

HAMPTON'S VICTORY CLOSES Y ANKEE ATTEMPT AT "RECONSTRUCTION"

A Review of Williams' Story of the South Carolina Campaign of 1876 by R. F. Beasley, in Beasley's Weekly

The year 1876 is notable not only as the centennial year but as the year when the white people of the South won the privilege of again directing without let or hindrance the affairs of the Southern States. South Carolina was the scene of the crucial struggle and Wade Hampton, the gallant leader, whose election as governor and acceptance by President-elect Hayes definitely ended the "Carpetbaggers'" regime in the South.

As a six-year old tot the editor of the Voice heard, without understanding, the echoes of the Hampton campaign. Here and there in North Carolina you will find a man named Wade Hampton during that famous campaign. When I was thirty I was to know Editor A. B. Williams of the Greenville (S. C.) News, one of the brightest journalists it has been my privilege to know. Not foreseeing the future, he sold his half interest in the News, now worth hundreds of thousands of dollars, and accepted the editorship of a Richmond, Virginia paper. While living at Richmond, Mr. Williams wrote a story of the Hampton campaign of 1876, and below we give a review of that story by Editor R. F. Beasley of Monroe, which readers of all ages should read with profit, for those were critical days. The same year Governor Vance was elected in North Carolina.

Mr. Beasley's Article

The recent discovery of an old negro who claimed that he had been a member of the South Carolina legislature in 1876 when the reconstruction era was wound up and overthrown by Wade Hampton and his red shirts, attracted some attention to that unhappy era. That same year saw the election of Zeb Vance in North Carolina and the wiping out of a similar situation, but one not near so serious and tragic as in the Palmetto State. It was worse down there because the negro population was so much greater. The federal census of 1870 gave the population of South Carolina as 286,667 white and 415,814 colored. There was no restriction of negro voting and there was a majority of 26,000 negro votes. All these had been held securely in mass by the few white men from the north and a lot of imported negroes, organized and backed by United States troops. In that year South Carolina was known all over the country as the "Prostrate State" and the carpet bag program backed by President Grant and Secretary of War Cameron, was to hold it prostrate until its vote had been securely delivered to Hayes, the Republican candidate for president. It is generally supposed even in this section that Hampton accomplished his purpose solely by violence and intimidation, but this is far from the truth. Hampton is the one man who prevented wholesale civil war and at the same time secured some semblance of law and order and safety to life and property.

In 1926, the late Mr. A. B. Williams published an authentic history of the campaign of 1876, called "Hampton and His Redshirts." In it he gave the story from the inside and at that time, just fifty years after the tragic campaign, was the only living man who could have done such a thing. Mr. Williams was a Virginian who came to South Carolina as a young newspaper man. From his own recollection as an eye witness and a reporter of the Hampton campaign, as well as from the files of local and national newspapers of the time, he made up his story. Newspaper men will recall that he spent his life in newspaper work in South Carolina and was for years the brilliant editor of the Greenville News. He died in 1930. His story is far from a biased or partisan account. He tries at this late date to fairly estimate the good and the bad on both sides, and above all to give the recorded facts about the campaign. Wade Hampton was then 58 years old. At the moment when he was called upon to lead the campaign he had no thought of doing so. He reluctantly accepted the obligation thrust upon him after vainly seeking some one whom he considered more fit. The sequel showed that he was not only the most fit man in South Carolina, but that probably no other living man could have done what he did. Driven to desperation by ten years of the most brutal and cruel reconstruction regime ever practiced upon any body of people in America, the people of South Carolina had de-

cidated that they could stand no more and were prepared to "storm hell," whether it should lead to relief or to total annihilation.

Hampton, at the close of the war a lieutenant general in charge of the Confederate cavalry, or what was left of it, had assumed the position of General Lee in advocating peace and reconciliation between the sections. He had remained quiet for ten years, giving the reconstruction leaders a chance to restore peace and safety. Instead of that restoration he had seen the state plunged deeper and deeper into the mire, so much so that the credit of the state was not sufficient to secure lights in the hall of the legislature to carry on night sessions. Drunken negroes manned the offices from the supreme court down, with a sprinkling of white carpet baggers who had lost to the venal and drunken elements of both races a full control of government. Two mistaken ideas of that campaign are prevalent. One is that Hampton was a fire eater, whereas he was the coolest and most conservative man of authority in the country at that time. He was as masterful of men as he was of horses and there was never a better master of horses than he. His fortune had been swept away by the war, but if there was a shadow of regret at the loss of his thousands of slaves in South Carolina and Mississippi, no one ever knew it. Except for the excesses of the reconstruction period he probably would have been content to live on his impoverished acres and pass the remainder of his life as a poor country squire interested mostly in horses and hunting. The other mistaken idea is that the red shirt revolution was instigated by the remnants of the low country aristocracy. It was not. It was started and carried on by the white counties of the west and middle country where there had been no large slave holders and the east had been so hard hit that it lay helpless.

Chamberlain, the Massachusetts carpet bagger who was governor, is treated most fairly by Mr. Williams. Williams looked upon him as a man who had firmly believed that he and others could weld the negro voters into a competent governing body held in restraint by men like himself, and backed by the federal authority, give good government to the state. How far he consciously departed from this ideal under the terrible rule of his own incompetent crowd and the hordes of venal and ignorant lesser lights that flocked around him, and entered into excesses which he was afterwards driven to, cannot be guessed at this day. But the quoted words of Chamberlain years afterwards, while he was living in New York, largely vindicated the course of the white people in the campaign. And at one time in his governorship when harassed by his own crowd, he wired a friend in the north that events in South Carolina were endangering the civilization of the Cavalier, the Puritan and Huguenot. The nation's eyes were on South Carolina strongly because of the national election. Grant time and time again informed Chamberlain that he should have all army support he needed. Hampton was compelled to conduct his campaign in such a way that it would not hurt the chances of Tilden in the North, and for this reason as well as for the necessities of the case at home, he was the actual preserver of such law and stability as there was. Time and time again the South Carolina Democrats let it be known that they would concede the state to Hayes, the Republican candidate for president, if the state were conceded to Hampton. And this was a big concession, for long before the campaign was over the north knew that it would take the whole United States army to keep the state eventually out of the hands of Hampton. And also, it was known that the national election would be so close that the State's vote might turn it. It was afterwards won for Hayes by throwing out the votes of Florida and Louisiana. Even in that result Hampton advised acquiescence before his own place was secure.

In the face of the returns the Democrats had elected 64 members of the house, all white men, the Republicans 60, all negroes but three, who were carpet baggers. The majority necessary to organize and control was 63. But if the Democrats controlled it meant the seating of Hampton and the election of a United States senator, a result

which Chamberlain and the northern republicans intended to prevent. The state house was seized by United States troops. The negroes organized by declaring that three white counties should be thrown out, this giving them a majority. The Democrats were not allowed to go in the hall, but organized outside. Each side elected a speaker. At this point there is another grave misconception in the public mind. That is that Hampton violently took charge of the hall and drove out the "Mackey" house. It was no such thing. Hampton never did any such thing. The Democrats one day marched in an orderly way and took seats on one side. After they had entered Hampton himself was refused admission by the negro door keeper and walked away. The two houses remained in session in the same hall side by side for four days and nights. Then the Democrats voluntarily left the hall in the interest of peace and to demonstrate to the north that though they had possession and though the state was at this time completely in the hands of the red shirts, no violence would be countenanced from that side unless it was started from the other. And but for the calmness and determination of Hampton and his friends, the state house itself would have been a shambles. For though it was in the hands of troops, more troops had been ordered and a spark would have turned loose the slaughter. This slaughter was planned and 200 negro soldiers had been sent up as deputy doorkeepers from Charleston, secretly. An anonymous note was sent to Hampton apprising him of this fact, and he took precautions to prevent the outbreak. One of the precautions was furnished by General Haskel. He took his seat behind Mackey, the speaker of the negro house, and quietly said in his ear:

"Mackey, you know I never go armed, but I am armed now, and for the purpose of killing you if trouble starts in this house; and I tell you as man to man, if trouble does start, you'll be the first to die." Under those circumstances it is no wonder that Mackey never gave the order to turn loose the 200 negro assistant sergeants at arms to throw out the white Democrats. Eventually the state was conceded to Hampton. Hayes got the South Carolina vote and after his inauguration withdrew the troops. Before he conceded the state to Hampton he sent for that gentleman to come to Washington for an interview.

That was one interview. The president asked Hampton if he would submit to an election again between him and Chamberlain. "Not, Mr. President," he said, "until you are ready to submit to another election between yourself and Mr. Tilden." That was a polite but deadly answer for historians have long conceded that Tilden was rightfully elected. Then Mr. Hayes asked what would be the result if the federal authorities sustained Chamberlain. "Every Chamberlain tax collector in South Carolina will be hanged within 48 hours," said Hampton. Then Hayes gave up as Grant had given up the impossible job, and the next day gave the signal to the world by having Hampton to tea and let him be seen riding in a carriage with Mrs. Hayes.

VISIT OF N. C. PRESS ASSOCIATION TO BOSTON IN 1883

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Connecticut Union soldiers.

After a most delightful week, every hour of which was filled with interest, we left for home, returning as we had come, by sea, and as usual, I became seasick but had recovered sufficiently by the time we reached Norfolk to enjoy to the full those Norfolk oysters. Our trip to the old historic town of Boston was marred by no untoward incident. It was throughout a delightful occasion that lingers still in my memory.

Your Dollar Would Help

Every subscription dollar sent in without the expense of going for it or the cost of writing for it is a boon. The editor is absolutely tied down at home; he hasn't been away from the house in over two weeks, but seems now getting better.

Five hundred tobacco growers of Wilson county are alleged to have overplanted their allotted acreage. Hoggishness is the cause of all the economic troubles in the country, and a runt can display the same quality of hoggishness that the big Poland-China can. If Wilson county with its fine school system cannot yet measure acreage it is mighty bad.

A county that will deliberately put liquor in the way of drunkards should not be too hard upon its products.