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A TRIBUTE TO A CONFEDERATE SOLDIER

By Tommie Bragg Ward

Some one has said: - "One glorious hour of crowded life is worth an age, without a name." This to us is an hour crowded with emotions, to which the tongue of eloquence could give no adequate utterance, and which will transmit to future ages, a record of deeds that will render the name Confederate Soldier immortal.

We are filled with gratitude, for the assurance it brings; that the Confederate cause is not a last cause, that the Confederate Soldier will not be forgotten, that his marvelous deeds in arms will live in song and story; marble and granite are emblems of his constancy and endurance, which will perpetuate his name and tell to generations yet unborn-the story of his life.

The Confederate Soldier with patriotic devotion espoused his country's cause, and his heart has never by a pause as slight as one pulsation ceased to beat with constancy for the principle for which he stood amid the flame of battle, which imperiled his fortune and life-and if as said, without a successor he is destined to live only in history. His history will mark a glorious period and transmit to the latest posterity unimitated deeds of valor and devotion, as he upheld the right of self government, the principle that has sanctified the graves of martyr's in all ages of the world.

Call the roll of all who imperiled life and all that life holds dear in the cause of the Confederacy.

From time immemorial the world has had its heroes, heroes of war and heroes of peace. But the heroes of war give us a theme ever full of interest. Macedonia, boasted of her brave son, Alexander the Great; Rome Caesar; France had her Napoleon, who mounted the most dazzling heights of military power and glory.

To the Thirteen Colonies of America belong the name of Washington; but greater still than all of these, the South had her heroes.

Lee, Jackson, Johnston, Gordon, Davis, Forrest, Stuart, Bragg, Wheeler, Hill, and on down the line, Gurley, Hamrick and many others, whose names are enshrined with deathless pride in every true Southern heart.

Gurley, long may he live, for there is no Gurley to take his place. He was in many of the hard fought battles of that, the most bloody and terrific war ever waged on this continent. He fought side by side with men, as brave as ever fought in Caesar's ten legions, or Napoleon's guard. Four years he spent in camp and in battle. His personal bravery was without limit, he was masterful, resolute and self reliant in the most perilous emergency. He was comprehensive in his grasp of every situation, supremely confident in his men. But going through the war and all its trials and sorrows only made him great, for he has labored both night and day for the future development of the South.

The most charitable man that ever lived in this country, he has been kind to all, has fed the hungry, clothed the naked, and buried the dead. No man ever did more for the poor, and not until the book of life is opened at the judgement, can all his great services be revealed, the only compensation that he wants in this life is the warm shake of the hand and the gleam of gratitude flashing from the eyes of these grand old veterans, who have borne all hardship and faced every danger in defense of their country.

It requires an able daring leader to call forth from the men a passionate devotion-to mould the multitude of thoughts of a great army into one mass of martial zeal. Without a leader an army is a mob, a powerless machine, but on the other hand what could a leader accomplish without an army!

We would not in the least degree, depreciate the sterling worth of those mighty Chieftans, the South's leaders; but we do maintain, that our truest heroes, those who presented to the world the sublimest deeds of valor and devotion ever witnessed, were the men behind the guns.

The private Confederate in his home spun jacket of gray, the men who stood in the ranks, and for long years with heroic courage beat back from their homes and fire-sides the ranks of ruthless and overwhelming invaders, was the "bone and sinew" of the Confederacy and only God's recording angel has preserved their muster roll, and it will be called in a better and purer world than this, where rewards are bestowed for honors deserved, and duty faithfully performed. Moses lived forty years at Pharoah's court, applying himself in all the learning of the Egyptians. He spent forty years in the land of Midian, in preparation for the work appointed by God for him to do. Moses for forty years led the children of Israel through the wilderness, surrounded at all times with trials and difficulties unsurmountable by any human effort.

He was directed by a cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. This was assurance of God's guidance and protection, and yet Moses, the friend of God holding converse and communion with the Almighty as no other man has ever done with his matchless faith and consecration, was only permitted to see the promised land from Pisgah's distant height. It was the same with the Confederate Soldier, he viewed the capital, but never entered, but he faithfully and conscientiously, as he saw the right, discharged the duties and obligations the situ-

ation enjoined. Although like Moses, he spent the best years of his life, devoted to his country's service he can with the eye of faith, penetrate the veil, that hides the future from our sight, and rest his cause before that August tribunal whose judgement never errs.

To our minds Appomattox meant the death knell of constitutional liberty on earth. In the light of events, the sufferings we as a people underwent, were but trials to prepare for the glory of our future descendants.

History furnishes no other example of a government crowding into four short years of its existence, the record of glorious deeds that has rendered the name Confederate States immortal.

There is in the annals of the past, no record of another people in a life time of a generation emerging from the destitution and suffering to which we were reduced, occupying the position to which we are now advanced in the councils of states, in material prosperity, and in the estimation of mankind. His devotion to duty and steadfast adherence to the principles implanted in his nature, and interwoven in his very life and being are best illustrated in this statement - To the honor of the Confederate Soldier.

The North held 220,000 Confederate prisoners and twelve per cent or 26,400 died in loathsome prison pens.

On the walls over the entrance to these prison pens, might well have been written by the Federal government, the inscription such as is said to be written over the portal gates of Hell, "He who enters here leaves hope behind."

They were offered liberty if they would swear allegiance to the Federal government. It is safe to say that not one in a thousand exchanged prison life, with its horrors for freedom at the price of renouncing allegiance to his country's cause.

In this one act of devotion, to which the world furnishes no parallel, the private Confederate Soldier sat for portrait to immortality. Again I say the Confederate

cause is not a lost cause and that the Confederate Soldier will never be forgotten, however, he may have felt in the past that he was neglected and the cause he espoused sacrificed on the altar of selfishness. But he now knows in this changing public sentiment, that the world is fast recognizing man's rights to this most noble blessing and this change means that, "When the drums sad roll shall beat the Confederate Soldiers last tattoo on earth, not honor alone, but a solitary Sentinel, with silent tread, will guard his last resting place."

The Confederate Soldier clung to the Declaration of Independence, which declares that government exists, for the protection of "Life Liberty and Happiness," believed in a strict construction of the Constitution and in the preservation of State rights. So when State rights were set aside, he was ready to strike for our homes and firesides and pour out his blood and if need be to die upon the altar of his country.

You left your happy Southern homes, and rushed to the fray where honor called and through four years of war, fought with such bravery, endured such hardships and won such brilliant victories on the battlefield that you deserved and won the name of the grandest heroes the world has ever known. "The wonder of the Ages."

It was the private soldier who trudged weary and foot sore over rocky and frozen roads on tiresome marches, who so fearlessly breasted the shot and shell of strong forces of the enemy.

It was the private soldier who shivered within the chilly walls of Northern prisons, half clothed and scantily fed. I have often heard Uncle Tom Bailes speak of the way they were treated and especially fed. But they chose to die there rather than purchase freedom at the price of honor.

Some one has said, to charge the batteries of the enemy requires great personal bravery. But it seems to me for one's life to be wafted to the skies upon the white

smoke of battle, amid the roar of musketry and the thunder of the artillery is almost God like, but it does not exceed the sublime heroism of the soldier, who suffered for duty's sake in the loathsome prison, who in dejection and despair, in neglect and unspeakable suffering, refused to surrender his convictions of right and forsake the flag of his country.

The North realized the devotion of the Confederate privates-General Grant himself said: "If we recruit the Southern Army by the exchange of prisoners, we shall have to fight on until the whole South is exterminated."¹³

The name of the Confederate Soldier had become known the world over for bravery, but at last, in the weakened condition of the South, it had to succumb, not to valor, but to overwhelming numbers.

She surrendered less than 100,000 ragged half starved veterans, to more than 1,000,000 Northern troops, 80 percent of which were foreigners. The cannon's mouth was stopped, the life of the Confederacy was dead, but no nation ever rose so white and fair, none ever fell so pure and free of crime with not a black spot to mar her glory. You turned with horror from those battlefields drenched with the blood of your comrades, and heart broken, with battle scars and empty sleeves you started homeward, there to find problems ever more difficult to face.

You left in '61 a garden of flowers and sunshine, and the vineclad hills of our sunny South were clothed in wealth and luxury. You returned in '65 to find nothing more than a wilderness of waste and desolation.

The whole political, social, and industrial fabric of the South lay in ruins. But you built up your shattered fortunes and defeated the attempt to fasten upon you political disgrace and shame. But in these years you have gained victories equal in renown to any gained on the battlefield, thus proving yourselves heroes of peace as well as of war. But in this you were not left alone, you

were cheered and comforted by the noble Southern women. To the Confederate mothers is due the present prosperity of the South, and to them do we owe much that we have today. The South was blessed with pure and gentle women before the war, but the war brought out their strength and nobility. What they learned in that terrible tragic school, prepared them to train the veterans and their sons and daughters to the eternal benefit of both.

These glorious women were taught by the hard schools of war to do many disagreeable duties, which enabled them to be true helpmates to the impoverished men of the South. They learned the heroic lesson of fortitude, which caused them to cheer, to sustain, to encourage the men of the South in that terrible struggle to rebuild their desolate homes and restore their ruined fortunes. They learned to think and to act, which they then did by the side of men, and by such help, did the men of the South build the splendid prosperity which now blesses our Southland. The same qualities which enable them to sustain their husbands and brothers, made them teach and rear a generation of men and women the stern realities of poverty, and to bring them up as the strong men and women who are today the pride of the South and admiration of the world, and who have carried on the splendid work begun by their fathers and mothers.

To these women is due the credit of educating the generation, which has given the South its present prosperity and happiness. Just call to mind the long list of women by whose privations, hardships and suffering the cause of the Confederacy was sanctified and made holy, and tell if you can if a just and righteous God will permit such suffering in the cause of right, baptized in the blood of the brave and hallowed by the prayers of the pure. The innocent and the good to go for naught and return to him void. I do not believe it.

But my friends the Confederate Soldier is fast passing

away. His locks are not raven now on his smooth unfurrowed brow, nor is the stream of his rich young blood coursing through his veins in the deep full tide of youthful pride. His fallen cheeks, his trembling hands and tottering knees, that scarce sustain his wasted body, are the certificates of discharge soon to relieve him of further service here. It devolves on you sons and daughters of the Confederacy and those who are to come after you to cherish his memory to preserve and keep alive the record of his glorious deeds. Let this sacred obligation sink deep into your hearts and tell the story of the Confederacy into the listening ears of your children, until it becomes part of their nature to love, cherish, and defend the principles for which your fathers fought, bled, and died. Do not slight them for they are sacred-guard, shield, protect and defend them from misrepresentation and abuse, no matter whence it comes, and your children and your children's children in successive generations looking back from the far distant future will proudly exclaim "I am the descendent of a Confederate Soldier."

Dedicated to the 4th, Alabama Cavalry