the front of Grady's ever-whirling mind. These considerations, though simplified, quite probably contributed to the conditions which resulted in Gordon's resignation and Brown's appointment.

Grady apparently had formulated his plans prior to 10 May because on that date while travelling on the train back from Washington, he discussed the matter with friends from Athens, Georgia. According to the Athens Southern Watchman, Grady spoke freely about Gordon's impending resignation, Brown's probable appointment and the General's association with the L and N. Among those Georgians who were aware of the journalist's "indiscretions," many, like Mrs. Felton, probably dismissed such talk as another example of Grady's "careless handling of facts." A second reference to prearrangements came from Judge D. G. Candler who revealed the details of a conversation with Colquitt on 20 May. The governor later denied discussing such matters, but Candler contended that he learned at that time Gordon had resigned to take a railroad job and that Brown would replace him in the Senate. Even though he personally rejected the notion that "any moneyed consideration passed between the parties," Candler did believe "that the matter was well understood for several days before Gordon's resignation was accepted." Thus there were some rents in

the veil of secrecy surrounding the pre-resignation negotiations.<sup>31</sup>

While very few people in Georgia may have suspected the extent of Grady's involvement in these discussions, virtually no one would have guessed the vitally important role played by the Georgia Western. This railroad had long been a dream of many Georgians. Considering Grady's great desire to provide Atlanta with immediate access to the mineral wealth of northeastern Alabama, it is quite likely that the possible sale of the old Georgia Western charter entered into these negotiations. Perhaps viewing Gordon as the man best suited to breathe life into this oft begun, yet never completed enterprise, Grady probably laid the groundwork for the actual sale at this time; but, at the very least, he aided Gordon in attaining a position from which the General could act whenever the opportunity presented itself. It is possible that Grady, trying to secure a lucrative position for a man whom he greatly admired while at the same time struggling to work out a railroad arrangement between Newcomb and Brown that would be beneficial to Atlanta, acted on his own, and not at the behest of Gordon; however, it seems improbable that these negotiations were conducted without the General's knowledge. And in spite of the difficulty in determining the exact nature of Gordon's involvement in the negotiations, it appears that he was not only aware of the discussions but probably a party to these "understandings" which were concealed from the public.

Grady's biographer, despite not having access to the Newcomb-Brown correspondence, may have been very close to the truth in his assessment of the affair. He concluded that "[U]ndoubtedly there were understandings of the kind

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31 Columbus Enquirer-Sun, 11 June 1880; Cartersville Free-Press, 17 June 1880; Mrs. William H. Felton, My Memoirs of Georgia Politics (Atlanta: Index Printing Co., 1911), pp. 303, 530; Atlanta Journal clipping, Scrapbook #19, p. 89, Felton Collection, UGA; Atlanta Constitution, 1 June, 5 June 1880.

that friends reach everyday in business and politics, but on the basis of available evidence the transaction must be described as 'a deal, not a steal.'" Obviously there were prearranged understandings which were not revealed to the public. In this respect, Gordon and the others misled Georgians by bitterly denying any contacts or prearrangements prior to the resignation-appointment. Yet, despite their secretive nature, these discussions do not appear to have violated either the law or public trust. Business and political agreements were often handled in precisely this manner. Even though Gordon saw nothing legally or morally wrong in his actions, he fully comprehended the wisdom of withholding both the existence and the details of these prearrangements from the people. An unsophisticated public would simply not understand the purpose or the intent of these discussions and consequently would draw only the most negative of conclusions. Thus he, and the other participants, concealed many of the facts surrounding the resignation-appointment in order to avoid implications of impropriety.<sup>32</sup>

And as all of the parties seemed to come away from the negotiations happy, there was no need to "enlighten" the public. Newcomb attained the services of a man whose name alone might prove invaluable to his railroad enterprises in the South, especially in Georgia. Also, he established a more intimate, though as time would prove not necessarily advantageous, relationship with Brown, his railroad rival. Brown continued as president of the W and A, but reentered politics, securing a position which afforded him the opportunity to redeem himself in the eyes of white Georgians. Grady aided all of his friends plus took giant strides towards the building of a railroad he deemed vitally important to Atlanta. Colquitt gained the badly needed support of two

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32 Nixon, Grady, p. 172.

influential Georgians for his upcoming campaign to retain the governorship. And Gordon fulfilled his desire to leave politics and obtain a position which would enable him to solve his financial woes.

An interesting epilogue to this controversy comes from the correspondence between Joe Brown and Herbert Fielder in 1882 and 1883. In the late 1870s, Brown persuaded the Georgia lawyer to write a life and times biography of the former governor who, in Fielder's words, was then "under a long-subsisting and heavy cloud in political matters." According to Fielder, Brown "took a deep interest" in publication of a favorable biography so that his image might be improved; however, "that interest ceased when your object was accomplished by an executive appointment." In the two years following the resignation-appointment controversy, relations between the two soured as Fielder charged his subject with withholding money owed to him and reneging on promises to help him get the manuscript published. Implicit in his letters to Brown demanding satisfaction was the veiled threat to rewrite portions of the biography that had purposely been omitted. Fielder referred specifically to the appointment as "a startling alliance" which "brought men together who had stood at a cold and selfish distance--men who up to that time sought honors by different and opposing currents." He later wrote that his friendship with Brown at the time made him "willing to pass in silence the criticisms it was in my power, from personal knowledge and authentic data, to make." But when their friendship significantly cooled, Fielder subtly applied pressure on the former governor. "It is quite probable that few if any living know more of these [public figures] who flourished, and how they rose than I do, the incorporation of which may impart more truth to history even if not so flattering to successful men." Brown, unshaken as always, brusquely rebuffed the threat, daring the author to

publish whatever he pleased. However, Brown insisted that if Fielder attacked him with materials which he had provided, then the author, as an honorable man, must return the \$3,000 earlier paid to him. Brown eventually purchased the manuscript from Fielder for an additional \$1,000 and had it published in 1883 under Fielder's name. Gordon's name never entered into the correspondence and, in my opinion, Fielder's references to the appointment controversy focused primarily on Colquitt and Brown. Nevertheless, these letters, always by indirect reference, provide additional evidence that the public knew very little of the details surrounding the resignation-appointment.<sup>33</sup>

Beyond the general satisfaction of all the parties involved, Gordon's motives and actions warrant a more thorough examination. There was no man more widely loved or respected in Georgia than Gordon. In all probability, he could have retained his Senate seat until he alone decided to step down, but I believe he sincerely yearned to leave politics. Disillusioned by the petty political squabbles that frequently dominated his post-reconstruction political life and convinced that Georgia and the South were secure in their relationship to the national government, Gordon sought to retreat from public life. Despite his concern that Georgia have first-rate representation in Congress, Gordon probably believed that he had certainly done his part on behalf of his native state and section. And he had done so at substantial cost to himself, both in physical and financial terms. Deeply affected by his two serious illnesses, Gordon felt a genuine concern for his health and the crippling financial effect his death or disablement would have upon his family. Although never totally overwhelmed by

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<sup>33</sup> Fielder to Brown, 23 August, 3 October, 30 October 1882, 30 July 1883, Hargrett Collection, UGA; Brown to Fielder, 16 October 1882, 6 July 1883, *ibid.*; Herbert Fielder, A Sketch of the Life and Times and Speeches of Joseph E. Brown (Springfield, Massachusetts: Springfield Printing Co., 1883).

his debts or the specter of economic ruin, Gordon had long indured the fears and doubts associated with financial insecurity. His senatorial salary and outside income had often failed to keep pace with the increasing demands of his family. All of these factors combined to exert a powerful force upon Gordon by 1880.

But of perhaps equal if not greater importance than these financial and family concerns was Gordon's deep seated desire to prove himself in the business world. His history of failure in business stood in stark contrast to his brilliant successes in military and political endeavors and must have caused him considerable anxiety. His almost daily association with men of wealth and influence could only have strengthened his resolve to erase this record of failure. Both in the Senate and in New York where he spent an increasing amount of time, Gordon saw tremendous fortunes being made. Envious, and possibly even piqued by the enormous success of many men whom he quite probably considered less able than himself, Gordon desperately wanted to make money and experience a sense of financial independence that he had never known. As a result, Gordon decided to leave the Senate.

Although some Georgians continued to believe that specific inducements from Brown had persuaded him to step down, I find it almost inconceivable that Gordon's resignation could have been "bought." As he steadfastly maintained and other accounts supported, he simply waited for the right time and best opportunity to leave politics. He did not apologize for his desire to devote himself to business full-time. Hogg's lucrative offer and the pressure to commit to the Oregon enterprise, in my opinion, convinced Gordon to resign. Only after he had already determined to send in his letter of resignation did the L and N opportunity materialize, and then primarily through the efforts of the Grady-handled negotiations between Newcomb and Brown. Gordon claimed that he

accepted the L and N position because it allowed him to remain in the South, but the Georgia Western charter was probably the lure that drew him to Newcomb's railroad. For it was the acquisition of this charter in 1881 that launched him into the high stakes world of railroad building, one where fortunes were made and lost in a remarkably short period of time. Certainly, Gordon did not have to resort to illegal deals to secure employment. In reality, he was a highly marketable product, especially in light of the national reputation he had gained in the Senate. Finding a job could not have posed a critical problem for the man whose name still held the magical allure it had first won in combat with the Army of Northern Virginia.

In any event, Gordon's popularity suffered very little despite widespread circulation of the charges that he had sold his office. Most Georgians either believed his explanation or were willing to accept Pro Bono Publico's assessment which concluded that the controversial situation "requires no direct bargain or sale, but it does involve a general understanding of the parties when the resignation of General Gordon, the offer of a lucrative railroad position and the appointment of Brown are so intimately connected." Perhaps they agreed that Gordon's twenty years of faithful service to them entitled him to the chance to seek his own fortune. Moreover, they may have realized that his activities as a private citizen might well aid Georgia and the South even more than had his actions as a public servant. Gordon saw the opportunity, as he had earlier with the Southern Life Insurance Company and the University Publishing Company, to link his own needs with those of Georgia. By accepting the job as general counsel for the L and N railroad, Gordon placed himself in a position which would eventually enable him to earn a great deal of money. And even though his own financial success proved only temporary, the tremendous strides he made,

particularly in the field of transportation, had significant and long lasting effects upon his native state.<sup>34</sup>

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34 Atlanta Constitution, 26 May 1880.

## CHAPTER VII

### NEW SOUTH BUSINESSMAN

Although Gordon resigned from the Senate in order to enter the business world, political considerations prevented him from devoting his full attention to financial concerns for some time. His commitment to the cause of the Democracy did not end with his departure from the national forum, so during the summer and fall of 1880, Gordon remained active in politics on both the national and state levels. After addressing the tirade of charges levelled against him in the aftermath of his resignation, he travelled northward to attend the national Democratic convention in Cincinnati. There he watched the prospects of his presidential hopeful, Thomas F. Bayard, fade as the Democrats turned to an old military foe of Gordon's, General Winfield Scott Hancock. Gordon remained apart from the Georgia state Democratic convention in August; however, the divisiveness that marked that assemblage provided the backdrop for the equally bitter fall gubernatorial contest—a fray into which he would enter and participate wholeheartedly.<sup>1</sup>

Even if Governor Alfred H. Colquitt had entertained thoughts of not running for reelection in 1880, he found himself honor-bound to stand for another term. The steady stream of abuse and criticism heaped upon him for his

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<sup>1</sup> Atlanta Constitution, 20 June, 23 June, 7 July 1880; Perry Belmont to T. F. Bayard, 24 April 1880, Thomas Francis Bayard Collection, Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Washington, D. C.. (hereafter cited as Bayard Collection, LC); John Hunter to T. F. Bayard, 11 May 1880, Bayard Collection, LC; T. F. Bayard to Snowden Andrews, 3 June 1880, Bayard Collection, LC.

appointment of Joe Brown called his honor into question. Consequently, Colquitt, a wealthy planter who had risen to the rank of major general during the war, felt compelled to seek vindication in the eyes of the people of Georgia. Not surprisingly, the man chosen to direct his campaign for reelection was the same man who had played such an integral role in the resignation-appointment scenario, Henry Grady. From the outset of the August Democratic convention, Colquitt held a clear majority, but more than a week of intense wrangling failed to gain for him the two-thirds vote necessary for nomination. The deadlocked convention adjourned, presenting Colquitt to the voters as the "recommended" candidate, rather than the Democratic nominee. The anti-Colquitt minority selected another prominent Democrat, former United States Senator from Georgia, Thomas M. Norwood, as their candidate. As the opposing camps marshalled their forces for the October general election, the second, more vitriolic phase of the campaign opened. Colquitt's record during his first administration--a four-year term marked by controversy and charges of unethical and illegal activity--provided the major points of attack for the opposition, but "the event around which the entire contest was to resolve" was the appointment of Brown. The villification of the governor that had begun in May for his part in the apparently corrupt bargain raged anew in the fall. And once more, the whirlwind of controversy drew Gordon into the center of its storm.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> I. W. Avery, History of the State of Georgia From 1850 to 1881, Embracing the Three Important Epochs: The Decades before the War of 1861-5; The War; The Period of Reconstruction, with Portraits of the Leading Public Men at the Era (New York: Brown and Derby, 1881), pp. 555-58, 563, 569; Atlanta Constitution, 4 August - 12 August 1880; New York Times, 21 May 1880; Kenneth Coleman, "The Georgia Gubernatorial Election of 1880," Georgia Historical Quarterly 25 (June 1941): 92, 95. For treatments of the 1880 contest, see Coleman, "1880 Gubernatorial Election," pp. 89-119, and Avery, History of

In Gordon's mind, slanderous indictments against Colquitt necessarily impugned his honor as well. Unwilling to endure renewed censure, Gordon took to the stump to defend the governor and himself. Much of the shock and anger at Gordon's and Colquitt's actions in May had worn off, but the lingering bitterness made this gubernatorial campaign, for one chronicler, "the most intense and desperate political contest of Georgia history. . . ." Another Georgian, Alexander H. Stephens, feared that "the old Democracy of Georgia [was being] sundered almost in her vitals," so he publicly avoided what he called "the present unfortunate embroglio [*sic*]." During September and early October, Gordon became Colquitt's greatest asset as he canvassed the state on behalf of his friend, neighbor, and frequent partner in business. He delivered perhaps his most forceful speech before a frequently disruptive crowd at Columbus. Rather than assail the governor's opponent, Gordon concentrated on explaining why he resigned from the Senate, on detailing the positive accomplishments of Colquitt's first term, and on praising the incumbent's virtues. As he had often done before, Gordon professed amazement that despite his sincere desire to retire from politics, vicious attacks from within his own home state again forced him to defend both himself and the governor. He closed by furiously denouncing the opposition's assault upon the reputation of Colquitt, a man who like himself, had proudly and honorably borne the Confederate standard. The "Hero of Olustee," as Colquitt was frequently styled, must be returned to the governor's mansion.<sup>3</sup>

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Georgia, pp. 568-601; Carl M. Logue, "Gubernatorial Campaign in Georgian in 1880," Southern Speech Communication Journal 40 (Fall 1974): 12-32.

<sup>3</sup> Avery, History of Georgia, pp. 555-56, 571, 589, 593-95; Coleman, "1880 Gubernatorial Election," p. 113; Alex Mathews Arnett, The Populist Movement in Georgia: A View of the "Agrarian Crusade" in the Light of Solid South Politics (New York: Columbia University Press, 1922), pp. 40-42; A. H.

The combined efforts of Gordon, Colquitt, Grady and Brown completely overwhelmed the Norwood forces. In the October election, Colquitt scored a resounding victory when he captured sixty-five percent of the votes. This triumph alone may have represented a satisfactory repudiation of all charges growing out of Gordon's resignation and Colquitt's appointment of Brown. However, one more victory was necessary before complete vindication could be claimed. Brown still faced the task of winning in his own right the Senate seat that he had been appointed to under such dubious circumstances. Although Gordon personally did not like Brown, he had no choice but to support him; once the general assembly officially selected Brown as his successor, Gordon could claim that the last spot of tarnish had successfully been removed from his armor. Or less poetically, as a supporter of Brown's opponent believed, "Colquitt and Gordon having been saved by the management and money of Brown will be compelled even if averse [sic] to do so, to stand up" for Brown. Opponents put forth a worthy candidate, General Alexander R. Lawton, but he stood little chance in the wake of Brown's ability to reestablish his reputation, a reputation restored primarily by several speeches he had made in the Senate during the last three weeks of the session. Most Georgians still did not like him, yet the vast majority of the general assembly recognized him as an able representative of the state. Thus in November, Brown too won convincingly. Vindication of the three men who had been villified and cursed so unmercifully at the end of May appeared complete by year's end.<sup>4</sup>

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Stephens to Mrs. A. R. Lawton, 20 September 1880, Alexander Robert Lawton Papers, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, North Carolina (hereafter cited as Lawton Papers, UNC); Atlanta Constitution, 26 August, 28 August, 1 September, 3 September, 7 September, 17 September 1880.

4 Joseph H. Parks, Joseph E. Brown of Georgia (Baton Rouge: Louisiana

The resignation-appointment controversy and its turbulent aftermath was the first time the interests of all three of these men so clearly coalesced. Gordon and Colquitt had long been friends and business associates; Brown and Colquitt had enjoyed a friendly relationship; Gordon and Brown, however, had never been very cordial. Perhaps Brown's refusal to accept Gordon's "Raccoon Roughs" into Georgia military service had been the genesis of their troubles. In any event, the separate paths they followed after the war precluded the development of a friendship between the two. Gordon found it impossible to countenance the former governor's defection from the Democratic party during Reconstruction. His antipathy increased substantially when the public controversy between Gordon and "Citizen" (Brown) erupted in the wake of the election of 1876. So, Gordon and Brown were never on good terms, and Gordon's endorsement of Brown as his successor in the Senate was rooted much more in the political benefit that would accrue to the Georgia Democracy than in personal affection. Yet, as the storm of public vituperation thundered down upon these three, they locked arms to repel charges of misconduct. As one Georgian observed, "[T]he alliance of the three in a battle where their coalition was intensified by a reciprocal interest and a common defamation of their conduct, was the junction of the most ponderous agencies of our Georgia leadership." Truly, he concluded, this "strong trio," became "an irresistible coalition" when assailed. An even more succinct appraisal of their combined strength came from a Georgia newspaper in the days well before the fall elections demonstrated its validity: "Brown with his money, Gordon with his

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State University Press, 1977), pp. 523-31; Avery, History of Georgia, pp. 564-67, 600-04; Atlanta Constitution, 6 October, 7 October, 10 October, 16 November, 17 November 1880; A. R. Lamar to A. R. Lawton, 9 October 1880, Lawton Papers, UNC: Journal of the House of Representatives of the State of Georgia, 1880, pp. 37, 120-21; Journal of the Senate of the State of Georgia, 1880, p. 78.

buttons, and Colquitt with his religion will make a combination that can not be beaten."<sup>5</sup>

Gordon, Colquitt and Brown dominated Georgia politics between 1872 and 1890 in much the same manner as Howell Cobb, Robert Toombs, and Alexander H. Stephens had dwarfed their rivals in the antebellum era. Indeed, like the earlier trio, they were recognized as a triumvirate, the so-called "Bourbon Triumvirate." This term like the one often applied to white southerners who reestablished home rule by ousting Republican regimes in the South—"Bourbon Democrats"—has become so historiographically encumbered that it tends to confuse rather than clarify. As C. Vann Woodward observed in the 1930s, "since the American aborigines were called Indians there has probably been no more fallacious misnomer in our history than this term Bourbon—at least when applied to the men who governed Georgia." Gordon, Colquitt, and Brown were unquestionably the most conspicuous members of this triumvirate, yet it was Henry Grady who personified the economic spirit that they espoused. He may have remained in the political shadows, but Grady was as important a component in the "Bourbon Triumvirate" as were the more recognizable politicians. None of these men, however, held so tenaciously to the ideas and institutions of the past that they longed for a restoration of the prewar order. Though they often capitalized on southerners' reverence of the past by appealing to memories of the Confederacy, they were instead spokesmen for and participants in a New South, a more industrial, commercially oriented South. That is not to say however that industry did not exist in the antebellum South or that there were no proponents of industrialization. To the contrary, on the eve

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<sup>5</sup> Avery, History of Georgia, pp. 558-59, 563-64; Atlanta Constitution, 8 June 1880; A. R. Lamar to A. R. Lawton, 9 October 1880, Lawton Papers, UNC; Columbus Daily Times, 25 May 1880, quoted in C. Vann Woodward, Tom Watson: Agrarian Rebel (New York: Macmillan Co., 1938), p. 72.

of the Civil War, a solid industrial base had already been established. There was a thriving, though limited, industrial sector, but agriculture--staple crop agriculture--overwhelmingly dominated the southern economy. In the post reconstruction period, adherents of the New South credo did not turn against agriculture. Indeed, on numerous occasions, Gordon stressed the necessity of fully developing the agrarian potential of his region; nevertheless, he and other New South leaders recognized that the South had to industrialize if it was to compete with the North. Accordingly, they championed the cause of industrialism in the South. Seeking a more balanced economy, they were both vocal and extremely active in their support of the New South.<sup>6</sup>

Any examination of the course of each man's postwar career clearly demonstrates a commitment to industrialism; yet while in control of Georgia politically, these men and their policies reflected traditional southern social and political values. They cut taxes, checked government spending, limited governmental services, and kept the forces of social change at bay. These conservative policies were crucial to the maintenance of their power. In the eighteen years following the Democrats' recapture of state control from Republicans, 1872-1890, either Gordon or Brown held one of Georgia's United States Senate seats, and after 1883, Colquitt occupied the other. Also, for ten of those years, Gordon or Colquitt served as governor of Georgia. Certainly,

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6 Woodward, Watson, pp. 56-66; C. Vann Woodward, Origins of the New South, 1877-1913 (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1951; revised ed., 1971), pp. 14-17, 75 and n.; Arnett, Populist Movement in Georgia, pp. 20-33; Mrs. William H. Felton, My Memoirs of Georgia Politics (Atlanta: Index Printing Co., 1911), pp. 629-30; E. Merton Coulter, A Short History of Georgia (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1933), pp. 363-65; Kenneth Coleman, ed., A History of Georgia (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1977), pp. 217-24; Judson Clements Ward, Jr., "The New Departure Democrats of Georgia, An Interpretation," Georgia Historical Quarterly 41 (September 1957), pp. 227-36.

these men, with the less visible, but equally influential Henry Grady, were the dominant powers in Georgia politics. So in spite of the confusion surrounding the term, "Bourbon Triumvirate" will be used in this study because it evokes the image of single-party, Conservative Democratic rule that did in fact exist in Georgia during much of the final third of the nineteenth century.<sup>7</sup>

With Brown in the Senate and Colquitt in the governor's chair, Gordon turned his full attention to making money. Even while serving in the Senate, he had never been very far removed from the speculative mania churning in New York City. He not only spent a great deal of time there, but he corresponded extensively with his friend and advisor, the successful corporate lawyer, Samuel L. M. Barlow. The New Yorker supplied trusted counsel for the General, joined him in a number of investments, and even loaned him money on occasion. Although compelled to use most of his salary to meet his everyday needs, Gordon was as financially active as his duties and limited resources permitted. In spite of frequent economic distress, he always seemed to have enough money for a ten percent advance necessary to speculate on stocks, bonds or some other money-making enterprise.<sup>8</sup>

Gordon's letters to Barlow during his latter years in the Senate reveal a myriad of financial dealings, some of which raise questions about the possible

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7 Although somewhat dated, Judson Clements Ward, Jr., "Georgia Under the Bourbon Democrats, 1872-1890," (Ph.D. dissertation, University of North Carolina, 1947) is the only significant study of Georgia during the period in question.

8 In view of the dearth of Gordon manuscript material that has survived, the number of letters to Barlow in the period between 1877 and May 1880 are numerous. In 1877, Gordon sent six letters; eight in 1878; eleven in 1879; and thirteen during the first five months of 1880. Although some deal with national political questions, the vast majority concentrate almost exclusively on speculative and other financial matters. And thus they provide some insight into Gordon's economic status. Samuel Latham Mitchill Barlow Papers, Huntington Library, San Marino, California (hereafter cited as Barlow Papers, Huntington).

misuse of his privileged position for personal pecuniary gain. In private, confidential letters—which often instructed Barlow not to let the information go any further or to destroy the missive—Gordon frequently wrote of his desire or his efforts to obtain inside information on bond and debt matters in several southern states. It appears that Gordon attempted to capitalize on information that he gained as a result of his prominent political position, information that was not readily available to the public. Whether he illegally sought unauthorized material is impossible to determine from his letters, but one point is clear. Gordon actively solicited advance notice on confidential matters which could tremendously benefit him. Similarly, whenever his own financial interests were involved, he lobbied extensively to protect those concerns. Evidently, he was not nearly so successful as many of his fellow Senators who utilized similar methods to accumulate substantial fortunes. In an era where political office offered enormous opportunities for wealth—beyond that gleaned from bribery or other illegal activities—Gordon seems to have occasionally used his political prominence for personal advantage; however, he appears to have enjoyed only limited success at best.<sup>9</sup>

Even as Gordon eased away from politics, he was actively pursuing his business career. It is difficult to ascertain what services, if any, he performed for the Louisville and Nashville Railroad as its general counsel. Perennial critic, Mrs. Felton, charged that when later pressed to explain the nature of his job,

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9 Gordon to Barlow, 5 May, 17 May, 13 June, 3 September 1877, 31 May 1878, 28 January, undated [probably January or February], 28 February 1879, 18 January, 31 March, 8 April, 16 April, 20 April 1880, Barlow Papers, Huntington; Thomas L. Snead to Gordon, 25 August 1877, Barlow Papers, Huntington; A. C. Haskell to Gordon, 10 September 1877, Barlow Papers, Huntington; J. L. Robertson to Gordon, 16 December 1877, Barlow Papers, Huntington; See also Syracuse Courier, quoted in Atlanta Constitution, 10 June 1880; Thomasville Times, quoted in ibid., 29 September 1881.

Gordon admitted that he did not serve "as a lawyer, but as counsellor and adviser to the president, Newcomb." To her, that meant he operated as a lobbyist. Regardless of his exact duties, it is apparent that while in the road's employ, he was steadily organizing and developing another railroad company. In June 1880, Gordon, A. H. Colquitt and the General's two brothers, Walter S. and Eugene C., formed a company to build a railroad between Columbus or Aberdeen, Mississippi, and Blount Springs or Birmingham, Alabama. These four men, who frequently pooled their resources and talents in various business ventures, envisioned much more than just the construction of a short stretch of track. Seeing the tremendous opportunity lying before them, Gordon and his partners, ambitiously planned to build a railroad joining Atlanta directly to the Mississippi River.<sup>10</sup>

Due west of Atlanta was what the Constitution called a "railroad desert," a vast, relatively undeveloped area unpenetrated by any east-west line. It seemed unimaginable that a straight-line connection between the railway hub of Atlanta and the railroad systems in Texas leading to the Pacific had not already been established. Also, a railroad running through Georgia, Alabama, and Mississippi would traverse some of the richest coal fields in America. The virtually untapped mineral wealth of these states, especially northern Alabama, would be opened up as never before. Many others, like Grady, had earlier seen the seemingly limitless potential offered by such a road, yet one had never been built. Gordon and his partners set out to rectify that situation.<sup>11</sup>

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10 Felton, Memoirs, pp. 304, 529-30, 536, 638-39; Atlanta Constitution, 23 May, 20 July 1880, 17 February, 26 March, 22 May, 26 August 1881.

11 Atlanta Constitution, 23 February, 18 May, 25 May, 31 May, 30 August 1881; Maury Klein, The Great Richmond Terminal: A Study in Businessmen and Business Strategy (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1970), p. 91.

In his effort to obtain the financial backing necessary for this enterprise, Gordon travelled extensively and spent much of his time in New York City. There he successfully enlisted the support of several noted capitalists eager to invest in such a promising venture. Hugh J. Jewett, president of the Erie Railroad, Joseph Anderson, president of the Tredgar Iron Works, C. H. Phinzy, president of the Georgia Railroad, and U. S. Grant, Jr. were among those prominent individuals who took stock in Gordon's project. While Eugene controlled operations on the western end, Gordon concentrated on securing the most crucial portion of the proposed road, certainly the most important section for Atlanta.<sup>12</sup> He sought to acquire the right to build westward from Atlanta into northeastern Alabama. Gordon began negotiations with L and N officials almost immediately upon joining the company—if not in fact even before he resigned from the Senate—for the purchase of the charter of that oft-envisioned, yet never realized railroad, the Georgia Western. Although a tentative agreement was reached in December 1880, a dispute over future traffic arrangements for the L and N and instability within that road's leadership—three different presidents in the space of three months—all contributed to delay the sale. Grady in the Constitution had confidently been predicting the signing of the final contract since February 1881, however, the actual transfer of the charter did not take place until May 1881. Almost one year to the day after Georgians were shocked by his resignation, they learned that Gordon had gained clear title to the Georgia Western charter for \$50,000.<sup>13</sup>

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12 For Eugene C. Gordon's prominent role in development of the Georgia Pacific, especially at the western end of the line, see Atlanta Constitution, 23 May, 20 July 1880, 17 February, 26 March, 7 June, 30 July 1881, 14 June 1882.

13 Avery, History of Georgia, p. 635; Gordon to Barlow, 18 May, 11 August 1881, Barlow Papers, Huntington; Maury Klein, History of the Louisville

Having acquired the Georgia Western, Gordon immediately proceeded to formalize the organization of the Georgia Pacific Company. As a parent company, the Georgia Pacific consolidated all of the Gordons' efforts and claims so that a single, united road between Atlanta and the Mississippi could be built. By June, Gordon and his partners had secured promises for \$350,000 from several Mississippi communities vitally interested in the construction of the road; they had obtained grants to over 100,000 acres of prime coal land in Alabama, deliverable upon completion of the railroad; they had solicited sufficient financial backing from primarily northern investors; and, in addition to the Georgia Western, they had obtained the charters for several other roads integrally involved in the overall scheme. The Georgia Pacific was eventually capitalized at \$12,500,000 and when all available stock in the company was rapidly taken, prospects appeared extremely promising. Even a threat by the Richmond and Danville Railroad Company to build a second, competing road into the coal fields failed to deter the June organization of the Georgia Pacific.<sup>14</sup>

Gordon's plunge into the vortex of high finance and railroad building vividly demonstrates his commitment to the economic philosophy of the New South. Even before he had arranged for the purchase of the Georgia Western charter from the L and N, Gordon had entered into additional discussions which illustrate both the expansiveness of his business mind and his deepening

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& Nashville Railroad (New York: Macmillan Co., 1972), pp. 174, 183; Klein, Great Richmond Terminal, p. 92; John F. Stover, The Railroads of the South, 1865-1900: A Study in Finance and Control (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1955), p. 240. References to Gordon's efforts to secure the Georgia Western charter are found in most issues of the Atlanta Constitution between February and May 1881. See especially 17 February, 23 February, 2 March, 18 March, 26 March, 18 May, 21 May, 22 May, 24 May, 25 May, 29 May, 8 June, 28 June, 28 July 1881.

<sup>14</sup> Atlanta Constitution, 29 May, 4 June, 7 June, 8 June, 28 July, 26 August 1881, 1 April 1882; Avery, History of Georgia, p. 635.

involvement in New South economics. The actual transfer of title to the Georgia Western had scarcely taken place when Gordon sold a half-interest in a seventeen mile stretch of the yet-to-be-built road. He sold it to a competitor of the L and N for \$50,000, thereby regaining the purchase price of the charter within a matter of days. More important, however, were Gordon's negotiations during the first half of 1881 with the sprawling Richmond and Danville syndicate. Gordon wanted to strike a deal whereby the Richmond and West Point Terminal Railway and Warehouse Company, a holding company for the R and D, would absorb the emerging Georgia Pacific into its network. His hopes had repeatedly been frustrated, primarily because of monetary considerations. Gordon and his associates valued the properties and possessions which formed the basis of the Georgia Pacific at \$700,000; the R and D, on the other hand, offered to pay only \$250,000.<sup>15</sup>

But as the Georgia Pacific developed into a going concern, one capitalized soundly enough to begin actual construction of an Atlanta-Mississippi River road independent of a major company, the R and D agreed to the merger on Gordon's terms. In return for the charter of the Georgia Pacific, all the lands and properties belonging to Gordon and his partners, and controlling interest in the Georgia Pacific, the R and D paid them a reported \$700,000 in cash. The founders of the Georgia Pacific (the Gordons and Colquitt) also received \$1,000,000 worth of stock in the Richmond and Danville extension company—the construction firm contracted to take over and complete the building of the road--and two and one half times that stock in the Georgia Pacific. Although they had sold their interest in the Georgia Pacific, the Gordons remained

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<sup>15</sup> Stover, Railroads of the South, p. 240; Klein, Great Richmond Terminal, pp. 90, 92; Atlanta Constitution, 29 May, 7 June, 26 August 1881.

exceedingly active in its operation. John continued as the company's president, Eugene served as president of two Mississippi railroads which extended the line from Birmingham to the river, and Walter became a director in the Richmond and Danville extension company. And so Gordon and his associates became very wealthy in a remarkably short period of time. Moreover, with John Brown as the guiding force, the Georgia Pacific was being built and the coveted opening of Atlanta to the west was at last being realized.<sup>16</sup>

Atlantans were overjoyed as work all along the line of the Georgia Pacific commenced and progressed smoothly. Gordon personally drove the first spike at the eastern end of the road in Atlanta in November 1881 and within three years, trains were running regularly between Atlanta and Birmingham. Henry Grady, more than any other man, probably deserved the credit for keeping the Georgia Western vision always before the public eye. He had for years extolled both the virtue of building a road into Alabama and the necessity of opening the region's mineral wealth to the Georgia capital. Still, it was Gordon who received the most effusive praise from his fellow Georgians for breathing life into the oft-begun, yet never completed railroad project. The Atlanta Constitution lauded "the man who in New York was fighting alone and almost without resource, a battle—and few men know how bitter and stubborn a battle—for the practical development of his section." Shortly after he returned to Atlanta in June with the title to the Georgia Western in hand, leading businessmen of the city tendered him a banquet at the Kimball House. Amid an

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16 Atlanta Constitution, 7 June, 8 June, 16 August, 26 August, 23 November 1881, 3 January, 9 February, 1 April, 25 August 1882; Avery, History of Georgia, pp. 635-36; Newspaper clipping, Charleston, Sunday Times, 3 July 1887, Scrapbook III, p. 37, Francis Warrington Dawson I Collection, Duke University, Durham, North Carolina (hereafter cited as Dawson Collection, Duke); Stover, Railroads of the South, p. 240; Klein, Great Richmond Terminal, p. 92.

evening overflowing with toasts and compliments, Gordon promised the commercial elite of Atlanta that he would push to finish the railroad as quickly as humanly and financially possible. And almost as if to assert his pride in his recent business success, he declared, "It has been my fortune to do what I could in various fields for my country, but I had rather be in the van of this great enterprise [the Georgia Pacific] than to bear all the political honors that could be heaped upon one." Gordon seemed to have finally gained the financial success he had longed for since the end of the Civil War.<sup>17</sup>

Gordon was more financially secure than at any earlier time in his life. As a consequence of the sale of the Georgia Pacific to the R and D, Gordon personally realized upwards of \$350,000. In addition to this cash payment, he held large blocks of stock in both the Georgia Pacific and the R and D extension company. Earlier in 1881, Gordon had also sold his interest in the Belmont coal mines in Jackson County, Alabama, for perhaps as much as \$100,000. Atop all of his success and monetary gain, Gordon occupied a secure position as president of the Georgia Pacific with an annual salary of \$10,000. He probably could have lived comfortably on this competency that he had gained so rapidly, but as he would exhibit throughout his business career, Gordon always looked to parlay whatever stake he had into something much grander. Success only whetted his appetite for more.<sup>18</sup>

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17 Atlanta Constitution, 18 May, 22 May, 8 June, 9 June, 30 August, 19 November 1881.

18 Newspaper clipping, Scrapbook III, p. 37, Dawson Collection, Duke; Atlanta Constitution, 26 March, 6 April, 28 June, 26 August, 27 September, 29 September 1881, 9 February, 25 August 1882; Felton, Memoirs, pp. 513, 535. See also Atlanta Constitution, 11 October 1885, for an interesting account by Ferdinand Ward of [U. S.] Grant, Ward & Company of how he believed Gordon bilked him on the Belmont deal.

The most common theme running through Gordon's financial correspondence during the last two decades of the nineteenth century was his apparent unbounded optimism. Whether publicly offering stocks and bonds or privately encouraging a friend to invest in his numerous enterprises, Gordon repeatedly spiced his endorsements with promises of immense returns in a short period with a minimum of risk. Shortly after selling the Georgia Pacific, he tried to interest a New York capitalist in "a large body of first class pine land on the line of the Georgia Pacific." "There is an enormous speculation and quick returns," he wrote. "But to make the speculation a great success we ought to purchase 100,000 acres, so as to monopolize & C." Certainly, as a friend once explained, Gordon's business mind "ran on large schemes." It was as if he believed that everything he undertook was guaranteed to succeed. To be sure, Gordon's Georgia Pacific venture proved a spectacular success which netted him tremendous wealth in little over a year after his resignation from the Senate. Still, Gordon continued to push ahead looking for that poverbial "pot of gold at the end of the rainbow." He was not content to rest on his economic laurels, for indeed, he longed for something more than mere financial success. Unquestionably, he coveted riches and he must have been gratified by the beneficial effects his labors had upon Georgia and the South, but above all else, Gordon ardently desired acceptance as a successful businessman. He yearned for recognition as a titan in the world of business and finance. A Georgia newspaper, commenting on his expansive mind in the wake of his recent success, reported that Gordon "has projects right ahead of him even larger than those that have engaged his attention for the past year. When these projects are unfolded and developed the people will understand that he could not afford and would not think of wasting any more of his life in politics." For now, Gordon the

businessman had the most to offer the South.<sup>19</sup>

While continuing to serve as president of the Georgia Pacific, Gordon became involved in several other businesses. He invested heavily in a cotton factory in Mississippi and in a Tennessee fertilizer firm that he hoped would locate in Atlanta. Gordon also acted as a land broker for an English company by overseeing the sale of 500,000 acres of Mississippi land. His connection with overseas capitalists deepened appreciably when he spent most of the latter half of 1882 in London and Paris, ostensibly to sell Georgia Pacific bonds to European investors. Although initially successful in placing some \$3,000,000 in bonds in London, Gordon ran into considerable difficulty when American railroad stocks, especially those of the R and D, plummeted. Nevertheless, when questioned after his return about what effect the English reluctance to invest would have upon the Georgia Pacific, Gordon reassured his interviewer that the road was in excellent shape and that the bonds could be placed in New York if overseas investors backed out.<sup>20</sup>

In addition to his attempts to obtain foreign backing for the Georgia Pacific bonds, Gordon also undertook several other missions while on his European trip. As an active promoter of the South since his Senate days, Gordon continued his efforts to attract investments into the South. For one correspondent, the main object of his visit was "to put the material interests and the vast possibilities of the south before the capitalists of Europe . . . presenting a rich field for investment and emigration." In that

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<sup>19</sup> Atlanta Constitution, 27 September, 29 September 1881; Gordon to Barlow, 18 August 1881, Barlow Papers, Huntington; Clement A. Evans, "General Gordon and General Longstreet," The Independent 56 (February 1904): 313.

<sup>20</sup> Atlanta Constitution, 17 January, 9 February, 30 March, 5 April, 11 August - 13 August, 25 August, 26 November, 14 December, 17 December 1882; Felton, Memoirs, pp. 304, 542.

vein, Gordon must have devoted a great deal of his time to drumming up interest in another of his railroad projects. He had already investigated the possibility of building a railroad in Florida that stretched all the way to Key West. But Gordon hoped to develop this enterprise into something much more than merely a railroad traversing Florida. Gordon's vision included steamship and telegraph lines across the Carribean as well as a wide variety of agricultural ventures in Latin America. It would make Florida, in the words of another, "the great commercial center of the Western World" by calling "to her shores the great trade of South America, Mexico and Cuba." Gordon did indeed have grand plans and upon his return to America in December 1882, he let it be known that he had "several large interests outside of the Georgia Pacific" that would demand his attention and keep him extremely busy the following year.<sup>21</sup>

By February 1883, Gordon had convinced the Florida legislature to approve a bill of incorporation granting a charter to the International Railroad and Steamship Company of Florida. Gordon organized the I.R.R.&S.S.Co. "for the purpose of constructing and operating a railroad from a point on the line of the State of Georgia to Key West and Tampa, in the State of Florida." In addition to the authorization to locate, build, equip, and operate a railroad, the charter also empowered the company to lay underwater telegraph lines and establish shipping lines between Florida and overseas ports. In return for construction of the railroad and the benefits that would accrue to the Florida, the charter granted 15,000 acres of land to the I.R.R.&S.S.Co. for every mile of completed track. On 22 March 1883, the company formally organized in

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<sup>21</sup> Atlanta Constitution, 12 August, 17 December 1882; Felton, Memoirs, p. 538; David L. Willing, "Florida's Overseas Railroad," Florida Historical Quarterly 35 (April 1957): 288-89; Carlton J. Corliss, "Building the Overseas Railway to Key West," Tequesta 13 (1953): 4.

Jacksonville, Florida, and Gordon, as the leading spirit of the enterprise, was selected president. Gordon subscribed to 991 of the first 1,000 shares (\$100 per share) of the I.R.R.&S.S.Co. stock issued at that time. He then established a construction company and on 20 June, entered into a contract with the I.R.R.&S.S.Co. in which he personally assumed responsibility for the actual construction of the Florida road. One week later, the New York, Florida, and Havana Construction Company purchased from him the contract for \$999,000, payment for which would be made in stock in the New York, Florida, and Havana. Clearly, with the exception of the bonds which he necessarily had to open to outside investors, Gordon organized the entire project so that it would be his.<sup>22</sup>

Gordon commenced work in Florida even before his construction company officially organized. Survey and work teams already dispatched to Tampa began laying out a route northward toward the Georgia line. In several strictly confidential letters to his chief engineers in Florida, Gordon stressed the necessity of maintaining absolute secrecy about where the road would actually be located. He had several reasons for his obsessive secrecy. He used the placement of the road as a point of leverage to extract concessions and in effect forced Florida communities to bid for the railroad to pass through their locales. Gordon was also interested in buying large chunks of land along the route of the railroad, well in advance of public announcement. Once word leaked out as to

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<sup>22</sup> Atlanta Constitution, 28 February 1883; Minute Book, 22 March, 20 June 1883, Records of the Proceedings of the International Railroad and Steamship Company of Florida, Public Service Commission, Common Carriers, Georgia Department of Archives and History, Atlanta, Georgia (hereafter cited as I.R.R.&S.S.Co. Minutebook, GDAH); Minute Book, 14 June, 27 June 1883, New York, Florida and Havana Construction Company, Public Service Commission, Common Carriers, Georgia Department of Archives and History, Atlanta, Georgia (hereafter cited as NY, FLA and Havana Minutebook, GDAH).

where the line would run, land values would skyrocket and provide handsome profits to those individuals owning the adjacent properties. In this vein, Gordon, as he put it, was often "offered such large inducements" that he would relocate his road even though the new route might be more expensive. On one occasion where he wanted to conceal a change in the path of the road, he encouraged his representative to employ all forms of deception in order to avoid arousing suspicion: "Discretion, caution, secrecy and the blinding of the public to our real designs is absolutely necessary to the accomplishment of my purposes." Orders like this, by no means uncommon, indicate that Gordon was intensely involved in the Florida project early on. As he soon found time for little else, he decided to resign as president of the Georgia Pacific. In his 30 June 1883 letter of resignation, Gordon stated that his Florida railroad "requires so much of my attention as to make it impossible for me to give my time to the Georgia Pacific."<sup>23</sup>

Gordon's wholehearted involvement in the I.R.R.&S.S.Co. is amply shown in a set of personal letterbooks he maintained during the 1880s. These seven letterbooks, spanning a period from May 1883 to November 1890, are the single most significant body of correspondence—save the smaller Barlow collection—that provide insight into Gordon's business dealings. He wrote numerous letters to people on both sides of the Atlantic about a wide variety of subjects. Certainly, the most dramatic impression conveyed by the letters of May to July

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23 All of the following letters are located in John Brown Gordon Personal Letterbooks, Georgia Department of Archives and History, Atlanta, Georgia (hereafter cited as Gordon's Personal Letterbooks, GDAH). Gordon to Henry Cooper, 9 May 1883; Gordon to J. B. Baird, 10 May 1883; Gordon to John T. Lesley, 11 May 1883; Gordon to Governor W. D. Bloxham, 14 May 1883; Gordon to Charles F. Smith, 17 May 1883; Gordon to Hamilton Disston, 17 May 1883; Gordon to W. H. Mabry, 24 May 1883; Gordon to S. Wailes, 31 May 1883. See also Atlanta Constitution, 7 June, 5 July, 8 July 1883; 20 February 1884, I.R.R.&S.S.Co. Minutebook, GDAH.

1883 is one of activity, hectic almost non-stop activity. In a ten-week period, Gordon wrote over 180 letters. The vast majority of these letters dealt with the I.R.R.&S.S.Co. and clearly showed that it was his overriding concern. Whether discussing the proposed route of the road, or how millions of dollars of stock would be marketed in Europe, or how smaller blocks of construction company stock would be sold to individuals, or lobbying for support for his Florida claims, or seeking trusted legal counsel from luminaries like L. Q. C. Lamar and Logan E. Bleckley, or trying to obtain inside information concerning the complicated legal questions involved in the developing disputes between the I.R.R.&S.S.Co. and other Florida railroad companies, or ordering materials for the construction of his railroad, these letters leave no doubt regarding Gordon's abiding commitment to his newest enterprise. He brought into the board room the same tenacity and sense of purpose that he had so often demonstrated on the battlefield.<sup>24</sup>

The letters also reveal Gordon's concern with a number of personal matters. He purchased substantial property in Florida in the belief that it would become quite valuable when his road was completed. In addition to his attempts to acquire orange groves so that he might establish a produce business for his sons, Gordon clearly had plans of establishing a winter home in Florida for himself. He also investigated the possibility of bringing in settlers and

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24 All of the following letters are located in Gordon's Personal Letterbooks, GDAH. Gordon to Governor W. D. Bloxham, 11 May, 14 May 1883; Gordon to L. Q. C. Lamar, 12 May 1883; Gordon to A. C. Harmer, 21 May, 11 June, 20 June, 13 September 1883; Gordon to George Walker, 26 May 1883; Gordon to James Hastings, 10 July, 23 July 1883; Gordon to James A. Williamson, 21 July 1883; Gordon to Israel Joseph, 17 August 1883; Gordon to Archer N. Martin, 20 September 1883; Gordon to W. L. Watson, 30 October 1883; Gordon to L. E. Bleckley, 22 April, 23 April 1884. Virtually everyday in November 1883 Gordon wrote one or more letters dealing with financing for his railroad. See also Gordon to Barlow, 14 April, 25 May, 29 June 1883, Barlow Papers, Huntington.

establishing colonies along the railroad. Gordon continued to operate as a land broker for English interests and when preparing to construct his railroad, inquired of the governor of Florida about the possibility of using convicts for his labor force. And even though he had severed his connection with the Georgia Pacific, Gordon remained actively concerned with real estate speculation in Mississippi.<sup>25</sup>

But it was the legal problems with other railroads in Florida that soon became Gordon's most serious problem. In its haste to construct railroads in the state as quickly as possible, the Florida legislature had granted too many charters with extraordinarily generous terms. It was said, and probably correctly, that the state of Florida gave away more public land than there was acreage in the state. Thus, there were overlapping claims, and the legal uncertainties surrounding these overlapping claims eventually spelled the doom of Gordon's grand project. Companies that had secured earlier charters but failed to commence work, or others that had begun construction but stopped or were not progressing quickly enough to comply with the terms of their contracts, resulted in muddled confusion out of which Gordon was unable to proceed freely. With so many legal questions unanswered, he found it increasingly difficult to attract investors. When efforts to place his bonds in Europe failed and similar efforts in New York also collapsed, the I.R.R.&S.S.Co. stagnated and never really had an opportunity to develop. Even as early as the end of 1883, these

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<sup>25</sup> All of the following letters are located in Gordon's Personal Letterbooks, GDAH. Gordon to Nathaniel Greene, 9 May 1883; Gordon to S. J. Wailes, 10 May, 31 May 1883; Gordon to J. W. Johnston, 10 May 1883; Gordon to Governor W. D. Bloxham, 11 May 1883; Gordon to Reynolds and Eckford, 11 June, 20 June 1883; Gordon to Charles H. Smith, 14 June 1883; Gordon to J. T. Lesley, 18 June, 14 July 1883; Gordon to C. G. Megrue, 20 June 1883; Gordon to Israel Joseph, 20 June 1883; Gordon to Jonathan A. Fitten, 14 July 1883; Gordon to J. S. Thrasher, 14 July 1883, Gordon to Son, 18 July 1883; Gordon to J. H. Lyman, 29 February 1884.

legal entanglements and the problems they generated dampened Gordon's prospects of success in Florida.<sup>26</sup>

Added to Gordon's legal problems with the International Railroad and Steamship Corporation were troubles of a different nature, ones that reached back to his days in the Senate. In December 1883, several national newspapers printed hundreds of the private letters between Collis P. Huntington, California railroad mogul, and one of his partners on the West Coast, David D. Colton. Huntington, vice president and general manager of the Central Pacific, was also vitally involved in the building of the Southern Pacific Railroad. In the 1870s, he spent much of his time in the nation's capital where he lobbied fiercely on behalf of his roads. This correspondence between Huntington and Colton revealed the shocking nature and enormous influence of the various railroad lobbying machines active in Washington. During the period covered by the letters, October 1874 to October 1878, Huntington and his Southern Pacific were frequently locked in battle with Tom Scott and his Texas and Pacific Railroad. Scott sought political and financial favors to aid in the construction of his road to the Pacific, while Huntington, by in large, worked to block Scott's efforts in

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<sup>26</sup> All of the following letters are located in Gordon's Personal Letterbooks, GDAH. Gordon to L. Q. C. Lamar, 12 May 1883; Gordon to Charles H. Smith, 21 May 1883; Gordon to N. H. Barnum 9 June 1883; Gordon to R. A. Lancaster, 21 June 1883; Gordon to Board of Trustees of International Improvement Fund of Florida, 29 June 1883, 14 February, 20 February 1884; Gordon to H. B. Plant, 29 June 1883, Gordon to A. B. Mason, 1 July, 11 July, 13 July, 21 July, 24 July, 24 August 1883; Gordon to John W. Candler, 13 July 1883; Gordon to D. C. Forney, 3 August 1883; Gordon to A. C. Horner, 13 September, 17 September 1883; Gordon to P. A. Wellford, 23 November 1883; Gordon to W. D. Bloxham, 24 November 1883; Gordon to Charles Harris, 30 November 1883. See also 27 June, 29 June 1883, 4 March 1884, I.R.R.&S.S.Co. Minutebook, GDAH; 21 February, 11 June 1884, NY, FLA and Havana Minutebook, GDAH; Gordon to Barlow, 25 May, 29 June 1883, Barlow Papers, Huntington; Atlanta Constitution, 12 July 1883, 2 February 1884, 3 February 1885; J. E. Dovell, "The Railroads and the Public Lands of Florida, 1879-1905," Florida Historical Quarterly 34 (January 1956): 236-58.

Congress. In their struggle to best one another, both railroadmen employed virtually every means at their disposal, regardless of legal considerations or ethics. The so-called "Colton Letters" exposed a startling web of fraud, disception, bribery, and corruption that had ensnared numerous Senators, representatives, and cabinet officers. Publication of the Huntington-Colton correspondence, wrote one historian, was "second only to the Credit Mobilier scandal as a soiler of Congressional names. . . ."27

Although there are no direct indications of payoffs to Gordon or willful wrong-doing on his part, six letters mention him by name and leave no doubt that Gordon and Huntington were frequently in contact with one another. The problem, however, lies in determining what effect their relationship had upon Gordon's senatorial actions, and particularly on railroad matters. One major question involves Gordon's opposition to the Texas and Pacific Bill. With this bill, Scott solicited government endorsement of approximately \$50,000,000 in bonds (whose aggregate interest over a fifty year period would amount to almost one-quarter of a billion dollars) in order to assure the building of his railroad. As early as December 1874, Scott was utilizing his contacts in Congress to gain Gordon's support. The following month, Gordon expressed in a letter his

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27 C. Vann Woodward, Reunion and Reaction: The Compromise of 1877 and the End of Reconstruction (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1951; revised ed., 1966), pp. 69-142, passim; Woodward, Watson, p. 3; Woodward, Origins of the New South, p. 37. A copy of the short pamphlet, The Colton Letters. The Inside Story of an Infamous Procedure, (n.p., n.d.) containing extracts of some thirty-eight letters, can be found in the Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, California. The 23 December 1883 issue of the San Francisco Chronicle reproduced verbatim most of Huntington's letters to Colton. The New York World and the Chicago Tribune also published extensive portions of the Huntington-Colton correspondence in late December 1883. See also Cerinda W. Evans, Collis Potter Huntington, 2 vols. (Newport News, Virginia: Mariners' Museum, 1954), 1: 340-58, and David Lavender, The Great Persuader [C. P. Huntington] (Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Co., Inc., 1970), pp. 307-17, 325-29.

reluctance to authorize subsidies even though the Texas and Pacific appeared to offer significant benefits for the South. Scott, in his effort to drum up southern support for his bill, continued to court Gordon, for in September he prevailed upon P. G. T. Beauregard to contact the Georgian and stress the necessity for united southern action. As active as Scott's wooing of Gordon may have been, it paled in comparison to that of Huntington.<sup>28</sup>

Despite the uncertainty as to when Gordon and Huntington first met, the two had clearly established contact by mid-1876. In a July 1876 letter, Huntington informed Colton that he had told Gordon "if he [Gordon] could get up a party of the best men of the South" to visit California and observe how work on the Southern Pacific was progressing, "we [the railroad lobby] would pay all their expenses." The cost might exceed \$10,000, but the railroad baron thought "it would be money well-expended." Gordon evidently had no qualms about travelling at the railroad's expense, but he advised Huntington "that some of his friends do not like to go on an invitation from a railroad company." Accordingly, Huntington instructed Colton to have "some of the prominent men in San Francisco" invite Gordon and other leading southerners to visit California. These invitations were issued almost immediately whereupon Gordon assured the railroadman that he could round up perhaps as many as thirty southerners for a trip that September. Huntington, however, expressed doubts in mid-August that a substantial party of southerners could be induced to travel to California that fall, especially since elections were nearing. Apparently his fears were well-

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<sup>28</sup> Atlanta Constitution, 17 January 1884; Woodward, Reunion and Reaction, pp. 80, 128-29; Felton, Memoirs, pp. 541-44; Tom A. Scott to M. W. Ransom, 15 December 1874, Matt W. Ransom Papers, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, North Carolina; Gordon to Barlow, 23 January 1875, Barlow Papers, Huntington; Huntington to Colton, 18 September 1875, San Francisco Chronicle, 23 December 1883.

founded because it does not appear Gordon ever made the trip. In any event, the General continued to oppose the Texas and Pacific Railroad bill.<sup>29</sup>

Gordon's introduction of a sinking fund bill on 12 January 1877 presents a more serious dilemma. "The most urgent legislative problem the Union Pacific and the Central Pacific had in common," wrote a historian of the complicated economic maneuverings underlying the Compromise of 1877, "was the large debt they owed to the Federal government and their combined effort to forestall impending steps to collect that debt." These roads, along with lesser railroads, owed the national government approximately \$55,000,000 for the subsidies that permitted completion of that railway. Gordon's proposal would create a sinking fund to help retire that debt, but at a much slower rate than that provided by a second bill sponsored by Senator Allen G. Thurman. Unquestionably, the Pacific railroads preferred Gordon's bill to the more rigorous repayment provisions of Thurman's so-called Judiciary Bill. In spite of immense pressure by Huntington and the other lobbyists, Gordon's sinking fund measure never had much chance of passage. Although Huntington admitted as much in February and March 1877, he optimistically reported, "it [the Gordon bill or as he styled it "our sinking fund bill"] is in a much better shape to pass than it has ever been before." He probably based his optimism on his ability "to fix up Railroad Committee in the Senate . . . just as we want it." Huntington miscalculated his capacity to influence the composition of that key Senate committee because one week later after appointments were made for the special session that began in March, he lamented Scott's success in replacing "one of our men" with one of his own on that railroad committee. And leaving no doubt of who he meant, he added,

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<sup>29</sup> Huntington to Colton, 26 July, 7 August, 14 August, 25 August 1876, San Francisco Chronicle, 23 December 1883.

"Gordon of Georgia was taken off and Bogy of Missouri put on." Huntington undoubtedly considered Gordon a man whom he could count on for support on the Senate.<sup>30</sup>

Gordon's opposition to both the Texas and Pacific bill and the Thurman bill as well as sponsorship of his own sinking fund proposal are not in and of themselves sufficient reasons for indictment. However, these actions in light of his relationship with Huntington certainly do raise some questions. Following publication of the "Colton Letters," when accusations were made that Gordon bore a large share of the responsibility for the defeat of the Scott bill, he apologized in no way whatsoever for his opposition. Quite simply, he said that he saw no reason for the government to endorse \$50,000,000 in bonds to build a railroad, when along the same general line, Huntington was already actively constructing a road without any assistance from the government. In addition to his belief that the government should not guarantee loans of private corporations, Gordon maintained that the Southern Pacific offered greater penetration of the South than the Texas and Pacific, and thus would be more beneficial to the region. Two years later when political opponents charged that his votes against Scott's bill stemmed from bribes, he contemptuously dismissed such accusations with the claim that "my silence could have won for me a colossal fortune." Gordon asserted that he could have secured both money and

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30 Congressional Record, 44th Cong., 2d sess., 589, 736, 1308; Appendix, 107-110; 45th Cong., 1st sess., 39; Woodward, Reunion and Reaction, pp. 122-25; Huntington to Colton; 12 February, 7 March, 14 March 1877, San Francisco Chronicle, 23 December 1883. Mrs. Felton, in her obsessive effort to portray Gordon in the worst possible light in her Memoirs, repeatedly used a 17 January 1876 letter, but cited it as 17 January 1877. In the letter, Huntington informed Colton, "I believe with \$200,000 I can pass our bill." By incorrectly citing this letter, Mrs. Felton constructed a false scenario where five days after Gordon introduced his bill, Huntington bragged he could pass that bill. Felton, Memoirs, pp. 83, 89, 102-03, 507, 514, 520, 541-44, 630.

immunity from criticism had he but feigned an illness and been silent; instead, he openly opposed the measure because, as he maintained, it was not in the best interests of the people or the nation. Similarly, when he introduced his sinking fund measure, Gordon contended that it would "exact from these railroads the last dollar due to the Government, and exact it by the shortest and safest process" compatible with the previous contracts and governmental good faith. He opposed the Thurman bill because he feared the railroad companies would reject its more stringent restructuring of earlier contracts, and that would lead to a costly lawsuit, further complicating and delaying the repayment process. Even after his proposal had died, Gordon persistently opposed the Judiciary Bill and was one of the few congressmen to vote against it when it finally passed and became law.<sup>31</sup>

Strangely, few Georgians ever demanded a fuller explanation by Gordon of his actions or his relationship with Huntington. Indeed, public reaction ranged from mild surprise to total lack of concern. An eyebrow may have occasionally been raised in 1877 by Gordon's backing of a measure obviously beneficial to the huge railroad interests, but most Georgians simply paid no attention to the matter. Following publication of the Huntington-Colton correspondence, some Georgia newspapers expressed a desire to learn more about the affair, but with the exception of the Felton's Cartersville Press, most papers refused to follow up on the "revelations." A frustrated, almost incredulous Mrs. Felton wrote that "[N]othing can account for this remarkable silence save the power of money and triumvirate patronage." National newspapers, however, were more willing to

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<sup>31</sup> Congressional Record, 44th Cong., 2d sess., Appendix, 107-110; 45th Cong., 1st sess., 2384, 2790; Atlanta Constitution, 17 January 1884, 27 May 1886; Atlanta Evening Capitol, 18 June 1886, quoted in James Gaston Towery, "The Georgia Gubernatorial Campaign of 1886," (M.A. Thesis, Emory University, 1945), p. 53.

question Gordon's actions. Yet, in the main, their responses generally reflected more sadness and disappointment than anger or indignation. The San Francisco Chronicle which "broke" the story found it difficult to reconcile Gordon's image "as the representative of everything that was highly respectable in the South" with his apparent as a "more than eager friend of the monopoly." Echoing similar sentiments, the New York World sadly concluded that Gordon had become "a servant of the corporation." Mrs. Felton may have derived some satisfaction from these mild indictments, but in spite of her steadfast condemnation of Gordon and her relentless search for materials damaging to him, she never uncovered conclusive proof that he had either sold his vote or betrayed the public trust. By and large, Georgians ignored the implications of the letters both at the time of their publication and later when opponents of the General attempted to use them to defeat him in a political contest.<sup>32</sup>

Nevertheless, the "Colton Letters" do furnish grounds for suspicion that Gordon did receive money from the Huntington interests. Reference to Gordon as "one of our men," or to his proposal as "our Sinking Fund bill" plus the smug sense of confidence with which Huntington banked on Gordon's support raise questions concerning the Senator's actions. Also, the more optimistic tone of Gordon's letters to Barlow in 1877 indicates that his desperate financial plight of the previous year had been substantially improved. Rather than bemoaning his economic distress or pleading with Barlow to assist him in securing urgently needed loans, Gordon discussed almost exclusively matters of investment and speculation. He was definitely more active financially after introducing the

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<sup>32</sup> Felton, Memoirs, pp. 114-18, 488, 508-12, 514, 541-43, 630; San Francisco Chronicle, 23 December 1883; Arnett, The Populist Movement in Georgia, p. 30; Woodward, Watson, p. 63; Towery, "1886 Gubernatorial Campaign," pp. 50-53.

Huntington-backed, sinking fund proposal than at any previous period of his senatorship. His increased ability to engage in all sorts of speculative ventures tends to lend credence to charges that Gordon sold his vote or became a paid hand-maiden of Huntington.<sup>33</sup>

Yet, even in the depths of his economic misery Gordon wrote a letter to Barlow that would seem to contravene such conduct. In July 1876, Gordon informed the New York attorney that he had received two offers of loans but had rejected them because they were "from sources which will not permit acceptance by me . . . as long as I am in the senate." This persistence in trying to borrow the money, plus his apparent ability to discriminate between acceptable creditors and those who would place him in a compromising position, is perhaps indicative of a moral resolution not easily seduced. Gordon's decision to refuse questionable loan offers at a time when he wrote, "I dont know what I am to do," demonstrates his unwillingness—at least at that point in time—to compromise his office. Certainly the people he represented were confident that he possessed such strength. In the following months, he may have secured his long sought loan, or he may have found other legitimate means of obtaining money, or, of course, it is possible that the financial pressures became so acute that he finally succumbed to the dollars Huntington undoubtedly dangled before him. It is simply impossible to ascertain how he "came into money," but the limited evidence available strongly suggests that Gordon did receive a substantial amount of money from an unidentifiable source in late 1876 or early 1877.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Huntington to Colton, 12 February, 14 March 1877, *San Francisco Chronicle*, 23 December 1883; See Gordon to Barlow [undated 1876], 19 May, 31 May, 7 June, 10 July 1876; 5 May, 17 May, 13 June 1877, Barlow Papers, Huntington.

<sup>34</sup> Gordon to Barlow, 10 July 1876, Barlow Papers, Huntington.

C. Vann Woodward, a keen student of leading southerners of the last third of the nineteenth century, refrained from attributing Gordon's actions to "conscious duplicity." Instead, he asserted that those who did so were "likely to credit him [Gordon] with a complexity of mind of which he was innocent, for it must be remembered that the General was an authentic hero, and heroes have never been notorious for complex mentalities." Woodward was seeking to explain as adequately as possible a situation where the material necessary to resolve the matter was unavailable. Although possibly correct, this assessment of Gordon's involvement in the Huntington affair tells us very little about Gordon. Granted he did not possess a first-rate business mind—a fact borne out by his long list of business failures—but the inability to distinguish oneself in business does not consign one to the ranks of the mentally infirm. Moreover, Gordon's reputation as a genuine military hero who had earned his reputation on the battlefield does not preclude him from possessing a sharp mind or a well developed sense of integrity. Indeed, for those men who had accomplished as much as he had militarily, the opposite would seem to be true as often as not. In the same vein, neither brilliance nor stupidity are prerequisites for accepting a bribe. Gordon was certainly an intelligent man, one entirely capable of differentiating between bribery and subtle pressure.<sup>35</sup>

If Gordon did receive money from Huntington, he most assuredly knew what he was doing. His willingness to accept railroad passes and to allow Huntington to pay his expenses was readily apparent, but that is not to say that he would have permitted himself to be bought and controlled by the railroad magnate. Still, in view of the unexplained improvement in Gordon's financial situation, the subsequent prearrangements which resulted in his resignation from

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35 Woodward, Watson, p. 63.

the Senate in 1880, and the general low level of public morality prevailing American politics at the time, it is likely that Gordon did receive unauthorized payments. Perhaps at some point during the last half of 1876, his financial burdens finally became too overwhelming. But again that fact cannot be determined positively. No conclusive proof of any illegality or betrayal of public trust has ever surfaced. Gordon may have appeared eager to ally himself with the railroad mogul—and in fact he may have done so—but the people chose to believe otherwise. To be sure, Gordon's popularity, both in Georgia and in the South as a whole, suffered little if at all from the Huntington "revelations."

Scarcely phased by publication of the Huntington-Colton correspondence, Gordon continued his efforts to develop the I.R.R.&S.S.Co., but with 1884 as a presidential election year, he also renewed his involvement in national politics. Spending most of his time at his business office in New York, Gordon was able to maintain close contact with many of the power brokers within the Democratic party. He visited with Samuel J. Tilden to learn what the elder statesman of the party thought was the wisest course for southern Democrats to pursue. Whenever interviewed, Gordon refrained from publicly endorsing a specific candidate, and instead stressed the necessity of selecting a man who would run well in New York and other crucial states. Although he appears to have preferred Grover Cleveland early in the year, at the July national convention he labored extensively on behalf of Thomas F. Bayard. Yet, when Cleveland emerged as the party's standard bearer, Gordon readily supported the New Yorker.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> New York Tribune, 3 April 1884; Atlanta Constitution, 6 April, 17 June 1884; Henry L. Bryan to T. F. Bayard, 8 July, 15 July 1884, Bayard Collection, LC; Gordon to A. H. Colquitt, 5 April 1884, Gordon's Personal Letterbooks, GDAH; Gordon to "Harry," 17 May 1884, Gordon's Personal Letterbooks, GDAH.

In a letter written shortly after the convention, Gordon made several suggestions to the Democratic nominee. He urged Cleveland to refrain from any "reference whatsoever to the war or to the sections of our common country or to the existence of any passion or prejudice engendered by the war." Such a course would be, in Gordon's mind, best for the country and for "your reputation as a reformer and the nonpartisan character of your administration." Gordon also encouraged Cleveland to make favorable overtures toward those "influential Republicans belonging to a class known as 'business men'"—those men with whom he had been heavily involved since leaving the Senate and entering the business world. In light of the current rift within the Republican party caused by James G. Blaine's nomination, Gordon believed that several of these prominent Republicans could be induced to support Cleveland. The Georgian volunteered his services in the upcoming campaign and closed by emphasizing the vital importance of the New Yorker's election. Gordon asserted, "I sincerely believe that your election will inaugurate an era of sectional concord, of higher peace, better administration of the government and a satisfaction which will be so nearly universal as to extend to all parties, classes, creeds and colors of the American people."<sup>37</sup>

Cleveland's victory in the fall elections surely gratified Gordon as the Democrats regained control of the national government for the first time since the war. When he learned of the Democratic triumph, he wired Senator L. Q. C. Lamar, "'Thank God! Cleveland is elected. Turn the rascals out!'" However, the party's success was not foremost in the General's mind during the final months of 1884. In September, his youngest son died unexpectedly of typhoid

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<sup>37</sup> Gordon to Cleveland, 24 July 1884, Gordon's Personal Letterbooks, GDAH.

fever. John Brown Gordon, Jr.'s death robbed his father of the jubilation he would normally have felt after the Democratic triumph in the national election. Moreover, the loss of the nineteen year-old, "a source of pride to himself and gratification to his parents and friends," devastated the entire Gordon family. This shock came only three years after Caroline Williams Gordon, wife of Gordon's eldest son, Hugh, had died at the age of twenty-seven. Tragedy would again strike the Gordon family less than two years later when Gordon's brother and father would die. Walter S., John's frequent partner in business, died in October 1886 and two weeks before Christmas the Reverend Zachariah H. Gordon also died. The deluge of so much sorrow in such a short period of time had to leave its mark on Gordon. But his greatest loss, the one that pained him most, was the death of his namesake.<sup>38</sup>

The burden of personal grief and business frustration lightened in the early days of 1885 when the prospect of a return to an active role in national politics beckoned. The Democrats' November triumph meant a significant turnover in government, especially in the executive branch. Following a congratulatory banquet of some 200 of New York's Democratic elite at which Gordon sat at the table of honor, word began to circulate that the president would tab the Georgian for some cabinet post. There seemed to be sufficient basis for such speculation because Cleveland had recently alluded to Gordon as "one of the southern men to whom he would look for advice." Indeed, Gordon did

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<sup>38</sup> Edward Mayes, Lucius Q. C. Lamar. His Life, Times, and Speeches. 1825-1893 (Nashville: Publishing House of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, 1896), p. 460; Atlanta Constitution, 16 August 1881, 13 September, 14 September 1884, 20 October, 11 December, 13 December 1886; Gordon to Barlow, 18 August 1881, Barlow Papers, Huntington; Hugh H. Gordon to John Hancock, 12 September 1884, Gordon's Personal Letterbooks, GDAH; Cemetery Records, Block 341-2, Oakland Cemetery, Atlanta Georgia; Hugh H. Gordon, Jr., A Letter to My Sons about their Forebears (privately printed, 1954); Fanny to daughter, 14 September 1892, Gordon Family Collection, UGA.

have substantial backing among prominent Democrats. Alfred H. Colquitt, then United States Senator from Georgia, wrote an enthusiastic letter of recommendation to the president-elect less than two weeks after the November election. Similarly, Senator L. Q. C. Lamar, in a 6 February 1885 letter to Cleveland, strongly endorsed Gordon as a man "full of ardor vim & energy; & his abilities are fully equal to the responsibilities of a Cabinet position." Although he acknowledged that Gordon "had not escaped criticism & detraction in his public career," Lamar asserted that in his opinion, "the imputations have not the slightest foundation in truth . . . [and] I have not a shadow of doubt about his purity of character in every respect."<sup>39</sup>

Gordon may not have publicly professed a desire for a cabinet position, but he certainly did in private. In a "strictly confidential" letter to Barlow on 3 February 1885, he related his discussion that morning with Lamar about the selection of Cleveland's cabinet. The Mississippian told Gordon then that he was not interested in a cabinet post, but that he intended to do all that he could on Gordon's behalf. Lamar's strong letter several days later evinced his desire to secure a position for the Georgian. Although he did not openly request Barlow's assistance, Gordon did write, "If you see your way clear you could not do me a greater service than to get Governor Cleveland to ask the leading Southern Senators . . . what they think of Gordon. These men . . . the real representatives of the best people of the South . . . w'd indicate how my appointment w'd be rec'd at the South." Gordon closed his private letter by adding, "You & others could tell him [Cleveland] how it [Gordon's

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<sup>39</sup> New York Times, 13 December 1884; Atlanta Constitution, 14 December 1884, 14 January 1885; A. H. Colquitt to Grover Cleveland, 18 November 1884, Grover Cleveland Papers, Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Washington, D. C.; L. Q. C. Lamar to Grover Cleveland, 6 February 1885, ibid.

appointment] w'd be rec'vd at the North." Clearly Gordon wanted a national cabinet post. When Cleveland passed him over, Gordon must have been disappointed but he could take heart in that his friend Lamar had received the cabinet appointment marked for a southerner.<sup>40</sup>

Once his brief political boom had spent itself, Gordon resumed his quest for crowning success in business. Both of his sons, especially Hugh, took on greater responsibilities as they became more vitally involved in their father's businesses. The wide range of enterprises included dredging for gold in the rivers of Georgia, continued real estate speculation both for himself and overseas investors, cultivating Latin American contacts, investing in and promoting inventions, and raising cattle on a huge scale. But above all else, Gordon persisted in his efforts to sell I.R.R.&S.S.Co. bonds which would permit work on the road to continue. Gordon's struggle to place the railroad's bonds, had peaked in 1884. Of the over 500 letters he wrote during that year, well over half of them dealt specifically with the increasingly difficult task of securing outside financing. In his numerous letters to agents, brokers, and potential investors on both sides of the Atlantic, Gordon continually insisted that large issues of bonds for his railroad would soon be taken and that full scale construction would commence at any moment. He attempted to attract interest in his project by offering land bonuses to investors. He also circulated thousands of pamphlets which purported to provide the "real facts" about the Florida situation and thereby inspire confidence. Similarly, in a February 1885 article in the Atlanta Constitution, Gordon went to great lengths to reassure the public that his company was a going concern and that laying of track would begin as soon as rails arrived by boat in Florida. Despite such assurances, by 1885, it had become

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40 Gordon to Barlow, 3 February 1885, Barlow Papers, Huntington.

apparent to most observers that the railway-steamship project was fizzling.<sup>41</sup>

Even as Gordon devoted himself to a variety of non-agricultural pursuits, he never lost touch with the agrarian roots of his native South. Throughout the latter decades of the 1800s, he engaged in all sorts of agricultural experimentation both at "Sutherland" and at his "Beechwood" plantation on the Flint River in Taylor County. Located near Reynolds, Georgia, about eighty miles south of Atlanta and almost equidistant between Macon and Columbus, "Beechwood" provided an ideal refuge to which Gordon escaped whenever possible. There his agronomic dabblings included the planting of many different types of grass, efforts to cultivate exotic fruits, and the growing of apples, peaches, pecans, as well as staple crops. But Gordon derived his greatest pleasure from the stock he raised at "Beechwood." Merino goats, shepherd dogs, sheep, thoroughbred horses, Texas ponies, hogs, and several varieties of cattle roamed the fields between his plantation home and the levees along the Flint River. On one occasion when the levee ruptured and flooded the overgrown bottomland, the "cane-breaks," Gordon lost most of his herd of 250 Brahman cattle. The loss of these prized animals and the grizzly task of disposing of the drowned creatures broke not only Gordon's heart but that of one of his daughters, who never forgot "the ghastly and pathetic sight." Despite this disaster and similar occurrences, Gordon loved this pastoral retreat, the place where he could truly feel close to the land.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> January - December 1884, passim, Gordon's Personal Letterbooks, GDAH (see especially Gordon to James A. Williamson, 14 April 1884; Gordon to New, 14 April 1884); Felton, Memoirs, pp. 538-40; Atlanta Constitution, 3 February 1885; 20 February, 4 March 1884; I.R.R.&S.S.Co. Minutebook, GDAH; 21 February 1884, 12 June, 29 September 1885, NY, FLA and Havana Minutebook, GDAH. See also Hugh H. Gordon Letterbook, passim, Department of Archives and History, Atlanta, Georgia.

<sup>42</sup> Caroline Lewis Gordon, "De Gin'ral an' Miss Fanny," Gordon Family

Overall, however, Gordon enjoyed little more success as a farmer than he did as a business man. Invariably engrossed in either public service or private enterprise, Gordon found it impossible to manage the plantation himself. Consequently, he often rented his lands to neighboring farmers and was forced to employ overseers to manage "Beechwood." The shortcomings of these managers, generally former Confederate soldiers, plus Gordon's willingness to experiment relegated "Beechwood" to, in his daughter's words, "a white elephant." Even in her partisan evaluation of her father, she acknowledged that his business sense left something to be desired: "My father was a military genius, a man of imagination and creative ability, and a great statesman, but he was not a practical business man." Apparently Fanny possessed a much shrewder business mind than her husband. And though he generally looked to her for advice and trusted counsel, she was frequently unable to dissuade him from making unfortunate decisions and disastrous appointments of men to manage the plantation. Years later, Gordon's daughter recalled how her mother used to joke when wagonload of goods from the plantation arrived at "Sutherland." Fanny would invite their neighbors "to come and enjoy some of her \$1,000 turkey and her \$100 a pound butter." Regardless of "Beechwood's" unprofitability, Gordon never tired of his country retreat. In addition to the long horseback rides over his property that he enjoyed so much, Gordon in his latter years wrote large

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Collection, University of Georgia, Athens, Georgia (hereafter cited as Gordon Family Collection, UGA); Atlanta Journal, 27 January 1929; Richard Frotscher to Gordon, 24 October 1893, Gordon Family Collection, UGA; S. M. Tracy to S. D. Lee, 31 October 1893, ibid.; S. M. Waymon to Gordon, 8 November 1893, ibid.; N. Dietzen to Gordon, 9 November 1893, ibid.; Gordon to Barlow, 8 June, 5 July 1878, 28 February, 29 March, 2 April, 22 April, 24 April 1879, 30 August 187[8-9?], 16 April 1880, Barlow Papers, Huntington; Atlanta Constitution, 14 January 1883.

portions of both his lectures and his reminiscences at "Beechwood."<sup>43</sup>

Convicts leased from the state supplied much of the labor employed on Gordon's "Beechwood" plantation. The practice of leasing out the state's prisoners dated back to the early days of Reconstruction. When he first began using convicts is uncertain, but under the act of 25 February 1876, Gordon became one of the four original lessees of Penitentiary Company No. 2. B. G. Lockett, L. A. Jordan, W. B. Lowe, and Gordon composed this company which leased convicts for twenty years for labor in camps in Taylor and Dougherty counties. In December of the same year, however, Gordon for whatever reasons tried to divest himself of his interest in the convict lease system. The governor refused his request because the legislature had not made any provisions for the release of the original lessees. Although Gordon persisted in his efforts to free himself of direct responsibility for convicts that he could not personally supervise, he retained his share of the penitentiary company and was legally accountable for the prisoners leased to him.<sup>44</sup>

In August 1878, Gordon sublet the sixty convicts at work on "Beechwood" to Edward Cox. At some point prior to this subleasing, Gordon and Cox had entered into an agricultural partnership in Taylor County. Evidently Cox

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43 Atlanta Journal, 27 January 1929; Gordon, "De Gin'ral an' Miss Fanny," Gordon Family Collection, UGA; Fanny to husband, 10 May 1873, ibid.; Fanny to daughter, 14 September 1893, ibid.

44 A. Elizabeth Taylor, "The Origin and Development of the Convict Lease System in Georgia," Georgia Historical Quarterly 26 (June 1942): 113-20; Journal of Georgia House, 1886, pp. 412-16; Derrell Roberts, "Joseph E. Brown and the Convict Lease System," Georgia Historical Quarterly 44 (December 1960): 399-401; Atlanta Constitution, 21 May, 6 June 1886; Scrapbook #16, p. 71, Rebecca L. Felton Collection, University of Georgia, Athens, Georgia. The uncertainty surrounding how or when Gordon managed to rid himself of his legal obligations under the terms of the 1876 contract led to charges during Gordon's governorship that he was in effect suing himself when he officially brought suit against the penitentiary companies.

managed and operated Gordon's plantation in addition to working his own holdings in central Georgia. It is possible that Gordon had earlier leased his convicts to Cox or that Cox merely oversaw their labor while they remained Gordon's responsibility but under the terms of their 1878 contract, Cox agreed to pay Gordon fifty bales of cotton annually in return for use of the prisoners and all products raised on Gordon's land. Details are lacking but whether as a result of Cox's mismanagement of "Beechwood," or his mistreatment of the convicts, or of the several law suits for non-payment brought against the firm of Gordon & Cox, relations between the two partners deteriorated almost immediately. Less than seven months after subletting his convicts to Cox, Gordon again sought to sever his connection with the convict labor system. On 1 April 1879, Gordon sold his share in Penitentiary Company No. 2 to C. B. Howard for \$4,000 cash, an annual payment of fifty bales of cotton for eight years, and Howard's assumption of most of the debts of Gordon & Cox. In addition to turning his sixty convicts over to Howard, Gordon rented his farm to Howard for eight years by signing away "his right to enter and take possession of his plantation in Taylor County." Technically, however, Gordon remained a convict lessee as prescribed by the 1876 contract.<sup>45</sup>

A tragic footnote to Gordon's attempt to sell his interest in the convict lease company occurred on 11 March 1879. Forced to remain in Washington during the early months of 1879 because of congressional duties, Gordon

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45 Felton, *Memoirs*, pp. 488, 498-501, 515; Scrapbook #16, p. 71, #28, pp. 15-16, Felton Collection, UGA; *George P. Swift and Son v. John B. Gordon and Ed Cox*, March 1880, DeKalb County Superior Court Minutes, Decatur, Georgia (hereafter cited as DeKalb County Superior Court, GDAH); *John D. Mitchell v. John B. Gordon and Ed Cox*, March 1881, DeKalb County Superior Court, GDAH; *Swift and Son v. Gordon & Cox and Cox as an individual*, March 1881, DeKalb County Superior Court, GDAH; 11 April 1878, Real Estate Deeds and Mortgages, DeKalb County, Decatur, Georgia.

authorized a friend, Robert A. Alston, to find a suitable buyer for his share of the company. Alston proceeded to negotiate with a number of interested parties, including Howard. Trouble arose when Alston concluded the arrangement with Howard, who refused to sublet convicts to Cox like Gordon had. An irate Cox confronted Alston and demanded that he rescind the Howard deal and accept another offer from Jessie Walters, a close friend of Cox. Tempers flared immediately and threats were exchanged. Later that day, the two engaged in a spectacular shoot-out in the Georgia State Capitol in which Cox mortally wounded Alston, who in turn gravely wounded his assailant. Cox recovered from his wounds and received a sentence of life imprisonment. His assignment to light duty at Joe Brown's Dade County convict camp and his subsequent pardon after serving less than three years gave rise to new rumors concerning Brown and Gordon. Some Georgians, most notably Mrs. Felton, suspected that Brown gave preferential treatment to Cox, Gordon's former business partner, in order to gain damaging information that he might later use against the General. Although Gordon's resignation from the Senate and Brown's appointment one year after the shoot-out might seem to lend a credence to these rumors, it is doubtful that the Cox-Alston tragedy had any impact whatsoever on the actions of May 1880.<sup>46</sup>

Gordon's unhappy association with Cox also reveals a distressing tendency that surfaced frequently throughout his life. Gordon and Cox's failure to pay their debts often brought them into court. Gordon, both as an individual and as a co-defendant was involved in a large number of additional legal actions

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<sup>46</sup> Atlanta Constitution, 12 March, 12 May 1879, 12 Decmeber 1882; Felton, Memoirs, pp. 372-73, 490-91; 496-97; Scrapbook #16, p. 71, Felton Collection, UGA; Derrell Roberts, "Duel in the Georgia State Capitol," Georgia Historical Quarterly 47 (December 1963): 420-24; Roberts, "Joe Brown and the Convict Lease," pp. 406-07.

in which he was sued for non-payment of debts, particularly loans. Most of the suits originated during the 1870s when he served in the Senate, but he continued his irresponsible fiscal course well after departing political office. On several instances, even after judgment had been made against him, Gordon refused to make the necessary arrangements to repay his loans until steps to seize his property were actually begun. Even though the sums rarely exceeded \$2,000, it is ironic that a man so acutely sensitive to all affronts to his personal honor could display such a remarkable lack of concern for his financial trustworthiness. Gordon evidently saw nothing dishonorable or dishonest in his reluctance to honor his financial obligations. Whether or not Gordon even recognized this inconsistency is impossible to determine. However, it is certain that his lax approach to his own indebtedness frequently created problems for the General. But these personal troubles were of little consequence when compared to those associated with Gordon's Florida railroad.<sup>47</sup>

Still, in spite of persistent legal complications surrounding land grants and rights-of-way for the I.R.R.&S.S.Co., Gordon appears to have been close to undertaking actual construction of a portion of the road in January 1886. With surveying and heavy grading along a forty mile stretch near Tampa completed, Gordon prepared to lay cross-ties and rails. As always though, the most serious problem facing him was a lack of funds. Having already spent \$200,000 of his

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<sup>47</sup> John R. Dos Possos v. John B. Gordon and Hugh H. Gordon, Circuit Court of the United States, for Northern District of Georgia, March 1887, Federal Archives and Records Center, East Point, Georgia; Campbell Brown v. John B. Gordon and E. C. Gordon, March 1877, *ibid.*; J. W. Smart and B. W. Smart v. Alfred H. Colquitt and John B. Gordon, March 1887, *ibid.*; Atlanta National Bank v. John B. Gordon, September 1880, *ibid.*; William P. Phillips v. John B. Gordon and Thomas C. Howard, September 1874, DeKalb County Superior Court, GDAH; Wood, Tabor and Moore v. John B. Gordon, March 1881, *ibid.*; Julius L. and Joseph M. Brown as Executors v. John B. Gordon, February 1900, *ibid.*

own money and having been repeatedly frustrated in his efforts to place his bonds, Gordon concentrated upon securing a loan. He believed he had found his backer when John R. Dos Possos of New York apparently agreed to loan him \$250,000 by 20 January 1886. That amount, Gordon believed, would allow him to complete that forty mile portion of the railroad. And then the profits gained from the completion of that line would permit construction to begin along other sections of the proposed 500 mile railroad. In return for the loan, Gordon agreed to divide equally with Dos Possos all of the profits he realized from the completion of the road and from speculation along the line. Gordon's creditor would also receive a \$50,000 bonus as well. These generous terms evince the extent of Gordon's desperation to see his Florida railroad built. Dos Possos, however, dashed the General's hopes as quickly as he had raised them when for unknown reasons he backed away from the enterprise. Gordon's inability to secure the funds necessary for construction brought work on the railroad to a halt and, in essence, sounded the death knell of the I.R.R.&S.S.Co.<sup>48</sup>

The I.R.R.&S.S.Co. bubble had burst. Gordon would continue to try and revive his railway-steamship project, but for all intents and purposes, it was dead. In its ashes lay Gordon's dreams of a financial empire in Florida and the Caribbean. Fresh from his stunning accomplishments in the early 1880s, Gordon had wholeheartedly committed himself to this immense enterprise that he believed would open up Florida and aid the economy of the entire Southeast. Certainly the successful development of the I.R.R.&S.S.Co. would have made

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48 Hoke and Burton Smith to Gordon, 20 October 1888, Hoke Smith Collection, Letterbooks, University of Georgia, Athens, Georgia; Gordon to J. R. Dos Possos, 15 September, 2 December 1886, 7 March 1888, Gordon's Personal Letterbooks, GDAH. The last entries in the I.R.R.&S.S.Co. Minutebook and the NY, FLA and Havana Minutebook are 4 August 1886 and 9 June 1887 respectively.

him a fabulously wealthy man. But more important than the potential riches it held for him was the impact it would have on his reputation. Heavily laden steamships and railroad cars steaming northward as part of a Gordon transportation system would completely remove the stigma of failure that marked his earlier business career. Indeed, Gordon could hold up the I.R.R.&S.S.Co. as a fitting tribute to his business acumen. Gordon the businessman could then finally assume the lofty, respected position attained by Gordon the soldier and Gordon the politician. Instead of new glories and new accolades, Gordon's grand vision had been all but destroyed by 1886 and his financial future seriously clouded.

Even though he lost most of his money in his Florida enterprises, and was in the words of a contemporary, "somewhat out at the elbow," Gordon retained his willingness to speculate and to engage in any number of "sure-fire" schemes. His active participation in a variety of business ventures during the next two decades demonstrate that he was neither financially nor spiritually broken. Nonetheless, by 1886, Gordon must have been tired, and surely frustrated. Six years of an almost obsessive involvement in railroading and numerous other facets of the burgeoning New South exacted a heavy toll on the General. The steady erosion of both his fortune and his newly-established reputation as a railroad developer forced him to step back and assess both his past and his future. His uneven course in the years after leaving the Senate had, in a very real sense, led him right back to the point where he began. Spectacular success had given way to dismal failure.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Raymond B. Nixon, Henry W. Grady: Spokesman of the New South (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1943), p. 226.

As he turned away from his frustrating business career and toward the future, he must have longed for a respite, a peaceful interlude where he could recoup his strength and regain his equilibrium. He yearned for a comfortable environment wherein he might again bask in the glory and respect that he had grown accustomed to in the decades after the war. New military laurels were impossible; however, a revival of his political career seemed possible. Thus, weary from his years of battle in the board rooms of New York and the courts of Florida, Gordon limped home to Georgia. Bowed but not beaten, he prepared to enter the familiar waters of Georgia politics once again. Perhaps they would provide him with the stability he desperately needed and now sought.

## CHAPTER VIII

### GOVERNOR OF GEORGIA

Prospects for Gordon's immediate reentry into Georgia politics did not appear particularly promising. Although he received occasional mention as a possible successor to Governor Henry D. McDaniel, few Georgians considered him a serious candidate. T. J. Simmons and Augustus O. Bacon were the two names most frequently bantered about, with the latter, the former speaker of the Georgia House, having a decided advantage. Since his unsuccessful bid for governor in 1883, Bacon had established an extensive machine with some 1,500 former members of the Georgia legislature actively working on his behalf throughout the state. Given his strength among county political leaders, Bacon appeared to have the nomination secured. But once again, as in 1880, Gordon was about to shatter Georgia's political calm. With the able assistance and brilliant guidance of Henry W. Grady, Gordon set out to capture the governorship of Georgia.<sup>1</sup>

Initially, most observers considered Gordon's nomination "a forlorn hope," but Grady felt he had a "sure-fire plan" to elect the General. Yet, numerous problems faced the young managing editor of the Constitution. He had

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1 Atlanta Constitution, 14 March, 28 March, 6 April, 9 April, 19 April 1886; James Gaston Towery, "The Georgia Gubernatorial Campaign of 1886," (M.A. thesis, Emory University, 1945), pp. 1-5; Raymond B. Nixon, Henry W. Grady: Spokesman of the New South (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1943), pp. 225-26; Judson Clements Ward, Jr., "Georgia Under the Bourbon Democrats, 1872-1890," (Ph.D. dissertation, University of North Carolina, 1947), pp. 177-78.

to place his candidate in the limelight immediately and find a means of preventing Bacon from winning the nomination before a Gordon organization and the General's natural strengths could be developed. In order to have any chance whatsoever in the upcoming campaign, it was absolutely imperative that Gordon recapture the political prominence he had willingly foresaken almost six years earlier. Gordon needed a vehicle to reawaken the tender, bittersweet memories of the Confederacy; he needed an event or action that would allow him to capitalize again on the reputation he had gained as a soldier. Grady found such a vehicle ready made for his purposes in the upcoming tour of the former president of the Confederacy.<sup>2</sup>

Grady's scheme centered around the 1 May unveiling and dedication of a statute of Benjamin H. Hill in Atlanta. Gordon had already accepted an invitation to deliver the major address in late April at the laying of the cornerstone of a Montgomery monument honoring the Confederate war dead of Alabama. Jefferson Davis would also attend the ceremonies and speak briefly. Upon learning of Davis' journey to Montgomery, Grady persuaded the B. H. Hill Monument Commission to invite the Mississippian to continue his trip on to Atlanta and participate in the Hill festivities as an honored guest. Davis' acceptance of this invitation undoubtedly thrilled Grady. Fully cognizant of the depth of emotional attachment to the "dear old Confederacy," Grady envisioned the former president acting like a magnet, drawing countless Confederate veterans to Atlanta to see or hear their former leader. He would not play a prominent role in the Atlanta dedication, but Davis would naturally serve as the center of attention. Grady also understood that Gordon's mere presence by the

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<sup>2</sup> Walter G. Cooper, Official History of Fulton County (Atlanta: W. W. Brown, 1934; reprint ed., Spartanburg, South Carolina: Reprint Company, 1978), p. 833; Nixon, Grady, p. 226.

side of his now enfeebled chieftain would warm the hearts of most Georgians, and certainly rekindle old fires in those of the veterans. And as Grady's biographer noted, "[T]hose veterans could determine the outcome of any political battle in Georgia."<sup>3</sup>

The ceremonies in Montgomery unquestionably bolstered the newspaperman's confidence. In order to guarantee full and colorful coverage, he had sent one of his best reporters to the Alabama capital, plus Grady himself supplemented the accounts of the activities with personal reports. The receptions for both Gordon and Davis were overwhelming as thousands of southerners descended upon the first capital of the Confederacy to recapture a piece of their past. Gordon's dedicatory speech focused upon the valor, courage and devotion of the southern soldiery. After briefly recounting the North's innumerable advantages in the war, he asked how could southerners--those of the same race and common ancestry as their foes--resist so doggedly in the face of such odds. He concluded that "the great, distinctive, primal thought that moved, dominated and inspired the southern people . . . [was] the law of self defense." For Gordon, it was this "one controlling, all prevading thought" that served as "the tower of her amazing strength." And as he usually did in similar laudatory addresses, Gordon closed on a nationalistic note by appealing to his listeners to "let your fidelity to the whole country be as conspicuous in peace as was your devotion to the south during devastating war." That evening, after the ceremonies, Gordon renewed friendships with many individuals whom he had not seen in years when he visited with his former comrades of the Sixth Alabama. It

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid.; Dunbar Rowland, Jefferson Davis, Constitutionalist: His Letters, Papers and Speeches, 10 vols. (Jackson, Mississippi: Mississippi Department of Archives and History, 1923), 9: 409, 412-13; Atlanta Constitution, 28 March 1886.

was a touching occasion, one that certainly provided a hint of what was to come in Atlanta.<sup>4</sup>

The following day, Gordon, along with members of the monument committee accompanied Davis on the train ride to the Georgia capital. The train made numerous stops along the way both in Alabama and Georgia where adoring crowds flocked to catch a glimpse of their heroes and coax a speech out of them. Davis, impaired by old age and physical infirmities as well as exhausted by the excitement in Montgomery, was physically unable to honor the repeated requests. At Opelika, Davis finally heeded Gordon's warnings against overexerting himself. He placed his hand upon the Georgian's shoulder and declared, "'This is my Aaron; let him speak for me.'" From that point on, Gordon spoke in place of the man he reverently styled "this dear old chief of ours." He explained that the former president's "heart, as well as his tongue, is full of eloquence, but his years are almost gone, and it is enough for us to look upon his face." Even after their arrival in Atlanta that evening, Gordon continued to speak on behalf of Davis, excusing his fatigue and expressing his gratitude.<sup>5</sup>

Nearly 100,000 spectators gathered in Atlanta for the 1 May dedication ceremonies. Grady had labored tirelessly in the days preceding the festivities to whip up enthusiasm for Davis' visit. The Constitution published a special "Davis Issue" on 25 April recalling "The Days of '61" and took every opportunity to set the stage for a tremendous outpouring of patriotic fervor. Throughout the morning and afternoon, Gordon maintained a relatively low profile as he had no direct role in the unveiling exercises. Grady, who presided as master of

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<sup>4</sup> Atlanta Constitution, 28 April - 30 April 1886; Nixon, Grady, p. 227; Ward, "Georgia Under the Bourbons," p. 180.

<sup>5</sup> Atlanta Constitution, 1 May 1886; Nixon, Grady, pp. 227-28.

ceremonies, Davis, and J. C. C. Black shared the day's spotlight. Grady had made sure that the dedication retained "an appropriate non-political atmosphere" by selecting Black, a leading supporter of Bacon, as the principal orator. Despite frequent calls from the overflowing crowd for him to speak, Gordon "could not be found" because he was "lost" among his former comrades with whom he had chosen to march. The proper moment to usher Gordon onto centerstage had not yet arrived.<sup>6</sup>

But later in the day with veterans milling about the Kimball House, a hotel long recognized as "the political center and beehive of Georgia," the time was at hand. Colonel Melville Dwinell of Rome, a friend and former employer of Grady, climbed on a chair on the balcony overlooking the main lobby and quickly gained the attention of the crowd below. His proposal that Gordon deliver an address that night elicited a wild response and the cry immediately went up for "Gordon! Gordon for Governor!" Almost "magically," Gordon appeared on the balcony. Although he declined to speak that evening, he tenderly informed the enthusiastic throng, "This is the happiest day of my life. My heart is full and it is all yours." Gordon had barely retreated from the frenzied hotel when cries from angry Baconites, protesting what they perceived as the politicalization of the dedication ceremony, were heard. Such protests, however, were drowned out in the tumult reigning after Gordon's brief appearance. Excitement spread from the hotel into the streets of Atlanta, leaving little doubt that Gordon would soon enter the gubernatorial race. Indeed, Grady's skillful use of the veterans strategy had been so successful that the newspaperman boasted to a friend, "Confederate money will be good before midnight!" The fire set by Grady had

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6 Nixon, Grady, pp. 227-29; Atlanta Constitution, 2 May 1886.

begun to blaze.<sup>7</sup>

His editorial the following morning in the Constitution called for Gordon's nomination for governor. Speculation about when he would officially enter the race abounded, but Gordon did not formally announce his candidacy until nearly a week later. After the Hill dedication ceremonies, Davis, again in the company of the Georgian, travelled to Savannah to review the troops of the Chatham Artillery. There Gordon told a reporter that he would become a candidate because the "pressure from all parts of the state urging me to run is so great that I do not see how I can resist it." Finally, in a 8 May letter to the people of Georgia, Gordon announced his candidacy for the office of governor. He related that "somber thought and full consideration" plus increasing evidence of widespread support among the people "profoundly stirred my heart and satisfied me of my duty." And as if to anticipate the bitter assault upon his character and integrity that would mark the ensuing campaign, he declared, "[I]f the life I have led for more than half a century . . . is not a sufficient answer to my enemies, who are enemies without cause or excuse, no reply from me would satisfy them." He was in the race and would make every effort to speak in as many counties as possible.<sup>8</sup>

Even before Gordon officially entered the race, charges were circulating that Davis' tour "was but a means of furthering General Gordon's political claims. . . ." The Atlanta Constitution emphatically denied such assertions, maintaining that Gordon had been selected to speak in Alabama by men unassociated with Georgia politics. Grady downplayed his manipulation of 1 May

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<sup>7</sup> Nixon, Grady, pp. 229-30; Cooper, History of Fulton County, pp. 833-34; Atlanta Constitution, 2 May 1886, 23 May 1921.

<sup>8</sup> Cooper, History of Fulton County, p. 834; Atlanta Constitution, 3 May, 7 May - 9 May 1886.

affairs by contending that Gordon had refrained from participating in the official party of the Hill Monument ceremonies for fear that he might detract from "the declared purpose of the day." In fact, stated the Constitution, if there was any blame to be attached to Gordon's advancement, it had to rest upon the people themselves for calling Gordon to the fore. If it was "the revival of memories" which elevated Gordon to the political forefront, then the real cause went back much further than just the Montgomery or Atlanta ceremonies. "If the popular heart kindled into applause whenever his scarred face was shown or his name mentioned, the cause is to be found in the popular heart. The people speak when they feel like speaking, and they are responsible to themselves for what they do." Thus, Gordon merely exercised "the indisputable right" of any citizen to answer the summons of the people.<sup>9</sup>

Despite Grady's protests that neither he nor anyone else had schemed to use the Davis tour for Gordon's political benefit, such professions have a hollow ring to them. The precise degree to which Grady shaped or controlled the events of late April-early May is impossible to determine, but the skillful manner in which Gordon emerged as a candidate suggests the presence of a master manipulator. In all probability, the same man who carefully orchestrated Gordon's resignation in 1880 similarly guided his return to Georgia politics six years later. Accurately perceiving the political capital to be gained by a rekindling of the passions stirred by Davis' emergence from the Mississippi coast, Grady constantly kept his man in the right place at the right time. Gordon's intimate association with Davis on the train-ride through Alabama and Georgia as well as their appearances together in Atlanta and Savannah allowed him to reap the benefits from such remembrances of the Confederacy. Yet, by keeping

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9 Atlanta Constitution, 7 May, 9 May 1886.

Gordon at a distance from the actual Atlanta ceremonies and having an active Bacon supporter as the primary orator, Grady softened later charges that the tour and dedication were used for political purposes. The veterans' demand for Gordon at the Kimball House, though carefully contrived, took on the appearance of a spontaneous call from the people. Again, despite the difficulty in ascertaining Grady's exact role, the deft handling of Gordon's dramatic move back into Georgia politics evinces that brilliant manipulation present in so many of Grady's dealings.

Gordon's participation in the Davis tour then was a calculated means of reawakening old memories and of tapping the wellspring of Confederate patriotism still running deep in the South. It can be viewed as Phase One of the Grady-Gordon plan to elect Gordon; Phase Two followed quickly on its heels. The 9 May edition of the Atlanta Constitution which printed Gordon's letter announcing his candidacy also carried a letter from Gordon to Bacon and all other candidates. In it, Gordon asked his opponents to join with him in requesting that the Democratic State Executive Committee recommend primary elections in every county "in order that the will of the people may be surely ascertained." His appeal for direct primaries became a crucial tactic in Gordon's quest for the gubernatorial nomination. Or as one student of the contest noted, "[E]ntirely non-existent before Gordon entered the campaign, it [primaries versus traditional courthouse meetings] was now a vital issue that was to play an important part in the final results of the campaign."<sup>10</sup>

The call for primary elections in the counties served a multitude of

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<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 9 May 1886; Ward, "Georgia Under the Bourbons," p. 182; Nixon, *Grady*, pp. 230-31; Towery, "1886 Gubernatorial Campaign," p. 26. See Towery, "1886 Gubernatorial Campaign," Chapter II, "Primaries versus Courthouse Meetings," for a thorough discussion of this issue.

purposes. It would, first and foremost, help forestall the delegate selection process. And since some counties, employing courthouse meetings, had already chosen delegates pledged to Bacon, Gordon's people had to work quickly. By interjecting popular primaries into the campaigns, the Gordon forces sought to buy the time necessary to organize and combat Bacon's already established organization. Moreover, if the contest were moved out onto the hustings, Gordon's oratorical ability and his personal magnetism could be fully employed. Although "deeply pious, hard working, highly respected, and successful," Bacon lacked the warmth and the heroic stature that Gordon so effectively exuded whenever in front of an audience. On the stump, Gordon's fiery, enthusiastic appeals to the jury invariably overshadowed Bacon's cold logical statements to the court. The General's voice, remembered one chronicler, "rang like a clarion; and, when he raised it to the highest pitch, it seemed to wake up all the echoes of the forest." If Gordon was afforded the opportunity to showcase his eloquence and capitalize on his superb war record, Bacon would be in trouble.<sup>11</sup>

As a result, Bacon, already stung by Gordon's sudden entry into what heretofore had not been considered much of a race, refused to accede to Gordon's call for primaries. In his public letter of refusal, he explained that he believed Georgia voters themselves "can determine better than the Executive Committee, or perhaps better than you or myself, the mode best suited to the situation of their several communities." Courthouse meetings that had been good enough in the past were still eminently satisfactory for Bacon. Although he may have possibly been genuinely concerned with each county's right to select

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<sup>11</sup> Nixon, *Grady*, p. 231; Ward, "Georgia Under the Bourbons," pp. 178, 182-83; Towery, "1886 Gubernatorial Campaign," pp. 24, 27-28, 79-81; Issac W. Avery, *History of the State of Georgia from 1850 to 1881* (New York: Brown and Derby, 1881), p. 391; Lucian Lamar Knight, *Reminiscences of Famous Georgians*, 2 vols. (Atlanta: Franklin-Turner Co., 1907-08), 2: 418-19.

its delegates in whatever method they chose, Bacon unquestionably saw through the opposition's strategy—a strategy which banked on the primaries as the best way to offset Bacon's established relationship with county political leaders. The dilemma facing him, however, was how to oppose the primary elections without, as the Gordon camp charged, appearing to resist the will of the people. It proved a difficult task, because once popular primaries emerged as a major issue, Bacon's carefully cultivated strength began to dissipate. Thus, the campaign evolved into a race where Bacon worked to speed up the selection of delegates while Gordon struggled to delay the voting until he could visit with and speak to the people in the various counties.<sup>12</sup>

Gordon and his supporters were quick to exploit Bacon's dilemma. He and the Constitution stressed almost ad nauseum that the request for primaries asked for nothing more than that "the democratic voters of the state be allowed to express their opinions through the ballot box." At a time when a Bacon paper likened primary elections to the opening of "Pandora's box," the Constitution confidently asserted that Gordon had nothing to fear in an open, fair fight. Grady in his editorials relentlessly hammered away. He reminded his readers that only "conspirators and wire-pullers"—those who based their hopes "on little courthouse meetings and back room caucuses"—sought to avoid the ballot box. When opponents renewed old charges accusing Gordon of being a candidate of the "Atlanta ring," Gordonites enjoyed a field day. They dismissed the accusations and declared there was "but one 'ring' in Georgia politics, and that is the little 'ring' at Macon"—the same one that had been laboring to elect Bacon for six years and was now desperately "muzzling the voices of the people with the hands

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<sup>12</sup> Atlanta Constitution, 11 May 1886; Towery, "1886 Gubernatorial Campaign," pp. 32-36, 101-02.

of politicians." Despite the rhetoric of the campaign, most Georgians probably concurred with the assessment by the Fort Gaines Tribune that "politics is nothing but a game of 'rings' anyway." For in Georgia at this time, two strong machines were indeed locked in combat. Nevertheless, Gordon profited from Bacon's apparent reluctance to allow the people to express themselves openly through primary elections.<sup>13</sup>

In addition to the call for primaries, Gordon and his lieutenants employed virtually every means at their disposal to erect a statewide organization as quickly as possible. Immediately after Gordon officially entered the race, Grady assumed personal command of the campaign and established campaign headquarters in a large storeroom near the offices of the Constitution. Although he professed in his editorials "to furnish the news fully, fairly and promptly," Grady unmistakably placed the Constitution squarely behind the General and until late in the campaign, his paper was the only major daily actively to support Gordon. The editor's tactics were as varied as they were often innovative. Early on he mailed lithographed letters to all identifiable Georgia voters; these facsimile letters bore Gordon's signature and since few Georgians were acquainted with the lithograph process, many believed they were actually receiving a personal message from Gordon himself.<sup>14</sup>

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13 Atlanta Constitution, 18 May, 9 May, 12 May, 14 May, 30 May 1886; Fort Gaines Tribune, quoted in *ibid.*, 18 May 1886. Rarely a day passed in May 1886 that the Constitution did not editorialize upon the primary issue. The paper continually harped upon the wisdom of giving the people a voice in the selection of their officials. Particularly effective portrayals of Gordon as the champion of the people and Bacon as a "ringster" can be found in the Atlanta Constitution, 9 May, 11 May, 12 May, 14 May, 17 May, 18 May, 30 May.

14 Nixon, Grady, pp. 231, 234; Atlanta Constitution, 9 May 1886; Towery, "1886 Gubernatorial Campaign," pp. 28-29, 72-73. Despite the lack of widespread editorial support for its candidate, the Atlanta Constitution steadfastly served as the journalistic cutting edge in Gordon's campaign. The strongest daily newspapers in Georgia opposing Gordon were the Macon Telegraph and the Augusta Chronicle.

The General and Grady also sent personal letters to influential Georgians soliciting support and urging the necessity of prompt action. "The campaign before us is so short," wrote Gordon, "that I am compelled to rely largely on the organization of my friends in the counties which I am unable to reach. . . . My competitor has a compact and trained following in every section. This must be met immediately by similar organization of my friends." Grady, in a letter to Colonel W. H. Harrison, wrote, "I know that you can do him [Gordon] a great deal of good if you will, and you may rest assured it will not hurt you to do it . . . Help him out . . . and the reward of the just will be yours." In addition to these mailings, Grady dispatched trusted assistants to critical counties prior to the selection of delegates. On one occasion, a Grady aide carried two notes with him, one for each of the county's leading politicians. The instructions were both succinct and pointed: "If you find that No. 1 is for Gordon, give him the note. Otherwise, see No. 2. He's bound to be against No. 1."<sup>15</sup>

Grady skillfully employed all of these devices, but the cornerstone of the Gordon-Grady strategy lay in the appeal to Gordon's glorious war record. Unquestionably, Grady succeeded in igniting old passions with the Montgomery ceremonies and Jefferson Davis' visit to Georgia. Now that these memories had been reawakened, it was time to use them on behalf of the "Hero of Appomattox." And it would be the old soldiers, the veterans who had followed Gordon into battle so often, that would serve the General again. They would act as Gordon's vanguards to victory. Grady sent word to Gordon supporters in the

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<sup>15</sup> Cooper, *History of Fulton County*, p. 834; Nixon, *Grady*, pp. 231-32; H. W. Grady to Colonel W. H. Harrison, 11 May 1886, Henry Woodfin Grady Collection, Georgia Department of Archives and History, Atlanta, Georgia; John B. Gordon to (unknown), 15 May 1886, John B. Gordon Collection, Emory University, Atlanta, Georgia.

individual counties "to station one-armed or one-legged Confederate veterans at all the crossroads to enlist the attendance of other veterans in the county at a caucus one hour before the covention opened." If this informal meeting determined that the county convention would probably select Gordon, the veterans were to proceed with the regular convention. But if, on the other hand, the Gordonites believed Bacon supporters would dominate, the old soldiers were instructed to disrupt the courthouse meetings, demand a primary, and allow Gordon time enough to canvass the county. Throughout the campaign at all political gatherings whenever Gordon spoke, maimed veterans, war widows, and orphans invariably occupied conspicuous positions. Grady's biographer stated that this tactic "created the impression that the former Confederates were unanimously behind their hero." In truth, the overwhelming majority of veterans were solidly behind Gordon. Emotional appeals to the Confederacy and wartime experiences were extraordinarily powerful devices. And as an unhappy Bacon was soon to discover, a reputation gained on the battlefield was rarely lost in politics or business.<sup>16</sup>

Gordon and Bacon discussed few substantive issues during the course of the campaign. Questions concerning Georgia's Railroad Commission, the proposed lease or sale of the state-owned Western and Atlantic Railroad, and the fate of the state's convict lease system were occasionally raised, but these issues did not provide the central focus of the contest. Beyond the debate over the advisability—or for Bacon the inadvisability—of primaries, the campaign

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16 Nixon, Grady, p. 232; Towery, "1886 Gubernatorial Campaign," pp. 81-82. The Atlanta Constitution frequently referred to the number of veterans who attended political meetings to boost the cause of Gordon. See especially 13 May 1886, when a wagon load of one-legged Confederate veterans appeared at a Gordon rally in Americus with a banner, "'One Leg only, but Will Get There All the Same.'" Also, the May and June issues of the paper literally abound with touching stories regarding Gordon's participation in the war.

revolved around the effort of the Bacon camp to "prove that General Gordon had been such a complete failure in both public and private life" that he was unworthy of Georgians' trust as governor. Bacon and his followers inaugurated and sustained a vicious, vituperative assault upon Gordon's honesty, integrity, and ability. An examination of virtually any Georgia newspaper between May and July 1886 reveals unmistakably this thrust of the Bacon campaign. His villification of his opponent dictated the tone of the campaign and forced Gordon to answer Bacon's charges by retaliating in kind.<sup>17</sup>

Nowhere was this more evident than at the "joint discussions" between the two candidates in late May. Seeking, as he put it, "the opportunity of meeting the people face to face and of giving them the fullest information on all the issues involved in the campaign," Bacon proposed that a speaking tour be arranged. Gordon accepted the proposal and a series of joint meetings began at Eatonton on 17 May. Five others, at Sparta, Augusta, Lexington, Greensboro, and Conyers, took place on each succeeding day.<sup>18</sup> Only these six were held because Bacon's supporters became so bitterly abusive of Gordon that the state Democratic committee reluctantly recommended a cessation of such joint meetings. Nevertheless, Bacon and his followers continued to villify the General with unrelenting fury. Old charges that Gordon had been a paid handmaiden of the railroad interests and that he had betrayed Georgians' trust by resigning his Senate post again surfaced. Similarly, Gordon's affiliation with the "Atlanta ring" and his involvement in the convict lease system served as major points of

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17 Towery, "1886 Gubernatorial Campaign," pp. 8-11, 42.

18 Although the organized tour included only these six meetings, Gordon and Bacon also met at Leesburg, Cuthbert, and Albany prior to Eatonton. Atlanta Constitution, 15 May - 17 May 1886.

criticism. Gordon's opponents, as if to provide a capstone for their assaults, also pounded away at his abysmal business record and questioned whether a man of such dubious financial ability could be entrusted with Georgia's fiscal well-being. Whatever validity these charges may have possessed was obscured and all but eviscerated by the malicious tone of this assault upon the most popular man in all of Georgia.<sup>19</sup>

Still, Gordon certainly did not enjoy the admiration of all Georgians. Patrick Walsh and J. F. Hanson, editors of the Augusta Chronicle and the Macon Telegraph, respectively, violently assailed Gordon. Their opposition to the "Atlanta ringster," however, paled in comparison with that of Gordon's most persistent nemeses, the Feltons. Doctor and Mrs. Felton renewed their war upon "the Artful Dodger" with a vengeance that exceeded even Bacon's. Writing under the pen-name, "Plain Talk," Mrs. Felton sent letters and articles to numerous newspapers and even published these exposes in a pamphlet, General J. B. Gordon as a Financier and Statesman. She reveled in referring to her hated foe as "a fourth rate lawyer" and "a political gymnast". And in the wake of the Gordon camp's evocation of his martial glory, or as she styled it, "military slush joined to political gush," she took great pains to point out to Georgians that they were electing a governor, not a general. Whenever campaigning for Bacon, Doctor Felton matched his wife's undying enmity and flatly declared he would not support Gordon for governor even if nominated. Doctor and Mrs. Felton's barbs unquestionably irritated their enemies and delighted their allies, but, as her biographer concluded, "they won few votes for Bacon among the Veterans, or

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<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 11 May, 19 May - 23 May 1886; Ward, "Georgia Under the Bourbons," pp. 184-85; Towery, "1886 Gubernatorial Campaign," pp. 42, 69-72. Towery's Chapter III, "General Gordon Answer His Critics," discusses at length the rhetoric and nature of this bitter campaign by focusing on Bacon's charges and Gordon's answers and countercharges.

among their sons reared in the Confederate tradition." Bacon and his supporters were sowing an evil seed that would soon bear a bitter fruit.<sup>20</sup>

This reliance upon personal slander proved a particularly flawed strategy. On the stump and in print, Gordon and Grady met the opposition's savage thrusts and repelled them with the skill of master duelists.<sup>21</sup> Gordon dismissed charges that he had used the Senate to enrich himself as ludicrous and maintained that he left Washington poorer than when he had arrived. He reiterated that he resigned his office when satisfied that his mission there had been accomplished, and then he continued service to the state after entering the railroad business. Whenever his departure from the Senate came up, Gordon masterfully turned the resignation controversy back upon his opponent. He slyly inquired about Bacon's resignation from active duty in the Confederate army in 1862, owing to illness, and effectively contrasted their war records, when he asked, "where was this gentleman who argues that I laid down office for personal gain? Where was he from '62 to '65?" The answer was obvious—while Gordon had braved the fire of battle, Bacon had remained safe and secure behind the

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20 Towery, "1886 Gubernatorial Campaign," pp. 82-88; John E. Talmadge, Rebecca Latimer Felton: Nine Stormy Decades (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1966), pp. 82-85; Atlanta Constitution, 4 June 1886; Mrs. William H. Felton, My Memoirs of Georgia Politics (Atlanta: Index Printing Co., 1911), p. 625, chapter "The Gordon-Bacon Campaign," *passim*. Both the Doctor William Harrell Felton and Mrs. Rebecca A. Latimer Felton Collection and the Rebecca Latimer Felton Collection (University of Georgia, Athens, Georgia) contain numerous anti-Gordon letters written in May and June 1886 which concern the gubernatorial campaign. See particularly, T. J. Simmons to W. H. Felton, 28 June 1886, Dr. and Mrs. Felton Collection, UGA; A. O. Bacon to W. H. Felton, 15 May 1886, *ibid.*; M. R. Tunno to W. H. Felton, 26 July 1886, *ibid.*; D. B. Harrell to W. H. Felton, 24 May 1886, Felton Collection, UGA; Felton, Memoirs, pp. 631-33. Also, Mrs. Felton's Plain Talk pamphlet can be found in her collection.

21 Gordon and Grady were ably assisted by a number of fine speakers. Former governor James M. Smith, Dupont Guerry, Colonel Albert Cox and Colonel W. C. Glenn, all spoke effectively and convincingly in the General's behalf. Towery, "1886 Gubernatorial Campaign," pp. 88-89.

lines serving in the Commissary. In the same manner, the General rebuffed "ring" charges by relying on his support of and Bacon's opposition to primaries as sufficient evidence of who was truly a ring candidate. Thus, the resort to abusive character assassination, in many instances, boomeranged on Bacon.<sup>22</sup>

Gordon responded with similar effect to questions about his record as a convict lessee and as a remarkably unsuccessful businessman. He freely admitted his previous involvement with the system of convict labor. He explained that the state's impoverishment at the war's end made the leasing of prisoners for labor "a valuable temporary expedient to care for these men until the white voters of Georgia" could regain control of their own affairs. Gordon did not apologize for leasing convicts because he "believed it to be the best system to use at the time." However, "[W]hen the usefulness of the system had passed I sought to end my connections with the lessee interests, and was finally able to do so" legally by 1883. For Gordon, the system had served a vital purpose, but now that its "baneful effects" outweighed any positive benefits, he promised to work toward its abolition if elected. Gordon discussed his well-chronicled failure as a businessman with a forthrightness that silenced many of his critics. In one speech, he frankly declared, "It is true that nearly all of the business enterprises with which I was connected failed for one reason or another, but [to answer all claims of impropriety on his part] I assure you I was not the monetary beneficiary of any of these failures." Gordon never squarely addressed the most important consideration--whether he was capable of managing the

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<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 44-48, 60-64; *Atlanta Constitution*, 13 May, 14 May, 20 May, 31 May 1886. Although these specific dates have been cited, almost every issue of the *Constitution* in May and early June--either in its coverage of Gordon's speaking engagements or in Grady's pointed editorials--boldly presented the General's arguments. This is particularly true in the reporting of the "joint discussions." *Atlanta Constitution*, 19 May - 23 May 1886.

state's finances prudently—but few seemed to notice. In spite of admitting that his business career left much to be desired, Gordon evidently managed to arrest fears concerning his financial responsibility. By the end of the campaign, most Georgia Democrats found his answers and explanations satisfactory.<sup>23</sup>

Gordon spoke in almost every county during the campaign in an effort to present his case to the people. Except in hotbeds of Bacon support, the General successfully blunted his opponent's criticisms, thereby enabling him to overcome Bacon's early lead and organizational advantages. Following the first major round of delegate selections in early June, Gordon had drawn almost even. Later in the month after another large number of counties voted, he took the lead and began pulling away, so that by early July, the campaign for all intents and purposes was over. When the state convention assembled on 28 July in Atlanta, Gordon secured the necessary majority on the first ballot, garnering 252 votes to Bacon's 70. A move to make his nomination unanimous proved unsuccessful, but Gordon, nonetheless, amassed 322 of the 332 votes cast and thus became the Democratic nominee. And in a state where "nomination had become tantamount to election," there was no doubt Gordon would be Georgia's next governor. Gordon ran unopposed in the October general election.<sup>24</sup>

The path to victory had been charted by an able navigator, Henry Grady.

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<sup>23</sup> Towery, "1886 Gubernatorial Campaign," pp. 53-57, 64-67; Atlanta Constitution, 12 May, 21 May, 6 June, 24 June 1886; Marietta Journal, 18 July 1886, quoted in Towery, "1886 Gubernatorial Campaign," p. 66. See also Atlanta Constitution, May - July 1886, passim.

<sup>24</sup> Towery, "1886 Gubernatorial Campaign," pp. 36, 76-79, 90-97; Atlanta Constitution, 7 July, 29 July, 6 October, 7 October 1886; Ward, "Georgia Under the Bourbons," p. 188; Journal of the House of Representatives of the State of Georgia, 1886, pp. 46; Journal of the Senate of the State of Georgia, 1886, p. 49.

The bold emergence of Gordon as a candidate, the skillful use of the primary election issue, and the effective utilization of the General's greatest strengths all provide evidence of Grady's steady, guiding hand. Reliance upon Gordon's personal magnetism and his natural speaking ability allowed him to harness the powerful emotional commitment to the Confederacy. Gordon became the "Very Embodiment of the Lost Cause" for many Georgians, and especially for the veterans. As a result, Bacon's campaign of slander, as a student of the contest concluded, "proved an utter failure and served only to arouse in the supporters of Gordon a determination to swing the tide of victory for their candidate." Bacon's failure to destroy Georgians' faith in the integrity and honesty of Gordon actually gained the General even greater support. The Atlanta Evening Capitol echoed this sentiment when it declared that Gordon's "whole life gives the denial to such a charge, and the accusation will continue to rally, as it has drawn to him, the masses of people in its indignant repudiation." Perhaps, the most succinct, yet astute analysis of the campaign came from the Savannah Morning News, when it wrote that Gordon's victory was rooted in "the skill of his managers, the abuse heaped upon him by his opponents and, more than all, his record as a soldier." Gordon was and would remain the most popular man in Georgia. His banner, once darkened by the smoke of battle, could not be tarnished by slanderous political rhetoric.<sup>25</sup>

Gordon's inauguration took place on 9 November 1886 in a light rain at the State Capitol in Atlanta. In his brief inaugural address, Gordon concentrated on what he considered at that time the greatest danger facing Georgia and all

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<sup>25</sup> Towery, "1886 Gubernatorial Campaign," pp. 98-99, 101-02; Nixon, Grady, pp. 234-35; Savannah Morning News, 8 July 1886, quoted in Ward, "Georgia Under the Bourbons," p. 187; Atlanta Evening Capitol, 29 June 1886; Atlanta Constitution, 23 May, 12 June 1886.

other states. He feared the states' steady loss of "constitutional vigor or power of self-preservation . . . by gradual accretions to federal power and imperceptible absorption of state functions." This distressing trend toward centralization had to be reversed because he believed the "freest government is that which is not controlled by homogeneous communities; and the strongest government for a country like ours is that which devolves upon the states the largest responsibilities." In addition to this reechoing of Jeffersonianism, Gordon urged his fellow Georgians to develop their industrial concerns, to promote agriculture, and to make broad and practical education "an object of universal concern." The gala festivities surrounding Gordon's induction into office resumed after his speech and culminated with a banquet and military ball that evening. Former president Rutherford B. Hayes, attending the inauguration of the southerner who so often aided his administration, recorded the prevailing excitement: "Balls, parties, processions. A wide-awake time indeed."<sup>26</sup>

Gordon's elevation to chief executive of Georgia represented the "Bourbon Triumvirate's" rule of Georgia at its height. With Colquitt and Joe Brown in the United States Senate and Gordon in the Governor's mansion, the three most powerful positions in Georgia politics were securely in the hands of the leading Conservative Democrats. Independentism which had been in decline in Georgia since the early 1880s was for all intents and purposes dead as a significant political force. The political calm that had existed in Georgia prior to Gordon's dramatic reentry in May 1886 once again settled over the state. To be sure, protests against single-party control and opposition to the policies of the Triumvirate were not completely silenced. Disputes over local issues persisted

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<sup>26</sup> Atlanta Constitution, 10 November 1886; Charles Richard Williams, ed., Diary and Letters of Rutherford B. Hayes, 5 vols. (Columbus: Ohio State Archeological and Historical Society, 1922-1926), 4: 292.

and the developing Farmers Alliance Movement continually gained strength in the second half of the 1880s; but, as a historian of this period concluded, none of these "local skirmishes" or "family quarrels . . . was sufficient to ruffle the placidity of the Bourbon control. . . ." Relative peace prevailed in Georgia during Gordon's tenure.<sup>27</sup>

Gordon's first official act was a symbolic one. His authorization of a \$100 warrant for a Confederate soldier who had lost a leg seemed particularly appropriate because the veterans had played such a prominent role in his gubernatorial victory. The General declared "that he was glad his entry into office had been signalized by an act in the interest of one of them." On 1 December 1886, Gordon sent a special message to the General Assembly in which he considered the state's penitentiary system and agricultural interests. He briefly discussed the major criticisms of the convict lease system—probably the most troublesome being its placing "pecuniary interests in conflict with humanity"—but averred that they were not grave enough to demand wholesale change. Rather than return to the costly old scheme of incarceration or use convicts to improve state roads, Gordon proposed a plan which he thought would both improve the penal system and possibly benefit Georgia's agriculture. He called for the establishment of a state-controlled experimental farm that would be worked by thirty or forty convicts. This minimal investment, he contended, would provide an excellent laboratory for scientific experiments that individual farmers had neither the time nor the money to undertake. Moreover, his farm proposal would eliminate walled incarceration, confine convicts yet employ them where they would not compete with free labor, restore control of prisoners to

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27 Kenneth Coleman, ed., *A History of Georgia* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1977), p. 222; Ward, "Georgia Under the Bourbons," p. 189.

the state, and make the system self-sustaining, if not in fact, profitable. Despite the apparent merits of Gordon's plan, the General Assembly did not enact such a program.<sup>28</sup>

Within two weeks, however, Gordon delivered additional messages concerning the convict lease system—one to the House detailing the history of the system and another to the Senate providing requested information plus recommending "careful investigations" of convict camps and "sworn reports" by impartial observers. This emphasis upon penal concerns early in his administration set the tone for much of Gordon's first year in office. It was ironic that Gordon, one of the original lessees of Penitentiary Company No. 2, would devote so much attention to convict lease matters.<sup>29</sup> Several plans for reforming the system were presented and debated in the legislature, but none attracted the attention or interest as that of a special investigation conducted by Gordon in the fall of 1887. After receiving two anonymous letters in late August that charged Camp Bingham officers with dispensing cruel and inhumane punishment, the Governor sent the Principal Keeper of the Penitentiary, Colonel John R. Towers, and the Principal Physician, Doctor Willis F. Westmoreland, to the Spalding County convict camp.<sup>30</sup>

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28 Atlanta Constitution, 11 November, 25 November, 2 December 1886; Minutes of the Executive Department, 1886-1890, 1 December 1886, Georgia Department of Archives and History, Atlanta, Georgia (hereafter cited as Executive Minutes). See also Journal of the Senate, 1886, pp. 215-21; Journal of the House, 1886, pp. 296-302.

29 See Chapter VII

30 Journal of the House, 1886, pp. 412-16; Journal of the Senate, 1886, pp. 332-33; Executive Minutes, 10 December, 15 December 1886; Executive Order Books, 1886-1890, 30 November 1886, Georgia Department of Archives and History, Atlanta, Georgia (hereafter cited as Executive Order Books); Governor's Incoming Correspondence, 1886-1890, 15 December 1886, Georgia Department of Archives and History, Atlanta, Georgia (hereafter cited as Incoming Correspondence); Atlanta Constitution, 26 August 1886.

During the preceding month, Gordon, acting under the recommendations of Towers and Westmoreland had ordered that a camp in Richmond County be broken up unless certain evils were remedied. When one of the lessees complained, Gordon wrote a letter exonerating him of any personal culpability. More importantly though, this letter clearly explained Gordon's perception of his responsibilities as chief executive. "So long as the present system of leasing out prisoners to individuals and corporations shall exist," he wrote, "all the protective agencies furnished by our laws must be supported and all the restraining regulations must be enforced by the Executive." In other words, he felt compelled not only to enforce court-determined penalties but to protect as best he could the convicts from excessive punishment or labor. Questions testing the strength of Gordon's convictions came to the fore even as he penned these words.<sup>31</sup>

In August, after receiving preliminary reports from Towers and Westmoreland that confirmed the filthy conditions of the camp as well as the brutal beating of four black convicts, Gordon removed Camp Bingham's whipping boss, C. C. Bingham. He also issued a second executive order, instructing that legal prosecution of Bingham be initiated, that suits to recover damages for cruelty to the prisoners be brought against Companies No. 2 and No. 3, and that both companies appear before him on 1 September "to show cause why their contracts with the state for the lease of convicts should not be annulled and cancelled." In addition, Gordon immediately sent a special observer to Spalding County to serve as a watchdog on his behalf. Having taken these actions, he

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<sup>31</sup> Executive Minutes, 27 July 1887; Governor John B. Gordon Letterbooks, 1886-1890, 13 August, 23 August 1887, Georgia Department of Archives and History, Atlanta, Georgia (hereafter cited as Governor Gordon's Letterbooks).

informed a reporter that "I shall hold the strong arm of the state between the convicts and such treatment at any cost and at any hazard."<sup>32</sup>

Public hearings into the convict lease system began on 1 September. Objections from defense attorneys that Gordon's original connection with Company No. 2 disqualified him as the presiding officer were considered, but dismissed by the Attorney General. The chief law enforcement officer of the state attended all sessions and served as the Governor's legal advisor. Thus Gordon chaired this inquiry which broadened far beyond the incidents at the two camps in the summer of 1887; it developed into the most thorough examination of Georgia's penal system ever conducted. With the state's reputation at stake and with the pecuniary interests of the lessees in jeopardy, Gordon devoted most of September to these questions of "utmost importance." Following final arguments by both sides in early October, Gordon adjourned the investigation, thanking all the participants and promising to deliver his verdict as soon as possible.<sup>33</sup>

Gordon did not render his judgment until 8 November 1887. A particularly difficult problem for him was what would the state do if he voided the leases and the prisoners were returned to its care. Funds necessary to provide for the convicts had not been appropriated, nor had provisions been made

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<sup>32</sup> Incoming Correspondence, 26 August 1887; Executive Minutes, 25 August, 31 August 1887; Governor Gordon's Letterbooks, 25 August 1887; Atlanta Constitution, 26 August, 28 August 1887.

<sup>33</sup> Atlanta Constitution, 2 September - 6 October 1887, *passim*; see also 9 October 1887; Ward, "Georgia Under the Bourbons," pp. 428-29. With the exception of Sundays, a delay to allow the defense time to prepare its case, and ten days when Gordon attended the Constitutional Centennial in Philadelphia, the investigation into the convict lease system met every day from 1 September to 5 October. If the terms of his 1876 contract with the state still legally bound him in some manner, Gordon as governor was in effect suing himself as a lease holder in Company No. 2. Opponents, particularly those associated with the Feltons, quickly picked up on this interesting fact. Charles L. Bartlett to Mrs. Felton, 4 December 1886, Dr. and Mrs. Felton Collection, UGA.

for entering into new contracts. And though closely counseled by the state attorney general, Gordon could not be absolutely certain that he even had the right to cancel the convict contracts. So despite evidence of periodic mistreatment and frequent overworking of prisoners, there simply did not seem to be a practical way to nullify the leases. These considerations must have worn heavily on Gordon because when he announced his decision he attempted to steer a prudent course between appearing to condone the brutal actions of some camps and revoking outright the leases on state convicts. Gordon forcefully asserted that the governor did have the right to cancel the leases for any number of abuses, including unreasonable or oppressive labor, unauthorized subletting and excessive brutality. Although he determined that the lessees of the penitentiary companies were not personally responsible for any misdeeds, they, nevertheless, were strictly accountable for the actions of their subordinates. Violations of the terms of their contracts and occasionally cruel and inhumane treatment of the prisoners had taken place, but Gordon concluded that such abuses were not of sufficient number or seriousness to justify rescinding the leases at the present. Consequently, his only punishment of Companies No. 2 and No. 3 was separate fines for cruelty amounting to \$2,500 on each. Despite his rather light sentence, Gordon did threaten that future violations would result in much more stringent penalties, perhaps even cancellation of their contracts.<sup>34</sup>

Gordon's decision unquestionably frustrated opponents of the convict lease system, but he did face a difficult dilemma. "The problem of disposing of convicts," observed a student of penology, "in such a way as to render them least troublesome and expensive to the government and, at the same time, insure them

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<sup>34</sup> Atlanta Constitution, 9 November 1887; Executive Minutes, 8 November 1887; Ward, "Georgia Under the Bourbons," pp. 429-31.

humane and proper treatment has always been a perplexing one." Abolition or wholesale reform of Georgia's established program was legally and practically almost impossible during Gordon's administration. The state had committed its convicts in binding leases until 1896 and, more importantly, had neither the plans nor the means for more conventional forms of incarceration. Nor was there any significant groundswell of public support for reformation of a system that had successfully and inexpensively kept undesirable elements away from society at large. Despite cries for more humane treatment of prisoners, few Georgians exhibited any concern whatsoever. In that sense then, Gordon's gubernatorial record as it concerned the convict lease system, wrote one Georgia historian, "was better than might have been expected from one who personally was a lessee of convicts and who so closely associated with the powerful group of men who dominated the penitentiary system."<sup>35</sup>

His decisions at this public investigation and his handling of convict matters throughout his four years as governor generally met with the approval of the public. He called for tighter state regulation of the system, more frequent visitation of the camps, and repeatedly pleaded for the establishment of a pardon board. A new commission specifically designed to handle pardons and commutations would both lighten the work load of the governor and insure that each case would have a proper hearing. Though unsuccessful on the last count, Gordon in November 1888 praised the operation of the system, particularly its decreased rates of crime, violence and mortality. And when he left office two years later, Gordon described the Georgia Penitentiary as "superior in the care of the health, and morals and comfort of its inmates to any county chain-gang in

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35 A. Elizabeth Taylor, "The Origin and Development of the Convict Lease System in Georgia," Georgia Historical Quarterly 26 (June 1942): 113; Ward, "Georgia Under the Bourbons," pp. 431-32.

the State of Georgia." Gordon may have been correct and he probably did take pride in the manner in which he handled convicts, but the convict lease system truly remained, as one historian has styled it, "the blackest chapter in the record of the Bourbon regime in Georgia." The death of this brutal and inhumane practice lay twenty years in the future.<sup>36</sup>

The investigation into the convict lease system was one of the most spectacular official happenings of his governorship; yet Gordon's involvement with national politics had forced him to delay the announcement of his decision for over a month. In mid-October, President Grover Cleveland travelled to Atlanta. As the "[F]irst democratic president that ever set foot on Georgia soil," his visit attracted as much attention as any event in recent years. Throughout the president's two day stay—a seemingly endless procession of receptions, parades, and dinners—Gordon rarely strayed far from Cleveland's side. The President had barely departed for Washington when Gordon himself ventured northward. Prominent Democrats in Ohio had long been beseeching Gordon to come to their state and speak to their citizens, but owing to his responsibilities, he had been forced to decline. However, the ending of the penal inquiry and the Ohioians' continued insistence finally convinced him to answer the call of Democracy.<sup>37</sup>

During the last week of October and the first week in November, Gordon spoke frequently to large audiences in the Buckeye State, especially in Cincinnati, Columbus and Cleveland. Even before his arrival, Ohio Republicans,

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<sup>36</sup> Executive Minutes, 7 July, 8 November 1887, 7 November 1888, 8 November 1890; Ward, "Georgia Under the Bourbons," p. 432. See also Incoming Correspondence, 5 May 1888, 2 April, 2 August 1889.

<sup>37</sup> Atlanta Constitution, 16 October - 20 October, 22 October 1887; Sue Harper Mims Scrapbook, 1876-1887, Atlanta Historical Society, Atlanta, Georgia.

particularly Governor J. B. Foraker, began assailing the southerner as a "kukluxer" who perpetuated the oppression of the black man in the South. Gordon devoted his efforts to refuting the charges of mistreatment of blacks and to repelling what he branded "unwarranted, ungracious and ungentlemanly attacks upon my character." But primarily, he exhorted his listeners "to forego the passions of the past and unite in a common purpose to promote the prosperity and exalt the greatness of our country." Although enthusiastically received and widely praised, Gordon was unable to boost the Ohio Democracy to victory as the Republicans triumphed in the elections that took place shortly after his tour. Saddened by the Republicans' resort to "bloody shirt" tactics again, Gordon undoubtedly concurred with a southern editorial at the time: "Seeking to heal the wounds of the war and to vouch for the good faith of the southern people, he [Gordon] is denounced as a traitor, a secessionist and an enemy of the union. With a message of unity and fraternity on his lips, it is charged that his hands are red with blood of innocent negroes." Such efforts to keep sectional passions and prejudices alive surely wore heavily on Gordon.<sup>38</sup>

In spite of the flurry of activity in his first year in office, Gordon's tenure as governor proved rather ordinary. Renominated in 1888, he won reelection for another two years, again without any Republican opposition. As governor, Gordon was certainly more than just a figurehead. He sent a number of special messages to the legislature, requesting specific, though minor

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<sup>38</sup> Atlanta Constitution, 28 October - 3 November, 9 November 1887; Huber W. Ellingsworth, "The Ohio Raid of General John B. Gordon," Southern Speech Journal 21 (Winter 1955): 120-26; Willie D. Halsell, ed., "Some Correspondence Between Lucius Q. C. Lamar and John B. Gordon," Georgia Historical Quarterly 28 (March 1940): 49-50. A copy of a pamphlet incorporating some of Foraker's speeches entitled Stand Up, Governor Gordon, Sit Down, Governor Gordon can be found in the Georgia Room, University of Georgia, Athens, Georgia.

legislation; he periodically reported on the condition of the state; he withheld the state's yearly allocation of funds to Atlanta University because co-education of the races was taking place in violation of the law; he dealt with the yellow fever epidemic in the summer and fall of 1888; he aided veterans whenever possible; he served as a gracious executive who brought a sense of elegance to the mansion; and he became the first governor to occupy the new State Capitol Building upon its completion in 1889. Although Gordon's biennial reports glowingly praised the prosperity of the time and cited impressive figures that seemed to indicate tremendous material and social advancement for the state, very little changed in Georgia between 1886-1890. Indeed, it is difficult to say much about Gordon's governorship because virtually nothing of importance occurred during his tenure. Minor improvements, yes, but few if any substantial accomplishments were achieved. With the exception of his investigation into the convict lease system, Gordon pursued no new directions in government. The move toward economy in government—always the watchwords of southern Conservative Democrats who regained control of their states from the Republicans after the war—continued unchecked during Gordon's governorship. The desire to curb spending dramatically inhibited governmental services and left social services and education at all levels abysmally underfunded. In his espousal of this philosophy of limited government, Gordon differed little from other southern leaders of his day. His four years in office can best be described as an interlude of calm between the turbulence of Colquitt's administrations and the agrarian turmoil of the 1890s.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Ward's "Georgia Under the Bourbons" is an excellent study of the Conservative Democratic regime in Georgia between 1872-1890. He details not only the politics of the era, but also investigates the convict lease system, agriculture, railroad policies, education, social welfare as well as the commercial, industrial and financial policies of the "Bourbons". For Gordon's governorship, see especially Executive Minutes, 1886-1890, passim.

During his governorship, Gordon engaged in a wide variety of personal activities as well. His attention to the world of business may necessarily have been restricted by his official duties, but not his interest. He and his sons continued to promote a large number of diverse enterprises--they sought to develop mining interests in north Georgia; they invested in the invention and manufacturing of a railroad coupler device; they dredged for gold in the rivers of Georgia and Florida; and they formed land and livestock companies for grazing animals. Gordon also helped establish and served as president of both a sewing-machine motor company and a firm which extracted and sold oil from cotton seeds. Clearly, his always active business mind continued to whirl as his quest for financial success went unfulfilled. In addition to these involvements and his responsibilities as governor, Gordon accepted the position as commander-in-chief of the United Confederate Veterans when it organized in June 1889. Although limited during the first few years, Gordon's commitment to the veterans' association would later expand and he would play a central role in the organization's development and success.<sup>40</sup>

As the end of his second term neared, plans were announced for Gordon to replace Senator Joe Brown who was retiring to private life in 1891. The prospect of Gordon returning to the United States Senate was not the least bit unexpected. In fact, only eight months after first capturing the governor's chair, rumors were already circulating that the General would serve two terms and then take Brown's post in Washington. But the man who had assisted Gordon in

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<sup>40</sup> Hugh H. Gordon Letterbook, 1887-1891, passim, Georgia Department of Archives and History, Atlanta, Georgia; John Brown Gordon Personal Letterbooks, 1887-1890, passim; Atlanta Constitution, 28 August, 25 September, 26 September, 13 November 1890; Proceedings of the Convention for Organization, and Adoption of the Constitution of the United Confederate Veterans, June 10th, 1889 (New Orleans: Hopkins Printing Office, 1891), p. 8.

many of his postwar business and political affairs would not again guide his actions. Henry W. Grady, at only thirty-nine, had died in 1889. Although Gordon attended Grady's funeral and later delivered a brief, but eloquent eulogy to the brilliant newspaperman, relations between the two had soured since the 1886 gubernatorial campaign. Evidently, Gordon became piqued in the aftermath of his election by reports that Grady had been "the master hand" who piloted him to victory. This estrangement grew more marked in 1888 when a movement to send Grady to the United States Senate gained strength. An "encouraging word" from Gordon might have enabled Grady to displace A. H. Colquitt as Senator, but the General withheld his assistance and, as friends of the editor charged, allowed his office to become the opposition's headquarters. The following year, Gordon wrote a blistering letter to Grady accusing him of leaking information to the family of the seriously ill Joe Brown that should he die, the Governor desired his Senate seat. Even though the letter contained "language that would make the friends of Governor Gordon blush," Grady refrained from publicly severing relations with the man he had admired so long. Even so, Grady's secretary later recalled that "'Governor Gordon's conduct hurt him [Grady] more than the outside world ever knew.'"<sup>41</sup>

This collapse of the friendship of two of Georgia's most prominent public figures reveals a darker side of Gordon's character. Although his point of view in the controversy has never been adequately aired, his silence in and of itself,

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41 Newspaper clipping, Charleston, Sunday News, 3 July 1887, Scrapbook III, p. 37, Francis Warrington Dawson I Collection, Duke University, Durham, North Carolina; Nixon, Grady, pp. 255-56, 291-96; Joel Chandler Harris, Life of Henry W. Grady including his Writings and Speeches (New York: Cassell Publishing Co., 1890), pp. 382-84; Life and Labors of Henry W. Grady (Atlanta: H. C. Hudgins and Co., 1890), pp. 82-83, 96-97; Atlanta Constitution, 18 November 1888, 21 December, 23 December - 26 December 1889, 16 November, 18 November 1890.

tends to substantiate the statements of Grady's friends. It seems certain that Gordon purposefully chose to cast the young man aside. He did so probably more because of his ego or pride than for any concrete reasons. Since his splendid military record had elevated him to heights of belovedness and popularity far beyond the reach of all other Georgians, Gordon was unaccustomed to sharing the political limelight with anyone. That same sense of self-importance or ambition that had helped make Gordon such a remarkably successful soldier would not allow him to tolerate a rival for the accolades of Georgians. The General must have considered himself the only actor worthy of occupying the centerstage of Georgia politics. Resentful of the gifted newspaperman's immense abilities or perhaps because of his fear that Grady might eclipse him in the hearts of the Georgia people, Gordon turned on the man who had provided him with such invaluable advice and guidance. Gordon's treatment of his friend, wrote one Grady intimate, "marks a tale of ingratitude which has not its parallel in the history of Georgia." This biting assessment sadly appears to be true. Gordon had abandoned Grady for a new crowd, new men who would direct his next campaign.<sup>42</sup>

As Gordon made plans to return to the national forum, he must have pondered the tremendous differences between the Congress he had served in the 1870s and the one he hoped to reenter in the 1890s. Unquestionably, much of the passion and emnity engendered by the war and Reconstruction had abated but, as his speaking tour in Ohio had proven, a willingness on the part of some to "wave the bloody-shirt" still existed. Gordon had labored tirelessly when in the Senate to extinguish the fires of sectional animosity. Indeed, the single most prominent theme prevading his post bellum career was his commitment to national

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42 Atlanta Constitution, 16 November 1890.

reconciliation. Although he had become involved in a myriad of financial and business dealings—and would continue to exhibit that adventuresome spirit of financial acquisitiveness—Gordon's final years were devoted more than ever to healing the long festering wounds of the war that had occurred over a generation earlier. In doing so, Gordon moved beyond his established reputation as southern spokesman and national statesman. He became the most outspoken and the most widely travelled proponent for national pacification during the last years of the nineteenth century.

## CHAPTER IX

### RETURN TO THE SENATE

When Joe Brown let it be known in March 1890 that he would not seek reelection to the United States Senate that November, a friend asked him who his successor would be. The enfeebled Senator, weakened by a long illness, replied, "I have never thought of but one man as likely to fill my place, and Governor Gordon is that man." To be sure, Brown and many other Georgians thought it only natural that the General move on into the national forum after his term as governor expired in October. Gordon immediately announced his candidacy and throughout most of 1890, he remained the only serious aspirant for Brown's Senate seat. However, the emergence of a vibrant, newly united force in Georgia politics soon threatened Gordon's plans.<sup>1</sup>

Impoverished by more than two decades of agricultural depression and frustratingly ensnared in the pernicious crop-lien system, farmers in Georgia and other states had begun to organize. As their efforts to ameliorate their desperate plight gained momentum, farmers entered the political arena where the Farmers' Alliance became a potent force that had to be reckoned with. By 1890, only three years after its inception in the state, the Georgia Alliance boasted 100,000 members and over 2,000 lodges. The farmers' organization so

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<sup>1</sup> Atlanta Constitution, 11 March 1890; Alex Mathews Arnett, The Populist Movement in Georgia: A View of the "Agrarian Crusade" in Light of Solid-South Politics, Economics and Public Law (New York: Columbia University, 1922), pp. 110-11.

thoroughly dominated state elections that year that it seemed as if the Alliance had swallowed up the Democratic party. With this vocal, assertive element now in the ascendancy, all politicians who wished to succeed in Georgia had to come to terms with the organization. Even the "Gallant Gordon" would have to stand the test.<sup>2</sup>

A long-time, self-professed friend and ally of the farmer, Gordon appeared to have sufficient support among Alliancemen to assure his election. However, his 20 August address to an audience composed largely of Alliancemen attending their annual state convention in Atlanta dramatically undercut Gordon's strength. In a speech sprinkled with martial analogies, Gordon referred to the Alliance and the Democratic party as "[T]wo armies with a single flag; or rather, one great army in a dual capacity, and yet holding the unity of faith." He praised the farmers' organization for "waging its special warfare within the democratic lines; marshalling its forces beneath the democratic flag; and battling as democratic veterans with ancestral democratic faith for cardinal democratic principles." It was these same principles, Gordon maintained, that had guided him throughout his public career in his struggles to provide for the prosperity and well-being of all the people. He asserted that despite the numerous obstacles lying along the reform path charted by the Alliance, success could be attained. But he stressed, above all else, that the triumph of Alliance-

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2 E. Merton Coulter, A Short History of Georgia (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1933), pp. 369-71; Kenneth Coleman, ed., A History of Georgia (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1977), pp. 295-96; Judson Clements Ward, Jr., "Georgia Under the Bourbon Democrats, 1872-1890," (Ph.D. dissertation, University of North Carolina, 1947), pp. 191-94, 196; James C. Bonner, "The Alliance Legislature of 1890," in James C. Bonner and Lucien E. Roberts, eds., Studies in Georgia History and Government (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1940), pp. 159-60, 163; Lewis Nicholas Wynne, "The Alliance Legislature of 1890," (M.A. thesis, University of Georgia, 1970), passim; Arnett, Populist Movement in Georgia, pp. 77-100.

Democratic principles would be realized only through organization, organization firmly rooted in conservative leadership and a broad-based unity embracing all classes and all sections. Clearly, Gordon was attempting to forestall the divisiveness that would eventually lead to the formation of a third party.<sup>3</sup>

Although it may have seemed strange, it was for precisely that reason--or for the threat to a united organizational front--that Gordon revealed his opposition to a major plank in the Alliance platform, the subtreasury plan. This program involved an arrangement whereby farmers could store non-perishable produce in government warehouses and graneries at minimum cost. Then, based upon the value of those crops, they could borrow money from the government at a low rate of interest. This system would allow the farmers to stagger the marketing of their produce, thus preventing a glutting of the market and the accompanying decline in prices. Quickly capturing the imagination of many farmers, the subtreasury plan represented in their minds a panacea for the ills besetting the agrarian sector. More importantly, the plan rapidly became the single standard whereby many farm leaders measured all people, Alliance and non-Alliance alike. That is why Gordon's announcement had the effect of an exploding bombshell.<sup>4</sup>

Gordon cited the distressing tendency of some farmers to focus solely on the subtreasury plan as his main reason for opposing the proposal. In addition to believing that it would not provide the relief farmers sought, he expressed his

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3 Atlanta Constitution, 23 July, 25 July, 21 August 1890.

4 Ibid., 21 August 1890; Lawrence Goodwyn, Democratic Promise: The Populist Movement in America (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976), pp. 166-71; John D. Hicks, The Populist Revolt: A History of the Farmers' Alliance and the People's Party (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1981; Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1931), pp. 186-204; Bonner, "Alliance Legislature," pp. 160-62.

fears that reliance upon a single standard for determining party loyalty could be disastrous for the Democratic party and the Alliance. He warned farmers, "You cannot afford to pin your destinies to any one programme or cast all your future in any one specific boat, which may be engulfed and lost." Gordon contended that the subtreasury plan was far too controversial, even among Georgians, to serve as the bulwark for party support. Unity of purpose and strength in numbers were, for Gordon, more effective means of improving the farmers' lot. By concentrating on electing Allancemen and Alliance supporters, Gordon assured farmers that they could dominate the legislative process and enact the laws and measures necessary to effect relief. Unity and organization, more than any specific measure, would open the road to success, or so Gordon believed.<sup>5</sup>

Although the tone and intended thrust of Gordon's speech was markedly sympathetic and solicitous of the cause of the Alliance, few Allancemen at the time saw beyond his opposition to the subtreasury plan. A roar of indignation arose immediately from many of the delegates. Gordon's position quickly became the major topic of discussion that evening and also during the following day's session of the convention. The unanimous endorsement of the plan by the Georgia Alliance that day heightened the sense of a developing confrontation. Some believed Gordon's bold stance would insure his election but most insisted that the General had sealed his own doom with his declaration against the plan. Nonetheless, as discussion about what effect Gordon's speech would have on his Senate chances increased, one point became abundantly clear. In the words of one Allanceman, "It makes certain . . . that he will have a straightout subtreasury opponent for the senate." With his hopes of running unopposed

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5 Atlanta Constitution, 21 August 1890.

dashed, Gordon again faced the prospect of another fight for his political life.<sup>6</sup>

Speculation as to who would oppose the General abounded, but opponents were slow in presenting themselves. Even though he refused to declare himself a candidate, Thomas M. Norwood, soon emerged as the most likely opponent. And by mid-September, he and Gordon were engaged in a heated exchange of public letters and verbal barbs, leaving no doubt that the ensuing campaign would be filled with rancor and bitterness. In spite of the extremely harsh words that passed between them, Norwood delayed announcing his candidacy until mid-October. His decision, as well as those of several others who entered the contest soon thereafter, was probably influenced by the stunning victory of the Alliance in the state elections on 1 October. Winning the governor's chair and almost eighty percent of the seats in the legislature, the Farmers' Alliance assumed a commanding position. Gordon and the other Senate hopefuls—Judge James K. Hines, H. J. Hammond, Patrick Calhoun and Norwood—all actively courted the farmers' votes. Even so, during the course of the campaign, Gordon often crossed swords with prominent national and state leaders of the Alliance. Irked by the General's opposition to the subtreasury plan, they issued strident calls for his defeat. As a result, Gordon increasingly accused Alliance leaders of misquoting and misrepresenting him for their own personal advantage. In doing so, Gordon generated substantial opposition outside of Georgia as well as within the state.<sup>7</sup>

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6 *Ibid.*, 21 August, 22 August 1890.

7 *Ibid.*, 24 August, 26 August, 30 August, 7 September, 13 September, 14 September, 16–18 September, 20 September, 22 September, 25 September, 26 September, 5 October, 9 October, 11 October 1890; Arnett, *Populist Movement in Georgia*, pp. 105, 116–20; C. Vann Woodward, *Tom Watson: Agrarian Rebel* (New York: Macmillan Co., 1930), pp. 162–63; Bonner, "Alliance Legislature," pp. 163–65; Burton Smith to Frank Gordon, 31 October 1890, Hoke Smith

Even before opposition crystallized and opponents emerged, Gordon had taken to the stump to plead his case. He spoke throughout the state in the two-and-one-half months preceding the mid-November election. Whether in front of county suballiances, or in an open circular letter to the people of Georgia, or before the newly elected Georgia legislature which would decide the Senate race, Gordon focused over and over on several main themes. He consistently portrayed himself as an ardent, life-long friend of the farmer. He had joined the Georgia Agricultural Society at twenty and since then had become a member of every farmers' organization to which he could be admitted, including the Grange. Gordon contended that he had always supported efforts by the "tillers of the soil" to organize. Now he felt that his long cherished hope had at last been realized with the establishment of the Farmers' Alliance. Gordon also maintained that he had unwaveringly championed the cause of the agrarian sector from his earliest days in the Senate. Styling himself as just another soldier who had long served in the ranks of the agrarian army, the General reiterated that his enemies were the same as the farmers. High tariffs, national banks, restrictions on silver, contraction of currency, and all other measures which imposed unequal burdens on farmers were their common foes. Gordon insisted, "I have been as consistent and persistent in my defense of those principles [of the Alliance] . . . as any man living. . . . I have defended those principles for a long series of years, and under circumstances which make it impossible for any fair-minded man to doubt

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Collection, University of Georgia, Athens, Georgia (hereafter cited as Smith Collection, UGA). The Samuel Houston Brodnax Collection, Duke University, Durham, North Carolina, contains numerous farmers' letters of opposition to Gordon. See especially W. L. Peek to Brodnax, 2 October 1890; J. H. Stewart to Brodnax, 11 October 1890; G. R. Brown to Brodnax, 11 October 1890, N. J. Day to Brodnax, 12 October 1890; N. H. Grumter to Brodnax, 15 October 1890; M. K. Bennett to Brodnax, 16 October 1890; (author unknown) to Brodnax, 20 October, 30 October 1890.

my sincerity or question my motives."<sup>8</sup>

Gordon explained that his refusal to endorse a major plank in the Alliance program stemmed not from opposition to the farmers' movement, but from the harm he believed would be "caused by making the endorsement of the subtreasury bill a test of democratic fealty." Having detected substantial opposition to the plan within the Georgia Democracy, he again voiced his fear that internal dissension "would not only threaten the integrity of the democratic party, but would assuredly defeat some of the alliance candidates, and bring serious embarrassment to the alliance cause in Georgia." The possibility that the newly developed strength of the farmers' organization would be dissipated made it imperative that he speak out: "I knew full well that silence on my part meant unanimous election to the senate but . . . I could not afford to be silent and see unauthorized tests applied which were separating democrats, and which, if persisted in, must rend the party in twain, and drive from the alliance cause throughout the union millions of votes."<sup>9</sup>

Gordon's objections to the subtreasury scheme seem sincere. Had he remained silent on the issue, his election, as he asserted, would have been virtually guaranteed. However, his belief that the program would not work and his insistence that reliance upon a single issue would divide and harm the cause compelled him to voice his opposition. Still, as he reemphasized constantly, his failure to endorse the plan did not make him an enemy of the Alliance. To the contrary, he appealed to the farmers, "you are firing at the wrong man. Turn your guns on the enemy!" For Gordon, it was ironic, almost tragic, that the

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<sup>8</sup> Atlanta Constitution, 31 August, 3 September, 13 September, 14 September, 11 October, 19 October, 11 November 1890.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 3 September 1890.

cause for which he maintained he had labored so long and so earnestly—an effective farmers' organization—might be the instrument of his defeat. In a speech delivered to the Alliance-dominated legislature one week before the election, Gordon protested, "Call me a traitor to the south, to my country, to my church and to society, but don't put your vote against me upon the pretense that I am not a friend of the Farmers' Alliance."<sup>10</sup>

Gordon, as he had done so often before, relied heavily on the support of his former comrades in arms. And because many of the members of the Farmers' Alliance were veterans of the war, the rekindling of memories of the Confederacy proved especially effective. Whenever he spoke, the aging General shamelessly appealed to those fond remembrances of Confederate service that few individuals wished to forget. Not only did he repeatedly refer back to the days when he commanded many of his listeners, but he also couched his arguments in martial terms or employed military analogies to emphasize his points. All of these references were carefully calculated to draw back into the Democratic fold those veterans considering political alternatives more directly addressing their economic distress. Gordon told his audiences that even though he certainly wanted to win, the loss of political office would not particularly trouble him; however, the "keenest pang would be the consciousness that among those who dealt the blow were my confederate comrades in the alliance brotherhood acting under leadership of men who never shared with them the dread fortunes of war." He refused to believe that those brave veterans, whom he styled "the Old Guard of the confederate army," would turn against him.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 3 September, 11 November 1890.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 3 September, 11 November 1890; Bonner, "Alliance Legislature," pp. 164-65. See virtually any of Gordon's speeches during the campaign because they were all loaded with martial references, *Atlanta Constitution*, September-mid November 1890, *passim*.

If his appeals as the "farmers best friend" and as "the man who led you into battle" were not enough, Gordon also touched another particularly sensitive nerve. He implored Democrats, both in and out of the Alliance, to remember that "the integrity of your party is essential to the continued supremacy of the white race in Georgia," which, in turn, was essential "to the security of your property and the safety of your homes." Bitter memories of Republican-imposed Reconstruction, when federal troops occupied the South and the spectre of black equality threatened the established social order, still haunted many white southerners. Fears of renewed federal intrusion into the affairs of southern states had been revived only weeks earlier when discussion of the "Force bill"—a proposal to provide supervision of Federal elections in the South in order to protect black voting rights—occupied headlines throughout the South. His efforts to capitalize on revitalized racial fear demonstrated Gordon's willingness to employ all of the weapons at his disposal in his quest for the Senate.<sup>12</sup>

As the campaign drew to a close, the outcome seemed to be in serious doubt. A major element of that uncertainty stemmed from the phenomenal success of Alliance candidates in the October state elections. Rumors and speculation about how the "Farmers' Legislature" would handle the old warrior generated intense excitement as both houses convened on 18 November. Earlier in the week, the Atlanta Constitution—no longer a supporter of Gordon primarily because of his falling out with Henry Grady—had announced that Patrick Calhoun had already gained the endorsement of a majority of the legislature and thus would be elected. In spite of Calhoun's extensive railroad connections, the Constitution believed that his strong endorsement of the subtreasury plan would win the nomination for him. Supporters of Norwood likewise appeared confident.

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 3 September 1890.

Although accounts of the voting reported that "it is doubtful if ever again such an exciting election will be held," the drama proved short-lived. On the first ballot, Gordon won a clear majority in the Senate and after some hasty vote-switching, gained a slim majority in the House as well. His consolidated total stood at one hundred twenty-two, to Norwood's forty-three, to Calhoun's twenty-five, to Hines' thirteen, with the remaining ten votes divided by two other candidates. Garnering votes from throughout the state, Gordon won a clear-cut, though narrow victory. According to one account, "[F]or a quarter of an hour the din of applause was deafening." His election set off a wild celebration which carried over well into the night. Indeed, it seemed to the Constitution as if even the supporters of the defeated candidates were happy. The following morning's edition of the paper saluted the Senator-elect and pledged its "hearty support" to him. Assuring its readers that Georgia's interests were truly safe with Gordon, the paper urged all Georgians to forget past differences and to rally around him "in the good old-fashioned democratic way."<sup>13</sup>

Even with his unmistakable business orientation and questionable claim as a true friend of the farmer, Gordon managed to win a Senate seat at the hands of a farmer-dominated legislature. To explain his remarkable success merely as the duping of political novices or as the machiavellian machinations of a political animal is simplistic and of little value. Although Gordon probably considered himself a genuine friend of farmers, he was by no means a bonafide spokesman for them. His postwar career leaves no doubt that his economic philosophy revolved more around the business and industry of the New South than

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<sup>13</sup> Atlanta Constitution, 14 November, 16 November, 18 November, 19 November 1890; Bonner, "Alliance Legislature," pp. 164-65; Journal of the House of Representatives of the State of Georgia, 1890, pp. 203-06, 217; Journal of the Senate of the State of Georgia, 1890, pp. 113-14, 121-22; Arnett, Populist Movement in Georgia, pp. 116-18.

the staple crop agriculture which dominated the Old South. Why or how then did he succeed in the face of marked agrarian opposition? Quite simply, in spite of all the controversy surrounding him in his postwar career and in spite of non-agrarian inclinations, Gordon retained his firm hold on the affections of Georgians.

The years in which he gained his fame and earned the confidence and respect of his fellow southerners were almost three decades in the past, but most Georgians still adored and trusted him. Just as in 1873 when one veteran characterized Gordon as one of the very few men you could "shut your eyes and go it blind on," an Allianceman in 1890 claimed, "We have all sorts of plans, and we can change 'em, and fix 'em up any way we please, but we've got only one Gordon." Or as another farmer explained, "I am for Gordon as well as the subtreasury plan, [but] I am for Gordon first. . . ." These sentiments were not isolated because many of the Alliancemen were "for Gordon on any sort of a platform." Whether donning the soiled, sweat-soaked overalls of a tenant farmer, or stuffing himself into faded, blood-stained gray uniform he had worn during the war, or even figuratively pulling on the robes and vestments of the Klan, Gordon remained Georgia's most beloved figure.<sup>14</sup>

The Senate that he joined in December 1891 differed significantly

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<sup>14</sup> Atlanta Constitution, 14 January 1873, 31 August 1890; Arnett, Populist Movement in Georgia, p. 120; Woodward, Watson, p. 163; Gordon to C. C. Jones, 28 November 1890, John B. Gordon Papers, Emory University, Atlanta, Georgia. Amid substantial speculation as to his intentions, Gordon finally joined the Farmers' Alliance in January 1891. When he announced his decision to join, he reiterated that he had wanted to join the order for long time; however, owing to his candidacy for the Senate, he deferred such action because "I feared my motives might be misrepresented." Once elected in his own right, Gordon no longer worried about his actions being misinterpreted or misconstrued. New York Times, 19 January 1891; Atlanta Constitution, 11 November, 19 November, 7 December 1890; Hoke Smith to Gordon, 30 December 1890, Smith Collection, UGA.

from the one he had served in during the 1870s. Most of the heated passions that had forced Gordon to defend his native South against Radical onslaughts had passed. Even though questions concerning the reconstruction of the nation had been resolved, new and equally troublesome problems were arising. In the 1890s, agrarian discontent flourished, labor unrest abounded, the battle of monetary standards raged, and social tensions during the decade assumed frightening proportions. Amid this growing anxiety, Gordon remained extraordinarily inactive. With the exception of the period between August 1893 and July 1894, his involvement in Senate affairs was negligible, almost non-existent. Although he presented numerous petitions and resolutions on behalf of his constituents, Gordon did not play as important a role as he had during his earlier tenure. He introduced very few bills, rarely entered into debates, made only a handful of speeches and, quite simply, did very little. A number of factors undoubtedly contributed to the minor role he played in the Senate in the 1890s. His advanced age, frequent bouts with disability, new business ventures, involvement with veterans organizations and extensive lecture tours all explain in part Gordon's lackluster performance. But, most importantly, he found little of interest in Senate affairs in the 1890s. For him, the sense of excitement or urgency that animated him in battle and during Reconstruction no longer existed. And with political leadership increasingly passing into the hands of younger men, men not of Gordon's generation, only the most serious national crises could bring him out of the shadows of the Senate chamber.

His first action of any note came on 13 January 1892. He had missed the initial meeting of the Committee on Coast Defenses due to a misunderstanding, but felt compelled to voice his opposition to a bill that the committee had reported upon favorably. Although he had no objections to voting

appropriations for national defense whenever necessary, Gordon believed that "the present condition of the country and of the people" and the absence of "war clouds" made the expenditures in question unwise and inappropriate. "The burdens of taxation from which the people are suffering," he contended, posed a far greater threat than "any invasion from a foreign foe." Accordingly, he urged Congress to economize by curtailing expenditures and cutting taxes. "Let us first relieve our people, as far as we may, from the present exactions of taxation and then, when the occasion arises, look to the remote and contingent danger from outside." This rather insignificant speech basically represented the extent of Gordon's participation in the Senate until late summer 1893.<sup>15</sup>

Victories in the 1892 fall elections swept the Democrats back into control of the national government, but with the onset of the Panic of 1893, cause for celebration evaporated almost immediately. Agricultural prices plummeted, unemployment skyrocketed, and currency contracted as the economy of the nation spiraled downward, leaving the Democracy "the party of depression." With economic dislocations working ever greater hardships upon the American people, Gordon stirred from his lethargy and assumed a more active role in the Senate. It was as if he had received his call to arms. On 14 August 1893, he submitted a series of resolutions dealing expressly with the financial policies he believed should be pursued by the Fifty-third Congress. In essence, Gordon called upon his fellow Democrats (and Republicans so inclined) to honor the pledges they had made during the previous campaign—namely, to repeal of the Sherman Silver Purchase Act of 1890, to develop a sounder, more flexible currency system based on bimetallism, and to repeal the federal tax on the issue of state bank notes. And, although not specifically enumerated in his program

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<sup>15</sup> Congressional Record, 52d Cong., 1st sess., 283.

of reform, Gordon also considered a stricter sense of economy in government essential to recovery.<sup>16</sup>

Gordon wasted little time swinging into action. He introduced a bill to suspend for six months the ten percent tax on state bank issues the following day. Realizing that repeal of the tax was impractical on such short notice, Gordon nevertheless understood the urgency of increasing the amount of money in circulation, particularly at this critical juncture when the current cotton crop was about to reach market. A temporary suspension, he asserted, would allow state banks to inject hundreds of thousands of dollars into the economy which would permit the marketing of the crop. Gordon announced that the increase in circulating medium "would be equivalent to a ship of gold emptied into our markets" and would relieve "all the cotton States within a few days from the embargo now imposed by want of currency." He dismissed several criticisms of his bill and claimed that even though "[I]t is not a pancea for all our ills," its enactment "would end the panic in the South, at least, within fifteen days." Despite his plea for early action on the measure by the Finance Committee, it remained buried beneath the avalanche of proposals presented to alleviate the nation's economic woes. When he introduced a bill calling for the outright repeal of the tax during the following session, it, too, met with a similar fate.<sup>17</sup>

Gordon delivered his major address on the money question on 29 August 1893. He focused mainly on the silver issue, but began by admonishing his fellow Democrats to deliver on the promises of financial reform that had paved the way to victory. The time had come to redeem their pledges to lower the tariff, to

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16 Ibid., 53d Cong., 1st sess., 288. See also ibid., 52d Cong., 1st sess., 283.

17 Ibid., 53d Cong., 1st sess., 329-30; 53d Cong., 2d sess., 3882-83.

repeal the Sherman law, to repeal the state bank tax, and to put gold and silver on the same footing. Gordon cautioned the Senate to heed the people's demand for "the inauguration of a sound and stable but more liberal policy of finance." And as he maintained, the loudest cries of the public centered around the repeal of the Sherman Silver Purchase Act of 1890. Even though he admitted his uncertainty as to the effect the silver purchasing provision had upon the panic, Gordon observed that the "Sherman law, rightfully or wrongfully, justly or unjustly, in the public estimation is the alarming agency which has brought the chill, frozen the currents, and stifled the heart-throbs of trade." Recognizing that "[B]elief in such case is as hurtful as reality," Gordon called the immediate repeal of the act. Even "[I]f we can not at once rescue the country bodily from the dead sea of distrust in which it is drowning, let us at least lift its head above the waves it [sic] [so] it may gather breath and strength for the next struggle." Repeal then would serve as a first step in the right direction toward restoring public faith and confidence. When the Senate voted in late October, Gordon was one of only a few southerners favoring the repeal.<sup>18</sup>

Yet, even while heartily endorsing President Grover Cleveland's call for repeal of the silver purchase act, Gordon went to great lengths to insure that no one would misinterpret his position on bimetallism. Disavowal of the Sherman Act by no means signalled a reversal of his long-held conviction that the soundest monetary system had its basis in the use of both gold and silver. He proclaimed that the Senate contained no "more consistent, ardent, and sincere" friend of bimetallism than himself. Indeed, bimetallism had been, in his opinion, "the most popular, if not most potential, factor in the last campaign" as all parties had "bowed before its altar and worshipped at the common shrine."

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 53d Cong., 1st sess., 862, 1013-16, 2958; Arnett, Populist Movement in Georgia, pp. 172, 179-80.

Gordon renewed his appeal to his fellow Senators to place gold and silver on an equal footing. As he saw it, once the repeal of the silver purchase provision had broken "a rift in the clouds," the Congress could go forward "then with more light and more time for deliberation . . . in the effort to arm the country with the double strength of its two great metals, and start it once more on a broader road to increased and permanent prosperity."<sup>19</sup>

But as economic conditions worsened and social disorders grew more pronounced, Gordon turned his attention away from specific financial reforms and toward apparent threats to the system. The arrival of "Coxey's army" in Washington in May 1894 aroused concern among many legislators. Jacob S. Coxey, an Ohio Populist, had called for a march on the nation's capital to dramatize his plans for government-sponsored work relief projects for the country's unemployed. Although only about 500 followers actually reached Washington, police prevented them from entering the Capitol and arrested Coxey and several others on concocted charges. When a resolution was introduced in the Senate to establish a committee to investigate the incident, Gordon took the opportunity to look at "Coxeyism" "from a Southern standpoint." He smugly asserted that the nation could learn a valuable lesson by closely examining that movement. Appeals for relief like those of Coxey and his supporters were coming, he contended, from every section of the country save one, the South. What explained "the remarkable freedom of the South from these ill-omened agitations," he asked. Clearly, the South had not been spared poverty or unemployment and it too suffered from the same lack of currency that harassed

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<sup>19</sup> Congressional Record, 53d Cong., 1st sess., 1013-16. See also Gordon to Grover Cleveland, 23 September 1892, 15 March 1894, Grover Cleveland Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.; Arnett, Populist Movement in Georgia, pp. 167-72.

the entire country. Also the South had not gained any special benefits from the tariff, nor had southerners received bountiful subsidies from the federal government. Why then had the South—if no better off materially than the rest of the country—been exempted from such agitations?<sup>20</sup>

For Gordon, "the towering, the overshadowing reason" was the South's special sense of self-reliance, a strength southerners developed as a result of the Civil War. "Shut out from all hope of governmental relief, they learned to lean not upon the legislative arm, but upon their own right arm." Southerners, Gordon explained, did not "look upon the Government as a fostering mother from which they were to draw sustenance or obtain relief in their periods of depression." Necessity, "[T]hat most relentless of taskmasters," had taught southerners to rely on no one but themselves and their own state governments. Gordon maintained that all states could learn an important lesson from the example of the South—"decentralize, as far as may be consistent with safety, this General Government, and devolve upon the States, as far as practicable, the responsibility of dealing with these ill-advised movements which agitate and disturb communities." In his mind, the individual states and not the federal government must be empowered to deal fully with their own problems. Having reiterated his conviction that state governments were the safest repositories of their citizens' interests, he closed by renewing his call for repeal of the state bank tax. States and state banks could better address the problems facing them than Congress could.<sup>21</sup>

Less than two months later, however, Gordon found it remarkably easy

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<sup>20</sup> Congressional Record, 53d Cong., 2d sess., 4564-65.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 4565; Atlanta Constitution, 11 May 1894; See also Congressional Record, 53d Cong., 2d sess., 3882-83.

to temper his life-long, states-rights views. As the strike of the American Railway Union against the Pullman Company widened during the summer of 1894, and despite strenuous objections from Illinois governor John P. Altgeld, President Grover Cleveland ordered federal troops into the Chicago area to insure delivery of the mail. In a 9 July conference at the White House, Gordon assured the president "that his course was eminently proper and that it would be endorsed by the entire country." The Georgian also tendered his services should volunteers be necessary to suppress the disturbance. Later that day in an interview, he insisted that his sympathies had always lain with the laboring classes, but he simply would not countenance lawlessness on their part. Mob violence wherever it appeared "must be put down at any cost or the government cannot last." When asked what the result of the current crisis would be, he replied, "[B]ut one thing is certain, the law will be enforced and the public peace preserved." Clearly, Gordon supported the employment of federal force to break the strike even though Governor Altgeld resisted such intervention. An opportunity to enunciate his views more fully and clearly presented itself the next day.<sup>22</sup>

On 10 July 1894, following Populist Senator William A. Pepper's blistering attack upon the Republican and Democratic parties for their responsibility for the current disorders, Gordon rose to address both Pepper's comments and the escalating social tensions. He began by expressing his disdain for the Kansas Senator's attempt to enlist support for the Populist party by placing the blame for the "present unhappy conditions" at the doorstep of the two major parties. At a time "when our very civilization, not to say the form of government under which we live, is heaving under the might ground-swell of a great agitation,"

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<sup>22</sup> Atlanta Constitution, 10 July 1894.

Gordon indignantly proclaimed that partisan political concerns were of little consequence. If anarchy was to be averted, he ardently asserted, "we must stand now shoulder to shoulder for the enforcement of its [the nation's] laws, for the preservation of its peace, the support of its dignity, and the perpetuity of its freedom." Gordon therefore disclaimed political or sectional affiliation and instead spoke as a "lover of his country and of his whole country" because the present situation involved "not only labor and law and personal liberty, but the life of the Republic itself." Fearful that the disorder in Chicago might ignite further outbreaks of violence, he stressed the imperativeness of meeting lawlessness firmly and immediately. A warning had to be issued to those who would defy the laws. And to remove any doubt as to how the South stood on the matter, Gordon dramatically proclaimed, "[T]he men who wore the gray from 1861 to 1865, under strong convictions, will be found side by side with the men who wore the blue, following the same flag, in upholding the dignity of the Republic over which it floats, and in enforcing every law upon its statute books." He closed his brief address with a sincere wish that further bloodshed could be avoided, but felt "impelled to add that the blood which has been shed or may yet be shed is nothing as compared to the value of this Republic, and that the sons of the men who established it will save it, whatever may be the cost."<sup>23</sup>

Gordon's eloquent statement lasted barely fifteen minutes, yet even as he spoke, excitement and applause rippled through the galleries and about the floor. When he had finished, prolonged and wildly enthusiastic applause swept through the Senate chamber. Senators from both sides of the aisle converged on the Georgian with warm congratulations. Former Union generals Daniel Sickles and Newton M. Curtis remarked that Gordon's speech would "do more to quell

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<sup>23</sup> Congressional Record, 53d Cong., 2d sess., 7231-35, 7240-41.

disorder and revolution than a regiment of soldiers, sent by federal or state authorities." Editorial comments from around the nation lavishly praised Gordon for his patriotic expressions at a time when many feared that the security of the country hung in the balance. Gordon also received a large number of letters from private citizens throughout the country—particularly from the North and West—lauding his "patriotic and soul-inspiring" remarks. Some considered this speech his greatest. Certainly he uttered few, if any, more positive endorsements of the enforcement powers of the federal government.<sup>24</sup>

Shortly after his nationalistic speech and prior to the adjournment of Congress, Gordon returned to Georgia where he lent his efforts to heading off Populist inroads in his home state. At Barnesville on 25 August 1894, he delivered a lengthy speech in which he discussed the current national situation. Feeling that the worst had passed, Gordon proclaimed that only "an over-ruling providence and the democratic party" had enabled the country to weather "the most gigantic and alarming industrial upheaval of the century." He again painted the remarkable spectacle of a serene South reposing amid the anarchy that threatened from all sides. "How comforting, sustaining, and inspiring is the reflection that while these industrial and social storms have been raging around us, we of the South have been resting in peace, in safety, and comparative comfort." In addition to that splendid, well-developed sense of self-reliance that he had referred to in the Senate, Gordon also supplied another reason for the absence of disturbances in the South. He stressed that the South's strength lay in

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24 *Ibid.*, 7240-41; *Atlanta Constitution*, 11 July, 12 July 1894; *New York Times*, 11 July 1894; John F. Rudisill to Gordon, 21 July 1894, Gordon Family Collection, University of Georgia, Athens, Georgia (hereafter cited as Gordon Family Collection, UGA); N. S. Dickson to Gordon, 17 July 1894, Gordon Family Collection, UGA. A large number of resolutions, letters, and editorial clippings congratulating and praising Gordon for his 10 July speech can be found in Gordon Family Collection, UGA.

the sound conservative policies of the Democratic party. With the Populists now posing a genuine third party threat to Democratic domination, Gordon renewed his call for loyalty to the party. Just as he had done in his 1890 senatorial campaign and again during the 1892 campaigns, he decried the decision of many farmers to resort to a third political party. After discussing several Populist proposals, showing to his satisfaction the impracticality of radicalism, and stressing the potentially disastrous consequences of abandoning the conservatism of the Democracy, he confidently concluded that Georgians "will stand in solid line against all hazardous experiments in government, and, above all, against the socialistic tendencies of the populists. . . ." As long as southerners eschewed radicalism, Gordon predicted that the country would continue "on the ascending highway now open before us to unprecedented prosperity, security and peace."<sup>25</sup>

Gordon's three 1894 speeches, for all their emotional rhetoric and high-sounding platitudes, have a superficial ring to them. Make no mistake, these addresses again illustrate the dual allegiances under which Gordon had labored since entering public service in 1873. He continued to defend and promote southern interests while at the same time struggling to foster a nationalism that encompassed all sections of the country as equal partners. Yet, the apparent simplicity of the speeches—particularly those portions where he asserted that the South was devoid of social unrest—evinces a certain naivety or sense of unreality on Gordon's part. It is true that the South experienced fewer outbreaks of industrial violence and labor disorder, but that was attributable more to demographics and agricultural domination of the southern economy than self-

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<sup>25</sup> Atlanta Constitution, 26 August 1894; New York Times, 7 August 1892; Woodward, Watson, pp. 226-29; Barton C. Shaw, "The Wool-Hat Boys: A History of the Populist Party in Georgia, 1892 to 1910," (Ph.D. dissertation, Emory University, 1979), p. 89.

reliance or party loyalty. And despite the less frequent incidents of violence, the South certainly had its share of unrest in the 1890s. Gordon, however, was either unaware of these disorders or, more probably, chose to ignore them.<sup>26</sup>

Both prospects raise questions about Gordon's capacity as a Senator, especially in light of his almost total lack of involvement in national affairs during his final two-and-one-half years of service. Evidently sensing imminent danger to the nation and excited at the prospect of meaningful service, the Georgian leaped on to centerstage briefly. However, even his speeches in the summer of 1894 seem to display more concern with style and appearance rather than content and results, for once the most serious threat had passed, he again lost interest and moved off stage. Gordon was a man made for turbulent times. Probably the best explanation of his poor record in the Senate is that the aging General had become not only an elder statesman, but an elderly statesman as well. Thirty years of public life on top of four years of military service had taken their toll. Physically, he had grown increasingly infirm. Gordon was now an old man, and politics no longer held much attraction for him. It was almost as if his final burst of activity during the summer of 1894 burned him out on politics. For when he announced in June 1895 that he would not seek reelection, Gordon informed his fellow Georgians that he had reached that decision over a year earlier. In 1896, when talk of running him for vice president surfaced, as it had often during career, Gordon squelched all possibilities by proclaiming he would not accept any nomination to any political office. As he turned his attention away from the Senate and toward other concerns of more interest, Gordon seems to have lost touch with the realities of national politics as well as

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26 C. Vann Woodward, Origins of the New South, 1877-1913 (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1951; revised ed., 1971), pp. 265-69.

those of his section.<sup>27</sup>

Even so, Gordon retained his abiding commitment to nationalism, or more specifically to national reconciliation. The steady erosion of sectional animosity that each passing year had brought most assuredly gratified the man who had buried his own wartime passions at Appomattox. Much of his postwar career had been devoted to helping other Americans--northerners and southerners alike--to cleanse themselves of their hatreds for one another. Gordon's Pullman strike speech then was merely another example of his continuing efforts, but its timing and the circumstances under which it was delivered made it extremely important. The reactions of national newspapers reflect the reconciliatory benefits it afforded. The New York Telegram concluded that his effort "must go far toward convincing the country and the world that the old time lines of difference between Southern thinking and Northern thinking are at length obliterated." Speaking not as a southerner but as an American, Gordon convincingly demonstrated to the Youngstown, Ohio Telegram "that the American people are a nation and that patriotism and love for the flag now knows no North or South." Realizing that most of the war-generated bitterness had dissipated and sensing in the uneasy mood of the country a desire for stability or a reaffirmation of old values, he redoubled his efforts to heal completely those wounds still festering. Indeed, during the final decade of his life, Gordon's commitment to national pacification

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27 New York Times, 16 June 1895, 10 January 1904; Atlanta Constitution, 4 August 1896; Gordon to George Moorman, 21 November, 11 December 1891, 1 March, 15 March, 2 June 1892, United Confederate Veterans Collection, Department of Archives, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, Louisiana (hereafter cited as UCV Collection, LSU); Gordon to John C. Underwood, 1 March 1892, UCV Collection, LSU; St. Paul Pioneer Press, 21 July 1896, newspaper clipping, Gordon Family Collection, UGA; Tomlinson Fort to Joseph Wheeler, 23 December 1893, Joseph Wheeler Papers, Alabama Department of Archives and History, Montgomery, Alabama.

overshadowed all of his other activities.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> New York Telegram, 12 July 1894, Gordon Family Collection, UGA; Youngstown (Ohio) Telegram, 11 July 1894, ibid.

## CHAPTER X

### THE SOUTHERNER AS AMERICAN

During the last ten years of his life, Gordon remained extremely active in his efforts to vindicate the South and at the same time to establish a new spirit of nationalism. He did not, however, avail himself of the forum that his Senate post afforded him. Instead, he opted for a less official, yet more effective means of reaching the American people. He embarked on a career as a lecturer. It is unclear as to when he decided to develop a public lecture, but by mid-1893, Gordon had begun to work on such a project and made arrangements to deliver the address in November. He chose the "Last Days of the Confederacy" as his topic. Rather than analyze the causes of the Confederate defeat or describe the battles themselves, Gordon proposed "to speak of those less grave but scarcely less important phases or incidents of the war which illustrate the spirit and character of the American soldier and people." He would tell his story from a southern point of view but show that neither side enjoyed a monopoly on virtue. His use of this broader nationalistic perspective helped establish a common vantage point from which northerners and southerners alike could view the war and derive pride and honor from their participation.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> New York Times, 11 June 1893; Gordon to Moorman, 18 July 1893, United Confederate Veterans Collection, Department of Archives, Baton Rouge, Louisiana (hereafter cited as UCV Collection, LSU); John Brown Gordon, "Last Days of the Confederacy," Thomas B. Reed, ed., Modern Eloquence, 15 vols. (Philadelphia: John D. Morris and Co., 1900-03), 5: 471-72.

Although concentrating heavily upon the final days of the war, Gordon included several anecdotes which effectively humanized his lecture. He related the story of the staunchly Unionist woman at Wrightsville who provided breakfast for the Confederates, the humorous account of the gregarious Yankee who crossed the Rapidian to visit with Gordon's troops, the remarkable Barlow saga that began on the battlefield of Gettysburg, and other touching tales which stirred the emotions of his listeners. Yet, it was his deft description of the closing scenes of the Civil War--the bone-tiring fatigue of the seemingly ceaseless retreat from Petersburg, the anxiety at leaving his wife and new born baby in Yankee hands, the magnanimous treatment of the Confederates by their humble victors, and the high drama of the surrender procession--that elicited the most tender responses. "Heroic bravery of Union soldiers, the undaunted courage of the Southern men, the self-sacrifice of noble Southern women, the patriotism of Northern womanhood, interspersed with lively anecdotes and abundant incidents illustrating the grim humor of the camp and the deep pathos and the suffering in the field and in the home"--containing all these elements, Gordon's lecture warmed the heart of even the coldest of listeners.<sup>2</sup>

Gordon first delivered "Last Days of the Confederacy" at the Tabernacle of Brooklyn in New York City on 17 November 1893. The audience and the reviewers in the northern city favorably received the southerner and his message. For two-and-one-half hours, his "magnetic eloquence" enthralled the 5,000 listeners, many of whom had fought against him during the war. In "low but earnest tones" with a powerful and resonant voice, Gordon spoke with "a

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<sup>2</sup> Gordon, "Last Days of the Confederacy," 5: 471-94; St. Louis Republic, Southern Lyceum Bureau program for Gordon Lecture, 1897-98 Season, John Brown Gordon File, Atlanta Historical Society, Atlanta, Georgia (hereafter cited as Gordon file, AHS).

Southern warmth, dash, brilliancy and force" one reviewer rarely found among northern orators. "Aroused to the highest pitch of enthusiasm," the hugh throng frequently interrupted the General with "long continued applause." Although a reporter praised the sprightliness of the written speech, he found Gordon's departures from the text particularly effective and moving: "The lecturer literally ran away from his manuscript so often to tell a story or relate an incident full of pathos, or patriotism, or both," that the audience did not even notice the exceptional length of the lecture. Gordon received a rousing three cheers upon concluding and spent a long time thereafter shaking hands with his appreciative listeners. Gordon's efforts proved so effective that New Yorkers immediately prevailed upon him to deliver the lecture again the following week at Carneige Music Hall.<sup>3</sup>

During the succeeding decade, Gordon would deliver his lecture hundreds of times as he traversed the country on extensive tours. He enlisted the services of several lyceums or booking agencies to organize his speaking engagements. Even while serving as Senator, Gordon conducted a series of tours when Congress was not in session. Soon after adjournment in March 1895, he set out on a ten-state tour through the Midwest and trans-Mississippi South in which he met twenty-two engagements in six weeks. When freed of his political duties in 1897, Gordon devoted most of his time to lecturing. Indeed, it may have seemed to the General that he lived on a train as his engagements kept him constantly on the move. So many of his letters closed with "hurriedly" or "on the run" that it is

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<sup>3</sup> New York Tribune, 18 November 1893; Gordon program, Gordon file, AHS; Slaton Lyceum Bureau program for Gordon Lecture, n.d., Gordon Family Collection, University of Georgia, Athens, Georgia (hereafter cited as Gordon Family Collection, UGA); Brooklyn Citizen, 18 November 1893, newspaper clipping, Gordon Family Collection, UGA; New York Times, 25 November, 26 November 1893.

obvious he was "constantly on the wing."<sup>4</sup>

Gordon's brutal speaking schedule frequently kept him away from his wife and family for extended periods. Fanny occasionally accompanied him on tour, but generally she remained behind and attended to business and family matters. While he was in the Senate, she screened newspapers for him, negotiated with his creditors, handled much of his correspondence, and managed the family budget. Even after he left political office, Fanny continued her efforts to lighten his always heavy burden by freeing him of many of the more mundane, day-to-day responsibilities. But more than her financial or clerical assistance, Fanny provided John with a sense of stability and serenity missing in his public career. Ever on the go and harried by indebtedness, Gordon derived strength from the affection and devotion of his wife. He was not the type of man to express publicly the depths of his feelings for Fanny, but on her birthday, and their thirty-seventh wedding anniversary, he penned a touching poem which reveals that his love for her had scarcely diminished over the years:

Of all the days I now remember,  
The sweetest far was in September  
When woods and fields and star-lit skies,  
And mellow suns and Autumn sighs,

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4 Gordon program, Gordon file, AHS; Gordon program, Gordon Family Collection, UGA; J. B. Gordon to Moorman, 24 October 1894, 13 March, 13 April 1895, 15 March, 27 March, 26 November 1897, 30 January, 23 October, 27 October 1899, UCV Collection, LSU; J. B. Gordon to Robert C. Woods, 16 July 1895, UCV Collection, LSU; Frank Gordon to Moorman, 30 April 1897, 7 February, 5 March, 26 March 1902, UCV Collection, LSU; J. B. Gordon to Miss Marry Carrington, 20 November 1899, Issac Howell Carrington Papers, Duke University, Durham, North Carolina; J. B. Gordon to B. T. Johnson, 26 November 1897, Bradley T. Johnson Papers, Duke University, Durham, North Carolina (hereafter cited as Johnson Papers, Duke); J. B. Gordon to W. E. Mickle, 30 April 1903, United Confederate Veterans Collection, University of Georgia, Athens, Georgia (hereafter cited as UCV Collection, UGA); Gordon to Scribner, 24 October 1902, Charles Scribner's Sons Papers, Princeton University, Princeton, New Jersey (hereafter cited as Scribner's Sons Papers, Princeton).

Made earth so fair and life so sweet,  
 As Heaven bowed this world to greet,  
 And threw it's sheen o'er Nature's face  
 And clasped all things in love's embrace.

'Twas natal day to fair young bride,  
 'Twas natal day to new born pride,  
 In him whose life and hope and care,  
 This fair young bride henceforth must share.

So young she was, so winsome coy,  
 So lithe her form, so pure her joy,  
 So rare her grace, so e'er discreet,  
 So trusting, true, so fair and sweet,

That happy man ne'er won for wife,  
 To lift his aims and brighten life,  
 More helpful hand or mind I ween,  
 Than this sweet girl of seventeen.

Though birthdays come and years pass by,  
 Though clouds may dim September's sky,  
 Though threads of gray may streak thy hair,  
 And roses fade from cheeks so fair,

Still beauty's seal is on thy brow,  
 No brighter, nobler, then than now,  
 And love's still warm, as 'twas when you  
 Were seventeen, I twenty-two.

Despite longing to spend more time with his beloved Fanny, Gordon felt compelled to continue his long tours, for debt remained an ever-present companion. Yet, as his fame as a lecturer swept the country, he took precautions to guarantee himself a steady income as long as the lecture remained popular by copyrighting his speech. His frequent admonitions to reporters not to record his address demonstrated Gordon's concern for continued drawing power and the concomitant continued income. Nevertheless, he rarely gave exactly the same lecture twice. His constant polishing and reworking, his tailoring of the lecture

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5 Gordon to daughter, Tuesday night [undated], 14 September 1893, Gordon Family Collection, UGA; Gordon, "De Gin'ral an' Miss Fanny," *ibid.*; 18 September 1893 poem, *ibid.*; Gordon to Moorman, 26 December 1896, 25 April 1900, UCV Collection, LSU; Gordon to Scribner, 11 September 1903, Scribner's Sons Papers, Princeton.

to particular locales, his proclivity to ad lib, and his stentorian bearing made his lecture an attraction of the first order. Even though he later developed a second companion lecture, "First Days of the Confederacy," it was his treatment of the "Last Days of the Confederacy" that captivated audiences throughout America.<sup>6</sup>

Reviews of Gordon's lectures seldom varied, except perhaps in reporters' efforts to outdo one another in their praise of the General. His stage presence rarely escaped mention. Described as "every inch a soldier, both in bearing and sentiment," or as "attractive, romantic, and courtly," Gordon was the very personification of a southern general. He brought with him to the lectern the "same spirit of dash and vivacity" that had distinguished him on the battlefield and in the Senate. His clear, ringing voice filled auditoriums, and his immense oratorical talents allowed him to move his audiences alternately from laughter to tears to outbursts of wild enthusiasm. His skillful mingling of humor, pathos, and patriotism made the lecture a masterpiece. Observers marveled at his "mastery over the human heart" and his ability to cast "a spell which enchanted and enhanced them through every word of his resounding eloquence." When Gordon frequently apologized for the length of his speech and offered to close quickly, audiences throughout the country pleaded with him not to stop but to go on. Perhaps the Minneapolis Sunday Times best assessed Gordon's powers and presence when its reviewer wrote, "There was something so much deeper in the man than even in what he uttered that his very presence lent a solemn and sacred grandeur to the occasion." Quite simply, Gordon mesmerized his

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6 Howard Dorgan, "A Case Study in Reconciliation: General John B. Gordon and 'The Last Days of the Confederacy,'" Quarterly Journal of Speech 60 (February 1974): 83-91; Gordon program, Gordon file, AHS; Gordon program, Gordon Family Collection, UGA.

audiences.<sup>7</sup>

But as inspiring and captivating as Gordon's abilities and image were, it was his message that moved the American people so deeply . More than "a gem of oratory," Gordon's lecture became a timeless and "superb outburst of patriotism." Newspapers called it a "matchless sermon from the gospel of peace," in which every sentence "was wreathed in an olive branch" and every thought "sweetly tempered with magnanimity." Certainly, Gordon's purpose was nationalistic, to present the war and wartime experiences in a manner removing the heated passions and transforming the struggle into a trial by fire wherein the American character had been tempered and strengthened. Thus the war and participation in it could be glorified. A Kansas editor wrote, "He is keeping green the memories of the war and its heroes on both sides, but he is obliterating the asperities of that strife." And a Georgian asserted, Gordon instilled "into the hearts of thousands of people, North and South, a higher appreciation of the gallant men who fought under Grant and Lee; a deeper veneration for American valor and unswerving fidelity, and a warmer love and a loftier pride in this great and reunited country."<sup>8</sup>

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7 New Haven Morning News, Gordon program, Gordon file, AHS; Atlanta Constitution, 8 January 1904; Clement A. Evans, "General Gordon and General Longstreet," Independent 56 (February 1904): 314; New Orleans Times-Democrat, Gordon program, Gordon Family Collection, UGA; New Orleans Daily Picayune, Gordon Family Collection, UGA; Minneapolis Sunday Times, Gordon program, Gordon file, AHS; Extracts from Press Comments on Gen. Gordon's Lecture (September 1894 tour), John B. Gordon Papers, Emory University, Atlanta, Georgia (hereafter cited as Extracts, Gordon Papers, Emory); Gordon program, passim, Gordon file, AHS; Gordon program, passim, Gordon Family Collection, UGA.

8 Louisville Courier-Journal, Gordon file, AHS; Augusta Chronicle, Extracts, Gordon Papers, Emory; St. Louis Republic, Gordon program, Gordon file, AHS; Kansas City Times, Gordon program, Gordon file, AHS; Extracts, Gordon Papers, Emory, passim; Gordon program, passim, Gordon file, AHS; Gordon program, passim, Gordon Family Collection, UGA. See also Judge

Gordon's effort to break down the barriers of hate and sectional animosity frequently brought about touching scenes, none more dramatic than an episode in Vermont. At the conclusion of Gordon's lecture before what had been a particularly icy crowd at the outset, an old man, with tears trickling down his cheeks, confronted the General and boldly proclaimed, "General Gordon, I have hated you for more than thirty years; I have hated everything South. I had cause for hating. You killed the noblest boy of my home, and he lies buried now in an unknown grave. We have mourned his loss all these years." But the elderly gentleman then added, "when I had listened to you and heard you tell the history of your hardships, how the soldier marched barefooted, how he lived without a bite some days, how he suffered, I can see that he was fighting for the cause which he esteemed more dear than life." As he extended his hand to the former Confederate, the bereaved, but now unburdened, father pronounced, "I will never hate you any more. . . . My hatred for the South is gone forever."<sup>9</sup>

Although few of Gordon's experiences were as dramatic, his efforts to draw the people of the North and the South closer together through his lecture met with considerable success. Gordon nurtured his image as a peacemaker and made sure that nothing would detract from his mission of reconciliation. When on tour, he refused to enter into political discussions. Instead, he concentrated exclusively on the nonpartisan, nationalistic message of his lecture, which served as "a healing balm for sectional ill-will." Gordon explicitly stated his intent at the opening of his lecture: "although you are to listen to-night to a Southern man, a Southern soldier, yet I beg you to believe that he is as true as any man to

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Selwyn N. Owen to Calvin Brice, 6 July 1894, Gordon Family Collection, UGA; W. H. Anderson to Gordon, 10 November 1903, Gordon Family Collection, UGA.

9 *Atlanta Journal*, 9 January 1904.

this Republic's flag and to all that it truly represents." Still, in his native South, Gordon's ability to make these old memories of heroism, comradeship and commitment to the Confederate cause come alive proved just as appealing and effective. In 1894, when Gordon's friend and fellow Senator from North Carolina, Matt Ransom, appeared headed for defeat in an upcoming election, another Tar Heel politician recommended that Ransom enlist Gordon's support. "Getting Genl Gordon to deliver his lecture on 'the last days of the Confederacy,' . . . and getting him to make an allusion to you," might be the trick needed to turn defeat into victory. So, Gordon's lecture was immensely popular both in the North and South. The changing times and gradual lessening of the bitterness engendered by the war account in part for the tremendous popularity of the "Last Days of the Confederacy;" however, it was the old General's adeptness at stirring southern emotions without offending northern sentiments that primarily explains the success of the lecture. Carefully treading along the narrow path of common ground that he had helped to establish, Gordon contributed significantly to cementing national bonds between the former warring sections.<sup>10</sup>

In addition to his commitment to national reconciliation, Gordon also played an important role in helping southerners finally come to grips with their defeat in the Civil War. In doing so, he contributed mightily to the development of both the myth of the Old South and the Cult of the Lost Cause. Southerners, in the wake of physical and psychological devastation wrought by the war, were a

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<sup>10</sup> Dorgan, "Case Study in Reconciliation," pp. 85-86; Gordon, "Last Days of the Confederacy," 5: 471; R. J. Brevard to M. W. Ransom, 3 July 1894, Matt W. Ransom Papers, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, North Carolina; Waldo W. Braden, The Oral Tradition in the South (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1983), pp. 77-78.

troubled people and slow to emerge from their disorientation in the years after Appomattox. The trauma of having to deal with humiliating defeat—an atypical American experience—largely explains the creation of an idealized heritage by postbellum southerners. They seized upon two powerful symbols to ease the burdens of their defeat. They painted a picture of the antebellum era as one of boundless prosperity, societal harmony, honorable and chivalrous whites, contented slaves, and, in every sense, a pastoral peaceful South—something certainly worth preserving. The Old South that they envisioned, however, was a myth, an invention designed to help justify southern actions and erase the haunting sense of inferiority. Similarly, the celebration of the Confederacy and of the war that grew during the final decades of the nineteenth century also aided southerners in their effort to come to terms with defeat. This Confederate celebration, writes a historian of the movement, "incorporated an historical interpretation that maintained that the South had acted rightly in 1861-1865, reassured southerners that their honor and manhood had survived, and praised the common soldier as well as the leaders of the Confederacy." By the 1880s, southerners had begun to look back upon their past with more of a sense of nostalgia and pride than uneasiness and uncertainty. Curiously, the same men who fostered and embellished the vision of the old order and conjured up the ghosts of the Confederacy with the greatest gusto were generally the architects of the new order. And among the most important of these New South figures glorifying the past was John B. Gordon.<sup>11</sup>

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11 C. Vann Woodward, Origins of the New South, 1877-1913 (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1951; revised ed., 1971), pp. 154-58; Gaines Milligan Foster, "Ghosts of the Confederacy: Defeat, History, and the Culture of the New South, 1865-1913," (Ph.D. dissertation, University of North Carolina, 1982), p. 4.

The manner in which the South attempted to come to terms with its defeat in the Civil War has proven to be a fertile ground for research for

Gordon's postwar career offers numerous examples of his determination to insure that southerners not be stripped of their heritage because of their participation in the Civil War. His address before the Confederate Survivors' Association of Augusta, Georgia, on 26 April 1887, most vividly revealed his stylized vision of the past. Gordon discussed how inaccurate portrayals of the South and its association with slavery endangered not only the present generations but succeeding ones as well. If these misrepresentations went unchallenged, a future fraught with peril, lay ahead: first, would come "a decrease of our appreciation of this section and of its people;" then, "a diminution of our own self-respect" followed by a "gradual but certain retrogression and impairment of our manhood; and, finally, the loss of those distinctive characteristics which are the traditional, recognized, and chief sources of this people's greatness." Southerners must cherish their heritage for, he claimed, "no age or country has ever produced a civilization of a nobler type than that which was born in the southern plantation home." Even though he admitted that the gentility of that "old plantation life of the South" was gone

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historians and scholars in other disciplines as well. Among the best and most widely used historical studies are Woodward, Origins, chapter 6; Paul H. Buck, The Road to Reunion, 1865-1900 (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1937); Paul M. Gaston, The New South Creed: A Study in Southern Mythmaking (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1970); Rollin G. Osterweis, The Myth of the Lost Cause, 1865-1900 (Hamden, Connecticut: Archon Books, 1973). A number of dissertation have also dealt with the myth of the Old South and the Cult of the Lost Cause. See especially, Foster, "Ghosts of the Confederacy;" Susan S. Durant, "The Gently Furred Banner: The Development of the Myth of the Lost Cause," (Ph.D. dissertation, University of North Carolina, 1972); Huber W. Ellingsworth, "Southern Reconciliation Orators in the North, 1869-1899," (Ph.D. dissertation, Florida State University, 1955); Lloyd A. Hunter, "The Sacred South: Postwar Confederates and the Sacralization of Southern Culture," (Ph.D. dissertation, St. Louis University, 1978); Walter S. Towns, "Ceremonial Speaking and the Reinforcing of American Nationalism in the South, 1875-1890," (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Florida, 1972); Alfred Y. Wolff, Jr., "The South and the American Imagination: Mythical Views of the Old South, 1865-1900," (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Virginia, 1971).

forever, Gordon implored southerners not to forget their past and the immense contributions their forebears had made to republicanism in America. "The great problem of our future," he asserted, ". . . is how to hold to the characteristics of our old civilization, when that civilization itself is gone; how to send the current which so enriched and purified the old, coursing forever through the new life before us; how to relight the old fires upon the new altars."<sup>12</sup>

Here within the parameters of a single speech to Confederate survivors lies a fascinating irony. Gordon, one of the most vocal proponents of and active participants in the new industrial order, was at the same time one of the greatest cultivators of the myth of the Old South. Although the incongruity appears obvious today, neither Gordon nor his contemporaries saw the apparent contradiction. The reason lies less in the duplicity of men like Gordon, and more in the South's desperate need for a past of which its residents could be proud. Defeat deeply scarred many southerners. Rather than face the possibility that the sufferings and exertions of war might have had been in vain, southerners created an Old South worth defending and dying for. In this manner, they also enabled former Confederates, as well as their descendants, to derive an intense,

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12 John B. Gordon, The Old South. Addresses Delivered Before the Confederate Survivors' Association in Augusta, Georgia, on the Occasion of Its Ninth Annual Reunion, on Memorial Day, April 16th 1887 by His Excellency, Governor John B. Gordon, and by Col. Charles C. Jones, Jr. (Augusta, Georgia: Chronicle Publishing Co., 1887), pp. 6-14. For a keener appreciation of the irony of ardent New South proponents embracing and developing a mythical vision of the Old South, see Michael M. Cass, "Charles C. Jones, Jr. and the 'Lost Cause,'" Georgia Historical Quarterly 55 (Summer 1971): 222-33; Gordon to C. C. Jones, Jr., 6 June 1889, John Brown Gordon Papers, Duke University, Durham, North Carolina (hereafter cited as Gordon Papers, Duke); A. H. Colquitt to C. C. Jones, Jr., 27 July 1889, Alfred Holt Colquitt Papers, Duke University. See also Waldo W. Braden, "Repining over an Irrevocable Past: The Ceremonial Orator in a Defeated Society, 1865-1900," in Oratory in the New South, ed. Waldo W. Braden (Baton Rouge: Louisiana University Press, 1979), pp. 8-37; Howard Dorgan, "Rhetoric of the United Confederate Veterans: A Lost Cause Mythology in the Making," in ibid., pp. 143-73; Braden, Oral Tradition in the Old South, chapter 4.

furious pride from participation in the war. Not only were motives ennobled but their cause sanctified. Few, if any, propositions afforded Gordon greater pleasure than the opportunity to glorify the Confederate soldiers and the Confederate cause.

Gordon always dreaded the possibility that children of former Confederates might turn on their parents for their part in the war. He always asserted that vigilance was especially necessary because "victory itself vindicates, while defeat dooms to disparagement and misrepresentation the cause of the vanquished." He had long labored to see that the motives and actions of southern whites were fully explained. In order to provide fair, impartial textbooks for southern school children, he became involved with the University Publishing Company. Gordon gave freely of his time and money to southern movements devoted to preserving the record of service of his beloved veterans. When veterans in Virginia organized the Association of the Army of Northern Virginia, Gordon joined his former comrades and also participated in several efforts to honor his former chieftain, Robert E. Lee. As statutes and memorials to Confederate officials and soldiers began to appear in the 1870s and proliferated in the 1880s, Gordon knew no peer as a dedicator of monuments. He also lent his support to movements to provide assistance for Confederate widows, orphans and disabled veterans. Fearful that the valiant conduct and honorable service of the Confederate soldiery might be forgotten or misconstrued, he warned his fellow southerners that "a people without the memories of heroic suffering and sacrifice are A PEOPLE WITHOUT A HISTORY." It was for these same purposes on behalf of which Gordon had labored so long—accurately preserving and presenting the history of the Confederacy, keeping alive the fraternal spirit born in the trials of war, and aiding survivors and dependants—that Confederate veterans organized in New

Orleans in June 1889. His election and annual reelection as Commander-in-Chief of the United Confederate Veterans (UCV) provided Gordon with a source of great pride. He considered the privilege of leading the old soldiers once again among his highest honors, and certainly the most gratifying.<sup>13</sup>

The organizers of the UCV gave scant consideration to someone other than Gordon for the post of Commander-in-Chief. There were other Confederate officers of higher rank, but none was more popular than the Georgian. Although it is difficult to determine the extent of Gordon's involvement in the early development of the UCV, he kept well abreast of its affairs. Even with his other interests and responsibilities, Gordon kept in almost continuous communication with the man most responsible for the success of

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13 William E. Mickle, ed., Orders, U.C.V., General and Special, 2 vols. (New Orleans: United Confederate Veterans, 1911-12), 1: General Orders No. 1 (hereafter cited as UCV Orders); Minutes of the Annual Meetings and Reunions of the United Confederate Veterans, 1898, p. 26 (hereafter cited as UCV Minutes); J. William Jones, compiler, Army of Northern Virginia Memorial Volume (Richmond: J. W. Randolph and English, 1880), pp. 13, 22-27, 37, 41-43, 48; "Appeal of the Lee Monument Association," Southern Historical Society Papers 5 (January - June 1879): 141-42; "Annual Reunion of the Virginia Division, A.N.V.," Southern Historical Society Papers 6 (July - December 1879): 289; "Sketch of the Lee Memorial Association," Southern Historical Society Papers 11 (July 1883): 388-90; "Annual Reunion of the Association of the Army of Northern Virginia," Southern Historical Society Papers 17 (1889): 112; "The Monument to General Robert E. Lee," Southern Historical Society Papers 17 (1889): 190, 193; "Soldiers Monument," Southern Historical Society Papers 17 (1889): 391; "General Jubal A. Early," Southern Historical Society Papers 22 (1894): 284; "Unveiling of the Soldiers and Sailors Monument," Southern Historical Society Papers 22 (1894): 342; Atlanta Constitution, 18 October, 25 October 1870, 12 November 1874, 2 June 1875, 23 May 1878, 16 June 1883, 10 April, 3 May 1884; Gordon to Fish, 7 April 1884, Hamilton Fish Collection, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D. C. (hereafter cited as Fish Collection, LC); Alberta Malone, History of the Atlanta Ladies Memorial Association, 1866 - 1946 (Atlanta, in possession of Atlanta Historical Society, Atlanta, Georgia, 1946), pp. 4, 31-32; Gordon to T. K. Oglesby, 7 September 1903, Thaddeus K. Oglesby Collection, Duke University, Durham, North Carolina; J. B. Gordon to Editor of the Richmond Dispatch, 19 May 1894, Munford-Ellis Papers, Duke University, Durham, North Carolina; William W. White, The Confederate Veteran (Tuscaloosa, Alabama: Confederate Printing Co., 1962), pp. 20-21; C. Vann Woodward, Tom Watson: Agrarian Rebel (New York: Macmillan Co., 1938), p. 63.

organization, George Moorman. Prior to Gordon's appointment of Moorman as Adjutant General in mid-1891, the UCV had grown very slowly, but once Moorman assumed responsibility for the management of the fledgling association, membership skyrocketed. Clearly, Moorman was the driving force behind the UCV. However, the heavy volume of correspondence between himself and the commander-in-chief demonstrates that Gordon was vitally concerned with the organization. In the year-and-a-half after Moorman's took control of the UCV office, Gordon continually prodded the adjutant to wage an active campaign to bring more and more Confederate veterans into the fold. Particularly interested that the Georgia camps join the UCV, Gordon wrote that he felt "it is a reflection on me to have Georgia lagging behind." In addition to pressing the effort to pull in all existing groups in the South, he encouraged the organization of camps in New York and Chicago. Gordon did not manage the UCV—that was left to Moorman—but he did oversee its operations.<sup>14</sup>

Even in later years, when his extensive speaking commitments and his deteriorating physical health severely restricted his involvement, Gordon

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<sup>14</sup> Proceedings of the Convention for Organization, and Adoption of the Constitution of the United Confederate Veterans, June 10th, 1889 (New Orleans: Hopkins Printing Office, 1891); Confederate Veteran, 3 (May 1895): 145; 12 (September 1904): 425; New Orleans Times-Picayune, 10 June, 11 June 1889; William W. White, The Confederate Veteran, pp. 26-35; Foster, "Ghosts of The Confederacy," pp. 222-23, 230-33; Herman Hattaway, "Clio's Southern Soldiers: The United Confederate Veterans and History," Louisiana History 12 (Summer 1971): 214; Herman Hattaway, "The United Confederate Veterans in Louisiana," Louisiana History 16 (Winter 1975): 15; Clement A. Evans, ed., Confederate Military History, 12 vols. (Atlanta: Confederate Publishing Co., 1899), 12: 512a-512h; Gordon to Moorman, 9 June, 17 September, 29 October, 12 November, 16 November, 21 November, 26 December 1891, 1 March, 15 March, 2 June, 7 July, 26 October, 27 October 1892, UCV Collection, LSU; Gordon to J. C. Underwood, 1 March 1892, UCV Collection, LSU; Gordon to W. E. Mickle, 27 February 1892, UCV Collection, UGA; S. D. Lee to W. E. Mickle, 4 April 1897, 4 February 1904, UCV Collection, UGA. For a brief history of the UCV, see William E. Beard, "The UCV Marches in Review," for the Nashville Banner, 1941, clippings in the Gordon Family Collection, UGA.

directed the course of the UCV as effectively as possible. He took his position as the symbolic head of all Confederate veterans quite seriously and displayed an acute concern for guarding the image of the organization. Wary of offending other Confederates, Gordon saw to it that the UCV generally refrained from endorsing specific magazines or books as officially sanctioned works. The UCV under Gordon's supervision, however, did lend support to organizations like the Sons of the Confederate Veterans and United Daughters of the Confederacy. When questions concerning the conduct of officials in local camps were raised, Gordon expressed his concern about possible disgrace such individuals might bring to the UCV. Gordon similarly maintained a firm control on what went before the public. Following Moorman's death in 1903, Gordon instructed his successor not to send out any public orders involving the association until he had personally reviewed them. Later, he added, "in all matters of any moment that go to the public press with my name, I naturally w'd like to see them before publication." More than mere personal considerations prompted Gordon's discretion, for he was determined to protect the UCV's image. His vigilance, along with Moorman's skillful management, prevented the minor controversies that surfaced frequently within the membership from ever erupting into serious threats to the organization.<sup>15</sup>

As the UCV grew in size, the reunion became the central focus of the organization. Each year, thousands of aging veterans, often accompanied by their families, descended upon a designated southern city. These annual meetings grew into magnificent spectacles. Transportation and lodging discounts

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<sup>15</sup> Gordon to Moorman, 13 December 1895, 19 February 1900, 25 March 1902, UCV Collection, LSU; S. A. Cunningham to Moorman, 11 February 1898, UCV Collection, LSU; Gordon to W. E. Mickle, 5 February, 15 February 1903, UCV Collection, UGA. Evidences of numerous minor controversies which sprang up among UCV members can be found throughout the voluminous correspondence of the organization, UCV Collection, LSU.

were often provided as each city struggled to outdo the efforts of previous hosts with even more elaborate preparations. Indeed, for most veterans, attendance at the UCV reunions became the major social event of the year as they attempted to recapture those magic moments of their youth. And just as the annual reunion served as the "central ritual of the Confederate celebration," Gordon served as the celebration's "primary ceremonial figure." As recorded in the minutes of one UCV meeting, the "name of Gordon is the electric spark that always makes the Veterans wild with joy." His mere arrival in the assembly hall frequently set off spontaneous demonstrations of tremendous enthusiasm. When he appeared on stage and spoke to the men he fondly referred to as "my boys," all the memories came flooding back. "His eloquence and spirited delivery never fail[ed] to have a marked effect on the veterans." The bond of love between the commander-in-chief and "his boys" was as mutual as it was genuine.<sup>16</sup>

The wildest, most unrestrained outbursts of affection occurred when Gordon attempted to step down as head of the UCV. He first expressed his desire that another veteran should be allowed to share the honor of heading the organization at the second reunion, but the rank and file would have none of it. They refused his request and unanimously reelected him. An obviously moved Gordon replied, "I cannot speak to you my brethren. My heart is full, is at your feet; my life and all I have is at your service." This same scene was repeated time and time again, for on every occasion that Gordon broached the subject of his retirement, his "boys" shouted him down and unanimously reelected him amidst the wildest of scenes. Hats and umbrellas were thrown into the air,

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<sup>16</sup> White, *Confederate Veteran*, pp. 35-41; Hattaway, "Clio's Southern Soldiers," p. 215; Foster, "Ghosts of the Confederacy," pp. 286-96, 343-44, 233; UCV Minutes, 1898, p. 59; 1899, p. 10; 1901, p. 72; New Orleans *Times-Picayune*, 14 June, 24 June 1897.

handkerchiefs fluttered, flags waved with the vigor of old, enthusiastic cheers mingled with strains of "Dixie", and the old "Rebel yell" reverberated off the walls as the "old warriors shouted themselves hoarse." Although these "love feasts" took place annually, perhaps the most touching of these always emotional scenes came during the seventh annual reunion in Nashville. Two weeks before the veterans assembled, Gordon issued a letter declining his sure-to-come nomination. At the reunion, he reiterated his desire to pass the mantle of command on to another and to take his place "by the side of those untitled heroes who bore the battle's brunt in the bloody work of war." But despite his protestations and a farewell speech, the veterans ignored his wishes, and instead, nominated and elected him by acclamation. A tearful, grateful Gordon, "humbled to dust," replied, "My comrades there is nothing left me as a soldier, but to bow to your will, and God being my helper I shall serve you to the best of my ability." There would be no further discussion of the matter--the old General would remain at the head of his men until death intervened.<sup>17</sup>

It would be difficult to exaggerate the central role Gordon played in the southern quest for vindication. As the living symbol of the Confederacy, he became the principal ceremonial figure in the Confederate celebration. Gordon was the embodiment of the Lost Cause. In his scarred face, veterans could catch a glimpse of their own past. The smell of powder, the smoke of battle, the roll of artillery and din of musketry, as well the fatigue of the march and the

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<sup>17</sup> UCV Minutes, 1891, pp. 13-14; 1897, pp. 52-60; 1898, p. 59; 1899, p. 10. See also ibid., 1891, pp. 13-14; 1892, pp. 107-09; 1894, pp. 13-14; 1895, p. 62; 1896, p. 115; 1897, pp. 54-60; 1898, pp. 58-59; 1899, p. 175; 1900, p. 68; 1901, p. 72; 1902, pp. 82-82; 1903, p. 87. Although the wildest reactions came when Gordon attempted to step down, the UCV Minutes are full of examples of similar enthusiastic outbursts. Reunions were held each year except 1893 when national economic conditions forced its cancellation. Gordon to Moorman, 3 July 1893, UCV Collection, LSU; UCV Orders, 1: General Orders No. 99; 1: General Orders No. 103; 1: General Orders No. 108.

comradery in camp, all came alive as the proud, erect figure of the Georgian strolled about the stage. The "Hero of Appomattox" stood as a statute-like representation of chivalry, honor, and bravery, all that was worthy of preserving in the Old South and in the Confederate war effort. Revered by the South and respected by the North, Gordon the symbol became even more important than Gordon the man.

As commander of the UCV and as a private citizen, Gordon resolutely strove to open channels of communication between northern and southern veterans. Both in the Senate and in his business dealings, he had developed associations with northerners, many of whom had fought against him. In the 1880s, as chairman of a committee to provide a home for disabled Confederate soldiers, Gordon solicited contributions from numerous former foes. In addition to attending the funerals of several Union generals, Gordon poignantly eulogized his friend, President Grant, in the southern press upon the Union general's death in 1885. And when the movement to establish national military parks began to grow, he frequently joined with northern veterans in dedications of the battlefields. Many of the barriers that once stood between the soldiers of the North and the South had been removed by the late 1880s when steps to organize joint reunions were undertaken. Gordon not only supported these Blue-Gray reunions, but also participated in many of them as well. In his commitment to bring veterans on both sides closer together, Gordon attempted to use the UCV as something more than just the celebration of the Confederacy and of the mythical southern past. For him, the UCV served as another section of the bridge spanning "the bloody chasm" that still yawned between the North and the South.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Atlanta Constitution, 4 June 1876, 22 March, 10 April, 3 May 1884, 10 April, 31 July, 13 August 1885, 5 July, 22 August 1890; New York Times, 17

The Spanish-American War in 1898 added impetus to Gordon's reconciliatory efforts. Eleven years prior to the outbreak of war with Spain, he had told an Ohio audience, "I have sometimes thought that I would be willing to see one more war, that we might march under the stars and stripes, shoulder to shoulder, against a common foe." Gordon seized upon the opportunity the war presented and expounded upon the vindictory benefits southern participation offered. At the eighth UCV reunion in July 1898 in Atlanta, Gordon declared that the war would lead "to the complete and permanent obliteration of the sectional distrusts, and to the establishment of the too long delayed brotherhood and unity of the American people, which shall neither be broken nor called into question no more forever." Later in the meeting at Gordon's prompting, the convention rose as one to approve a patriotic memorial pledging the full support of the UCV for President William McKinley. The president's reply to the Confederates' resolution echoed Gordon's sentiments: "The present war has certainly served one very useful purpose in completely obliterated the sectional lines drawn in the last one. The response to the Union's call to arms has been equally spontaneous and patriotic in all parts of the country. Veterans of the gray, as well as of the blue, are now fighting side by side, winning equal honor and renown." It seemed as if virtually all obstacles on the road to reunion had

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August 1891, 20 September 1895; Gilbert E. Govan and James W. Livingood, The Chattanooga Country, 1540-1976: From Tomahawks to TVA (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1977), pp. 367-68; Gordon to Hamilton Fish, 7 April 1884, Fish Collection, LC; Gordon to J. Madison Drake, 27 May 1889, Gordon Papers, Duke; William O. McDowell to Gordon, 1 November 1891, UCV Collection, LSU; Gordon to Thomas J. Kennan, Jr., 23 May 1894, Gordon Papers, Duke; Gordon (?) to C. A. Williams, 19 April 1884, John B. Gordon Personal Letterbooks, Georgia Department of Archives and History, Atlanta, Georgia (hereafter cited as Gordon's Personal Letterbooks, GDAH); Gordon to A. W. Rand, 23 April 1884, Gordon's Personal Letterbooks, GDAH; Gordon to J. Z. Westervelt, 2 May 1884, Gordon's Personal Letterbooks, GDAH; O'Beirne to Gordon, 3 May 1884, Gordon's Personal Letterbooks, GDAH; U. S. Grant to Gordon, 21 April 1884, Gordon Family Collection, UGA; "Editorial Paragraphs," Southern Historical Society Papers 12 (May 1884): 238-39.

been removed.<sup>19</sup>

Despite the satisfaction Gordon unquestionably derived from the increased evidence of reconciliation at the term of the century, events in the middle of 1900 revealed that sectional antagonisms were still alive. A minority within the organization continued to generate an undercurrent hostile to all moves toward fraternization with the UCV's northern counterpart, the Grand Army of the Republic. At the tenth annual UCV meeting in Louisville in June, the introduction of a resolution "calling for expressions of fraternal feeling between the North and South threw the convention into an uproar." Amid a wildly chaotic scene, Gordon rose to head off the minority challenge by earnestly speaking in favor of the proposal. "I trust the day shall never come," he told the veterans, "when I shall refuse to send a message of cordial greeting to an enemy gallant enough to greet a foe of thirty-five years ago." Following his forceful endorsement, the resolution passed; nevertheless, the hostile opposition it inspired showed that not all Confederates accepted increasing fraternization with their former enemies.<sup>20</sup>

A brief, but potentially explosive incident at a large Blue-Gray reunion in Atlanta six weeks later could have provided substantial ammunition for these irreconcilables. Both Gordon and Albert Shaw, commander of the Grand Army of the Republic (GAR), attended and spoke at the ceremonies. Relations between

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19 Huber W. Ellingsworth, "Southern Reconciliation Orators in the North, 1868-11899," (Ph.D. dissertation, Florida State University, 1955), quoted on p. 77; UCV Minutes, 1898, pp. 22-27, 55-57; New York Times, 24 July 1898; Atlanta Constitution, 24 July 1898.

20 UCV Minutes, 1900, pp. 111-113. Several letters from R. F. Armstrong to Mrs. J. M. Kell reveal the depth of hatred for Yankees and all things northern that continued into the 1890s for some southerners. Armstrong, living in self-imposed exile in Halifax, Nova Scotia, abhorred Gordon-led moves toward Blue-Gray fraternization. See especially 1 August 1894, 10 March 1896, John McIntosh Kell Papers, Duke University, Durham, North Carolina.

the old foes was exceedingly cordial until Shaw interjected a objectionable request into his otherwise warmly reconciliatory address. The Union commander urged southerners to refrain from teaching their children that the Confederate cause had been just and correct. Such teachings, he maintained, were "all out of order, unwise, unjust" and fanned the flames of sectionalism. Shaw meant no disrespect whatsoever to the Confederate veterans themselves in his call for a common history for all sections of the country. But Gordon, sensing personal and sectional impugment leaped to his feet immediately upon the conclusion of Shaw's speech. Having labored so earnestly since the war's end to insure that southerners' motives would not be misconstrued and that the exertions of the southern soldiery would not be denigrated, Gordon could not allow what he perceived as an affront to the South to pass unchallenged. He protested against the insinuation "that teaching our children that the cause for what we fought and our comrades died is all wrong." Rather than assail his Union counterpart, however, Gordon again presented his nationalistic interpretation of the war-- "namely, that both sides were right because both sides were fighting for the constitution of the fathers as they had been taught to interpret it, and both were right." Shaw, realizing how his remarks lent themselves to misinterpretation, endorsed Gordon's comments and stated that though confusion had resulted, he and the Georgian were of the same sentiment. Prudence on the part of the two commanders, particularly Shaw, avoided what could have developed into a fiery and damaging confrontation.<sup>21</sup>

Continued criticism from a few disgruntled Confederate veterans for his

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<sup>21</sup> Atlanta Constitution, 20 July, 21 July 1900; New York Times, 20 July, 21 July 1900; Mary R. Dearing, Veterans in Politics: The Story of the G.A.R. (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1952), p. 495; Confederate Veteran, 8 (July 1900): 297; Gordon to Moorman, 25 July, 26 July, 14 August 1900, UCV Collection, LSU.

participation in Blue-Gray activities quickly brought forth a public letter of explanation from the General. He did not apologize in the least for his actions; on the contrary, he insisted, "I shall continue the efforts which I have made for nearly thirty years in the interest of sectional harmony and unity." Gordon reiterated his commitment to do whatever he could "for the truth of history, for justice to the South and to all sections, for fostering our cherished memories and for the settlement of all sectional controversies on a basis consistent with the honor the manhood and the self-respect of all." In essence, Gordon summarized the major influences on his postwar career. While steadily working to eradicate sectional differences, he remained on guard to see that the interests of the South were protected and that its inhabitants were not portrayed in an uncomplimentary light. His efforts continued to widen that narrow path leading toward national unity that he had helped to cut with his lecture and other earlier actions.<sup>22</sup>

Still, Gordon's most enduring contribution to nationalism came with the publication of Reminiscences of the Civil War. Although friends had long urged him to write a book about his war experiences, Gordon found it difficult to devote time to the project. In addition to his Senate responsibilities, his long lecture tours, his commitments to the UCV, his various business ventures and his private interests, Gordon's health noticeably began to fail. Beset by the infirmities normally associated with old age, Gordon frequently fell victim to over-exertion. Also in his later years, broken bones, dislocated and sprained joints, and a variety of other incapacitating injuries and illnesses increasingly plagued the General. Nevertheless, in December 1896, he first approached Charles S. Scribner's Sons about a book on the Civil War which he stated he had

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<sup>22</sup> New York Times, 21 August 1900.

been preparing for some time. Modeling his work after the informal style he used in his lecture, Gordon proposed to develop "another side of that war, as yet unwritten, the story which should not be lost." He wanted to preserve the story of the soldiers who had fought on both sides. He forthrightly stated his purpose: "first to intensify, if I can, the National patriotic and fraternal spirit and second, to make money for myself. The one I trust is a high and laudable purpose; the other is with me a stern necessity." Once again, Gordon tied his own fortunes to that of a higher goal.<sup>23</sup>

Gordon and the publishing firm finally reached an agreement in 1902. The terms of his contract with Scribner's Sons provided him with a fifteen percent royalty on the first 10,000 copies sold and twenty percent on all books sold thereafter. Gordon would receive a \$3,000 advance and agreed to allow Scribner's Sons to publish articles from his manuscript in Scribner's Magazine.

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23 John B. Gordon, Reminiscences of the Civil War (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1903), p. xi; Gordon to Gentlemen, 22 December 1896, Scribner's Sons Papers, Princeton; New York Times, 1 May 1897; Frank Gordon to Moorman, 3 May, 5 May, 11 December 1897, 25 February 1898, 13 June 1899, UCV Collection, LSU; J. B. Gordon to Moorman, 23 December 1897, 7 September, 26 November 1898, 2 January, 10 January, 24 July, 13 September, (n.d.) September, 31 October 1899, 16 February, 26 August 1900, 8 January 1901, 27 March 1902, *ibid.*; Caroline Lewis Gordon to Moorman, 7 October 1898, 25 March, 31 May 1899, *ibid.*; Hugh H. Gordon, Jr. to Moorman, 15 July 1901, *ibid.*; J. B. Gordon to W. E. Mickle, 9 February, 13 July 1903, UCV Collection, LSU; J. B. Gordon to W. E. Mickle, 5 February, 15 February, 10 March, 21 March, 21 August 1903, UCV Collection, UGA; J. B. Gordon to W. E. Mickle, 29 December 1903, Gordon Papers, Emory; Atlanta Journal, 8 January 1904.

One of Gordon's interesting side-lights involved his efforts "to revive in this country the manly hunting sports of our Fathers and transmit the opportunity of indulging in them to our posterity." He invited numerous "genial American gentlemen" to join the Thronatieska Club of Associated Hunters. Located in Central Georgia not far from Gordon's "Beechwood" plantation, this hunting and fishing ranch would encompass twenty to forty square miles and serve as a bountiful wildlife reserve for dues-paying members. Gordon to B. T. Johnson, 9 February 1888, 26 November 1897, Johnson Papers, Duke; Gordon to B. H. Harrison, 26 November 1897, Benjamin H. Harrison Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D. C.; Gordon to J. J. Hall, 6 March 1888, Gordon's Personal Letterbooks, GDAH; Gordon to D. W. Thomas, 6 March 1888, Gordon's Personal Letterbooks, GDAH.

For each of the three articles published prior to the release of his book, he received \$400. The General also gained the right to purchase copies of the book at half-price, so that he could sell them on his own. And in addition to the fifty percent discount, Gordon arranged for a personal commission on all books that he helped sell for the publisher. Although he would not permit the UCV itself to become directly involved in the marketing of the book, Gordon clearly sought to capitalize on his contacts with the veterans and on his lecture engagements.<sup>24</sup>

Gordon made numerous suggestions concerning the printing, illustrating, and marketing of the book, but he was unable to press his proposals because he needed money badly. Even as he and his sons moved toward establishing another southern life insurance company, he bemoaned his indebtedness, "debt, debt—what a horrible master it is & how I long to get from under its dominion so I can rest & take it easy." Obviously, the financial duress under which he had labored much of his life continued to stalk him in his latter years. The destruction of his "Sutherland" estate by fire in June 1899 further complicated his financial problems. Even though Gordon saved most of the furniture and carried insurance, the destruction of his magnificent estate and the cost of rebuilding it "block for block" in the style of the original worked a significant hardship on the General. Perhaps even worse than the financial burdens it imposed upon him was the keen sense of loss he felt at the destruction of most of his private correspondence and personal mementos. Almost as quickly as word of the sad

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<sup>24</sup> Gordon to Scribner, 17 January 1901, 24 May, 11 June, 2 July, 29 September, 24 October, 1 November 1902, 7 September, 11 September 1903, Scribner's Sons Papers, Princeton; Memorandum of Agreement between Gordon and Charles Scribner's Sons, 2 June 1902, *ibid.* See also Points of Vantage on Gordon Book, *ibid.*; Gordon to W. E. Mickle, 21 August, 27 August, 11 September 1903, UCV Collection, UGA. For Gordon's three articles, see "My First Command and the Outbreak of War," *Scribner's Magazine* 33 (May 1903): 514-28; "Antietam and Chancellorsville," *ibid.*, 33 (June 1903): 685-99; "Gettysburg," *ibid.*, 34 (July 1903): 2-24.

fate that had befallen their commander reached prominent members of the UCV, movements were undertaken to ease his distress. Gordon graciously thanked his fellow veterans, but he declined to accept any assistance and disavowed all such efforts. It seems almost ironic that the man who had so often organized and contributed to similar efforts to aid other Confederates would adamantly prohibit "his boys" from assisting him.<sup>25</sup>

Nevertheless, many aided him in a less direct manner by buying his book. Reminiscences of the Civil War became an immediate success and went through several printings within the first year. Reviewers lavished praise upon both the author and his work. Written with "charming simplicity" in a "style unaffected, luminous and often eloquent," Reminiscences was "genial, magnanimous and tolerant," a "model of modesty and clarity." Many readers marvelled at his ability to bring to life the humorous, tragic and pathos-laden scenes of the Civil War while avoiding "the peculiar egotism" which often marred works of its kind. The absence of personal and sectional prejudice made it appealing to all parts of

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25 Gordon to Scribner, 6 May, 26 August, 3 September, 5 September, 7 September, 11 September 1903, Scribner's Sons Papers, Princeton; Clark Howell to Gordon, 4 September 1903, Scribner's Sons Papers, Princeton; Atlanta Constitution, 22 June 1899; Atlanta Journal, 8 January 1904; Caroline Lewis Gordon, "De Gin'ral an' Miss Fanny," Gordon Family Collection, UGA; E. G. Gordon to Moorman, 8 July 1899, UCV Collection, LSU; G. W. Gordon to Moorman, 25 July 1899, UCV Collection, LSU; J. B. Gordon to Moorman, 26 December 1896, 13 September, (n.d.) September 1899, 25 April 1900, UCV Collection, LSU; Gordon to W. E. Mickle, 29 December 1903, Gordon Papers, Emory. For details concerning Gordon's "Sutherland" home and its eventual razing, see Atlanta Journal, 16 March 1924, 16 January 1927, 21 February 1937, 11 October 1942; Gordon, "De Gin'ral an' Miss Fanny," Gordon Family Collection, UGA; Paul W. Miller, ed., Atlanta: Capital of the South (New York: Oliver Durrell, Inc., 1949), pp. 218-20. Also for a brief sketch of Gordon's new life insurance company, the American Annuity and Mutual Life Company, see J. B. Gordon to Moorman, 27 February 1900, 8 January, 19 October 1901, UCV Collection, LSU; Hugh H. Gordon to Moorman, 10 November 1900, *ibid.*; Frank Gordon to Moorman, 4 December 1900, *ibid.*; Gordon to B. N. Duke, 7 September 1900, Benjamin N. Duke Collection, Duke University, Durham, North Carolina (hereafter cited as Duke Collection, Duke); Confidential Circular Letter from General J. B. Gordon, 1 September 1900, Duke Collection, Duke.

the country. Northerners found no bitterness or animosity toward themselves and southerners praised the book's lesson "that it is un-American and untruthful to contend that all the honorable motives rested with one side and all the ignoble motives in the other." One journal, The Outlook, called Reminiscences "not only one of the most important contributions yet made to the literature of a great period, but one of the most fascinating and charming books that has come from the hand of an American man of action."<sup>26</sup>

Gordon's uplifting, nationalistic message contributed significantly to the success of the book. Gordon did not discuss the causes of the war at length; instead, as he put it in his introduction, he endeavored "to make a brief but dispassionate and judicially fair analysis of the divergent opinions and ceaseless controversies" which precipitated the war. Although he admitted that "[S]lavery was undoubtedly the immediate fermenting cause of the woful [*sic*] American conflict," he contended that it was not the sole cause. For Gordon, the fundamental issue originated in "the clashing theories and bristling arguments of 1787," those matters so earnestly debated by the Founding Fathers. As he had maintained since the war's end, differing constitutional interpretations as to where the locus of power lay--whether with the states or with the national

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26 Advertisements in The Dial: A Semi-Monthly Journal of Literary Criticism, Discussion, and Information 35 (July-December 1903): 241, 329, 377, 445; "Reminiscences of a Confederate General," Dial 35 (November 1903): 302-05; John S. Wise, "Two Great Confederates. General John B. Gordon and General James Longstreet: Characterizations by a Friend of Both," The American Monthly Review of Reviews 29 (February 1904): 204; New York Evening Sun, quoted in Dial 35 (November 1903): 329; New York Times, 21 November 1903; Thomas G. Jones to Gordon, 10 November 1903, Gordon Family Collection, UGA; "Soldier and Gentleman," The Outlook: A Weekly Newspaper 76 (January 1904): 152. See also George F. Hoar to Gordon, 2 November 1903, Gordon Family Collection, UGA; Grover Cleveland to Gordon, 7 January 1904, *ibid.*; New York Sun, 1 November 1903, clipping, *ibid.*; "A Volunteer General," The Spectator: A Weekly Review of Politics, Literature, Theology and Art 92 (April 1904): 667-68; "Gen. Gordon's Reminiscences," The Nation 78 (May 1904): 373-75; "General Gordon's Reminiscences," Independent 55 (December 1903): 3127-28.

government—provided the genesis of conflict. Over time these opposing constitutional concepts took on sectional dimensions and eventually lead to war. Gordon explained that southerners, believing that efforts to restrict the expansion of slavery infringed upon their constitutionality prescribed rights, merely exercised another constitutional right when they seceded. So, southerners were as justified in their effort to dissolve the Union as northerners were in theirs to preserve it. Yet, Gordon did not dwell upon constitutional differences because, for him, the northern victory in the war finally and forever settled all questions concerning the nature of the Union. Continued controversy over who was right or wrong was pointless because in Gordon's mind, both sides were right. Or as he asserted, "Truth, justice and patriotism unite in proclaiming that both sides fought for liberty as bequeathed by the Fathers, one for liberty in the Union of the States, the other for liberty in the Independence of the States."<sup>27</sup>

Reminiscences, however, reveals that Gordon had far more in mind than a brief discussion of the causes of the Civil War. Indeed, the dominating spirit of the book emanates from Gordon's desire to preserve a record of the soldiers who wore both the blue and the gray. Gordon's glorification of the honor, bravery, and patriotism of the American soldier and of American manhood spills over onto every page of this charming, completely inoffensive account of his wartime experiences. Gordon paid equally high tributes to the leaders and men of both armies. His praise of the "Yank" and the "Reb" alike is so overflowing that it is impossible to ascertain any point of distinction between the character of the two. A portrait of a chivalrous, humble, spiritual, gallant American soldier emerges from Gordon's vivid descriptions of battle and camp scenes. But, in his

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27 Gordon, Reminiscences, pp. xi-xiii, 13-25.

veneration of the character of the American soldier, Gordon hoped to accomplish "a still higher aim." He wanted to establish a "common ground on which all may stand; where justification of one section does not require or imply condemnation of the other." It was Gordon's fervent wish that all Americans recognize the strength of character exhibited by soldiers in both the blue and the gray. Recognition that each side had fought equally hard for what it believed was right would open the door to complete reconciliation. Once again, Gordon propounded a nationalist interpretation of the war that was acceptable to northerners and southerners alike.<sup>28</sup>

Reminiscences of the Civil War preached virtually the same sermon Gordon had delivered so often with the "Last Days of the Confederacy," at joint functions between the UCV and GAR, and on so many other occasions during the last third of the nineteenth century. Gordon may have reached more people with his lecture and may have drawn greater pleasure from his command of the Confederate veterans, but Reminiscences is his most far-reaching and lasting contribution to national reconciliation. Certainly, it is his most complete statement of his feelings. Gordon summarized his message best in the final pages of the book.

The unseemly things which occurred in the great conflict between the States should be forgotten, or at least forgiven, and no longer permitted to disturb complete harmony between North and South. American youth in all sections should be taught to hold in perpetual remembrance all that was great and good on both sides; to comprehend the inherited convictions for which saintly women suffered and patriotic men died; to recognize the unparalleled carnage as proof unrivalled courage; to appreciate the singular absence of personal animosity and the frequent manifestation between those brave antagonists of a good-fellowship such as had never before been witnessed between hostile armies. It will be a

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid., pp. xii-xiii, 25, passim; "Reminiscences of a Confederate General," Dial, p. 303.

glorious day for our country when all the children within its borders shall learn that the four years of fratricidal war between the North and the South was waged by neither with criminal or unworthy intent, but by both to protect what they conceived to be threatened rights and imperilled liberty; that the issues which divided the sections were born when the Republic was born, and were forever buried in an ocean of fraternal blood. We shall then see that, under God's providence, every sheet of flame from the blazing rifles of the contending armies, every whizzing shell that tore through the forests at Shiloh and Chancellorsville, every cannon-shot that shook Chickamauga's hills or thundered around the heights of Gettysburg, and all the blood and the tears that were shed yet to become contributions for the upbuilding of American manhood and for the future defence of American freedom. The Christian Church received its baptism of pentecostal power as it emerged from the shadows of Calvary, and went forth to its world-wide work with greater unity and a diviner purpose. So the Republic, rising from its baptism of blood with a national life more robust, a national union more complete, and a national influence ever widening, shall go forever forward in its benign mission to humanity.

For Gordon, the Civil War served as the crucible of the American experience. This testing, purifying and strengthening of the character of its citizens in both the North and the South convinced him that the future of America was indeed bright.<sup>29</sup>

In Reminiscences, Gordon brought together all of his earlier efforts. Published less than three months before his death, Reminiscences represented the capstone of a nearly forty-year career devoted largely to reconciling the former warring sections. One contemporary regarded the book as "a monument to his memory more beautiful than any that will be built by those who loved and honored him, a tribute more eloquent than any that can ever be paid by those who knew him best." With publication of his book in October 1903, Gordon's labors were at an end. He said as much just before Christmas. Stopping briefly in Atlanta on his way to his winter home near Miami, Gordon confided in a friend, "I feel in my heart that is not much left for me to do" now that the

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29 Gordon, Reminiscences, pp. 464-65.

bitterness of the Civil War had been replaced with "a promise of universal brotherhood under a reunited flag. . . ." Looking forward to a period of rest and recuperation, he continued on to Florida where the Gordon family would spend the holidays. There in the state where Gordon had envisioned an empire, yet had experienced his greatest business failure, the vital spirit which had driven him so fiercely on the battlefield, in the Senate, and in business would finally be stilled.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Advertisement in Dial, p. 241; "Soldier and Gentleman," Outlook, p. 152; Frances Gordon Smith, "Memorial Sketch of the Last Hours, Death, and Funeral of General John B. Gordon," in Gordon, Reminiscences p. xxi.

## EPILOGUE

After completing an exhausting lecture tour through New England shortly before the Christmas holidays, Gordon headed south for his winter home on Biscayne Bay. Having wintered on the bay just a few miles from Miami the past few years, he sought to escape the wintry blasts of Georgia in favor of the tropical breezes of Florida. Gordon seemed tired but not overly so because these speaking engagements always wore heavily on the nearly seventy-two year old General. Two weeks in the sunlight and warm ocean air again appeared to work their recuperative magic as Gordon revived and "was feeling unusually well." On Tuesday, 5 January, he and his grandson tramped through the fields and orchards surrounding his home. That evening Gordon speculated with members of his family about further developing his farming interests on the Florida property. All seemed fine and the General appeared healthy.<sup>1</sup>

The following morning, however, almost immediately upon arising, Gordon was seized by a severe chill. He returned to bed at once but the chill persisted and grew more violent. Gordon's alarmed family quickly summoned a physician from Miami; yet before the doctor arrived, the chill had given way to a fever that rapidly rose to 105 degrees. The General's condition continued to

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1 Frances Gordon Smith, "Memorial Sketch of the Last Hours, Death, and Funeral of General John B. Gordon," in John B. Gordon, Reminiscences of the Civil War (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1904), pp. xxi-xxii; Atlanta Constitution, 8 January - 10 January 1904; Atlanta Journal, 7 January - 9 January 1904. For additional information on Gordon's agricultural plans in Florida, see Henry F. Emery-J. B. Gordon letters, John Brown Gordon Letters, University of Georgia, Athens, Georgia.

worsen as he suffered severely from an attack of nausea and within a remarkably short period lapsed into a delirium. He was fighting for his life. Almost from the outset, attending physicians entertained serious doubts about Gordon's recovery because of his "advanced age and general depleted strength from previous impaired health." Throughout Wednesday, Thursday and Friday, he showed no real signs of improving as his kidneys increasingly failed to function and his heart action became weak and intermittent. Application of "hypodermic stimulation" seemed to bring some relief, but Gordon remained critically ill. Briefly regaining consciousness on Saturday morning, he gazed out upon a sun-drenched Biscayne Bay and in "low and broken tones" spoke to those gathered at his bedside. "'It seems,' he sighed, 'a poor use of God's beautiful gifts to us to be ill on a day like this!'" For the remainder of the day, Gordon slipped from unconsciousness to semi-consciousness and back again. Although occasionally aware of those around him, he was simply too weak to speak. By early evening, all hope of recovery had evaporated, as his kidneys shut down and uremic poisoning set in. Finally, at 10:05 p.m., 9 January 1904, John B. Gordon died "as peacefully as a little child falls asleep." Gordon was gone.<sup>2</sup>

As word of Gordon's death flashed across the country, Georgians prepared to honor their most beloved native son. Plans for a massive state funeral were undertaken immediately and proposals to erect a statute in memory of the General were widely discussed. Before the Gordon family returned to Atlanta, they acceded to the request of Miamians and permitted them to pay their final respects to the General. Gordon's body lay in state in the Presbyterian church of Miami until a railroad car specially provided by the

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<sup>2</sup> Gordon Smith, "Memorial Sketch," p. xxii; Atlanta Journal, 8 January - 10 January, 12 January 1904;; Atlanta Constitution, 8 January - 10 January 1904.

transportation magnate, Henry M. Flagler, arrived on Monday. Early on the morning of Tuesday, 12 January, the black-draped funeral car began the long journey to the Georgia capital. All along the train's route, Floridians, and then Georgians, turned out to catch a glimpse of the man revered throughout the South. Nearly twenty-four hours later, about 7:00 a.m. on the chilly gray morning of 13 January, the funeral train pulled into the Atlanta terminal where a large crowd had gathered. As the pall-bearers, veterans all, sadly bore the casket of their fallen chieftain to the hearse, one old veteran surged forward. Removing his worn and faded gray jacket, he meekly inquired, "May I lay it on his coffin just one minute?" Receiving permission, he accomplished his purpose. As the aged Confederate withdrew from the coffin and slipped the jacket over his shoulders, he sobbed, "Now thousands couldn't buy it from me!"<sup>3</sup>

Drawn by four magnificent white horses, the hearse proceeded to the State Capitol where Gordon's simple black casket was placed in the center of the rotunda. There beneath Confederate battleflags drooped at half-mast and surrounded by oceans of flowers, Gordon lay in state for Georgia to honor. The doors of the capitol opened shortly after nine and the mourners slowly, silently began moving past the funeral bier in single file. Thousands of southerners, availing themselves of special discounts offered by all railroad lines—south of

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3 Atlanta Journal, 10 January - 13 January 1904; Atlanta Constitution, 11 January - 14 January 1904; Gordon Smith, "Memorial Sketch," pp. xxiii-xxiv.

An imposing equestrian statute of Gordon was erected on the State Capitol grounds in Atlanta where it still stands. Sculptored by Solon H. Borglum, the statute depicts Gordon astride Marye, the magnificent mare that his men captured on Marye's Heights at Fredericksburg in 1863. In addition to voluntary contributions which poured in all over the country, the state of Georgia appropriated \$10,000 for the monument. The dedication and unveiling ceremonies took place on 25 May 1907. Report of the Gordon Monument Commission (located in Georgia Department of Archives and History, Atlanta, Georgia); Gordon, Reminiscences, pp. 101-02; Atlanta Constitution, 26 May 1907; New York Times, 26 May 1907.

the Potomac and east of the Mississippi—leading to Atlanta, had flocked to the capital city to pay their respects to the "Hero of Appomattox." The crowd soon grew so large that two lines proved necessary. For the numerous veterans who passed in final review of the General, the experience must have been particularly moving. More than the grief they felt, many were overwhelmed by the visions of the past that flooded before them. As they gazed upon the face of the man who had led them in battle so often, they saw far beyond his scarred countenance. Memories of their youth spent upon the battlefield and in camp came alive. Gordon's death dramatically compelled the aging veterans to confront their own mortality. His passing only one week after that of General James Longstreet, another of Lee's lieutenants, drove home the somber reality that their days too were drawing to a close. In a very real sense then, they were paying tribute to their own past as well as to the Gallant Gordon. Most assuredly, it was the old veterans who comprised a large portion of the upwards of 50,000 mourners who steadily filed past Gordon's coffin well into the night.<sup>4</sup>

The following day, 14 January, was an official day of mourning in Georgia as memorial services were held throughout the state. In Atlanta, flags hung at half-mast, a seventeen-gun salute was fired every one-half hour, and state offices, courts, schools, businesses and shops were closed in honor of Gordon's funeral. At 10:00 a.m., a two-hour memorial service commenced at the state house in which many of his friends delivered eloquent, ten-minute eulogies. Immediately following these ceremonies, pall-bearers carried Gordon's casket across the street into the Central Presbyterian Church where religious services were conducted. Although limited seating existed, Mrs. Gordon specifically

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<sup>4</sup> Gordon Smith, "Memorial Sketch," pp. xxiv-xxv; Atlanta Constitution, 10 January, 14 January - 15 January 1904; Atlanta Journal, 10 January, 13 January - 14 January 1904.

requested that veterans "be given every opportunity of witnessing these services." Shortly after 1:00 p.m., Gordon's final march began. Moving to "muffled drumbeats" and escorted by military units from all sections of the state as well as United States regulars and a contingent from the Grand Army of the Republic, the solemn funeral procession made its way through streets lined with mourners to Oakland Cemetery. Although the Gordon family already owned a large plot at the cemetery, the Ladies Memorial Association of Atlanta donated "the most beautiful site in the confederate burying ground" for the General. Gordon would rest among his fallen comrades near the Confederate Memorial Monument. The day was raw but thousands attended the simple ceremony at Oakland which one reporter styled "the most touching spectacle ever seen in Georgia." Immediately following the brief, poignant graveside service, Gordon's body was lowered into the ground as "taps" sounded and ruffled drums beat "the soldier's last tattoo." With a band playing "Nearer my God to Thee," the family and then the assembled mourners filed past the grave in final tribute to the man who had devoted so much of himself to his state, his section and his country. He would not be forgotten. As one eulogist proclaimed, "his name becomes the heritage of his people, and his fame the glory of a nation."<sup>5</sup>

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5 Atlanta Constitution, 11 January - 12 January, 14 January - 15 January 1904; Gordon Smith, "Memorial Sketch," pp. xxv-xxvii; Atlanta Journal, 12 January, 14 January - 15 January 1904; Confederate Veteran 12 (February 1904): 56; 12 (July 1904): 332-33.

## BIBLIOGRAPHICAL ESSAY

### PRIMARY SOURCES

#### Manuscripts

The major problem in writing this biography has been the dearth of manuscript material. The bulk of Gordon's personal correspondence and private papers were destroyed when his home burned in June 1899. As a result, the search for Gordon material—especially letters to, from, and about him—has not been that productive. At the outset of my research, no one repository stood above the others as the most important archival source; however, the recent acquisition of the Gordon Family Collection by the University of Georgia has made it the single most valuable source. This collection, which I helped catalogue, contains letters, personal papers and mementoes that survived the fire. Letters between Gordon and his wife—during and after the war—and between Fanny and other members of the family provide an insight into Gordon's personal and family life unavailable anywhere else. As such, the Gordon Family Collection is invaluable. A special tribute must be paid to the late Hugh H. Gordon, III whose efforts at gathering materials scattered among various branches of the Gordon family were finally rewarded in this single collection. In addition to family correspondence, the collection also includes postwar letters between Gordon and R. E. Lee, numerous letters of praise for speeches made or actions taken by Gordon, and a variety of miscellaneous papers. Caroline Lewis Gordon's "De Gin'ral an' Miss Fanny," an unpublished manuscript within the collection, is a wholly uncritical, yet valuable source of information on Gordon's

home life.

Other University of Georgia collections were also helpful. The Doctor William Harrell Felton and Rebecca A. Latimer Felton Collection plus the Rebecca L. Felton Collection are storehouses of anti-Gordon material. As the General's most relentless and vocal critic, Mrs. Felton spent decades accumulating information that she deemed damaging to Gordon. In addition to her large body of correspondence, an impressive collection of scrapbooks contain criticisms of Gordon as a politician and a businessman as well as her frequent newspaper attacks upon him. The Joseph E. Brown Papers in the Felix Hargrett Collection shed light on the secret maneuverings which underlay the resignation-appointment scenario of May 1880. Early records of the University of Georgia, including Faculty Minutes and Records of the Demosthenian Literary Society, present a sketchy, though valuable picture of Gordon's days as a college student. Other collections that contain useful material are the Henry P. Farrow Papers, the Alfred H. Colquitt Scrapbooks, the United Confederate Veteran Papers, the Hoke Smith Collection, and the Keith Morton Read Papers.

The holdings of the Georgia Department of Archives and History include the official records of Gordon's governorship—Executive Minutes, Executive Orders, Incoming Correspondence and the Governor's Letterbooks—but they are disappointing. The seven volumes of Personal Letterbooks that he and his sons maintained between 1883 and 1890, however, are much more valuable. These largely illegible letterbooks are the richest source of information on the International Railroad and Steamship Corporation of Florida. The Minutebooks of the I.R.R.&S.S.Co. and the New York, Florida and Havana Construction Company are also helpful in developing his Florida railroad activities. The Gordon Letterbooks along with the Hugh H. Gordon Letterbook document the wide variety of other interests in which he and his sons were involved. The

Henry Woodfin Grady Papers contain an important letter dealing with Gordon's gubernatorial campaign in 1886. The Governor's Letterbooks of Alfred H. Colquitt are useful as are two poignant 1864 letters from Fanny to John which are located in the Department's files.

In the Southern Historical Collection at the University of North Carolina, I found a number of collections with helpful letters. The Matt W. Ransom Papers contain correspondence between Gordon and his former comrade-in-arms while they served in the Senate, plus a letter illustrating the political usefulness of Gordon's famous lecture. The papers of Alexander Robert Lawton are informative in discussing Georgia politics. Gordon's involvements with the Southern Life Insurance Company and the Plantation Publishing Company are illuminated in the papers of Benjamin C. Yancey. Letters in the Edward Porter Alexander Collection touch upon the final battle of the war and Gordon's plans in the immediate postwar period. An 1886 letter in the William Gaston Lewis Collection provides additional details on Gordon's attack on Fort Stedman in March 1865. In the Marcus Joseph Wright Papers, Gordon explains why he remained a major general even though he exercised the command responsibilities of a lieutenant general. Gordon's letter to the ladies of Columbia, South Carolina, thanking them for the silver service presented to him in honor of his labors on behalf of the Palmetto State, can be found in the Franklin Harper Elmore Papers.

The Duke University Library also holds several collections with a small number of Gordon letters within them. Correspondence between Thomas G. Jones and John W. Daniel in the John Warwick Daniel Papers elaborate upon and clarify many points of controversy between Jubal A. Early and Gordon. The Munford-Ellis Papers also discuss certain aspects of Gordon's Civil War career and contain valuable letters from Thomas H. Carter. A large body of letters in

the Samuel Houston Brodnax Collection demonstrate that there was substantial opposition to Gordon from the agrarian sector in his 1890 Senate bid. The Herschel Vespasian Johnson Papers provide information on postwar Georgia politics. Other useful collections are the John Brown Gordon Papers, Thaddeus K. Oglesby Collection, Paul Hamilton Hayne Collection, Bradley T. Johnson Papers, Charles Edgeworth Jones Collection, John McIntosh Kell Papers, Richard Lancelot Maury Papers, Frederick W. M. Holliday Papers, and the Francis Warrington Dawson I Collection.

The Special Collections Department at Emory University contains a number of helpful collections. The John Brown Gordon Papers are few in number but they provide information on a variety of subjects. Letters in the James P. Hambleton Collection and in the L. N. Trammell Collection are useful in discussing Georgia politics and Gordon's role therein. A single letter in the John Hill Hewitt Papers deals with Gordon's race for the Senate in 1872. The most valuable material in the Alexander H. Stephens I Collection is an 1871 Gordon letter in which he discusses his unsuccessful lumber business at Brunswick and his efforts to resolve his resulting debts.

Collections in the Virginia Historical Society supply additional details on Gordon's military career. Several unpublished reports, especially his 11 April 1865 Report, and postwar correspondence between Gordon and Lee in the Robert E. Lee Headquarters Papers shed substantial light on his Civil War actions. The Charles Scott Venable Papers and Samuel J. C. Moore Papers help detail Gordon's role in battles during 1864. Also, a special thanks must go to the staffs of the National Military Battlefield Parks at Antietam and Petersburg for their assistance and willingness to open their archives to me.

The holdings of the Library of Congress were somewhat disappointing, nevertheless, I found valuable information in several collections. The Thomas

Francis Bayard, Manton Marble and Alexander H. Stephens Collections as well as the presidential papers of Grover Cleveland, Benjamin Harrison, and William McKinley, all supply information on Gordon's role in national politics. The papers of both Jedediah Hotchkiss and Jubal A. Early add to the discussion of Civil War actions that erupted into full-blown controversies during the last third of the nineteenth century.

Other repositories, though they have fewer collections that contain Gordon material, are also of value. The Huntington Library in San Marino, California has only one important collection pertinent to my study, but the Samuel Latham Mitchill Barlow Papers are an excellent source on Gordon behind-the-scenes. These letters, approximately eighty in number, demonstrate both the activity and diversity of Gordon's business and political involvements in the postwar period. The "Colton Letters" pamphlet in the University of California Library at Berkley is a reprint of a few of the over 400 letters between David D. Colton and Collis P. Huntington, some of which seem to implicate Gordon in questionable senatorial activities. The Thomas Goode Jones Collection in the Alabama Department of Archives and History contain additional letters between Jones and Daniel not found in the Daniel Papers at Duke. Gordon's Service File in the National Archives plus his military records and those of the Sixth Alabama Regiment in the Alabama Department of Archives and History, supply valuable information on his war record. In the South Caroliniana Library at the University of South Carolina, the papers of Edward Perrin McKissick, the Bratton Family and the Simpson, Young, Dean, and Coleman Families all contain letters concerning Gordon's life insurance and railroading ventures. The United Confederate Veterans Collection at Louisiana State University is the best manuscript source on Gordon's involvement with the veterans' organization. John Sutlive's "The Lady and the General" at the Georgia

Historical Society is an interesting account of the conflict between Mrs. Felton and Gordon. Details concerning the negotiations and publication of Gordon's Reminiscences are found in the Charles Scribner's Collection at Princeton University. Other collections that provided some information are the William Leroy Broun Papers at Auburn University, the Bryan Grimes Papers at the North Carolina Department of Archives and History, the Fairbanks Collection at the University of the South, the Dabney Family Papers at the University of Virginia, and the John B. Gordon File at the Atlanta Historical Society.

#### Newspapers

The single most important source in my biography is the Atlanta Constitution. From 1868 to 1904, the Atlanta daily thoroughly covered Gordon's postwar career. Although generally favorable to him, the Constitution provides a tremendous amount of material on his varied business enterprises and on his political activities unavailable from other sources. It not only presents a Georgia perspective of Gordon and his actions but also supplies valuable sectional and national points of view with its reprinting of southern and national editorials. For a broader national perspective, I relied on the New York Times and New York Tribune. Their ample coverage of Gordon demonstrates his importance as a national statesman. The late December 1883 issues of the San Francisco Chronicle carried many of the letters between D. D. Colton and C. P. Huntington. A few of the other newspapers consulted were the Athens Herald, the Athens Southern Banner, the Athens Southern Watchman, the Atlanta Intelligencer, the Atlanta Daily Herald, the Atlanta Daily New Era, the Atlanta Journal, the Augusta Daily Constitutionalist, the Columbus Weekly Enquirer, the Milledgeville Southern Recorder, the Milledgeville Federal Union, and the Savannah Daily News and Herald.

### Official Government Publications, Reports and Records

The starting point for any study of the military aspects of the Civil War is The War of Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies (128 vols., Washington: Government Printing Office, 1880-1901). The Official Records is the single most valuable source in determining Gordon's role in the Confederate army. Publications of the United States Bureau of the Census provide useful data on Gordon's financial status over the years. Those most helpful were the 1840 Georgia Slave Schedule, the 1850 Georgia Free and Slave Schedules, the 1860 Alabama Free and Slave Schedules, and the 1870 and 1880 Georgia Schedules. His testimony before the so-called Ku Klux Committee contained in Testimony Taken by the Joint Select Committee to Inquire into the Conditions of Affairs in the Late Insurrectionary States (vol. 6, Washington: Government Printing Office, 1872) is an extremely useful source of information not only on the Klan in Georgia, but on a myriad of related subjects as well. The Congressional Record is invaluable in assessing his activities as a United States Senator. Also, federal court documents at the Federal Records Center in East Point, Georgia, reveal Gordon's history of legal problems. The Journal of the House of Representatives of the State of Georgia and the Journal of the Senate of the State of Georgia are important publications which provide roll call votes in Gordon's elections, plus legislative details during his governorship. Real estate and court records for the Georgia counties of DeKalb and Taylor contain legal documents involving Gordon and his family.

### Contemporary Observers

Among the most valuable works by a Gordon contemporary is I. W. Avery's The History of the State of Georgia From 1850 to 1881 (New York: Brown and Derby, 1881). Although exceedingly favorable to Gordon and other

Conservative Democrats, Avery provides a particularly informative account of Georgia political history during these three turbulent decades. E. A. Pollard's The Early Life, Campaigns and Public Services of Robert E. Lee, with a Record of the Campaigns and Heroic Deeds of his Companions in Arms (New York: E. B. Treat and Co., 1871) contains a fine early biographical sketch of Gordon. Edward Mayes', Lucius Q. C. Lamar: His Life, Times, and Speeches, 1825-1893 (Nashville: Publishing House of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, 1896) points out the close ties between the Mississippian and the Georgian. And in her testament of hatred, My Memoirs of Georgia Politics (Atlanta: Index Printing Co., 1911), Mrs. William H. Felton catalogues her long list of charges against the General.

Useful works touching on Gordon as a soldier are Robert Underwood Johnson and Clarence Clough Buel, eds., Battles and Leaders of the Civil War (4 vols., New York: Century Co., 1887-88; reprint ed., New York: Thomas Yoseloff, Inc., 1956), John H. Worsham's One of Jackson's Foot Cavalry (New York: Neale Publishing Co., 1912), Henry Kyd Douglas' I Rode with Stonewall (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1940) and Jubal A. Early's Autobiographical Sketch and Narrative of the War Between the States (Philadelphia and London: J. B. Lippincott Co., 1912). The Southern Historical Society Papers (52 vols., Richmond, Virginia: Southern Historical Society, 1876-1959) are second only to the Official Records as the finest source of printed material on the Confederacy. Also, the Confederate Veteran (40 vols., Nashville: Trustees of the Confederate Veteran, 1893-1932), Clement A. Evans' Confederate Military History (12 vols., Atlanta: Confederate Publishing Co., 1899), Dunbar Rowland's Jefferson Davis: Constitutionalist, His Letters, Papers and Speeches (10 vols., Jackson: Mississippi Department of Archives and History, 1923), and William E. Mickle, ed., Minutes of the Annual Meetings and

Reunions of the United Confederate Veterans (3 vols., New Orleans: Hopkins Printing Co., 1891-1904), help trace Gordon's military and postwar career. Lucian Lamar Knight's Reminiscences of Famous Georgians (2 vols., Atlanta: Franklin-Turner Co., 1907-08) and William J. Northen's Men of Mark in Georgia (7 vols., Atlanta: A. B. Caldwell, 1907-12) supply valuable sketches of Gordon and of other prominent Georgians.

#### Published Works of John Brown Gordon

Gordon's A Boyhood Sketch (n.p., n.d.) is a brief personal account of his youth in Georgia and, as such, is one of the only sources on his earliest years. The only extant copy of this sketch is in the Atlanta Public Library. A portion of this sketch can be found in "Boyhood in the South," The Youth's Companion: An Illustrated Weekly Paper for Young People and Families 74 (January 1900): 15-16. His address before the literary societies of Oglethorpe University in July 1860 is reproduced in Progress of Civil Liberty. An Address Delivered Before the Thalian and Phi Delta Societies, of Oglethorpe University, Georgia, at the Last Annual Commencement (Macon: Telegraph Mammoth Steam Press, 1861). Gordon's 1887 speech to the Augusta Survivors Association is published under the title, The Old South. Addresses Delivered Before the Confederate Survivors' Association in Augusta, Georgia, on the Occasion of Its Ninth Annual Reunion, on Memorial Day, April 16th 1887 by His Excellency, Governor John B. Gordon, and by Col. Charles C. Jones, Jr. (Augusta: Chronicle Publishing Co., 1887). "Last Days of the Confederacy," his famous lecture, can be found in Thomas Reed, ed., Modern Eloquence, 15 vols. (Philadelphia: John D. Morris and Co., 1900-03), 5: 471-94. An article under the same title dealing with the final winter of war is published in Rossister Johnson, ed., Campfire and Battlefield (New York: Fairfax Press, 1978), pp. 485-94.

Although Gordon's Reminiscences of the Civil War (New York: Charles

Scribner's Sons, 1903) was written almost forty years after the war, and must be read carefully with that fact in mind, it nevertheless is preceded only by the Official Records in developing Gordon's activities during the war. Reminiscences provides additional information and adds a valuable human touch missing in official reports or service records. Several editions of Reminiscences were printed in 1903 and 1904, with the 1904 Memorial Edition including an introduction by Gordon's successor as commander-in-chief of the United Confederate Veterans, Stephen Dill Lee, and a sketch of his final hours and funeral by his daughter, Frances Gordon Smith.

#### SECONDARY WORKS

A number of books are extremely useful in providing an adequate background of Georgia and southern history. E. Merton Coulter's A Short History of Georgia (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1933) and the more balanced, recent work of Kenneth Coleman, ed., A History of Georgia (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1977) supply brief but informative accounts of Georgia history during the second half of the nineteenth century. C. Mildred Thompson's Reconstruction in Georgia, Economic, Social, Political, 1865-1872 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1915), Edwin C. Woolley's The Reconstruction of Georgia (New York: Columbia University Press, 1901), Alan Conway's The Reconstruction of Georgia (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1966), and Elizabeth S. Nathans' Losing the Peace: Georgia Republicans and Reconstruction, 1865-1871 (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1968) aid in understanding Reconstruction in Georgia, but a well balanced comprehensive interpretation of the period has yet to be written. The final three decades of the 1800s in Georgia are treated in Judson Clements Ward, Jr.'s "Georgia Under the Bourbon Democrats 1872-1890" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of North Carolina, 1947) and Alex Mathews Arnett's The Populist

Movement in Georgia: A View of the "Agrarian Crusade" in Light of Solid-South Politics, Economics and Public Law (New York: Columbia University, 1922). E. Merton Coulter's The South During Reconstruction, 1865-1877 (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1947), though often dismissed as a racist tract, nevertheless provides substantial material on Reconstruction in the South. The following volume in A History of the South series, C. Vann Woodward's The Origins of the New South, 1877-1913 (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1951; revised, ed., 1971), remains the standard study of the South during that period.

Other helpful works include Paul M. Gaston, The New South Creed: A Study in Southern Mythmaking (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1970), Paul H. Buck, The Road to Reunion, 1865-1900 (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1937), C. Vann Woodward, Reunion and Reaction: The Compromise of 1877 and the End of Reconstruction (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1951), Maury Klein, History of the Louisville and Nashville Railroad (New York: Macmillan Co., 1972) and John F. Stover, The Railroads of the South 1865-1900: A Study in Finance and Control (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1955), Walter G. Cooper, Official History of Fulton County (Atlanta: W. W. Brown, 1934; reprint ed., Spartanburg, South Carolina: Reprint Company, 1978), and Franklin M. Garrett, Atlanta and Its Environs: A Chronicle of Its People and Events (3 vols., New York: Lewis Historical Publishing Co., 1954).

Biographical studies of prominent southerners were also of great use. Among them were C. Vann Woodward's Tom Watson: Agrarian Rebel (New York: Macmillan Co., 1938), Raymond B. Nixon, Henry W. Grady: Spokesman of the New South (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1943), John E. Talmadge, Rebecca Latimer Felton: Nine Stormy Decades (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1966), and Joseph H. Parks, Joseph E. Brown of Georgia (Baton Rouge:

Louisiana State University Press, 1977). And any reference to the Army of Northern Virginia without mention of Douglas Southall Freeman's R. E. Lee: A Biography (4 vols., New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1934-35) and Lee's Lieutenants: A Study in Command (3 vols., New York: Charles Scribner's Sons 1942-44) would be an unforgiveable slight. Possessing a better understanding of the men of Lee's army than any other twentieth century writer, Freeman recognized Gordon as one of the finest of Lee's lieutenants. These two classics contributed significantly to the study of Gordon's military career.

The two previous major studies of Gordon--Allen P. Tankersley's John B. Gordon: A Study in Gallantry (Atlanta: Whitehall Press, 1955) and Grady Sylvester Culpepper's "The Political Career of John Brown Gordon, 1868 to 1897" (Ph.D. dissertation, Emory University, 1981) are both extremely disappointing. Tankersley's biography failed to utilize manuscript material, but, more importantly, failed to evaluate Gordon critically. The work is a paeon, lacking the balance and objectivity necessary in good biography. Culpepper's effort is a thinly researched, superficial treatment of Gordon's political career. It is not analytical, makes no attempt to place Gordon in a national context, and adds nothing to the incomplete discussion provided by Tankersley.

## VITA

Born in Brookville, Pennsylvania on 25 November 1949, Ralph Lowell Eckert was graduated from Warren Area High School in 1967. He received his Bachelor of Arts degree in history from Pennsylvania State University in 1971. Three years later, he returned to Penn State where he received a Master of Arts degree in history in 1975. Since that time he has been at Louisiana State University working toward the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in history, which will be conferred upon him at the 1983 Summer Commencement. On 1 April 1983, he married Jeanne Diane Dier of Baton Rouge, Louisiana. In August of 1983, they will move to Erie, Pennsylvania where he has accepted an assistant professorship at the Pennsylvania State University-Behrend College.

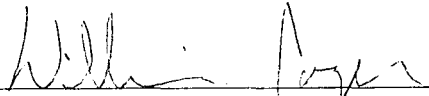
## EXAMINATION AND THESIS REPORT

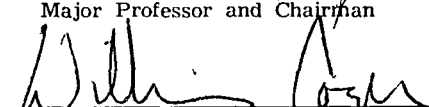
Candidate: Ralph Lowell Eckert

Major Field: History


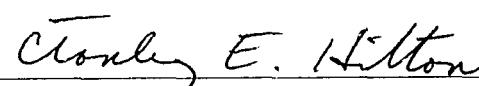

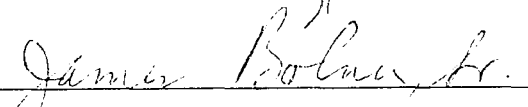
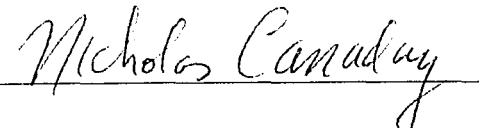
Title of Thesis: John Brown Gordon: Soldier, Southerner, American

Approved:

  
Major Professor and Chairman

  
Dean of the Graduate School

### EXAMINING COMMITTEE:

Date of Examination:

June 13, 1983