

The National Tribune

A Monthly Journal devoted to the Soldiers, Sailors, and Pensioners of the United States, and the instruction of the Family Circle.

Published by The
NATIONAL TRIBUNE COMPANY.

VOL. V, No. 6.

WASHINGTON, D. C., JUNE, 1881.

TERMS, FIFTY CENTS PER YEAR.
Specimen Copies sent Free on Request.

Entered according to act of Congress, in the year of our Lord, 1878, in the Office of the Librarian of Congress, at Washington, D. C.

(Written for the National Tribune.)

DECORATION ODE.

Inscribed to the Grand Army of the Republic,
and the Memory of our Fallen Heroes.

To-day we recall, with most tender devotion,
As with sad eyes we gaze on each grass-covered grave,
The brave deeds of those who, in Love's strong devotion,
Their lives for their country as heroes they gave.

We think of the time when the war-cloud had lowered,
And the battle-cry sounded all over our land,
Till the traitors were vanquished, the wrong overpowered,
By a gallant, undaunted, and patriot band.

All honor be unto those noble ones given!
How great is their glory! immortal their fame!
And on our heart's tablets, so deeply engraven,
Is each sainted hero and patriot's name.

As a little child sleeps on its sweet, downy pillow,
When daylight has faded, and stars stud the sky;
So our martyr'd dead, in the shade of the willow,
Wrapped in calmest repose now in slumber do lie.

Above them the flowers in beauty are growing:
The birds warble sweetly, the waving grass bends
While soft, balmy breezes of Spring-time are blowing,
And the pure dew of Heaven so gently descends.

The flag that they carried in battle before them,
The banner they fought for, no trailing it knew,
In all its proud beauty floats gracefully o'er them,
And sweet is their rest 'neath the Red, White, and Blue.

While love for our heroes each bosom is filling,
We come to this hallow'd ground, tribute to pay
To their sacred memory; with hands the most willing,
We deck their green graves with the flowers of May.

Now, God of our Fathers! we pray Thee defend us!
And cause Peace, supreme e'er to reign in our land;
And Hatred and Strife—may they never more rend us!
Help us ever a true, loyal Nation to stand.

May the Union, our heroes have saved, never perish,
But our banner float ever on land and on sea;
And while we our country so lovingly cherish,
Let us praise Thee, our God, in this Land of the Free.

RAHWAY, N. J., May 24, 1881.

JASMINE.

The young lady who wrote the above, in her letter forwarding it, says:

"I am a soldier's daughter. Three of my uncles, as well as my father, were in the late war. My father lost an arm in the battle of Gettysburgh, and the same shell that struck him killed one of my uncles—my mother's only brother. I have always felt a warm love and sympathy for the soldiers."—[Ed. N. T.]

A Decoration Day Oration.

Among the many addresses on Decoration Day which have come to us, we find none more able and patriotic than the following, delivered at Baltimore, by Hon. R. C. Thackeray, of Elkton, Md.:

The central thought of the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution of the Union, and from which all their ideas radiate, and on which they rest, is the right to personal freedom, controlled, however, and modified by political and beneficial restrictions. The thought perhaps is expressed with some ambiguity, and Luther Martin and Patrick Henry, in old colonial days insisted that because of that ambiguity the Declaration and the Constitution contained the seeds of civil war. But such is the spirit of those instruments and such was the genius of the movement that gave them to the world. Government exists for the benefit of the individual. Rulers are the servants, (it cannot be too often repeated,) not the masters of the people. "All men are created equal," is the language of the idea. Said Abraham Lincoln, speaking from the steps of Independence Hall, in Philadelphia, after having raised the flag of an imperiled Union to the dome of that sanctuary of freedom: "It was something in the Declaration of Independence giving liberty not only to the people of this country, but hope to the world for all future time; it was that which gave promise that in due time the weights should be lifted from the shoulders of all men, and that all should have an equal chance." In other words, Mr. Lincoln meant to say that the basal principle upon which this western system of government rested and rests was and is "that every man, high or low, great or small, black or white, born in wealth or in the lap of poverty—every man should have the right, under the law and before the law, to a fair, square, even and equal start in the great race of life, and adding the words which after events made memorable: "Now, my friends," said he, "can the country be saved upon that basis? If it can I will consider myself one of the happiest of men in the world if I can help to save it. But if this country cannot be saved without giving it up, that principle, I was about to say, I would rather be assassinated upon this spot than to surrender it." Encompassed as we are to-day by the evidences of its triumph, forgetful of the struggles through which it passed in order to see the sun-

light of the day of victory, the idea seems trite and fundamental. With England, France, and stubborn Germany bowing at the shrine of its temple; with the champion of the cross and the followers of the crescent paying homage to its influence; with reunited Italy loitering near its altars; with all civilization turning its eyes and its hopes toward it, it would appear that the idea had never an opponent. In the glorious light of its achievements, amid the realities of its final success, it is hard to realize that, because and in advocacy of it the fountains were broken loose of the great depths of thought, and nations experienced the throes of political and social revolution. Human memory is short, and the means by which an end was accomplished are soon forgotten after the end has been attained. But when our forefathers, one hundred years ago, made the first formal but earnest announcement of the right of full personal freedom, the doctrine seemed startling. As Luther, in a preceding century, had formulated anew and advanced the doctrine of religious freedom, so these men of the later colonial history, these sturdy heroes of 1776, formulated anew and advanced the doctrine of political and personal freedom, ample and complete. They fired the shot heard around the world. Under the impulse which they gave it the idea, like a great ball of fire, rose rapidly to the zenith. It shook the very foundations of feudal and despotic domination; set the great forces of society in motion, obliterated the doctrine of the "divine right of kings," and started on the round of life another series of questions of political and social ethics. But the success of the men of the revolution, the establishment of the American Republic was not the full and complete triumph of the doctrines of Jefferson and Adams, of Hamilton and of Henry. It was not the utter final overthrow of the antagonistic dogma. There still remained the conflicting, contesting force, subdued in a measure it is true, but still able to put its impress even upon the organic law of the new nation. Anomalous as it may appear, a war for human freedom was successfully waged, and a constitution that did not in terms prohibit human slavery was the result. Hence the fountain head of all our blessings, of our enlightened institutions, of our civil and religious liberty, because, also, at last the fountain head of all our woes. So the second Magna Charta of human rights given to the world by the Anglo-Saxon race became, through the machinations of unscrupulous and ambitious men, the Magna Charta of human wrongs.

A quarter of a century passed and the Tory forces under free government remained, to all appearances, passive, but in reality accumulating power and preparing for the new agitation. It soon came. The intelligent American is sufficiently acquainted with the events that followed. It would be useless, perhaps, on this occasion to rehearse the long record of concession and surrender—shameful record that it is—of Missouri compromises and Wilmot provisions and Leecompton constitutions and nullification threatenings. It was free thought against slave thought, with slave thought too often in the ascendancy. It was the "irrepressible conflict" renewed.

It was the central thought of the declaration again at war with the champions of the doctrine of the inequality of man. Across the new empire of the West a black line had been permitted to remain. The struggle finally resolved itself into an effort, on the one hand, to widen and deepen that line; and on the other hand, to narrow and ultimately to forever wipe it out. The indomitable will, the high purpose, the lofty patriotism and courage of Andrew Jackson for a season held the disintegrating forces in check, but the vacillation and weakness of succeeding administrations furnished those forces their opportunity and precipitated the conflict. On the one side or on the other, all the forces of learning and of logic enlisted. Society rushed into the swollen stream, and unable to stem the current, was carried past the rapids to the very brink of the precipice. Men proclaimed their anger from the hustings and from the high places of authority. They refused to see the right and unfurled the banner of might. Reason lost her sway, and amid the conflicting element the forces of logic gave way to the forces of arms. The sword was drawn and Sumter fell.

Quick as electric light there ran along the fold of the ensign of the Republic the letters that formed the question pure and simple, Shall the Union stand? High on the dome of the sky, and in every wind that blew, in every battle that was fought, and in every charge that was made, in every bayonet thrust and bursting shell, in every dying groan, either upon the one side or upon the other, in all the long years of havoc and carnage and desolation, was seen or heard the inquiry—shall free government continue to exist?

We are here to-day, my friends, to celebrate the memories and to commemorate the services of the men and women of America who finally and forever settled those questions in the affirmative. I say the men and women. For while I give full honor to the heroic and patriotic men who upheld the flag of free government while the tempest of death raged all around, I must also award praise and glory to the womanhood of America, whose loving hearts and willing hands bound up the wounds, pillowed the dying heads, and administered the Holy Grail; whose noble sympathy did more than I can tell to cheer the fainting spirit and to strengthen, maintain, and encourage the hand that held the gun. We are here, sixteen years after the close of a great civil war, on an occasion set apart, on a day of rest and relaxation, to take note of the blessings which, under the Providence of God, we this day enjoy as the supporters of enlightened

self-government; to recall the past, not in bitterness nor animosity, but for the examples which it teaches, so that we may thus be the better able to meet the problems of the future.

We are not here "to fight the war over again." None of us, I am sure, have any desire to kindle anew the smouldering embers of discord, or to fan afresh "the policy of hate." The struggle was long enough and cruel enough, God knows, when the opposing forces contended in physical combat. "Malice toward none, charity for all," said our martyred President. But while that is true, I see no occasion to go further and apologize for what the Union soldiers did. I am equally, and more than equally, opposed to that policy.

We are not here to honor treason, nor to sanction the principles for which the South seceded. I am afraid, my friends, that these later days have been a little too fertile of "gush" on this subject, and it seems to me to be high time for some voice of authority in the land to call a halt on the sentimentalists and deny their right to concede away the cause for which the Union soldier fought. It is too soon to pronounce eulogies on Jefferson Davis; too soon for the "stars and bars" to float over the dome of the Capitol as the insignia of a regenerate Union.

The stars and stripes won the fight, and that flag is entitled to float and to rule. It is possible for pacification to go a little too far. There appears to be in some quarters too great a tendency to ignore the fact that "the blue" and "the gray" were the representatives of distinctive and irreconcilable ideas. A common honor is not due to them; a common glory is not their portion. The systems which they respectively sought to uphold were uncompromisingly antagonistic. Between them it was war to the knife. It was light against darkness. It was the good against the evil spirit of our institutions.

It was the genius of progress, of advanced thought, against retrogression, or at least, against a conservative adherence to old creeds and despotic forms. And no interests of peace or good will, however great or however overshadowing, can justify or excuse forgetfulness of the truth. However desirable conciliation and harmony may be, there is one thing immeasurably more precious, one thing the sacrifice of which no emergency, no combination of circumstances would justify, and one thing which the patriotic people of this country will never yield, and that is, the righteousness of the Union cause.

"Decoration day," if it is anything, it is the type of an idea. It symbolizes something. It has a purpose. Its authors had a motive. If not, its observance is useless. It was instituted not simply that flowers might be laid on dead men's graves, nor simply that the memory of the Union soldier and his services might be appropriately honored, but that the principles, the cause of constitutional law, the great dogma of individual liberty, for which that soldier gave or imperiled his life might, also, be cherished and ever held up before the minds of men. The righteousness of the cause justifies the honoring of the champion.

It was a cause that founded its claim to righteousness and justice upon more than the fortuitous circumstances of victory. True, "nothing is so successful as success." But the cause for which the Union soldier fought was righteous and just by virtue of the everlasting principles which gave it its vitality. He fought that free government might continue to exist; that the Union might stand, and to make that Union what it was intended it should be—the one great shining champion and example among the nations of the equality of man and the liberty of the individual.

The movement against which he fought was a movement characterized by feudalism, possessing the features and the tendencies of an aristocratic oligarchy, and seeking, as its vice-president, Alexander H. Stephens, said, "to erect on the ruins of the Union a confederacy, of which slavery should be the corner-stone." The Union soldier fought to prove that the doctrine of Alexander H. Stephens was wrong; that the leaders of the rebellion were in error. He fought to sustain the grand, elemental principles of Jefferson and the Continental Congress, and his fight was successful when Gen. William T. Sherman marched "down to the sea," and when, under the apple tree at Appomattox, Lee gave up his sword to Grant and abandoned the struggle for secession.

But, while I place the cause so high, let me not be understood as detracting from the glory of the champion, as withholding from the tribute he so richly deserves. It has been said that "the silent sufferer is earth's noblest hero." I change the phraseology, and say that earth's noblest hero is the soldier who, without hope of glory or expectation of renown, has laid upon his country's altar his costliest sacrifice, has paid to his country's cause "the last full measure of devotion." That soldier has no better representative than the Union private. He did not hear in "the wild, grand music of war," the alluring strains that become the echoes of remembrance; he was not filled with the consuming fire that ambition kindles, that hurries men on to "seek the bubble reputation even in the cannon's mouth." No shining niche in the Parthenon temple of glory beckoned him onward; no siren song gave promise of due recompense. He knew that where he fell there he would lie, and that, in the general mass, his name would pass away from the recollection of men and be treasured by none save those to whom the chords of affection bound him. He bared his breast to the tempest of death in the highest spirit of noble self-sacrifice, and as he pressed on to the ramparts of the foe, he heard in the buzz of the bullet and the whirr of the