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A TRIBUTE

— TO —

General William Tecumseh Sherman,

— BY —

REV. S. J. NICCOLLS, D. D., L. L. D.,

ST. LOUIS.

DELIVERED AT THE PUBLIC MEMORIAL SERVICE
OF RANSOM POST No. 131, DEPARTMENT
OF MISSOURI. G. A. R.

IN EXPOSITION BUILDING, ST. LOUIS.

MAY 30TH, 1891.

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REV. S. J. NICCOLLS, D. D.,

St. Louis, June 1st, 1891.

DEAR COMRADE :

Will you kindly furnish for publication, your oration on General Sherman, delivered on last Saturday afternoon upon the occasion of the public Memorial Service, held by Ransom Post in Entertainment Hall.

In making this request, we second the desire expressed by many who listened to your eloquent delineation of the life and services of that illustrious soldier; and we feel confident that a host of old soldiers and their friends, who did not share with us the pleasure of listening to your admirable address, will appreciate the privilege of reading it.

Very cordially,

Your Comrades,

JAS. G. BUTLER,	JAS. O. CHURCHILL.
HENRY HITCHCOCK,	O. L. WHITELAW.
L. B. RIPLEY,	GEO. H. MORGAN.
CHAS. S. HILLS,	W. D. WETHERELL.
H. M. POLLARD,	THOS. S. HAWLEY.
DELOS R. HAYNES,	A. P. FORBES,
AUSTIN E. COOK,	JNO. SCHENK,
JNO. B. BRANDT,	S. C. BUCKINGHAM,
C. P. CHESEBRO,	JAS. A. SUDBOROUGH.
T. D. KIMBALL,	N. W. TAYLOR.
GEO. D. REYNOLDS,	DWIGHT TREADWAY,
W. G. HILLS.	F. WALTON.
W. B. DEAN,	E. W. DUNCAN.
ADAM ROTH,	

MESSRS. BUTLER, HITCHCOCK, RIPLEY, HILLS AND OTHERS :

DEAR COMRADES :

In answer to your kind request, I send you for publication the manuscript of my Address. I know that it poorly expresses what is due to General Sherman and our dead heroes, but your approval makes me bold to contribute it to the honoring of their achievements.

Sincerely yours,

SAM'L J. NICCOLLS.

St. Louis, June 3rd, 1891.

COMRADES AND FELLOW CITIZENS :

The just sentiment of a grateful people has set apart this day in remembrance of those who gave their lives for their country, in the day of its extreme peril. Our laws confirm its observance. It is thus, in part, that the Republic seeks to honor those who fought and fell in its defense, and who, by their valor and self-sacrifice, secured its present unparalleled greatness. To some here present, the observance of this day is nothing more than a memorial of a time in the past, which has a general but no personal interest for them. At best, they are curious to learn of it from those who were eye witnesses of its scenes. But to others, companions in arms of those who died, it is more than a memorial. It is a day of sacred and tender memories, and it calls us to the fulfillment of a duty which we owe to the dead. Others may forget them, but we cannot, and be true to our better selves. We are carried back to the time when we marched with them to the throb of the drum, and waked with them at the bugle's call. Over us was the flag, red as the wrath of a great people in the hour of their just anger, and the thunderous sound of battle smote our ears. Again we see the faces of our comrades bright with smiles, around the camp fire; or shadowed with pensive thought as they look far away over hill tops and valleys, to the dear homes they had left behind; or transfigured in the fierce light of battle; or pale in death, when the bloody strife was over. They shared our trials, they cheered us on our way with their brave words, they died that we might live. We caught their last whispered words of love, and sent their last messages to those who were waiting in agony of suspense, for tidings from the camp or battle field. They are the spent ammunition of the war; we, that which was carried back in cason and cartridge box.

How then can we forget their graves, or cease to cherish their memories? Some tell us that it were better for present peace, that the observance of this day should fall into disuse. But who demands it? Certainly not those gallant men who with equal, though with erring patriotism and valor, fought against us. They would be the last to ask it. Certainly not those who know from the teachings of history, how much examples of patriotic devotion have to do with the greatness of the State. When that profound instinct in humanity, which ever leads it to honor the graves of its heroes, is stifled, one of its mightiest inspirations to true greatness will be lost. It may be that coming generations, filled with their own pleasures or enervated by luxury, shall no longer observe this day; but sure I am, that so long as one of the Grand Army of the Republic shall survive, he will come, though bent with years and upheld by his tottering staff, to lay his tribute of honor and affection on the graves of his comrades.

It is no easy task to speak appropriately in the honor of the dead. When Pericles, in obedience to a custom like that which calls us together to-day, spoke in memory of those who sacrificed their lives for the safety of their country, he began by saying that it was difficult to say neither too little nor too much, and that even moderation was apt not to give the impression of truthfulness. "The friend of the dead who knows the facts is likely to think that the words of the speaker fall short of his knowledge and wishes; another who is not so well informed, when he hears of anything that surpasses his own powers, will be envious and suspect exaggeration. Men are tolerant of the praises of others so long as each hearer thinks he can do as well himself; but when the speaker rises above him, jealousy is aroused and he begins to be incredulous." So I cannot hope to speak in such a way as to please, or satisfy all. For indeed what mind short of an omniscient one, could hold in view the mighty number of the dead, or place in order their deeds, so as to measure to each one his appropriate praise. Call up in memory a single brave, self-sacrificing soldier of the Republic, and it is as though you looked for the first star in the evening sky. Even while you look, another, and another—and then a score stand revealed from the violet

depths, until the whole heavens are ablaze with their splendor. So our heroic dead appear in the sky of memory. They come singly from the skirmish line where they fell, faithful unto death. They come in regiments from battle fields encrimsoned with their blood, and in mighty divisions from prisons and hospitals. They form galaxies and flaming constellations. They stud the sky thick as the stars in the Milky Way. There let them shine forever together, great commanders and common soldiers, leaders and followers, the men who issued commands and the no less glorious men who dared to execute them. Who would rob night of its splendor by diminishing its glory to a single star!

Even were I to attempt to speak the names of the dead associated with this Post, from that of the heroic general whose name you bear, to that of the brave and loyal hearted man whom you so recently followed in sorrow and love to his tomb in a neighboring State, I should fail by omission. But you, comrades, have in part relieved me by asking me to speak of one with whom it was our privilege to be associated in comradeship, and whose name will ever remain chief in honor, on the roll of our post. I need not say that I refer to him, whose high distinction it is, to be enrolled among the greatest military commanders of the world, COMRADE SHERMAN.

It is not possible to reach a proper understanding of a character such as his, or to explain his greatness, apart from his birth and education. Great men are not made by opportunities, rather, they are prepared for them. The chief matter is the making of the man, after that all he accomplishes follows as a matter of course. Great souls have their roots in the soil of the past. They have gathered from immediate and remote ancestors, as well as from great minds that touched theirs, inspirations, convictions, ideals and principles, that have been wrought together in their moral and intellectual fiber. Their temperaments have slowly ripened in secrecy like:

“Wines, that heaven knows where,
Have sucked the fire of some forgotten sun;
And kept it through a hundred years of gloom,
Yet glowing in a heart of ruby.”

Great men are God's gift to his people. He raises them up and calls them to the field of action, at the appointed hour. Usually too, he calls them from obscurity, and not from high rank and king's palaces, that the glory of what is done may be his, and not man's. It was so in this case.

The quiet home in Lancaster, Ohio, in which William Sherman was born, was that of a distinctively American family, of two generations ago. Judge Sherman, his father, and Rev. John Sherman, his grandfather, with their wives, were true representatives of that stalwart generation that passed through the war for Independence. They were frugal livers, strong in convictions, intense in their patriotism, and Puritan in the best sense, in their ideas of honesty and honor. Such homes are unconsciously breeding great men. They transmit and give inspirations which in due time embody themselves in heroic deeds, and win the grandest victories for liberty, law and humanity.

The death of Judge Sherman, when his illustrious son was only nine years old, brought a sorrowful change for his family. The future general was left a poor boy, depending upon his own exertions and the aid of friendly neighbors. Necessity, rather than choice led him to accept the appointment of cadet at West Point.

In the year 1846 he began his services in the army as lieutenant in the artillery. He was then twenty-six years old. But while trained for the profession of arms, he had no love for it. His eager nature was impatient under its restraints, and his tastes turned to civil, rather than military pursuits. The impending war with Mexico seemed to promise him a field for action, but he was not destined to take part in it, as his orders transferred him to the newly acquired territory of California. No one can read his own account of his experience, both as an army officer and as a civilian, during his residence on the Pacific coast, without seeing that that experience strengthened and ripened those qualities which afterwards served him so well in his great campaigns. California at that time was the land for adventurers of every class, eager to get wealth at any price. Bold and often unscrupulous speculators were the men in power. The mad thirst for gold had taken possession of the whole

country. Men forgot honor and betrayed sacred trusts to secure gain for themselves. Through all this trying period young Sherman passed uncorrupted, and without a stain upon his honor. No one ever accused him of using his official position to promote rascality, nor was he associated with schemers and speculators whose actions could not bear the light of day. In his respect for law, his wonderful foresight, his prompt and vigorous action and his determination to overcome all obstacles, we can see the budding of those powers which were displayed so conspicuously in the more stirring events of the great civil war.

This is not the time nor place to detail the events of his early life. Enough now to say, that the opening of the civil war found him in charge of a military academy, under the control of the State of Louisiana. The social atmosphere in which he lived was full of the spirit of rebellion, and few were rugged enough in loyalty to escape untouched. But among them was the Superintendent of the State Military Academy, who, anticipating the secession of Louisiana, sent in his resignation, in which were these memorable words: "On no earthly account will I do any act, or think any thought hostile to, or in defiance of the old government of the United States." No vow of love escaping from a chaste maiden's lips, was ever more ardent and sincere than was this avowal of patriotism. Mark it, for it explains all that follows. It is the very soul of his soul. Presently it will break forth in fiery energy, and manifest itself in deeds of devotion and sublime daring. It will subordinate his rare gifts and high mental endowments to itself; it will rise superior to reproach, to the calls of ambition, to domestic sorrow, and to the love of gain. It will sit enthroned in his imperial genius until at last, men shall see pure, unselfish patriotism incarnate in one of the greatest of the world's military commanders.

Shortly after this he is in Washington, disgusted with the condition of affairs there. It seemed to him a veritable witches caldron, in which "white spirits and black, red spirits and gray" were stewing together. He had just come from the South, and in his view, the Government was bewildered and did not comprehend the magnitude of the dangers which threatened it. Sorrowing and despondent, this man of action comes

to St. Louis, to be the superintendent of a street railway. Here he was a deeply interested spectator in the stirring scenes and the fierce war of words that marked the beginning of sectional strife. He was offered a local command of importance but refused it. He wanted no ninety days work in a contest which he saw must last for years. At last he was called to Washington as colonel of the Thirteenth Regular Infantry, and with this appointment he began his eventful career. He commands a brigade at ill-starred Bull Run. Subsequently he is ordered to the Department of the Cumberland, to which he goes, stipulating with the President, that in no event was he to be placed in a superior command. This fledgling hero is diffident of his powers, and it is at this time that he gives himself to the renewed study of the art of war, confident that a long and hard contest is before the country. Contrary to his desire, he was placed in superior command of his department. He was, however, soon relieved, for a strange reason. He was "crazy," so it was said. Seeing, as others did not, the magnitude of the struggle, he asked for men and means proportionate to it, and for this reason, men in power judged that his mind was disturbed. Wise above the rest, they therefore judged him a fool. Happy would it have been for the country, if a like madness could have possessed all, instead of the infantile wisdom that was predicting conquest and peace at the end of three months. It is enough here to say, that in less than a year, the foresight and wisdom of General Sherman, as expressed in his plans which had been so sharply condemned, were more than justified by events. But the sting of the foolish charge long rankled in the heart of the brave soldier. It is ever the lot of great genius to be misunderstood, reviled and assailed. Ignorance and stupidity will abuse it and pronounce its acts folly; the hounds of envy and malice will follow, baying at it, through all its course. In short, it must have its baptism of suffering before it can wear its crown of success. The future General of the army of his country, was ordered to Jefferson Barracks to be a driller and organizer of raw recruits. Accepting the humiliation with such patience as his fiery spirit could command, he addressed himself to the execution of his new duties. He was no sulking Achilles, refusing to do his part because due honor had

not been shown him. And is it too much to say that this humbler service, by which he became more familiar with that part of war which has reference to organization and supply, trained him into a larger efficiency for the great work before him, to which he was called in the Providence of God?

Again, Sherman is at the front, and on the bloody field of Shiloh he displays those qualities of personal courage, promptness in action, cool judgment in the heat of conflict, firmness in the midst of disaster, and wisdom in command, which soon won him the unbounded confidence of his soldiers, and which subsequently shone so conspicuously on many a battle field. From this time to the close of the war, he stands in the forefront of the conflict. Battle succeeds battle, campaign follows campaign, in all of which he takes a conspicuous and successful part. The names of Vicksburg, Chattanooga, Meridian, Knoxville, Kenesaw and Atlanta indicate the line of his advancing course and are forever associated with his fame. The fall of Atlanta marked the close of as well conceived and executed campaign, as was ever recorded in the bloody annals of war. That there were some mistakes in it, is but to say that it was planned and executed by men. But were there nothing else recorded in the history of our country to the honor of General Sherman, than the story of that campaign, it alone would be sufficient evidence of his surpassing genius as a military leader. Nor was that campaign less glorious in its fruits than in its execution. There are thousands still living, who can remember the sense of relief which came, and the wave of joy which swept over the land, when it was told that Sherman's boys held Atlanta, and that the old flag waved in triumph over that stronghold of rebellion, second only in importance to Richmond itself. But after this came another campaign, less bloody indeed in its events, but far surpassing the former in boldness of design and brilliancy of execution. It was that of the famous "March to the Sea." Some have tried to belittle it, because it was comparatively bloodless and unopposed; forgetting that the highest art of civilized war is to accomplish great results without opposition and bloodshed. It is to do the unexpected. It is to feign here and to strike there. It is to outmarch and outgeneral

the foe. It is to command armies with such skill and energy that when the decisive movement is begun, the foe is powerless to resist. It is to secure victory without bloodshed, and that is vastly better than mere slaughter. How much that ever-memorable march displays, in its details, this highest skill of war, it would be presumption in me to decide; others competent for the task must judge it. But the humblest citizen knows the result of the movement. Boldly cutting loose from all lines of supplies, this great leader and his gallant army left Atlanta and marched eastward. They disappear from the sight of friends, and rumor alone could report their progress as they cut a broad swath of desolation across half a continent. The enemy, perplexed and dismayed, cannot organize to resist them. They take cities and towns, an easy prey. The sound of their advance is heard mingling with the roar of the sea. They appear for a short time to encircle and capture Savannah. They march northward, sweeping all before them like a tropical tempest. They compel the surrender of the last army of the Confederacy. Still onward they march, though no longer in battle array, until they enter the proud capital of the nation they fought to save. Down the wide streets, through lines of rejoicing citizens, eager to behold the conquering heroes, on past the dignitaries of the nation, assembled to witness the last act in the mighty drama, rode the man who had left Atlanta, and after him, regiment following regiment, brigade upon brigade, corps after corps, their battle-rent flags uplifted and their arms glittering in the sunlight, came his bronzed and scarred veterans, tramping on with the tread of conquerers. The long march of 2,000 miles under Sherman's leadership was ended. The work was done and triumphant war gave place to peace.

What I have said is only a brief and bare outline of the life and achievements of General Sherman. It remains for the biographer and historian to record the whole story; and when it is written, it will reveal, more clearly than his contemporaries have been able to discern, the greatness of his genius and the nobility of his character. We are too close to the great men of our civil war to measure them rightly; but even now the verdict of the masses places the leader of the March to the Sea, among the greatest of Americans. Whoever calls the roll of our

dead heroes, whose achievements fill us with pride, and whose examples are worthy to be held in memory, will find among the names at the head of the list, that of William T. Sherman.

It would be folly on my part, to undertake to pass judgment on his military career. But those, who are masters in the art of war, have already done so, and without hesitation rank him among the first of military leaders of this, or any age. None has been more outspoken or positive in his praise, than the great Commander, General Grant. Such words as these from the "silent man" mean something: "I feel that you have accomplished the most gigantic undertaking given to any General in this war, and with a skill and ability that will be acknowledged in history, as unsurpassed if not unequaled." In another letter, which was private and confidential he says: "I do not propose to lay down for you a plan of campaign, but simply to indicate the work which it is advisable for you to have done, and leave you free to execute it in your own way." Grant knew his man. He says in that same letter that he had placed another in a particular position with special orders, and as if some thought of his old tanner life had come to him, he writes: "If he cannot skin for himself, he can hold a leg while some one else skins." He knew that Sherman left to himself, could take off the hide.

But there are some things which we all, however ignorant of military affairs, can see in his character and course, worthy of our profound admiration. No one can fail to discern his unfaltering loyalty to his country. He has no ambition which leads him to delight in war. He accepts it sorrowfully, as a means to an end, and that end was the preservation of the Union. He believed with all his soul, that rebellion was treason, and that war, relentless and vigorous, was the shortest road to peace. His singleness of purpose gave him a clearness of vision with reference to the prosecution of the war, which others did not possess. His passionate loyalty and high sense of duty ever kept in restraint that selfish ambition which is so often the evil genius of successful leaders. He was singularly free from political ambition, nor did he ever use his high position for personal advantage. England's greatest military genius, the Duke of Marlborough, has a record of character that stains the pages

of history ; but it is with just pride that we point to the great American soldier, and claim for him a character so transparent in honor and integrity, that even his enemies could not find a pretext for an accusation against him.

No one familiar with his career and the times in which he lived, can fail to see that his greatness was not accidental. It was not happy fortune that raised him on high, and left him crowned with honor which he had not fairly won. Others had equal opportunities, and failed. In those days of intense passion, when cool judgment was so often compelled to yield to popular clamor and political policy, when envy, ambition, jealousy and treachery sought to distract the counsels and defeat the plans of the wisest and best, it required of one in command, almost super-human powers of will, rare tact and judgment in dealing with men, wide knowledge of facts, and especially a character that invited confidence, in order to stand erect and conquer. The greatness of his generalship also appears, when we recall the character of the army which he led. Never before in all history, was so large a number of intelligent soldiers massed together for battle, as in our civil war. They thought for themselves, they had their own convictions, and knew, or fancied they knew, as much as their officers, how battles should be fought and won. They were ready to fight, but they refused to be misled. That such men gave their implicit confidence to their General, and that he drew forth from them a faith that made them invincible, is no small testimony to Sherman's greatness. Indeed, I know not whether it is better to say, that the commander was worthy of his soldiers, or that the soldiers were worthy of their great commander. Each statement is equally true. Certain it is, that no one of our great leaders had so large a share of the affection of the army as he. One who was his companion in his march, has well said: "What General Sherman was to his men, not merely as the leader whom they would follow wherever he went, but as a friend in whom they trusted, is part of the history of the war. Ready to share their dangers, provident and careful of their needs to the utmost of his power, exacting of them the obedience to duty which he exacted still more rigorously from himself, he was always 'uncle Billy' to the rank and file."

More than any other of our great commanders, he represents that mighty host of common soldiers who went forth in defense of the Union. As the apex of the pyramid, though complete in itself, is after all only the topmost section of the mass underneath, and draws into itself all the lines of the huge bulk that upholds it in his pre-eminent glory, so General Sherman seems to gather and centre in himself all that energy, patriotic devotion and self-sacrifice of the common soldiers, which made his great achievements possible.

Men who are crowned with the glory of great enterprises are generally more admired than loved. They attract others by the splendor of their genius; but it is not so in this case. The great heart, the true manhood of the bluff soldier won the love of his countrymen, as much as his genius, their admiration. Sincere affection, as well as fame, made his name familiar as a household word in countless homes. A great nation mourned his death, not only as a public loss, but with a sense of personal bereavement, so much did he seem to belong to us all. It was given to him to enjoy, in the largest measure, the earthly reward of his services. He lived to see the country he had so efficiently and devotedly served, established in peace and unity, and advancing with unparalleled power in its new career. He received that which was more to him than the highest station or rank, the affection and gratitude of his countrymen. He died as a patriot soldier might well wish to die, full of years and rich in honor. His grave is with us, henceforth to be a shrine where pilgrims shall come from afar, to do honor to his genius, and where patriotism shall reverently stand to have its spirit purified and quickened. We do well to build a monument to his memory. Less than that we could not do, and be true to our trust. But he has built a monument for himself in the hearts of his countrymen, which shall endure when bronze has become rust, and granite dust. This great man of noble simplicity, of cunning brain and great heart, of disinterested patriotism and unstained honor, is no longer with us in the flesh; but the grave has not entombed him. He lives and will continue to live among his countrymen. His unique figure will stand in striking majesty among our great historic characters, not to dwarf us into littleness, but to show into what greatness men may

grow, who are wise and unselfish in patriotism, and true to their convictions of honor and duty.

But, comrades, we do not come to-day, to lament over the graves of our dead. Rather do we rejoice with a solemn joy, as we recall their memories. They opened the door by which a great people passed through to victory, to high enterprise and unparalleled prosperity. We shall best honor them by keeping secure what they died to save. Shiloh, Chattanooga and Atlanta are senseless wastes, the March to the Sea, vainer than a dream, Gettysburg, useless slaughter, and the whole struggle a hideous mistake, if our union of States shall not remain one and indissoluble, and the rights of men be maintained by the free government of the people. It was the high privilege of most here, to take some part in the work of that most eventful period in the history of our country. We cherish the memory of those days with honest pride; and well may we, for there never was a war like it, fought out on so vast a scale, involving such tremendous cost and so many thousands of priceless lives, and in behalf of so high principles. We can say of all the combatants, as did the Greek historian of those who engaged in the civil war of that famous State, "There were no mean thoughts on either side." It was a war of giants, and it has led to results in which all acquiesce and rejoice.

Comrades, year by year our ranks are depleted, and soon the Grand Army of the Republic will be marshalled on the other side of the flood. But while we live, let us not forget the mighty inspiration of the heroic days of the past, and let us strive by the victories of peace to keep in purity, in honor and in integrity, and to raise to higher glory that "Government of the people, for the people and by the people" which we fought to save. Then it may be, that grateful hearts will strew flowers of affection on our graves, and our children evoke inspiration from our examples, as we do from our immortal dead.

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