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EVIDENCE OF GEN. ROBERT E. LEE BEFORE THE COMMITTEE OF RECONSTRUCTION

Mr. Conklin, from the Joint Committee of Fifteen, reported to the House a large amount of evidence on the condition of the Southern States. The first in order was Virginia.

On February 17, General Robert E. Lee was sworn and examined.

By Senator Howard—Q. Where is your present residence? A. Lexington, Virginia

Q. How long have you been in Lexington? A. Since the first of October last—nearly five months.

Q. Are you acquainted with the state of feeling among what we call Secessionists a present in Virginia, toward the Federal Government? A. I do not know that I am. I have been living very retired, and have had but little communication with politicians. I know nothing more than from my observations and from such facts as have come to my knowledge.

Q. What is your opinion, from observations among the Secession people of that State, of the feeling toward this government at this time? A. So far as come to my knowledge I do not know of a single person who either feels or contemplates any resistance to the government of the United States, or indeed any opposition to it. No word has reached me to either purpose.

Q. From what you have observed is it your opinion that they are friendly towards the Government, and they will cooperate to sustain and uphold it in future? A. I believe they entirely acquiesce in the Government, and so far as I have heard any one express an opinion, they are for co-operating with President Johnson in his policy.

Q. In his policy in regard to what? A. His policy in regard to the restoration of the whole country. I have heard persons with whom I have conversed express great confidence in the wisdom of his policy of restoration, and they seem to look forward to it as a hope of restoration

Q. How do they feel in regard to that portion of the people of the United States who have been forward and zealous in the prosecution of the war against rebellion? A. I said before, I have not had much conversation with politicians in the country, if there are any. Every one appears to be engaged in his own affairs and is endeavoring to restore the civil government of the State.

Q. How do the people of Virginia, the Secessionists particularly, feel toward the freedmen? A. Everyone with whom I have associated expresses kind feelings toward the freemen. They wish to see them get on in the world, and particularly to take up some occupation for a living, and to turn their hands to some work. I know that efforts have been made among the farmers near where I live to induce them to engage for the year at regular wages.

Q. How do they feel in regard to the education of the black; is there a general willingness or unwillingness to have them educated? A. Where I have been the people have exhibited a willingness that the black should be educated and they express an opinion that that would be better for the blacks and for the whites.

Q. General, you are very competent to judge of the capacity of black men to acquire knowledge. I want your opinion on that capacity as compared with the capacity of white men? A. I do not know that I am particularly qualified to speak on that subject as you seem to intimate, but I do not think he is as capable of acquiring knowledge as the white man is. There are some more apt than others. I have known some to gain knowledge and skill in their trade or profession. I have had servants of my own who learned to read and write very well.

Q. Do they show a capacity to obtain a knowledge of mathematics and the exact sciences? A. I have no

knowledge on that subject. I am merely acquainted with those who have learned the common rudiments of education.

Q. General are you aware of any combination existing among the black of Virginia anywhere in the State, having to view the disturbance of the peace, or any improper or unlawful acts? A. I am not, I have seen no evidence of it, and have heard of none. Wherever I have been, they have been quiet and orderly, not disposed to work, or rather not disposed to any continuous engagement to work, but just very short jobs to provide them with the immediate means of subsistence.

Q. Has the colored race generally as much love for money and property as the white race? A. I do not think it has. The blacks whom I know look more to the present than to the future.

Q. Does that absence of a lust of money arise more from the nature of the negro than from his former servile condition? A. Well, it may be in some measure attributed to his former condition. They are an amiable, social race.

Q. Can Capitalists and working men from the North go into Virginia and go to work among the people? A. I do not know anything to prevent them, their peace and pleasure there would depend very much on their conduct. I do not believe they would be molested; there is no desire to keep out labor and capital; on the contrary, they are very anxious to get labor and capital into the state; the manner in which they would be received (as I said before) would depend entirely on the individuals; they might make themselves obnoxious.

By Mr. Howard—Is there not a general dislike of Northern men among secessionists? A. I suppose they would prefer not to associate with them. I do not know that they would select them as their associates. Q. Do they avoid and ostracize them socially? A. They might avoid them. They would not select them as associate unless there was some reason.

By Mr. Blow—Do you think the colored person would rather work for a Northern and a Southern man? A. I think it very probable that they would prefer the Northern man, although I have no facts. I know a number of blacks engaging with their old masters, and I know of a good many who prefer to go off and look for new homes. Whether it is from any dislike to former masters, or a desire for change, I do not know.

Q. In the event of a war between the United States and any foreign power, such as England or France, if there should be held out to the secession portions of the people of Virginia or the other recently Rebel States, a fair prospect of gaining their independence and shaking off the Government of the United States, is it or is it not your opinion that they would avail themselves of that opportunity? A. I cannot speak with any certainty on that point. So far as I know, they contemplate nothing of the kind now.

Q. Do you not frequently hear in your intercourse with secessionists in Virginia expressions of a hope that such a war may break out? A. I cannot say that I have heard it. On the contrary, I have heard persons (I do not know whether you can call them secessionists or not, I mean those people in Virginia with whom I associate) express a hope that the country many not be led into a war.

Q. In such an event, do you jot think that that class of people whom I call Secessionists would join the common enemy? A. It is possible. It depends upon the feeling of the individual.

Q. If it is a fair question (you may answer it or not as you choose), what, in such an event, might be your choice? A. I have no disposition now to do it and I never have.

Q. And you cannot foresee that such would be your inclination in such an event? A. No, I can only judge from the past. I do not know what circumstances may produce. I cannot pretend to foresee events. So far as I know, the wish of the people of Virginia is for peace.

Q. During the war was it not contemplated by the Government of the Confederate States to form an alliance with some foreign nations, if possible? A. I believe it was their wish to do so. It was their wish to have the Confederate Government recognized as an independent Government. I have no doubt if it could have made favorable treaties it would have done so. But I know nothing of the policy of the Government. I had no hand or part in it.

Q. The question I am about to put to you, you may answer or not, as you choose. Did you take an oath of

fidelity, of allegiance to the Confederate Government? A. I do not recollect having done so, but it is possible when I was commissioned I did.

Q. Suppose a jury was empanelled in your own neighborhood, taken by lot, would it be practical to convict, for instance, Jefferson Davis for having levied war on the United States, and thus having committed the criminal treason? A. I think it would be very probable that they would not consider he had committed treason. I do not know whether a jury would heed the instructions of the court to convict the offender.

Q. They do not generally suppose that it was treason against the government do they? A. I do not think that they do so consider it. So far as I know, they look upon the action of a State, in withdrawing from the government as carrying the individuals in it along with it., that the State was responsible for the act and not the individual.

Q. State, if you please, (and if you are disinclined you need not answer the question) what your own personal views on that question were? A. That was my view: that the act of Virginia in withdrawing herself from the Union carried me along as a citizen of Virginia and that her laws and her acts were binding on me.

Q. And that you feel, is to be your justification in taking the course you did? A. Yes, sir.