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The History of the Confederate War, Its Causes and Its Conduct (Volume I & II of 2): A Narrative and Critical History

George Cary Eggleston

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During the years from 1861 to 1865, one of the greatest wars in all history was fought in this country.

There were in all three million three hundred and seventy-eight thousand men engaged in the fighting of it.

There are not that many men in all the regular standing armies of Europe combined, even if we include the unpaid hordes of Turkey and the military myriads of the armed camp known to geography as Russia.

The actual fighting field of this war of ours was larger than the whole of western Europe, and all of it was trampled over and fought over by great armies.

The men killed or mortally wounded in our war numbered on the Northern side alone 110,000. The total number of deaths resulting from military operations on the Northern side alone was 350,000. The figures for the Southern side are not accessible, owing to the loss of records. But as the fighting was equally determined on both sides, and as other conditions were substantially equal, it is certain that the losses of life were relatively about the same on both sides. It is well within the facts, therefore, to say that this war of ours directly caused the death of more than half a million men. No other war in modern history has cost so many lives or half so many.

We hear much of our recent war with Spain. Let us take it as a basis of comparison. The total number of men even nominally called into the field in that war was less by nearly two to one than the deaths alone during the Confederate war. The number of men who were actually engaged in the Spanish war numbered only about one tenth as many as those who were buried as victims of the Confederate war's battle fields.

Again, the total number of men killed and wounded during the Spanish war—including every man who was touched by a bullet or scratched by a sword or bayonet thrust or hurt by a splinter at sea—was only two hundred sixty-eight. That is fewer than the number who were stricken in each of many before-breakfast skirmishes of the Confederate war, some of which were deemed too insignificant to be reported to headquarters with precision.

Looking for higher standards of comparison, we find that 43,449 men fell killed or wounded at Gettysburg alone. That is almost double the loss of the allied forces at Waterloo and probably equal to the total losses on both sides at that greatest and most decisive of European battles.

There were more than a dozen other battles of the Confederate war which in slaughter fairly deserved comparison with Waterloo. These included the Seven Days' battle before Richmond, and the battles of Fredericksburg, Chancellorsville, Antietam, Shiloh, Chickamauga, the Wilderness, Spottsylvania, Cold Harbor, the Second Manassas (or Bull Run), Stone River, Petersburg, Franklin, Lookout Mountain, Nashville

and several others.

Still another measure of the magnitude of a war is its duration. It is duration indeed that chiefly determines the amount of human suffering caused by a war, especially to the women and children who are war's chief victims.

Measured by this test of duration the Confederate war exceeded all other recent conflicts in the magnitude of the suffering it inflicted.

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