

Reminiscences of the Civil War

John Brown Gordon

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The strong and salutary characteristics of both Lee and Grant
5 should live in history as an inspiration to coming generations. Posterity will find nobler and more wholesome incentives in their high attributes as men than in their brilliant careers as warriors. The lustre of a stainless life is more lasting than the fame of any soldier; and if General Lee's self-abnegation, his unblemished purity, his triumph
10 over alluring temptations, and his unwavering consecration to all life's duties do not lift him to the morally sublime and make him a fit ideal for young men to follow, then no human conduct can achieve such position.

And the repeated manifestations of General Grant's truly great
15 qualities—his innate modesty, his freedom from every trace of vain-glory or ostentation, his magnanimity in victory, his genuine sympathy for his brave and sensitive foemen, and his inflexible resolve to protect paroled Confederates against any assault, and vindicate, at whatever cost, the sanctity of his pledge to the vanquished—will give
20 him a place in history no less renowned [...]

Scarcely less prominent in American annals than the record of these two lives, should stand a catalogue of the thrilling incidents which illustrate the nobler phase of soldier life so inadequately described in these reminiscences. The unseemly things which occurred
25 in the great conflict between the States should be forgotten, or at least forgiven, and no longer permitted to disturb complete harmony between North and South. American youth in all sections should be taught to hold in perpetual remembrance all that was great and good on both sides; to comprehend the inherited convictions for which
30 saintly women suffered and patriotic men died; to recognize the unparalleled carnage as proof of unrivalled courage; to appreciate the singular absence of personal animosity and the frequent manifestation between those brave antagonists of a good-fellowship such as had never before been witnessed between hostile armies. It will be a
35 glorious day for our country when all the children within its borders shall learn that the four years of fratricidal* war between the North and the South was waged by neither with criminal or unworthy intent, but by both to protect what they conceived to be threatened rights and imperilled liberty; that the issues which divided the sections were born when the Republic was born and were forever buried
40 in an ocean of fraternal blood. [...] So the Republic, rising from its baptism of blood with a national life more robust ... shall go forever forward in its benign mission to humanity.

* "Fratricidal" refers to violent conflict between siblings.

⁴⁵ Source: John Brown Gordon, *Reminiscences of the Civil War* (New York: Scribner's, 1904), available online at <http://docsouth.unc.edu/fpn/gordon/>.