

PREFACE TO FIRST EDITION.

It is not without diffidence that I give to the world a volume including within its single self the history of events so vast and complicated, so little understood and so greatly misunderstood, as those that filled up the momentous four years during which the chief armies of the North and the South fought the war of secession to an issue upon the soil of Virginia. Yet, I should not have attempted the task, had I not been met both by an inward prompting in the desire to speak truly of actions and men whereof there has been hitherto little else than false witness, and by outward solicitations, in the possession of such a mass of documentary material as it seldom falls to the writer of contemporaneous history to obtain.

While the Army of the Potomac was yet in the field, there were many who, believing that I would in time make fitter record of the doings and sufferings of that army than was possible in the brief chronicles which it was my duty to prepare for the press, began even then to furnish me with oral and written information. And no sooner had the war closed, and it was known that I had ad-

dressed myself to this work in earnest, than, from all sides, reports, dispatches, and memorials poured in upon me. It soon came about that, respecting every important action of the Army of the Potomac, there were brought to my hand, not only the manuscript official reports of its corps, division, and brigade commanders, but, for the illustration of its inner life and history, a prodigious mass of memoirs, private note-books, dispatches, letter-books, etc. In addition, I have had the benefit of the memory and judgment of most of the chief officers ; and, both from these and others, have had so many proofs of their kindly solicitude that nothing which could be of use to me should be wanting, that I have been led to believe they did not regard me as entirely unworthy to record the history of their army.

For the elucidation of the deeds of the Army of Northern Virginia, the mighty rival of the Army of the Potomac, my sources of information have been scarcely less ample. These embrace the complete "Reports of the Army of Northern Virginia," and many manuscript reports and documents kindly forwarded to me. I have also had the advantage of full conversations with most of the chief commanders of the Confederate army ; and I think the result cannot fail to appear in the explanation of many things hitherto wrongly interpreted, many things hitherto wholly incomprehensible.

I have seldom needed to refer for the corroboration of statements to what I personally saw ; and indeed the individual knowledge of any one man respecting such actions as were waged in Virginia, is necessarily slight. But that which has been of such use that without it the history of the Army of the Potomac never could have been written, is the power, gained by personal experience in the field, of

testing the truth of written evidence by a reference to the actual conditions under which warfare was made in Virginia. Nor is it of less value to have known the private judgments upon events of that great body of instructed officers that adorned the Army of the Potomac. As these judgments took shape from the deeds themselves under the very circumstances of their performance, I hold them to be sounder than any that are hereafter likely to be rendered. Hence I have garnered these with care, endeavoring to make this a record of the *army-verdicts* on men and things. It will be safe to presume that whatever is of worth in this book has this origin.

It is probable that the estimates here rendered of the successive commanders of the Army of the Potomac, may in some cases be found to run counter to, and in other cases to be a reversal of, popular estimates. I must say, in justice to myself, that if some commanders are here exalted above the place they have hitherto held in popular esteem, and others brought down to a lower place, it is because I dared not judge one commander by one standard, and another by another. Whatever criticism I have made on men has resulted from the reference of their actions to the test of those simple principles to which almost all great military questions may be reduced. Those, therefore, who would impugn these judgments must in justice first impugn the reasoning on which they are founded.

I desire to call attention to the maps and plans, which, though on a small scale, are entirely reliable. They have been prepared with great care, by Colonel W. H. PAINE, of the engineer staff of the Army of the Potomac. I particularly instance those illustrative of Grant's campaign from the Rappahannock to Petersburg. The

lines of works marked thereon are derived from the government surveys, and the angles indicated are correct. They will prove highly interesting and instructive to military students.

To a distinguished officer I owe a special acknowledgment for the invaluable gift of the unpublished consolidated monthly returns of the Confederate army from the commencement to the close of the war.

The notes in support of the text are made very ample, especially touching all disputed points. As, with a few well-known exceptions, the sources of information are entirely manuscript, it has not been thought necessary to state this fact in each individual case.

W. S.

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PORTRAITS.

LIEUTENANT-GENERAL U. S. GRANT.

MAJOR-GENERAL G. B. McCLELLAN.

MAJOR-GENERAL A. E. BURNSIDE.

MAJOR-GENERAL J. HOOKER.

MAJOR-GENERAL G. G. MEADE.