

FUNERAL ORATION

PRONOUNCED IN THE OPERA HOUSE

IN

AUGUSTA GEORGIA,

DECEMBER 11TH, 1889,

UPON THE OCCASION OF THE MEMORIAL SERVICES

IN HONOR OF

PRESIDENT JEFFERSON DAVIS

BY

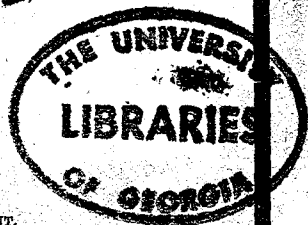
COL. CHARLES C. JONES, Jr., LL. D.

PRESIDENT OF THE CONFEDERATE SURVIVORS' ASSOCIATION

AUGUSTA, GA.

CHRONICLE PRINTING ESTABLISHMENT.

1889



OBSEQUIES
IN HONOR OF
PRESIDENT



JEFFERSON DAVIS

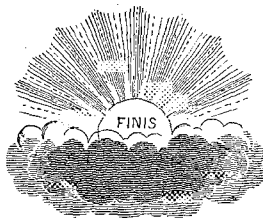
HELD AT

AUGUSTA, GA.

December the 11th, 1889

BY THE

Confederate Survivors' Association



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THE ORATION.

Ladies and Gentlemen:

In yielding to the solicitation of my brethren of the Confederate Survivors' Association to address you on this memorial occasion, I was appalled at the shortness of the period allotted for preparation, and at the magnitude of the theme suggested for our contemplation. I am painfully aware that under the most favorable circumstances in any attempt to remind you of the virtues and the services of the illustrious dead in whose honor we are assembled, everything I could say would be anticipated by your thoughts, and I would suffer the reproach of falling far below them. Nevertheless, answering the call of an Association whose lightest request is to me a command, with all the traditions of a consecrated past thrilling through my veins, and cherishing an admiration most profound for the character and acts of him who but yesterday was the noblest living embodiment of Confederate manhood, I respond, as best I may, to the needs of this occasion, craving your generous indulgence if I fulfill not the expectation of the hour.

10-17-19

When Wilkie was in the Escorial studying those famous pictures which have so long attracted the notice of all lovers of art, an old Jeronymite said to him; I have sat daily in sight of those paintings for nearly four score years. During that time all who were more aged than myself have passed away. My contemporaries are gone. Many younger than myself are in their graves; and still the figures upon those canvasses remain unchanged. I look at them until I sometimes think they are the realities and we but the shadows.

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The battle scenes which the heroes of the South have painted; the memories which Confederate valor, loyalty, and endurance have bequeathed; the blessed recollections which the pious labors, the saintly ministrations, and the more than Spartan inspiration of the women of the Revolution have embalmed, these will dignify for all time the annals of the civilized world; but the actors in that memorable crisis, they, —the shadows—will pass away. Johnston —the Bayard of the South—Jackson,—our military meteor streaming upward and onward in an unbroken track of light and ascending to the skies in the zenith of his fame—Lee—the most stainless of earthly commanders and, except in fortune, the greatest—and multitudes of their companions in arms have already gone

“To where beyond these voices there is peace.”

But yesterday Jefferson Davis —the commander of them all—the most distinguished representative of a cause which electrified the civilized world by the grandeur of its sacrifices, the dignity and rectitude of its aims, the nobility of its pursuit, and the magnitude and brilliancy of the deeds performed in its support, entered into rest. The President of the dead Confederacy lies in state in the metropolis of the South, and every Southern commonwealth is clothed in the habiliments of mourning. At this moment, throughout the wide borders of this Southern land, there is not a village or a hamlet which bears not the tokens of sorrow. By common consent the entire region consecrates this hour to the observance of funeral ceremonies in honor of our departed chief. General and heartfelt grief pervades the whole territory once claimed by the Confederacy. Was sorrow so spontaneous, so genuine, so unselfish, so universal, ever known in the history of community and nation—sorrow at the departure of one who long ago refrained from a participation in public affairs, who had no pecuniary or political legacies to

bequeath, and whose supreme blessings were utterly devoid of utilitarian advantage? This spectacle, grand, pathetic, and unique, is not incapable of explanation or devoid of special significance.

Within that coffin in New Orleans in silent majesty reposes all that was mortal of him whom impartial history will designate as one of the most remarkable men of the nineteenth century. Around his bier in profound respect and loving veneration are assembled the trustworthy representatives of the South. Encircling that venerable and uncrowned head are memories of valor, of knightly courtesy, of intellectual, moral, and political pre-eminence, of high endeavor, and of heroic martyrdom. In that dignified form—so calm, so cold in the embrace of death—we recognized the highest type of the Southern gentleman. In his person, carriage, cultivated address, and superior endowments, we hailed the culmination of our patriarchal civilization. In him was personified all that was highest, truest, grandest, alike in the hour of triumph and in the day of defeat. He was the chosen head and the prime exponent of the aspirations and the heroism of the Southern Confederacy. As such his people looked up to and rallied around him in the period of proud endeavor, and as such they still saluted him amid the gloom of disappointment. As we approach that revered form and render signal tribute at the grave of our dead President, every recollection of a glorious past is revived, and our souls are filled with memories over which the "iniquity of oblivion" should never be allowed blindly to "scatter her poppy." It is a great privilege, my friends, to render honor to this illustrious man. Ours be the mission to guard well his memory—accepting it in the present and commending it to the future as redolent of manhood most exalted, of virtues varied and most admirable.

Although no Federal Flag be displayed at half-mast, or Union guns deliver the funeral salute customary upon the demise of an ex-Secretary of War, we may regard

with composure the littleness of the attempted slight, and pity the timidity, the narrow-mindedness, and the malevolence of the powers that be. The great soul of the dead chief has passed into a higher, a purer sphere uncontaminated by sectional hatred, wholly purged of all dross engendered by contemptible human animosity.

It were impossible, my friends, within the limits of this hour to even allude to the leading events and mighty occurrences in the life and career of him whose obsequies we are now solemnizing. Born of Georgia parents in bountiful Kentucky, while yet an infant his home was transferred to Mississippi, where his childhood and youth were spent in a community remarkable for the lofty, honorable, hospitable, and courteous bearing of its men, and the chastity, polish, and loveliness of its women. In such an atmosphere he acquired at the outset those gallant, urbane, refined, elevated, and commanding traits which characterized him through the whole course of his prominent and checkered career.

Leaving Transylvania college in 1824, he entered the United States Military Academy at West Point. Upon his graduation in 1828 he was assigned to the First Infantry, and saw his earliest active service in the Black-Hawk war. On June 30, 1835, he resigned his commission as first lieutenant of Dragoons; and, having married a daughter of Col. Zachary Taylor—afterwards President of this Republic—established his home near Vicksburg where, pursuing the avocation of a cotton planter, for some eight years he led a retired life devoted to earnest thought and intelligent study. Entering the political arena in 1843 in the midst of an exciting gubernatorial canvass, he rapidly acquired such popularity as a public speaker and as a political leader, that two years afterwards he was complimented with a seat in the Lower House of the National Congress. During this service, and in debates upon prominent issues, he bore a leading part;

never once wavering in his devotion to the Union of our fathers, but, on the contrary, with loyal lip and ready hand endeavoring to promote the "common glory of our common country."

In June, 1846, he resigned his seat in Congress to accept the colonelcy of the First Regiment of Mississippi Rifles, to which position he had been unanimously elected. Joining his command at New Orleans, he proceeded at once to reinforce Gen. Taylor on the Rio Grande and, during our war with Mexico, conducted himself with a courage and soldierly skill which reflected honor upon American arms, enriched the history of that important period, and won for him, from the chief executive of the nation, promotion to the grade of brigadier general.

Well do you remember the conspicuous gallantry of Col. Davis when, at Monterey, he stormed Fort Leneria without bayonets, and, amid a hurricane of shot and shell, led his regiment as far as the Grand Plaza. At Buena Vista, too, he attracted the notice of, and evoked hearty plaudits from the entire army of invasion. It was there, by his celebrated V-shaped formation that, unsupported, with his regiment he utterly routed a charging brigade of Mexican Lancers, thrilling the nation by the brilliancy and the intrepidity of the movement, and eliciting from the commanding general commendation couched in the most complimentary terms. It was then, my countrymen, that he received a severe wound from the effects of which he suffered to the day of his death. Yes, my friends, for more than forty years Jefferson Davis bore upon his person the marks of a painful and well-nigh mortal hurt encountered in supporting the flag of his country.

Entering the United States Senate in 1847, he became chairman of the committee on military affairs, and exerted an influence second to none in the discussion and settlement of the important questions which then agitated the legislative mind.

Upon the election of Gen. Pierce as President of the United States, Senator

Davis accepted from his hands the portfolio of war; and, I am persuaded that I indulge in no extravagant statement when I affirm that his administration of the affairs of that important bureau was more efficient, noteworthy, and satisfactory than that of any cabinet officer who preceded or has followed him in that position. This I believe to be the consentient verdict alike of friend and enemy.

Resuming his seat in the Senate Chamber in 1857, he was recognized as the Democratic leader of the 36th Congress. This distinguished honor he maintained, with consummate ability, during a period of unusual anxiety and profound responsibility, until the secession of Mississippi in January, 1861, when he withdrew from the national councils and returned home, where a commission as commander-in-chief of the Army of Mississippi awaited him.

In this exciting political service no smell of fire touched the hem of his garment. No truculent spirit contaminated the manhood of his soul. No utilitarian methods dwarfed the dignity of his acts, or questionable policy impaired the honesty of his utterances. With no uncertain voice he denounced all partisans who purposed an obliteration of the landmarks of the fathers. The doctrine of popular sovereignty he utterly repudiated. Carefully distinguishing "between the independence which the States had achieved at great cost," and the Union which had been compassed by an expenditure of "little time, little money, and no blood," he eloquently and effectively maintained the State-right's theory which had taken such firm root in the constitutional thought of the Southern people. Although the admitted champion of his section, he professed and exhibited an abounding love for the Union, and avowed a willingness to make any sacrifice, consistent with the preservation of constitutional liberty, to avert the impending struggle. Mr. Davis was no political iconoclast—no disunionist in the vulgar acceptance of that term.

In the first volume of his "Rise and Fall of the Confederate Government," he has presented in a masterly manner his views upon the weighty question of the reserved rights of the States, and has submitted to the world an argument which, in my judgment, has not yet been answered save by the arbitrament of the sword, clearly demonstrating that the "Southern States had rightfully the power to withdraw from a union into which they had, as sovereign communities, voluntarily entered; that the denial of that right was a violation of the letter and spirit of the compact between the states; and that the war waged by the Federal government against the seceding States was in disregard of the limitations of the constitution, and destructive of the principles of the Declaration of Independence."

I have no desire, my countrymen, in this presence and on this occasion, to discuss issues which have been, at least for the present, settled at the cannon's mouth; and yet, in justice to the illustrious dead who by ribald tongue has been denounced as a "rebel" and a "traitor," in defence of you—brave women and gallant men of the South,—who followed the fortunes of the Confederacy and who are now gathered together to pay homage at the shrine of him who occupied the chief seat of honor in the day of our nation's hope and peril, I cannot refrain from saying, in all truth and soberness, that the States never having surrendered their sovereignty, "it is a palpable absurdity to apply to them, and to their citizens when obeying their mandates, the terms rebellion and treason: that the Confederate States, so far from making war against, or seeking to destroy the United States, so soon as they had an official organ, strove earnestly, by peaceful recognition, to equitably adjust all questions growing out of the separation from their late associates," and that the "arraignment of the men who participated in the formation of the Confederacy and who bore arms in its defence as the instigators of a controversy leading to disunion," is wholly unjustifiable.

For many years prior to the civil war the Honorable Jefferson Davis was one of the most commanding figures in the public eye. His services in the Mexican war had won for him military distinction, while his intellect, his oratory, his statesmanship, and his ability in dealing with questions of moment in the Senate of the United States, and in conducting the affairs of the bureau of war, were admitted by his opponents and applauded by his friends.

In his esteem constitutional liberty was dearer than life. Possessing in an extraordinary degree those moral traits which are intensified under the test of heroic trial, he lived to show to the world "the matchless and unconquerable grandeur of Southern character."

"In mind, manners, and heart, he was a type of that old race of Southern gentlemen whom these bustling times are fast crowding out of our civilization." With him fidelity, chivalry, honor, and patriotism were realities, not words—entities, not abstractions. To the South, and the cause which it represented, he remained faithful even unto death.

On Feb. 9, 1861, in his personal absence, and without any solicitation on his part, Mr. Davis was, by the Provisional Congress assembled at Montgomery, Alabama, chosen President of the Confederate States. This foremost office in the gift of the South he continued to hold until the disastrous conclusion of the Confederate struggle for independence. It is historically true that if his inclination had been consulted, President Davis would have preferred high military command to the station of chief executive of the nation.

Summoning to his aid such heads of departments as appeared most suitable, and proclaiming in his inaugural address that necessity not choice had compelled the secession of the Southern States; that the true policy of the South—an agricultural community—was peace; and that the constituent parts, but not the system of the government had been changed, he bent his every energy to the creation and the confirmation of the republic newly born into

the sisterhood of nations. Herculean was the effort, involving as it did the entire organization of the Confederacy, the accumulation of supplies, the consummation of governmental plans, and the enlistment, equipment, and mobilization of armies at a formative period when that union of seceding commonwealths was little more than a political name. Volunteers there were of exalted spirit and capable of the highest endeavor, but the problem was how to arm them for efficient service. In the language of the venerable historian of Louisiana; "If Minerva with wisdom, courage, justice, and right was on the side of the Southern champion, it was Minerva not only without any armor, but even without the necessary garments to protect her against the inclemencies of the weather; whilst on the other side stood Mars in full panoply, Ceres with her inexhaustible cornucopia, Jupiter with his thunderbolts, Neptune with his trident, Mercury with his winged feet and emblematic rod, Pluto with his hounds, and Vulcan with his forge and hammer."

It is even now a marvel, transcending comprehension, that the Confederate States were able so rapidly to place in the field large bodies of troops. Equally astounding is it that a government—born in a day and erected in the midst of a population almost wholly agricultural—could so quickly summon to its support the entire manhood of the land, establish machine shops and foundries, compass the importation and manufacture of quartermaster stores and munitions of war, accumulate commissary and other supplies at convenient points, erect and man heavy batteries, furnish field artillery, place muskets and sabres in the hands of expectant soldiery, and organize the various departments requisite for the efficient administration of public affairs:—and all this in the face of an impending war of gigantic proportions. That President Davis, in the consummation of this complex and most difficult business, evinced a patriotism, an energy, a capacity, and a devotion worthy of the

highest commendation, will be freely admitted.

And what, my friends, shall I say of his conduct as Chief Magistrate of the Confederacy during the more than four long and bloody years which marked the duration of our heroic struggle in defence of vested rights and in behalf of a separate national existence? Time would fail me to enumerate even the salient points of his overshadowing intervention in, and controlling guidance of, the operations—civil and military—appurtenant to that eventful epoch. He was the central sun of our system, around which all lesser luminaries revolved in subordinated orbits. He was the guardian of our national honor, and the conservator of the public weal. Amid trials the most oppressive, and disasters the most appalling, he never forfeited the confidence of his people; but under all circumstances retained their loves and their allegiance. His messages, state papers, and public utterances were models alike of statesmanship and of scholarly diction. His constant effort was to maintain, upon the highest plane, the purposes and acts of the government. Every suggestion was discountenanced which was not in harmony with the dictates of the most approved international ethics and the principles of civilized warfare. In communing with citizens and soldiers he inculcated sentiments exalted in their character, and counselled every sacrifice necessary for the accomplishment of the vital purpose in view. His energy in the discharge of the multifarious, perplexing, and important duties which devolved upon him, never flagged. His sacrifice of self was conspicuous. His spotless integrity, tenacity of convictions, courage in maintaining his opinions, his enlightened conscience, his resolute temper, and his clear conception of right and honor in every relation, were potent factors in the solution of the tremendous problems claiming his attention. His resolution—formed after the most careful consideration—was followed with a relentless fidelity. Some men thought him dictatorial; but an iron will, inflexible nerve,

and the bravest assumption of personal responsibility were demanded by the occasion. For the guidance of the time and the control of events there were no precedents. Action, immediate, decisive, was the watchword of the hour. "They that stand high have many blasts to shake them," and the marvel is that he was able to endure the tremendous pressure, and to bear the burthens incident to the position he occupied, and consequent upon the perils which environed his beleaguered nation. Some there were who questioned the propriety of certain appointments to and removals from important commands,—criticised his plans,—and denied the advisability of some of the public measures which he favored; but no one ever doubted either the sincerity of his convictions or his absolute devotion to the best interests of people and government as he comprehended them. Difficult beyond expression was the execution of the momentous trust committed to his keeping. To say that he perpetrated no mistakes, would be to proclaim him more than mortal. In the light of past events, and in expression of the general verdict, this we will venture to affirm: that with the resources at command, and in view of the desperate odds encountered, President Davis and the Southern people achieved wonders, and accomplished all that the purest patriotism, the most unswerving valor, the loftiest aspirations, and the most patient endurance could have compassed.

"Till the future dares
Forget the past,"
the fame of both shall be
"An echo and a light unto eternity."

With the surrender of the armies of Generals Lee and Johnston, and upon the disintegration of the Confederate government at Washington, Georgia, the end came. While attempting to reach the trans-Mississippi Department, and cherishing the hope that with the assistance of Gens. E. Kirby Smith and J. B. Magruder and the forces under their command he

would there be able to prolong the struggle, President Davis was captured by a detachment of Federal cavalry. Subjected to petty pillage and to annoyances inconsistent with the usages of civilized warfare, he was conveyed under guard to Fortress Monroe where, charged with being an accomplice in the assassination of President Lincoln, and accused of treason, separated from family and companions, heavy fetters riveted upon him, he was immured in a stone casemate. "Bitter tears have been shed by the gentle, and stern reproaches" have been uttered by the "magnanimous on account of the needless torture" to which he was then subjected. For two long years did this illustrious prisoner endure this unmerited disgrace,—his unwarranted and oppressive confinement. Could you, my friends, at this moment, with uncovered heads approach the coffin which encloses the mortal remains of our dead President, and reverently lift the shroud which enfolds his precious body, you would even now discover, on those pale and shrunken limbs, the abrasions caused by Federal gyves. Behold, my countrymen, what he suffered as the representative of the South! Behold the martyrdom he then endured for the alleged sins of his people. He was indeed "a nation's prisoner."

Bravely did he bear himself during this season of privation, of loneliness, of insult, and of attempted degradation, protracted until satiated by their own cruelty and baffled in their rage, the prison doors were opened, and the Federal authorities were forced to acknowledge that the charge of complicity in the assassination of President Lincoln was a lie; and that Jefferson Davis—President of the Confederate States—was not a traitor.

If anything were needed to consecrate his memory in the affection and the gratitude of the Southern people, it is surely supplied in this vicarious suffering, and in the nobleness of spirit with which it was endured.

Time and again since his liberation have

the shafts of falsehood, of hatred, of detraction, and of jealousy, been directed against him; but, successfully parried, they have returned to wound the hands which launched them.

In his quiet home at Beauvoir, ennobled by the presence of the live-oak—that monarch of the Southern forest—, beautified by the queenly magnolia-grandiflora, redolent of the perfumes of a semi-tropical region, fanned by the soft breezes from the Gulf, and cheered by exhibitions of respect, affection, and veneration most sincere, President Davis passed the evening of his eventful life. Since the hush of that great storm which convulsed this land, he has borne himself with a dignity and a composure, with a fidelity to Confederate traditions, with a just observance of the proprieties of the situation, and with an exalted manhood worthy of all admiration.

Conspicuous for his gallantry and ability as a military leader—prominent as a Federal Secretary of War—as a senator and statesman renowned in the political annals of these United States—illustrious for all time as the President of a nation which, although maintaining its existence for only a brief space, bequeathed glorious names, notable events, and proud memories which will survive the flood of years—most active, intelligent, and successful in vindicating the aims, the impulses, the rights, and the conduct of the Southern people during their phenomenal struggle for independence—his reputation abides unclouded by defeat, unimpaired by the mutations of fortune and the shadows of disappointment.

Surely no token of affection can be too profuse—no mark of respect too emphatic—no rendition of honor too conspicuous—no funeral tribute too imposing for this dead chieftain of the South. Dead, did I say?

“To live in hearts we leave behind
Is not to die.”

Even now his name is upon every Southern lip, and his memory enshrined in every Southern heart.

Even now, all through this brave Southland funeral bells are tolling his requiem. The bravest and the knightliest are reverently bearing his precious body to the tomb. Benedictions, invoked by lips touched with a live coal from off the altar, are descending like the dew of Hermon. Pious drops bedew the cheeks of noble women, and the heads of stalwart men are bowed in grief. The hour is holy, and the occasion most privileged.

In bidding farewell to our President, we rejoice that, by a kind Providence, it was granted unto him to spend in our midst

"His twelve long hours
Bright to the edge of darkness; then the
calm
Repose of twilight—and a crown of
stars."

We rejoice that he was permitted to render back his great spirit into the hands of the God who gave it, surrounded by devoted friends, accompanied by the loves of Southern hearts, and amid the comforts of the metropolis of the South. We rejoice that having attained unto the full measure of human life and enjoyed the highest honors which Southern hands could offer—all mundane cares overpast—he has, as we confidently believe, serenely entered into that Upper Realm where there are "trees of unfading loveliness, pavements of emerald, canopies of brightest radiance, gardens of deep and tranquil security, palaces of proud and stately decoration, and a city of lofty pinnacles through which there unceasingly flows the river of gladness, and where jubilee is ever rung with the concord of seraphic voices."

