JEFFERSON DAVIS, SOUTHERN NATIONALIST

"A Study in Background"

Romayne A. Barnes

The night of February 16, 1861, found the provincial inland capital of Alabama ablaze with unaccustomed light and excitement. A picturesque little town perched above the bend of the Alabama River, Montgomery in that day branched out from one central artery, Main Street, that ran a half mile upward from the banks of the river to the white columned and classic Georgian capitol building. This pleasant unassuming town was not old. It had existed for only forty years. It had been the cotton state's seat of government just the past fourteen years. Yet now it had a new part to play. Virtually overnight it had become a world capital in which men were saying and doing things that would affect American History for generations to come. And on this February night one hundred and two years ago, with the scent of an early spring already in the air, cheering throngs packed Fountain Square in front of the Exchange Hotel. Shortly before, the train from Atlanta had puffed in at dusk to the little station. The principal occupant, an erect, well groomed man, with a reserved, rather severe manner, with a square jaw, high cheek bones and thin flexible lips had acknowledged with dignity the welcome from a waiting official delegation. Then he mounted a carriage to be driven down the long torch-lit avenue, decked as though for a fair, to the hotel. Within minutes after his arrival here the newcomer appeared on the hotel balcony to face the cheering crowds below. He was not alone. Standing at his side was a short, rather undistinguished looking individual whose upraised arm brought a sudden silence to the applauding multitude. This latter man was no stranger to Alabama and southern political gatherings. In over twenty years the magic of his golden voice had brought to William Lowndes Yancey the sobriquet of "The Fire Brand of Secession." A passionate, intense person, he had labored mightily to create a new nation and tonight he would reach the pinnacle in his almost ended career of eloquence. Turning and pointing to the tall, determined-looking man at his side Mr. Yancey presented him to the expectant throng below in a historic phrase of singular dignity and beauty, "The man and the hour have met."

And so on the balcony of a country hotel in a little southern

city Jefferson Davis of Mississippi, member of Congress and twice United States Senator from that state, Secretary of War in the Cabinet of President Franklin Pierce, Colonel of the First Mississippi Rifles during the war with Mexico, graduate of West Point, and now Major General of the Mississippi State Volunteers, met his hour; an hour that grew out of everything a proud and independent society had been striving for through thirty years of a cold war atmosphere since nullification in an attempt to ward off unwelcome change; an hour that would reach high noon two days later in the Grecian portico of the Capitol Building of Alabama when he, the Southern Nationalist, would be inaugurated Provisional President of the Confederate States of America.

It may be of interest to digress here for a moment and note the Greenville connection of two of the most prominent participants in this Montgomery drama of over a century ago. The prayer at the Inaugurational Ceremony for Jefferson Davis was made by Doctor Basil Manly, Sr., whose own life and that of his descendents are closely entwined with the history of Greenville. Dr. Manly, prior to his going to Alabama to become President of the University of Alabama in the 1850's, had served pastorates in South Carolina and played a part in the founding of Furman University. He was instrumental in the establishment of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary which was located in Greenville in 1857, and became the first President of its Board of Trustees. His eldest son and namesake, Basil Manly, Jr., was one of the original four professors. Also to me Basil, Jr., is of especial interest since he purchased and owned the so-called "Coleman Place," the main house of which became the Tindal home on Crescent Avenue, now the site of the Shafter Merritt home. The handsomely landscaped grounds extended over that whole area from Augusta to the stadium, and the lot on which I now live was cut from the Manly estate and sold by Basil, Jr., to his fellow professor William Williams for his home site. Dr. Manly Sr. spent the last several years of his life in Greenville, and is buried in the family lot in Springwood Cemetery. Over the grave a monument bears his name with the dates of birth and death, and the places of his life's labors. Underneath, carved in Greek, is the simple addition, "Servant of Jesus Christ."

William L. Yancey, Davis' companion on the Montgomery hotel balcony scene had spent part of his younger years in Greenville, married a Greenville girl, the fifth daughter of George Washington

Earle, and had the distinction of being the defendant in the most famous murder trial in the history of our county—the so-called "Yancey Trial."

It is an interesting paradox that for many today Jefferson Davis looms in history as the typical "Southern Aristocrat," an appropriate successor in founding a new nation to the Virginians and South Carolinians who played so great a role in establishing the American Republic. The truth, however, is that in his birth and background he was as much a frontiersman as his counterpart, Abraham Lincoln. Both were born in Kentucky within one hundred miles of each other. On June 3, 1808, in a rude "double pin log" house in Cristian, now Todd County, Kentucky, Jefferson Davis became the tenth child of Samuel and Jane Davis. Their earlier nine children had all been given names from the Bible, but this boy was named for the current President of the United States and given the middle name of Finis, in the belief, or perhaps the hope, that he would be the last offspring, which he was. Only three generations away from an immigrant Welshman who signed his name with an "X," Little Jeff had for a father a Georgia Revolutionary veteran who, having married a South Carolina girl, pulled up stakes and set out for the Kentucky wilderness. Before the boy was old enough to remember, his restless father moved his entire family 600 miles overland to Louisiana and then on to southwest Mississippi below Natchez. This homeplace was a farm, not a plantation. Samuel Davis had slaves but he was his own overseer, working along side them in the fields. In a region where the leading men were Episcopalians and Liberalists he was a Baptist and a Democrat.

Young Jefferson Davis received a better education than fell to the lot of most boys in that undeveloped southwest portion of the New South. First the neighborhood log school house, then to a Catholic Academy 700 miles away in Kentucky, back to the log school in Mississippi, and next again to Kentucky to enter Transylvania University, one of the outstanding institutions of its day with a faculty that ranked with Harvard or Yale. Later when he was serving his first term as United States Senator, Davis would be one of six students of Transylvania holding seats in the U. S. Senate at the time. While here his father, Samuel, died and the seventeen-year-old Jefferson came under the sponsorship of a forty-year-old brother Joseph. This proved the most fortunate and influential event of young Jeff's early life. Joseph Davis, 24 years his senior,

was just reaching the peak of his own success as a planter with large estates near Vicksburg. This masterful and intelligent brother would soon be the richest man in Mississippi and in many ways its leading citizen. Having become the success his father never was, Joseph now developed vast ambitions for his younger brother. He obtained for Jefferson an appointment to West Point. It was signed by John C. Calhoun, President Monroe's Secretary of War, whose mantle as spokesman for the cause of the South would, a quarter of a century later, fall four-square on Jefferson Davis' shoulders.

Davis was a mediocre student at the Point, graduating twenty-third out of a class of thirty-three. The now Lieutenant Davis spent the seven years from 1828 to 1835 serving at frontier posts in Wisconsin, Iowa, Illinois, and Missouri. He had liked West Point, liked the regular army even better and would have continued a military career except for falling in love with his commanding officer's daughter. Colonel Zachary Taylor, "Old Rough and Ready," a future President of the United States, had no quarrel with his young lieutenant as an officer, but for unknown reasons would have no part of him as a son-in-law. Davis resigned from the army despite its future for him, taking his bride to an 800-acre plantation back in Mississippi provided for Jefferson by his indulgent brother. The newlywed couple were settled in his new life only three months when Knox Taylor Davis died of a malaria fever which almost carried off her husband also. Although he would marry a second time and happily, Jefferson never fully recovered from the tragedy of this first and intense love affair. His wife's death brought to an end this phase of Davis' life and started him on a new course.

It is well to pause here to consider briefly several important and lasting influences these initial twenty-seven years had on Davis' character and career. A first of these was the effect of West Point and his years of army service upon him. They planted the seeds of his lifelong preoccupation with military matters and a belief that the civil phrase, "Commander-in-Chief" of the Confederacy, meant just that for the Southern President as far as the far-flung battlefronts and military strategy were concerned. His attitude toward the army was respectful, almost worshipful. And in a more subtle fashion this early military training, without a doubt, strengthened a natural rigidity of will and thought thus firming Davis' mind into fixed habits. He loved routine, definite organization, authority and obedience, rank and position. Throughout his life

Davis would always be more concerned with the formalities of life than with its flexibilities. Thinking and living by rule greatly handicapped him as a politician and a statesman. A second result of this period was its permanent effect on his physical nature. A severe attack of pneumonia during his army tour in Wisconsin left him with a facial neuralgia which would plague him the rest of his life, incapacitating him completely at times and practically blinding him in one eye. In addition, he would never fully recover from the malaria fever at the time of his wife's death. During the war his "inner enemy," a nervous dyspepsia, would send him home from his office, in the words of the second Mrs. Davis, "a mere mass of throbbing nerves and perfectly exhausted." This frail health and lack of a normal nervous system tended to make him unusually irritable and tense, especially in a time of crisis or decision. His able Secretary of War, James A. Seldon, declared that "the President was the most difficult man to get along with he had ever seen." And thirdly, there was the influence on Davis in later years of his lack of geographical heritage in these young formative years. Until this time, the year 1835, he had led a wandering existence without developing that loyalty to a particular state or region which was supposed to be the birth right of the traditional Southerner. Robert E. Lee's ancestors, for over two hundred years, had been the sons not only of Virginia, but for the most part of a particular county, Westmoreland. Not such long established loyalties, ideas, or certain political or social standards surrounded the early years of Jefferson Davis. He was not a Georgian, a Kentuckian, a South Carolinian, probably not even a Mississippian. This latter state in 1835 was only eighteen years old and therefore had no special character of its own for him to tie to. Thus, the future President Davis would represent a new phenomenon in American progress; he was a Southerner, a citizen of that great region south of the Potomac and the Ohio, and not primarily the citizen of any one commonwealth. Unfamiliar with any long-established community in his sensitive years, and thus destitute of local patriotism, he would become the champion of the Southern Nationalism which gained ascendency in the thirty years preceding the Civil War. And this championship of Southern Nationalism over the cause of States Rights brought from the very start a disunity in the civil and administrative policies of the Confederacy which Davis as President could never heal or resolve.

Following the tragic death in 1835 of his beloved young bride-wife the solitary widower turned scholar-planter. For the next decade he lived the life of almost a hermit. All ambition for outside life vanished. Jefferson lived with brother Joseph at the latter's vast plantation and farmed his own farm there. The farming operations prospered and the young planter developed a model slave community therein. Intellectually, these recluse ten years proved the most fruitful of Jefferson Davis' life. All the time not given to the plantation was consumed in reading and study by the two brothers together. Both became avid students of political history and philosophy and omnivorous readers in the field of constitutional government. The future Confederacy President would emerge from this ten year seclusion as well informed, as well educated and certainly as intellectually developed as any public figure of his day.

Before Jefferson emerged from his retreat into the world of men, arms, and politics, again his remarkable brother Joseph would procure for him one more item from the horn of plenty. Joseph had a close friend, W. B. Howell of Natchez, son of an eight-term governor of New Jersey. The elder Davis was an intimate of the Howell house, their first son was named for him and their seventeen-year-old daughter Varina called him Uncle Joe. This lovely young girl, born to the purple, was invited to the Davis plantation house for Christmas holidays, and Joseph proved a success in matchmaking as in other endeavors. Varina's first impression of the brother Jefferson in a letter to her Virginia-born mother is illuminating, "Would you believe it, he is refined and cultivated, and yet he is a Democrat!" The prospective bridegroom's initial reaction to his future bride is equally illuminating as to his nature. In answer to Joseph's enthusiastic comment regarding the young visitor, "By Jove, Jefferson, she is beautiful as Venus," the serious-minded brother replied, "She is beautiful and she has a fine mind." After a six weeks courtship they were engaged and a year later, in February 1845, they were married. Davis was thirty-six, Varina half that. This second marriage proved to be Jefferson Davis' greatest single stroke of personal good fortune. He would be blessed the balance of his life with a wife designed by nature to help a public personage. A handsome, even striking looking woman, rather than pretty, Varina Howell Davis had fine dark eyes and a good figure. She and her husband set each other off well and among friends they were a pleasing, interesting couple. Mrs. Davis highly cultivated her na-

tive intelligence, had a low tolerance for fools and bores, and possessed a deep and knowledgeable interest in national affairs. She was forthright and forceful, an energetic woman of strong character, and in her great admiring love for Jefferson Davis there was nothing of the clinging vine. Though eighteen years his junior, Varina Davis was truly the helpmate of her husband in the finest sense of the word and never consciously failed him. Where she unknowingly failed him was in never turning her analytical gaze on the man she regarded as perfect, almost god-like. She saw Jefferson Davis, without reservation, precisely and as largely as he saw himself. No background study of her husband's career could minimize the powerful influence she exercised behind the official scene. He was her cause and the Confederate cause became hers also because it was his.

With this marriage Davis emerged from his cloistered shell in more ways than one. In the same year he stumped the state and was elected to Congress as a representative-at-large from Mississippi. To those who observed him in his race it was obvious that the new congressman was on his way to a brilliant career. The Mexican War the next year gave the first big push to his promising career. Resigning his seat in Congress he came home to head, as Colonel Davis, a volunteer regiment: The Mississippi Rifles. They were the crack outfit of his former father-in-law, General Zachary Taylor's army, fighting bravely at Monterey and saving the day at Buena Vista where Davis formed them in a "V" that broke the back of a Mexican calvary charge thus winning the battle. When he returned home on crutches (he was wounded in the foot) he was feted all the way and at victory banquets in New Orleans, Vicksburg, and elsewhere heard himself proclaimed a military genius and the hero of the South.

This adventure in Mexico had twin effects on Jefferson Davis' career. It made him the most popular man in Mississippi and provided a firm base for the next stage in his political career. And at the same time it strengthened the former West Pointer's natural passion for military glory and convinced him that his real talents lay in this field. Years later a Confederate newspaper, critical of President Davis' constant interference in army matters and his endless bickerings with his generals, alluded to the form in which he had disposed his men at the battle of Beuna Vista and said, "If the Confederacy perishes, it will have died of a V." Recognition came fast. Within sixty days the Governor appointed him to the United States Senate.

This role as popular hero and junior Senator from Mississippi gave him, for the first time, a national reputation but not a commanding position in his Democratic party. Davis fought to the last the admission of California as a free state, and joined with William Lowndes Yancey of Alabama and Robert Barnwell Rhett of South Carolina to call the Nashville Convention of 1850 to brandish to the North the threat of Southern Secession. Today we do not recall how close the nation came to secession and civil war in 1850. Seventy-two-year-old Henry Clay returned to the Senate from retirement of offer his famous compromise of 1850 to avert the crisis. With the support of Daniel Webster, and over the opposition of the dying Calhoun, the compromise was adopted by both houses of Congress and the civil war was postponed another decade. The southern sentiment abruptly changed with the passage of the compromise. There was rejoicing throughout the South that disunion and war had been avoided. The secessionists became unpopular. No one found this to be more true than Jefferson Davis. He resigned from the Senate to go home to Mississippi and run for governor against a detested opponent who advocated Unionism and the compromise while condemning the recent Convention. The voters repudiated Davis and secession. It was a sad moment for the forty-three-year-old hero of Beuna Vista, recently the darling of the Delta. He was politically destroyed, or at least he thought so, on the altar of secession. At any rate he was through. He went home to his plantation on the lower Mississippi to plant cotton.

But then history intervened again, as history always seemed to do for him. This time it was New Hampshire-born Franklin Pierce, newly-elected Democratic President, who reached all the way down to the banks of the lower Mississippi to choose Jefferson Davis as his Secretary of War. They had been fellow officers in Mexico and friends in Congress. Whatever his reasons Pierce chose well. As Secretary of War no appointee ever served the nation better in peace time than this West Pointer from the deep South. Yet the man who returned to public life in 1853 was different from the man who had left it in 1851. Somewhat chastened by his rebuke at the hands of the voters he was no longer the impetuous champion of secession. Rather he believed now that whatever was to be gained for the cause of Southern Right might best be accomplished within the Union. Thus he assumed his new position with concentration

on the national welfare rather than on sectional defense. Jefferson Davis' tenure in the War Secretaryship was perhaps the peak of his career; certainly no chapter of his life was more to his taste. His health, delicate both before and after, was during this period remarkably robust. It was a tragedy for the Confederacy that, as far as Davis is concerned, his service to its cause could not have come a decade earlier in his lifetime. For Davis rose to dominate the cabinet of the Pierce Administration, directing its destinies both in domestic affairs and in foreign relations.

Unfortunately, in 1854, at the urgent request of Senator Stephen A. Douglas, he persuaded the President to back the measure known in history as the Kansas-Nebraska Bill. Thus in one stroke, he would unwittingly play a major role in opening a Pandora's Box for the South in the passage of this bill. In basic effect it struck down the Missouri Compromise and the great Compromise of 1850, thus setting the slavery agitation at large again. Out of this measure the Republican Party was born and the holocaust of the Civil War was insured. Davis longed for the forum of the United States Senate once again. Now a national figure in his own right he was gladly sent back by Mississippi in 1857 to serve a second time in that body under the incoming President Buchanan's administration. But ill health struck him now with full force. For the first year and a half of his term he was almost inoperative. He came close to losing his eyesight and from this time on would be a chronic dyspeptic. Never again would he function at the peak of his physical and nervous powers. From his forum in the Senate Jefferson Davis was the acknowledged successor to John C. Calhoun, spokesman for the South. He championed the protection of slavery in the new territories and, following the Dred Scott decision, Davis engaged in a duel to the death with Stephen Douglas up to the divided Democratic Convention of 1860. Passive during the days after Lincoln's election he resigned for the third time from the halls of the National Congress upon the secession of Mississippi from the Union.

In contrast to many of his fellow Southerners who were leaving Washington excitedly, the Davises left in a spirit of grief and regret. In his farewell address to the Senate, one of his most noted efforts, his mood was similar to the sadness in which Calhoun, ten years before, at the time of the Clay Compromise, had made his final speech to the same body. Upon his return to the state Davis was immediately appointed commander-in-chief of the Mississippi

Volunteers. He was happy at the prospect and went home to "Brierfield" to await the raising of his Army. He was content to let his fellow Southern political leaders formulate the new government at Montgomery. He considered his highest talents to be military and he had the position he wanted in the new order of things.

Once again history intervened for Jefferson Davis. He and Varina were in their garden pruning rose bushes on an early February afternoon when a messenger with the fateful telegram from Montgomery arrived. Davis read it. In that moment of painful silence he seemed stricken. His face took on a look of calamity. He told his wife he had been summoned to lead the Confederacy, not in the field, but as its President. He spoke of it, Mrs. Davis said, "as a man might speak of a sentence of death." Yet he wasted no time. He packed and left the next day. While Jefferson Davis pruned his roses in Mississippi and dreamed of perhaps another Monterey or Beuna Vista, delegates from the six states that had already left the Federal Union were meeting in Montgomery to create and staff a government for the new Confederate States of America. The thirty-seven delegates charged with this large assignment discharged it with speed and competence. Within four days a provisional constitution had been drafted and adopted. This document was primarily the work of one man, probably the most brilliant and contradictory of all the Southern Statesmen, Alexander H. Stephens of Georgia. Just an even five feet tall, weighing only 90 pounds and having the body of a fourteen year old boy, he and his colleagues produced a constitution different in little respect from the United States Constitution whose jurisdiction they had just renounced. The protection of slavery was implicit, the sovereign and independent character of each state was emphasized, the President's term of office was limited to a single six year term. Oddly nothing was said or provided for the charter of this new nation about the right of secession.

On the morning of February 9, the convention assembled to elect a President and Vice-President for the infant Confederacy. Each state would have one vote and it was agreed that the choice of a President should be unanimous. By unspoken agreement the delegates shied away from the extreme secessionists or firebrands. The Georgia delegation led by their great triumvirate of Stephens, the able Robert Toombs and the controversial Howell Cobb, dominated the small group of less than forty convention delegates. And there is good evidence that except for conflicting impressions as to which

of her favorite sons should be presented for the highest office, Georgia would have given the new nation its President. Instead a compromise candidate was sought and, by the time the confusion about Georgia cleared away, a man who, alone of all the Southern secession leaders was not even present at the convention, was unanimously elected on the first ballot. Alexander Stephens who had fought to keep Georgia in the Union up to the very last was elected Vice-President.

And so the man and hour for the future fate of the Southern Confederacy were joined at high noon on Monday, February 16, 1861, on the portico of the Alabama Capitol in the heart of the slave country. In unsought honor Jefferson Davis, a tired man in delicate health and already passed the zenith of his powers, yet standing tall in late winter sunshine, took oath to carry out an almost impossible task for the next four years. Students of his life conclude that the answers to much of the success or failure of this mission are found in a detailed study of his earlier background and training. This we have endeavored to do at some length this afternoon. To continue such detail into the period of his Confederate Presidency would require almost a day by day history of the Civil War itself. However, with some picture before us of this idealistic and humorless statesman on whom the South had pinned her hopes and future, it will be well to make some evaluations of his discharge of such obligations. First, let us do justice to certain fine qualities possessed by Jefferson Davis. The purity and elevation of his character have never been questioned. Unyielding integrity and a deep sense of moral courage were native to him. He shared a religious devoutness with his wife throughout their lifetime. A proud, austere man, his mind brilliant if not original, he had the approach of a statesman to public problems. His loyalty, once given, was held to firmly and fastly. A man of indomitable will, who though he had not sought the Presidency, was resolved to give it the last ounce of his devotion. The main task of the newly inaugurated President, as he well knew, was not to manage the detailed military operations of the Confederacy; it was to create a new nation. But this main task tended always to fall into the background of his mind. Nevertheless, it was his main task and his title to the name of statesman depended on whether he performed it well. His dedication to Southern Nationalism was complete. Infirm of health, tortured by neuralgia and insomnia,

sensitive to hurts that a less finely organized man would have taken in his stride, he toiled with superhuman intensity and as a well trained executive in office showed an efficiency in dispatching business that his great rival in Washington never approached. The South must always remember with special gratitude his magnificent cooperation with Robert E. Lee. Unfortunately, such service was not enough. Jefferson Davis failed to mold a Southern Nation; regardless of the military defeats which insured this failure, he failed even to make the contribution to that end which might have been expected. In major part the fault lay in his misconception of his true role. We have seen the build up of his ambition for military fame. With the war a fact his faith in his own military genius grew so intense that he believed himself the equal of any southern general. His wife records his heartfelt yet absurb cry in an hour of desperate southern peril, "if I could take one wing and Lee the other, I think we could, between us, wrest a victory from these people." Jefferson Davis knew in his heart that his main task was a civil task and not the management of the military affairs of the confederacy, but he could never quite give himself up to it.

The frequent interference by President Davis with tactical as well as strategic military operations, his numerous expressions of personal pride and his irritability in dealing with commanders, his bitter quarrels with Generals Beauregard, Joseph E. Johnston and others, his extreme favoritism toward incompetent Generals Braxton Bragg, John B. Hood, and Commissary-General Northrop —all these acts did the Confederacy a double harm. They both seriously hampered the military effort and they took the President's mind from pressing civil problems. The results of Davis' misapplication of energy and attention soon became evident. For him, as for Lincoln, a critical election came midway in the war. Lincoln was able to hold his ground in the 1862 Northern election and kept control of Congress; had he not done so, the North might well have lost the war. But Davis, repudiated in the Confederate Congressional elections of 1863 saw the legislative branch taken over by a hostile majority. Perhaps even the strongest and most tactful of Presidents could not have rallied a United South after the defeats of Vicksburg and Gettysburg in the summer of 1863. Nevertheless, Jefferson Davis, a favorite of fortune since early

youth, who had developed the sympathetic common touch so necessary to political success, combined at this late date a remarkable capacity for making foes, with a remarkable incapacity for mobilizing friends. The roster of his opponents became terrifying: former political allies and fellow officers including such prominent figures as Rhett, Yancey, Beauregard, Joseph E. Johnston, Zeb Vance of North Carolina, his own Vice-President Alexander H. Stephens and Governor Joe Brown of Georgia to name just a few. Some of them denounced Davis more savagely than they did the enemy government in Washington. Both Charleston papers, the *Mercury* and the *Examiner* were strongly anti-administration; the Richmond *Examiner* breathed criticism right at his front door. But despite these attacks from within his own camp, Jefferson Davis must be admired and given great credit for his courage in pushing through the violently opposed Conscription Bill in the spring of 1862. This act of Davis unquestionably maintained the Confederate Armies in the field and primarily brought about the military victories which made 1862 the high water mark of Southern fortunes. It was probably President Davis' greatest moment; yet for it he was treated as a combination of Benedict Arnold, Brutus and Judas Iscariot by a majority of the state governments of the South.

Douglas Freeman, the Virginia historian, says Washington, the maker of the Nation, and Lincoln, its preserver, were alike endowed with two magic gifts: utter self abnegation and utter patience, gifts closely linked—for the man who thinks of self-interest cannot be patient. The lack of these elements in Davis' temper is strongly revealed in his relations with the Confederate Congress and his cabinet. He vetoed no fewer than thirty-nine acts of Congress, ample proof of the friction between its leaders and himself. As for cabinet relations, Davis made twice as many changes in his official family as did Lincoln. The Confederate President had six Secretaries of War alone. He consented to the departure of the ablest of these, James A. Seldon, under fire in a controversy for which Davis' jealousy of his own dignity and want of tact were chiefly responsible. But historian Allen Nevins, in his Page Barbour Lectures at the University of Virginia developed the thesis that the principal deficiency of President Davis as a nation-maker lay in his want of passion. The great nation-builders must, he says, possess some of the qualities of seer and poet, as strong Nationalists like Masaryk and Churchill had. Such men could profoundly stir

and inspire the hearts of their people. In his four years at Washington, Lincoln touched again and again the highest emotions of his countrymen—when did Davis, for all his devotion to a great cause, do such? He had a reputation for eloquence, but it was an eloquence cold, chiseled and intellectual. We recall and quote from the White House in Richmond no equivalent to the Gettysburg Address, the Second Inaugural, or Mr. Lincoln's letter to Mrs. Bixby on the loss of her five sons.

Such thoughts and words of Lincoln or of Churchill come only from a vision, a generosity and an insight which were not within the devoted and heroic Davis. Mr. Nevins makes the conclusion that the South could not have had grander generals than Lee and Jackson, but that it might have had a greater civil leadership. But was this necessarily true? Dr. Frank Owsley of Vanderbilt University, acknowledged contemporary authority on the Confederacy, believes that the South failed not because of overwhelming Northern strength, not because of the blockade, not because of Jefferson Davis, but because of internal weakness. "The seeds of death were implanted in the Confederacy at birth," he writes, "and these seeds were States Rights." The story of the lack of support from the Southern state governments for the war effort of the Richmond Confederate Administration is an intriguing one. It merits a future paper of its own. Certainly it was a burdensome cross for any leader or nation to carry in a struggle for final victory.

Jefferson Davis—Southern Nationalist or Confederate Scapegoat? Even today, a century later, no one can say for sure. But of all the answers probably Bruce Catton gives us as good a one as any. He writes, "Jefferson Davis emerged from prison to become the embodiment of the Lost Cause, standing alone in the haunted sunset where the Confederate horizon ended. He had done the best he could in an impossible job, and if it is easy to show where he made grievous mistakes, it is difficult to show where any other man, given the materials available, could have done much better. He had great courage, integrity, devotion to his cause but like Old Testament Sisera the stars in their courses marched against him."