

Memorial Day

No 19

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Memorial Day 30 1880*

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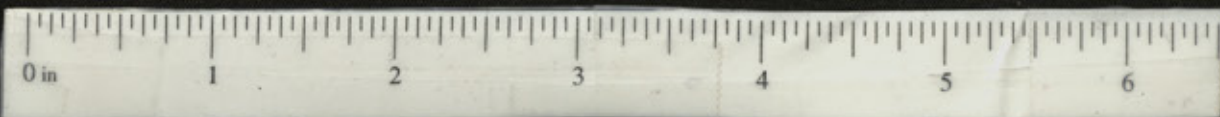
GENERAL OLIVER O. HOWARD,

COMMANDING THE DEPARTMENT OF THE COLUMBIA.

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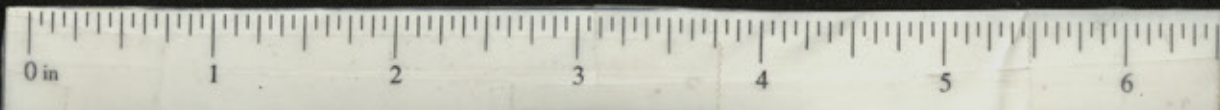
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ADDRESS

OF

GENERAL OLIVER O. HOWARD,

COMMANDING THE

DEPARTMENT OF THE COLUMBIA,

At the Decoration of the Soldiers' Graves

IN THE

MILITARY CEMETERY

AT

Vancouver Barracks, W. T., May 31, 1880.

ADDRESS BY
GENERAL O. O. HOWARD,
AT THE
SOLDIERS' CEMETERY,

Vancouver, W. T., May 31, 1880.

Ladies and Gentlemen, Comrades:—"The commemoration to-day of the bravery of the men who have fallen in defense of their country, will recall memories of many events of former years, which the country is too prone to forget, and which many denounce as things to be forever hid in oblivion. But the nation which forgets her defenders does not deserve them. Either those men fell in a noble cause, or the United States has committed a crime for which it ought to be ostracized by the nations of the world."

Last Saturday morning, noticing the fact that I was advertised to make a speech on this memorial day, with the morning paper, the *Oregonian*, in my hand, my eye fell upon the words which have just been read.

"Memories which the country at large is too prone to forget, and which many denounce as things to be forever hid in oblivion!" This expression produced on my mind a two-fold effect.

First—*those memories!* I began to recall the personal friends who went bravely to the conflict, and who lost their lives during the struggle.

Generalities do not usually or deeply excite the emotions of our hearts; but the specific, the concrete, the recital of individual achievements, of personal exposure to suffering, to danger, to death;

these things, this portraiture, are always calculated from childhood to old age to stir the depths of the human soul. So, in common with the sympathies of humanity, as the individuals whom I loved, and whose lives paid the forfeit of patriotic devotion were passed slowly in review on the field of memory, my heart swelled and my eyes ran with tears.

But after this tender review of the most familiar faces among the dead, I thought of the men in America who could denounce such sweet, precious, soul-inspiring, heart-uplifting memories as "things only fit to be forever hid in oblivion," and my emotions suddenly changed. With a scowl on my forehead, with my teeth set, my nerves braced and my hand clenched, I felt a little of the old indignation which moved men at the time of the first evil tidings of 1861, tidings that a murderous blow had been dealt, a blow that was aimed at the nation's life. I hope there are not really many to denounce these memories. If there are, they may be open enemies to be fought; or secret moth-eaters, to be watched and guarded against; or men bred in that cowardly atmosphere where it was the fashion in war time to spit out the venom of contagion and treason, and twist off into other lands to avoid the blows of patriotism and valor; or they may be a weakly, milk-and-water brood, who never entertain any clear ideas of patriotism or principle, who always in tremulous watching for troubles fend them off by the coveted oblivion of opiates or debaucheries.

True enough, "the nation which forgets her defenders does not deserve them." Each of us can contribute but little to prevent such forgetfulness. Do not neglect, in the midst of business ac-

tivities and absorbing cares, as this day yearly rolls around, amid the flattening turf and the dimming headstone record, while the object of this memorial service becomes less and less clear to your offspring, do not forget that each one must make his own contribution to the remembrance of his country's defenders.

In keeping with this thought I propose to-day to make mine,—a small contribution; to confine your attention to the mention of those classmates of my own at the Military Academy whose lives were surrendered during the Rebellion.

Here are some noticeable statistics: My class entered the Military Academy in 1850, over one hundred strong. There fell out by the way some sixty members. There was graduated in 1854 forty-six members, of whom seven died in the United States service before the war. In 1861 fourteen joined the Rebellion, while twenty-one were of Southern parentage. Seven were killed or died in consequence of wounds in the Confederate army. Five were killed in the Union army. There are now left but eleven of the original forty-six, three of whom are here at Vancouver Barracks to-day.

The first of these regular officers killed in the war of the Rebellion was Lieutenant JOHN T. GREBLE; killed June 10, 1861, in the action of Big Bethel, Virginia. His conduct was so conspicuous in gallantry that he was accorded two brevets, which only his friends were able to enjoy. The Honorable Secretary of War, immediately after his death, promptly forwarding these as a deserved recognition of honor to his father, accompanied the commissions with the following expression of his feelings:

"His (Greble's) distinguished character, his gallant conduct on the field, where he fell, and his devoted sacrifice to the cause of his country, will make his name and memory illustrious."

My own memory makes clear several choice pictures concerning GREBLE:

First—A modest boy of 16, steadily winning his way to the affection and esteem of his classmates.

The second—When a little later he formed the center of a sweet family group, where father, mother and sisters embraced him in the circle of their love and thoughtful devotion.

The third—A diligent artillery Lieutenant among the jungles and hummocks of Florida.

The fourth—While instructor at West Point as the father and head of a beautiful family—the youthful father, mother and two little children. There can be no holier or happier grouping.

The fifth—The officer commanding his battery in desperate action; standing on the causeway looking across the bridge which leads to Big Bethel, GREBLE is resolutely holding his position to the last; silencing batteries, keeping back the enemy's advance, covering the awkward mistakes of new troops, and then falling and lying dead on the spot where he had fought his battery till he had but one gun, and but five of his men were left alive.

The sixth picture—When his widow, at the funeral, lifted her little Edwin so that he could look upon the face of his father, then lying with a sweet and peaceful expression upon his face, he knew him, smiled and whispered "Papa," and then, with sudden, unexpected feeling, cried out: "Take my papa out of that box."

The seventh—The desolate home. A father bereaved, never to be comforted. A mother only satisfied when doing for other stricken mothers the offices of sympathy and help; then for the wife the perpetual widowhood, often, it is true, brightened into the smile of sunshine. It is like that on yonder crests of snowy whiteness, which mingles with the clouds with Heaven behind them. For her the boy and girl are a perpetual reminder of past joys and future hopes. To-day, following his father's footsteps of honor and fidelity, EDWIN stands number five in the graduating class of West Point cadets.

Such are a few of the glimpses into the life, character and death, and family, of the first of the five classmates who fell "in the struggle for the new birth of Freedom."

The second officer whom I will mention is Captain JOHN R. SMEAD, 5th Artillery. He was killed in action August 30, 1862, at the battle of Manassas, Va., at the age of 32. This is the battle which we have been accustomed to call the "Second Bull Run;" a battle probably lost to us because of the rivalries and cross-purposes of men in power.

There is a feeling of sadness, peculiar in its nature, which comes over you when a friend is thrown beneath the crushing wheels of such a Juggernaut of useless sacrifice. SMEAD had sterling qualities, and bears on the Register an abundant record. He was on the road to promotion,—to higher promotion,—when his earthly career was cut short on that field which twice was enriched, too abundantly, by the best blood of the nation.

The third on the list is STEPHEN H. WEED. He was killed on the second day of the battle of Gettysburg. It was while marshaling his brigade of the 5th Army Corps, which bore no small part in preserving to us the

"Little Round Top," and the integrity of our line of battle that he did most effective service. He fell by "Little Round Top." Here his faithful lieutenant was catching his last words to bear them as a meagre consolation to the beloved home-circle in New York, when he, too, received a fatal shot and fell across the body of his General; thus leaving to others to carry an increase of the sad tidings,—of the surrender of two devoted lives.

Weed was a young man of much spirit. He had a large circle of friends, and he gave promise, with a steady eye and glowing cheeks, of attaining to higher and higher claims of honor and usefulness as the years went by. Already at 30 years he was a brigadier-general of volunteers, when he fell at the head of his command in the great battle of Gettysburg, which signalled the wane of the Rebellion.

The fourth classmate is Colonel BENJAMIN F. DAVIS. Colonel DAVIS was one of those true men from the South who, at the cost of sacrifices more trying than the loss of life, remained, from conviction, true to the government which had educated him, and whose flag he had been taught to revere. I confessed my surprise and joy when I first met him during the Peninsula Campaign of 1862. I was surprised that the immense pressure had not carried him to his state of Mississippi. Still, when I recalled the nerve of the man, as shown in those youthful struggles at West Point in which many weak characters succumb, I could understand it better. To be convinced that it was duty was, with DAVIS, to induce immediate resolve; and resolve with him always signified action. His career was being marked by a record of brevets for merit and by promotions when it was ended June 9, 1863, in a small combat with the enemy at Beverly Ford. Colonel DAVIS, familiarly called "GRIMES DAVIS,"—the cadet sobriquet—was every inch a sol-

dier. To lead a forlorn hope, to make a charge, to hold a position with the utmost tenacity, or to move men with all the inspiration and vehemence of a strong man with indomitable will, there were few officers who could equal him. He chose his appropriate command—the cavalry—the 8th New York Regiment. Probably if he had lived "GRIMES DAVIS" would have rivaled or excelled PLEASANTON, KILPATRICK and, CUSTER as cavalry leaders.

He counted truth more precious far than life,
And valued honor more than loud acclaim;
As Douglass bold, in every manly strife,
The blow descended ere the tongue could blame.

At clank of chains his noble heart rebell'd,
Than woman's, gentler at the suppliant's cry;
The name of treason in disdain he held;
In Freedom's cause he dared to live and die!

The fifth martyred classmate who fell in loyal service is Colonel EDGAR O'CONNOR. He became the colonel of the second regiment of volunteers raised in Wisconsin. He brought his regiment into the field after the first battle of Bull Run, and had but one year of service in the Rebellion when he was killed, the 28th of August, 1862, in a combat at Groveton, Virginia. O'CONNOR was a young man of a happy temperament. Fat, hearty, companionable, humorous,—he was of the kind that took deep root in social life. He left the army after a service of four years on the frontiers, to occupy himself in civil life, when the sudden rebellion called him, as it called other army men who loved their country, again to join the service. So, after hearing of our first terrific defeat at Bull Run,

he hastened to Washington with a choice regiment raised in his own neighborhood. Self-possessed, phlegmatic, imperturbable, with sufficient disciplining power in his composition for the use of war,—these elements, coupled with his jovial temper, made him a capital and successful commander of volunteers. But in the very beginning, at the age of twenty-nine, his pleasant spirit suddenly ascended to join our other companions in the realms of the departed.

The names of our confederate classmates,—that I will not give on this occasion,—who went into the battles fourteen strong and came out but seven, I am familiar with. They were brave men. I have for these dead many precious and tender remembrances. I wish, imitating "GRIMES DAVIS," of Mississippi, that they had not raised their hands against the Republic. But I have no hard words for them. I would probably myself have been weak enough to have been controlled by local influences and strong friends had I lived in a slave state, and particularly had I been educated to put implicit faith in the pernicious, disintegrating, suicidal doctrine of state supremacy. It is hard, even for a northern man, who has been from his youth thoroughly imbued with the idea that state supremacy is in our Constitution and essential to liberty. I say it is hard for him, so imbued with pernicious teaching, to understand the propriety of attempting to save our government against internal attack. Patriotic men who suffered the loss of property and of blood to prevent the destruction of the Government and to rid it forever of the horrible incubus of slavery, are often now-a-days confused, mortified, and chagrined when some of our brightest statesmen assure them that they have been violating the American Constitution from 1861 till to-day; that they are in favor of monarchical tendencies; that they would snatch from the people the liberties which are dear to them, and more

in this land than any other. In brief, they declare that the habit of war has overturned forever the habit of peace, and, in effect, submerged and destroyed beyond recovery, the life and power of the old Constitution. So, day by day, week by week, year by year, the struggle goes on among the political managers to take from us all that we thought we had gained by the war, namely, the Constitution redeemed, the laws readjusted, the judiciary purged, and liberty become universal and secured in the eternal anchorage of right. This cry against the honest patriotic men of the land is a false one.

If a man's dwelling is on fire he may be obliged to step outside of it and submit to temporary injuries from the firemen and the floods of water in order to preserve it.

A vessel in a storm carrying a heavy canvas must furl her sails and render much of her moving machinery inoperative to save herself from utter wreck.

So, when the terrible struggle of war was upon us, and before the winds of commotion, engendered by war, had died away, our statesmen were obliged to step outside of the Constitution in order to save the Constitution itself; to render temporarily inoperative much of its machinery, which now, it is plain, was only in rest and folded up,—never destroyed. It has again, in its full force, become essential to the existence and progress of the Republic.

With such sentiments filling our minds and hearts, let us reassure ourselves that in suppressing the Rebellion we accomplished a good work; that our patriotic dead did not die in vain; that while we are not perfect, and may improve even the Constitution as well as the laws of our country, still

let us congratulate ourselves, our children, and the lovers of freedom throughout the world, that this *American Republic* rests on the permanent foundations of a written Constitution, and rises into view with the strong masonry of her structure rivetted by the will of an intelligent people, and with an elevated watch tower carrying the lights of principle and knowledge and wisdom, which are indeed the beacons of hope to the thinking men of every nation of the globe.

