

arm such portion of our able-bodied slave population as may be necessary, and put them in the field, so as to have them ready for the spring campaign, even if it resulted in the freedom of those thus organized. Will I not employ them to fight the negro force of the enemy? Aye, the Yankees themselves, who already boast that they have 200,000 of our slaves in arms against us. Can we hesitate, can we doubt, when the question is, whether the enemy shall use our slaves against us or we use them against him; when the question may be between liberty and independence on the one hand, or our subjugation and utter ruin on the other?

With their Governor as leader for the Administration, the Virginians found this issue the absorbing topic of the hour. And now the great figure of Lee takes its rightful place at the very center of Confederate history, not only military but civil, for to Lee the Virginia politicians turned for advice.¹ In a letter to a State Senator of Virginia who had asked for a public expression of Lee's

¹ Lee now revealed himself in his previously overlooked capacity of statesman. Whether his abilities in this respect equaled his abilities as a soldier need not here be considered; it is said that he himself had no high opinion of them. However, in the advice which he gave at this final moment of crisis, he expressed a definite conception of the articulation of civil forces in such a system as that of the Confederacy. He held that all initiative upon basal matters should remain with the separate States, that the function of the general Government was to administer, not to create conditions, and that the proper power to constrain the State Legislatures was the flexible, extralegal power of public opinion.