

**THE CONFEDERATE DEAD. TWO
ADDRESSES. A PLEA FOR A HISTORY OF
THE CONFEDERATE WAR: AN ADDRESS AT
THE DECORATION OF THE CONFEDERATE
GRAVES IN CAVE HILL CEMETERY,
LOUISVILLE, KENTUCKY, MAY 26, 1879**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649750597

The Confederate Dead. Two Addresses. A Plea for a History of the Confederate War: An Address at the Decoration of the Confederate Graves in Cave Hill Cemetery, Louisville, Kentucky, May 26, 1879 by William C. P. Breckinridge

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Edited by Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd.
Cover @ 2017

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WILLIAM C. P. BRECKINRIDGE

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WM. C. F. BRECKINRIDGE.

• A P L E A •

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HISTORY • OF • THE • CONFEDERATE • WAR:

An Address

AT THE DECORATION OF THE CONFEDERATE GRAVES
IN CAVE HILL CEMETERY, LOUISVILLE,
KENTUCKY, MAY 26, 1879.

By WM. C. P. BRECKINRIDGE.

LOUISVILLE:
JOHN P. NORTON & CO., PRINTERS.

1879

EXPLANATORY NOTE.

These addresses are now reprinted in this form at the request of comrades whose wishes have controlled me.

The first was delivered at the decoration of the Confederate graves in Cave Hill Cemetery, near Louisville, on May 26, 1879; the second at Hopkinsville on May 19, 1887, at the unveiling of the monument erected by JOHN C. LATHAM, jr., Esq., formerly of Hopkinsville, now of New York, in honor of the Confederate dead buried in the Cemetery near that beautiful little city.

At the unveiling of that monument addresses were delivered by Hon. JAMES BREATHITT, Rev. Dr. CHARLES F. DEEMS, and GEORGE O. THOMPSON, Esq., Mayor of Hopkinsville.

ADDRESS.

In this lovely and sacred city of the dead are buried the beautiful, the learned, the wise, and the loved. Around you on every side are holy graves in which lie until the resurrection morn the bodies of the mourned, and over which have been placed memorials of love and grief. Among these dead are men who gave honor to the great city whose spires and ascending smoke, the rising incense of profitable industry, are in our sight; men whose virtues were living epistles read of all who came in contact with them, and whose lives were fit exemplars for your children to imitate. And still more precious, scattered every where, are graves of pious mothers, idolized wives, of children whose death broke your hearts, of friends still mourned. And yet, all these honored and loved graves are passed by to-day, and this multitudinous throng of women and men, turning from grave of father and mother, of husband and wife, of child and sister and friend, of statesman, philanthropist, and sage, turning from the family group where the heart-pangs of the living can be read in the names of the dead, is gathered around these rows of mounds, and upon them have strown fragrant flowers, and in honor of them have left home and the duties of arduous life. Why this unusual honor? Why this resounding music, these exquisite flowers, this more significant gathering? Whose graves are these to which this mournful but beautiful homage is rendered? Some stranger in our midst—another Anacharsis—a modern Herodotus, having just reached this city in his pilgrimage, turns to some grave gray-headed man bearing flowers, and asks with eager but restrained curiosity, "What is the meaning of this striking scene?" What answer will you give, middle-aged man of business and care? Or, if he should chance to ask you, fair matron, what reply would you return? What reply can we to-day return to such question, when not another but our own hearts ask it? Here, to-day, in the sight of Almighty God, whose heavens lend to catch the answer; in the midst of the graves of those we loved, whose spirits are witnesses

to this scene; in the hearing of our children, whose lives may be molded in the likeness of our reply, I lay my hand upon my heart, and lift my eyes to God, and in the name of this assemblage avow that this homage is in honor of martyrs to liberty, who died for the right, and gave their lives in defense of truth; and for the verity of this reply I confidently appeal to God and history. This is our answer to whomsoever may cavil or question: it is not our apology or defense. By the side of these graves we make neither apology nor defense.

Fourteen years, this very day, have passed since the last Confederate surrender was made; eighteen since the echo of Sumter's guns announced that war in all its horrible reality had indeed befallen our unhappy land.

Death has been busy during these years, and the actors in those four years of war are rapidly passing away, and a new generation is taking their places. The majority of those who hear me were not participants in that struggle.

The kindly powers of nature and the active industry of man are obliterating all the physical evidences of the camp, the trench, and battle-field. The golden grain, or green grass, or tangled underbrush conceal the trench behind which human hearts bled to death, or on which heroic courage won glory and wrested victory. The ravaged fields have been refenced and the burnt homestead replaced with an humble but loved roof-tree, under which wife and little ones lie down to sleep. So, too, the stern necessities and the daily duties of life have called forth and absorbed all the energies of manhood and womanhood. Houses have been rebuilt, cities re-established, railways constructed, States regained, and liberties recovered.

During these years, time and labor and necessity, the new duties, the new vocations, the new relations, have legislated, have molded, have modified until a new generation is entering into life under auspices, relations, and circumstances peculiar to this day. It is but natural that the causes and events of our war should seem to be mere matters of history, unimportant save as a romance or a study, and that this feeling will grow each day. And as it grows there may be an acquiescence in the charge that these men whose graves we honor were indeed heroic men, but were rebels and traitors, who fought to preserve human slavery; who rebelled without cause, and went to war for unholy purposes, and during that war committed grave excesses, permitted horrid cruelties; and that their defeat was necessary for humanity, liberty, and free government. Upon these graves and the

graves of all our dead and the good name of all our living has this charge been made. The ear of the world has been dinned with its clamor, and at the bar of every nation and of posterity we stand confronted with the charge. I do not come to answer it to-day, but I do come to plead that it be answered in its length and breadth, and the answer be made accurate and permanent. The only true answer is a complete and accurate history of the causes which produced the Confederate war, the events of that war, civil and military, and of its results. This history is the true monument we owe to the memory of our dead comrades, and this is the justification our children have a right to ask at our hands for their sakes.

A history will be written. We owe it to every sentiment of honor, patriotism, and gratitude that at least we furnish the materials for a true history. It may be said that I am urging that all the animosities of that war be revived; that after fourteen years of peace and common citizenship, of social life and intermarriage, I am dragging forth the skeleton of those terrible days. Nay, not so. No one has more sincerely yearned for a return of true fraternity than I, and over these lowly but precious graves I am ready to do all that a gentleman and soldier, a patriot and citizen can in honor and duty do to secure for our country and our children a true, generous, equal destiny. But truth is the only corner-stone on which peace can be built, and the truth, as it is seen by God, is that truth which I do pray to be known of those causes, events, and results. My friends, such a war can not be ignored; its lessons will be learned by mankind; its voice has reverberated through all the world; its heroes have entered into the temple of immortality, and the sole question for us to determine is, whether those lessons shall be in accordance with the truth, that voice sound the truth or a lie, those heroes receive the places to which they are justly entitled?

It is a glorious history, though a sad one. It can not be written justly as yet, but the material for it can be gathered now, and only now. Soon it will be too late; and to-day, standing by these graves, in the name of the dead, I demand of every one who participated in that war to do his and her part in this great work, and he who fails to do it will be held negligent of his duty and forgetful of his dead comrades. This history necessarily includes a complete and philosophical history of our American Liberty and Constitution, and of the causes which produced the secession of the States. And in this part of our answer to the charge brought against us at the bar of public opinion

and of posterity, every lover of liberty and every hope of freedom are interested. On this day, and in this presence, I content myself with the solemn avowal that the cause for which the South fought was that of personal liberty, State sovereignty, and national independence, and to add that liberty in a republic of States can be preserved only on the principle on which the American Union, as constituted before that war, and the Confederacy were founded; that unless those principles become dominant, centralization, which is despotism, or disintegration is absolutely certain. Our defense, therefore, is a plea for republican liberty—a defense of a union of equal States—a demonstration that man may be free under a government strong enough to protect his freedom and pure enough to command his love.

It will be a defense of our revolutionary forefathers and of the government they established, under which for three quarters of a century liberty was protected, and peace and prosperity dwelt among us. It will establish our hereditary claim to this constitutional freedom, and our fidelity alike to the teachings and to the example of our sires, and to demonstrate that the sons who fell at Manassas and in front of Richmond were equal to the sires who froze at Valley Forge and conquered at Yorktown. It will be another proof that forms of government may be a deception, and that liberty was in danger—even in temples erected to her honor and at altars where priests minister in her name.

And then, when our historian unfolds the rolls on which are written the deeds and sacrifices of those who loved constitutional liberty, this liberty regulated by law and guarded by sovereign States compacted into a great confederacy, what a touching, noble, and immortal story will entrance the world. Sad, but glorious four years! My tongue can not utter the proper requiem for the dead of those years, for the martyrs who died in defeat, for the women who gave their all to this conquered country. Have the story told in its simple and naked truthfulness, and stand silent as the world listens; tears will run down your cheeks, grief will ring your hearts, anguish may pale your faces, but never a blush will flush them. We will have no cause to hang our heads nor hide our eyes, and our heroes can stand covered in any presence. As another has said, "When written history shall truly record the struggle which ended thus, every leaf may be dripping with the tears of grief and woe, but not a page will be stained with a stigma of shame."

The military part of this story—the narrative of campaign, march,