

Confederate Veteran, XIV (June 1906)

GEN. STEPHEN DILL LEE'S ADDRESS AT NEW ORLEANS

April 25, 1906



When the greetings and welcomes of the hospitable New Orleans authorities had been expressed at the opening of the last great U. C. V. Reunion in New Orleans, Gen. Stephen D. Lee, upon taking the chair as presiding officer, said:

The United Confederate Veterans are again met in the city of their origin. We are once more the guests of those patriotic and energetic men, into whose labors we have entered and to whom the thanks of all surviving Confederates are due. Again and again we have returned to taste of the inexhaustible bounty of your hospitality, to be refreshed by the patriotism and enthusiasm of this generous and beautiful city.

The flags of France and of Spain, of the Union and of the Confederacy have floated over the soil upon which we stand, but always over brave men and lovely women, loyal to the best they knew, faithful alike to the living and to the dead, a civilization transplanted like a rare flower of France, blossoming in the New World and bearing exquisite fruit. The Confederate cannot forget the city of the gallant and accomplished Beauregard, the brave and unfortunate Hood, the city where Jefferson Davis loved to walk, and which honored him in his death with an outpouring of loyalty and grief which did honor to the Southern heart. Here is Metairie, where Albert Sidney Johnston speaks in imperishable bronze, and the monument to the Army of Northern Virginia rises, tall and white, like the soul of its great chieftain.

We love you, Louisiana, where the stern blood of the Anglo Saxon has been touched with the grace and the genius of France. Here amid the very chivalry of patriotism there is welcome for all who prize noble and generous deeds and most of all a welcome for him who loved his country best and bore her cross of pain ... the Confederate soldier. We who grieved for this unhappy city in the hour of its capture and humiliation rejoice in its pride today standing second only to New York among American ports of export, your mighty river filled with the ships of all nations, your historic streets alive with the commerce of the world. We behold with satisfaction great railroad systems struggling to enter your gates and the merchants of a thousand cities listening for the murmurs of your markets. We wait the coming of the day when the waters of the Atlantic and Pacific shall mingle together, and on both alike shall float the commerce of this imperial city, when the sons of those who struggled in vain for Southern supremacy shall here behold a peaceful

victory more magnificent than those of their great armies, a commercial supremacy more splendid than their noblest visions, and here beside the Father of Waters shall be realized the capital of their dreams.

We have lost dear friends and comrades since we met together, none more beloved and more honored than the soldier who was recently laid to rest at Arlington. Joe Wheeler won his spurs by true and honorable service. He was a superb cavalry leader, and earned on many a hard fought field the right to lead where brave men follow. When the heart of our common country yearned to express to her Confederate sons that their welcome home was complete, to Wheeler it was given to show on our behalf that every star on the flag was now dear to us, and that we were ready to follow it to the very "Isles of the Sea." It was Southern hands that set star after star in that blue field of glory, and if any more stars are ever planted there, it will be strange if Southerners are not found assisting at the service.

Comrades, there is one thing committed to our care as a peculiar trust ... the memory of the Confederate soldier. So far as lies in our power, we have striven that history may not lack the evidence of his purity of motive, his fortitude, his heroism. I for one do not fear that, justice, however long delayed, will not ultimately be done to one of the grandest bodies of men who ever battled for independence or, triumphing over defeat, bound up the bleeding wounds of their country.

There are three things peculiarly left for our concern. One of these is the erection of public monuments to our Confederate dead, not only to our leaders, but, above all, to those private soldiers who made our leaders immortal. We must not over task posterity by expecting those who come after us to build monuments to heroes whom their own generations were unwilling to commemorate. The South has reached a position of material prosperity which justifies both State and private beneficence to honor the faithful dead.

In all human lot there has nothing better been found for man than to die for his country. If there be any virtue, if there be any praise, this fate is to be preferred above all others. We feel it is well with those who have thus fulfilled the highest of all trusts, the duty of a citizen to his native land, and whatever may have been their private faults, their public service on the field of battle has rightly given them a place with the immortals. Theirs was the martyr's devotion without the martyr's hope. Their generation and their country imposed upon them this high service. They fulfilled it without flinching. They felt that the issue of the battle was with God, the issue of their duty was with themselves. . . .

I urge monuments to the Confederate soldier first for the sake of the dead, but most for the sake of the living, that in this busy industrial age these stones to the Confederate soldier may stand like great interrogation marks to the soul of each beholder.

Let us pass the remainder of our day's ill, suchwise that nothing we shall do will bring shame and, shared with them the glory of their sufferings, the fame of their victories, the tragedy of their regret that we also were Confederate soldiers. As we overthrow, and that sympathy of their countrymen which covered the defeated as with a mantle of imperishable love, let us also share as best we may their simplicity of heart, their scorn of all ignoble actions, their dignity of soul, that our descendants may say of us with swelling hearts: "He also followed Johnston, he also fought with Lee." To this day there stands carved upon the graves of our English ancestors the symbol of the Crusaders. Their names are forgotten, but the cross remains. So let it be with the Confederate soldier! . . .

And is there any message we would give to the States we loved and on whose behalf we drew our swords more than a generation ago? As we have sorrowed over your devotion, we now rejoice in your prosperity. We chose for you the fortune of war rather than a shameful peace. We battled for your principles rather than yield them, not to conviction but to force. With breaking hearts we bowed beneath the stroke of fate. We chose the only course worthy of Americans. Better defeat than dishonor, better the long, bitter story of reconstruction than tame surrender of the convictions we received from our fathers, the principles which we cherished as the basis of our liberties. We leave our motives to the judgment of posterity. In the choice we made we followed the dictates of conscience and the voice of honor. We sacrificed all that men hold dear for the land of our birth, and, while we have no fear that history will record our deeds with shame, we do not regard even the verdict of posterity as the equivalent of a clear conscience, nor ought we to have been false to our convictions even to win the eternal praises of mankind. If our children shall praise us, it is well, if our own hearts tell us we have fulfilled our duty, it is better.

Last of all; let us remember our less prosperous comrades. If we can perhaps sweeten the last years of those old men, bring back, maybe, the light of other days in their fading eyes, awake in their hearts the great memories, they will bless us in receiving more than we in giving. Many of the States whom they so nobly served are gathering them in soldiers' homes, institutions which combine the beauty of charity with the grace of gratitude. But there are many other old veterans who will never be brought within such hospitable walls and who are left to our personal charge for such sympathy and assistance as are honorable alike to them and to us. Let each Camp continue its special care for this beneficent labor, and see to it that true comradeship shall cease only when all of us have passed beyond human power to relieve.

To you, mothers of the Memorial Association, will be given the service of commemorating the soldier's virtues in the hearts of those who come after us by the story of the illustrious dead, of comforting the hearts of those who mourn our lost heroes with such ministrations as bespeak the sympathy of the patriot and the loving kindness of those who are familiar with the same sorrow.

To you, Sons of Confederate Veterans, we will commit the vindication of the cause for which we fought. To your strength will be given the defense of the Confederate soldier's good name, the guardianship of his history, the emulation of his virtues, the perpetuation of those principles which he loved and which you love also, and those ideals which made him glorious and which you also cherish. Are you also ready to die for your country? Is your life worthy to be remembered along with theirs? Do you choose for yourself this greatness of soul?

Not in the clamor of the crowded street,
Not in the shouts and plaudits of the throng,
But in ourselves are triumph and defeat.

To you, Daughters of the Confederacy will be given the loving service of remembering the Confederate dead and of ministering to the living who were dear to him and are in need of your help and tenderness. Worthy daughters you shall be of the immortal women, your mothers, who gave to womanhood a new perfection of heroism and a more divine expression of sacrifice and devotion.

To you, brave people of the South, to you, true hearted Americans everywhere, to you, world conquering race from which we sprung; To all men everywhere who prize in man the manliest deeds, who love in man the love of country, who praise fidelity and courage, who honor self sacrifice and noble devotion, will be given an incomparable inheritance, the memory of our prince of men ... the Confederate soldier.

At the conclusion of General Lee's address the bright and beautiful young daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Charles Madison presented him an exquisite group of flowers.

