

THE CIVIL WAR AS A UNIFIER

In these days of Civil War anniversaries and celebrations, memory constantly turns back fifty years to the stupendous conflict that preserved our existence as a nation. Yet with all our pride in the achievements of that heroic struggle we Americans generally overlook its true significance. Other struggles have been rendered glorious by daring charges upon the ramparts of the foe; other armies have inscribed on their banners victories as brilliant as Chancellorsville or Gettysburg; other crises have developed leaders whom whole nations have delighted to honor. What is peculiar to the American Civil War is the generous feeling of reconciliation, the spirit of nationality, which has developed since the close of hostilities.

In this connection we too often forget the conditions in our early history as an independent government. When the Constitution was adopted, there was virtually no consciousness of national unity. The colonies, widely separated and dependent for communication on slow oxen and lumbering coaches, were naturally far more sensible of their individual needs and importance than of any common aims and aspirations. The War of 1812 was the first event in our national existence to arouse a feeling of unity among the separate commonwealths. But it is significant of the state of public opinion in 1814 that, before the treaty of peace was signed, a New England convention met in Hartford to safeguard the privileges of the states against the alleged encroachments of the federal government.

In the succeeding two decades the commonwealths carved from the Northwest Territory were filled with a vigorous, self-reliant democracy, which demanded that popular majorities should become the ruling power in government, and with the election of Jackson in 1828 put that demand into effect. During the '30's and '40's the increased use of steam in transportation on land and water, the diversification of manufactures resulting from numerous inventions, the swiftly growing forces of industry and commerce, consolidated this democracy, brought forward conspicuously the common interests of the republic as

The Sewanee Review: April, 1913

-the second of ten pages-

The Civil War as a Unifier

a whole, and produced a new organic consciousness and singleness of purpose.

This consciousness remained vague and general until it received magnificent expression in the speeches of Daniel Webster. Joseph Story's *Commentaries on the Constitution* presented to lawyers, indeed, a lucid and logical argument for the theory that the central government is supreme, but it was Webster's reply to Hayne and his debate with Calhoun that clothed with eloquence the conviction of the North and West that the United States, bound in indivisible union, had become a mighty nation, the sovereign power in an empire, which could appeal to the allegiance of every individual within its bounds. When declaimed by thousands of schoolboys during the thirty years that intervened before the opening of the Civil War, his words aroused in the heart of the maturing democracy an ever deeper devotion to the Union.

From this sense of nationality the South was largely shut out by its peculiar institution. It remained a strictly agricultural section. Streams of commerce flowed but sluggishly through its territory. It retained the notions and customs of the Revolutionary era while the Western democracy was coming into control of the machinery of national government, and it was because this young democracy was antagonistic to what the Southern aristocracy regarded as its interests and its future that the differences were submitted to the arbitrament of the sword.

To say that the war confirmed the sentiment of disunion is a superficial judgment. On the contrary, the war deepened and spread the sense of nationality until we have become one people in fact as well as in name. The citizen of Maine or Michigan was not defending the soil of his native state, but fighting for the flag of the Union. The Georgia youth who toiled through the Seven Days Battles before Richmond was not protecting his home, but battling for the cause of the South. Moreover, when once the battle was joined, the forces of common tradition and of common blood asserted themselves strongly. Numerous poems depicted scenes on the battlefield where sons of the same mother clutched each other in the death-grapple. The outcome

OldMagazineArticles.com

The Sewanee Review: April, 1913

-the third of ten pages-

The Civil War as a Unifier

of the struggle was to leave the idea of national sovereignty permanently and triumphantly established.

The period of Reconstruction, to be sure, was attended by a temporary widening of the breach between the North and the South. The man who had to begin life anew without his slaves and without a voice in the government was very likely to experience a depth of alienation that four years of armed conflict had not produced. Some Northern politicians, too, found it advantageous to foment as much hostility to the recently embattled section as possible. But even during this period the spirit of reconciliation was abroad. Henry Peterson's "Ode for Decoration Day" contained a section beginning—

O gallant foeman of the generous South,
Foes for a day and brothers for all time.

In the same year a graduate of Yale, Francis Miles Finch, later a justice of the New York Court of Appeals, reflected in "The Blue and the Gray" the calmer feeling of the victorious section so perfectly that the poem became a classic in both North and South.

Several episodes in the growth of the reconciliation begun so early are indeed notable. When Senator Charles Sumner died on March 11, 1874, the Massachusetts delegation invited Lucius Q. C. Lamar, Congressman from Mississippi, to second the resolution for suspending the business of the House out of respect to his memory. His eulogy of the New Englander that 28th of April was expected to be only a perfunctory performance. But as he proceeded, the stillness of the House and galleries became almost oppressive. Speaker Blaine sat motionless, with tears running down his cheeks. Opponents in many a hot debate, Democrats and Republicans alike, were melted to tears. When Lamar sat down, all seemed to hold their breath, as if to prolong the spell. Then came a burst of hearty and sympathetic applause such as had not been heard since the war. Of all the speeches delivered in both houses, Lamar's alone was sent by telegraph to all parts of the country—a seemingly excessive tribute that was merited. For though Charles Sumner had been foremost among the leaders in the negro legislation of Congress,

OldMagazineArticles.com

The Sewanee Review: April, 1913

-the fourth of ten pages-

The Civil War as a Unifier

Lamar's eulogy was conceived in the most magnanimous spirit and closed with a plea for a fuller understanding and a closer union.

How quickly the prayer was being answered, appeared in 1876. The hundredth anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence was celebrated by the International Industrial Exhibition at Philadelphia. The honor of writing the official cantata for this national occasion was conferred upon the Southern poet, Sidney Lanier. The cantata, composed for Dudley Buck's music, was sung "in the open air, by a chorus of many hundred voices, and with the accompaniment of a majestic orchestra." Daniel Coit Gilman thus describes the event: "The devotional exercises awakened no sentiment of reverence. At length came the Cantata. From the overture to the closing cadence it held the attention of the vast throng of listeners, and when it was concluded loud applause rang through the air. A noble conception had been nobly rendered." Lanier was the first Southern poet to give a full, clear voice to the spirit of nationality.

Ten years later there was an equally enthusiastic demonstration in New York City. The New England Society extended an urgent invitation to Henry W. Grady, then managing editor of the *Atlanta Constitution*, to attend the annual banquet on December 22, 1886. He was a leader in his native state of Georgia. His father had lost his life at the head of the forlorn hope directed by General John B. Gordon against Fort Stedman, only two weeks before the surrender at Appomattox. Yet the son looked back on the struggle with no bitterness. The outcome he accepted loyally. To numberless rural audiences he preached the gospel of industrial alertness and national unity. He was largely instrumental in organizing the Atlanta exposition of the manufacturing and commercial progress of the South. Yet, as he was almost unknown in the North, when he stepped into the banquet hall of the New England Society, he expected to make a mere formal response to the toast, "The South." But the occasion proved inspiring. "When I found myself on my feet," he said, describing the scene on his return to Atlanta, "every nerve in my body was strung as tight as a fiddle-string.

The Sewanee Review: April, 1913
- the fifth of ten pages -

The Civil War as a Unifier

and all tingling. I knew then that I had a message for that assemblage and as soon as I opened my mouth it came rushing out." This impromptu address, flashed over the country as "The New South," not only made Grady famous from coast to coast, but marked him as one of the potent influences in the unification of the once sundered sections.

That unification was actually taking place had been apparent at the death of General Grant in 1885. The last words made public from his bedside were: "I am thankful for the providential extension of my time to enable me to continue my work. I am further thankful, because it has enabled me to see for myself the happy harmony which has so suddenly sprung up between those engaged but a few short years ago in deadly conflict." The harmony was real. With only insignificant exceptions the Southern press used language like this from the *Mobile Register*: "The South unites with the North in paying tribute to his memory. He saved the Union. For this triumph—and time has shown it to be a triumph for the South as well as the North—he is entitled to, and will receive, the grateful tribute of the millions who, in the course of time, will crowd this continent with a hundred imperial states and spread to the world the blessings of republican freedom." Another paper of influence, the *Montgomery Advertiser*, remarked: "Looking at the life and character of General Grant from the broadest national standpoint, it is true to say that no man since Washington has better illustrated the genius of American institutions or the temper of Americans as a people."

A truer test of national spirit came in 1887, when it was shown that the survivors of the "lost cause" were as loyal to the Union as the survivors to the cause that won. In that year Adjutant-General Drum suggested the return of the Confederate battle-flags then in the War Department at Washington to the governors of the states from whose troops they were captured. President Cleveland accordingly ordered their return. A distinguished Union veteran, on hearing the news, shouted for Almighty God to blast the President with two strokes of paralysis, one in the hand and another in the brain. Other ejaculations almost as pious were heard from other old soldiers.

OldMagazineArticles.com

The Sewanee Review: April, 1913

-the sixth of ten pages-

The Civil War as a Unifier

The attitude representative of the North, however, may be seen in Senator Hoar's address of welcome to the R. E. Lee Camp of Confederate Veterans of Richmond, Virginia, delivered at Faneuil Hall, Boston, on June 17, the day after Cleveland's revocation of the flag order. Senator Hoar said: "Your presence to-night is a token that the memories of four years cannot efface the memories of three hundred. . . . You have learned something of the Puritan. We too have learned to know as we never knew before the quality of the noble Southern stock; what courage in war; what attachment to home and state; what capacity for great affection and generous emotion; what aptness for command; above all, what constancy—that virtue beyond all virtues, without which no people can long be either great or free. . . . In the great and magnificent future which is before our country, you are to contribute a large share both of strength and of ornament."

The Southern spirit was equally admirable. When Governor Fitzhugh Lee of Virginia heard of the Northern protest over the return of the flags, he said: "The country should not again be agitated by pieces of bunting that mean nothing now. The South is part and parcel of the Union to-day, and means to do her part toward increasing its prosperity and maintaining the peace of the republic." The leading Southern newspapers treated the subject in a similar manner. The *Atlanta Constitution* said the flags would have been received "as a solemn pledge that the last spark of resentment between the two best armies the sun ever shone on had died out forever." It at the same time recorded its belief that "the great American heart can neither be misled or deterred. It has determined that there shall be peace. . . . The war is over—its results are fixed—its passions are dead; and its heroism and sacrifices have bound this people together as they were never bound before." It was therefore no exaggeration for that eminent Mississippian, L. Q. C. Lamar, in his oration at Charleston, the centre of secession, on the unveiling of the statue of Calhoun, the apostle of States' Rights, to declare that the appeal to arms in 1861 guaranteed and established "the indissolubility of the American Union and the universality of American freedom."

OldMagazineArticles.com

The Sewanee Review: April, 1913
-the seventh of ten pages-

The Civil War as a Unifier

The progress of unification was furthered by the work of historians and biographers. Patriots like Lamar and Grady caught the heart of the people, but for permanence of good relations the public mind had also to be enlightened. Beginning with the last decade of the nineteenth century, students in American history who had been trained to scientific accuracy and impartiality in the growing universities of the country, brought into clear light the disputed causes of the war, and investigated the inner nature of the conflict and its results. The immediate effect was not always pacific. When a life of the Southern romancer, William Gilmore Simms, appeared in 1892, certain chapters that discussed without reserve his political activities raised such a storm of criticism that the young biographer was threatened with the loss of his position in a Southern college. Within ten years, however, many who still disagreed with the conclusions of the book were ready to admit the right of the author to express his opinion frankly and fearlessly. Richmond itself turned out to give him an enthusiastic welcome.

A broader influence was exerted by the novelists. The South took pride in the recognition of its writers by Northern magazines and publishers. The emergence of a new author was an occasion for demonstrations of sectional enthusiasm which at the same time bound the section to the nation by giving it a conscious share in the national life. Then came the vogue of the historical novel. For a time it seemed as if the Civil War and Reconstruction periods were the only ones novelists knew anything about. But though the field was much overworked, this activity had a salutary influence in acquainting the whole country with Southern civilization and conditions, and in setting the Southern people before the reading public in a new light. Indeed, one of these novels was reviewed at some length in a periodical of national weight devoted almost exclusively to politics and industrial progress. The prophecy of Lamar, "Know each other and you will love each other," was proving true.

The final stage in unification may be found in that ninety days' frolic known as the War with Spain. Congress removed

The Sewanee Review: April, 1913

-the eighth of ten pages-

The Civil War as a Unifier

all discriminations against former Confederate officers. Wheeler's brigade at Santiago revived memories of his Civil War raids, and inspired many a generous poem like John Howard Jewett's "Joined the Blues." Indeed, North and South were drawn into relations of exultant brotherhood. The sacrifice of blood and gold in the cause of an oppressed people fostered an intensity of patriotic fervor that lifted national life from the individualism and sectionalism which had lingered on since the Civil War. This new patriotism was no spasmodic affair of the moment. Political parties were still fervidly debating about imperialism and the colonial policy when the assassination of McKinley, in 1901, startled the whole country. Professor William P. Trent, an acute observer, once remarked: "I recall vividly how I had to make a flying trip from North to South at the time, and how impressed I was with the fact that *not a particle of difference* could be noticed between the sections—both were deep in grief I should say that few events of our time have brought out our essential unity more clearly than his assassination."

How true the observation was may be judged from an incident almost unnoticed at the time. On February 24, 1905, a bill for returning the Confederate flags was passed in Congress without a single dissenting vote, without even a single moment's debate. This result was not due to careful prearrangement. It was due to the spontaneous unanimity among the representatives of a harmonious people—a silent but impressive proof of the completeness of our union.

What makes our Civil War unique is this remarkable sequel. The most stubborn and tremendous fratricidal struggle of modern times has been followed by an unexampled obliteration of sectional animosities. The civil wars of France in the sixteenth century were followed by a century of faction. Only the iron rule of Richelieu, Mazarin, and Louis XIV kept this spirit from flaring up into conflagration. Undisturbed consolidation of power was not attained till the emigration of the Huguenot artisans robbed France of its industrial vitality. The English war of the Commonwealth in the seventeenth century was attended by a similar result. The Puritans, for a time tri-

The Sewanee Review: April, 1913

-the ninth of ten pages-

The Civil War as a Unifier

umphant, were thereafter subjected to an aversion that for a hundred years made that name odious to the ruling powers of Great Britain.

That one generation has accomplished in America what a century could not accomplish in France or England is capable of one very easy explanation. We have lived in a swifter age than the world has before seen—an age of steam and electricity, resulting in a pace of industry and a volume of commerce hitherto unwitnessed. The civilization of the South has in a few years been transformed from the purely agricultural condition of ante-bellum times. Coal and iron have been found in untold quantities beneath the fertile soil. Manufactures have been developed with astonishing rapidity. Railways and telegraph lines have spread a network over the entire section, linking it with every part of our vast domain. Even widely distant regions have not been able to retain long the sense of separateness and the feeling of antagonism that brought on the war and were for a time strengthened by it. The torrent of natural life has swept away the bitter memories of brother struggling with brother. In both North and South faces are turned from the past, and hearts are filled with pride and hope and aspiration for the future of the republic.

But economic causes do not entirely explain the quickness of the result. This peculiarity of the Civil War is due to the American people themselves. The magnanimity which Grant displayed at Appomattox, the restraint which even political temper displayed during Reconstruction, stopping short of the confiscation of property and the execution of prominent leaders, the courageous acceptance of the issues which the South displayed at the close of an exhausting struggle and under the burden of a crushing social problem—these things furnish a new chapter in the history of the relations between victor and vanquished. Indeed, the sober truth of the matter is that the war, instead of splitting the country asunder, has cemented it more firmly than any other force could have done. Without an appeal to arms to settle forever and beyond question the differences that had arisen, the North would have grown more and more unlike the South. The sundering flood would have

The Sewanee Review: April, 1913
-the last of ten pages-

The Civil War as a Unifier

become more and more impassable. The war removed from the South the cause of this growing alienation and thereby made possible a gradual but complete unification. Now no region in the whole land is more eager to claim its birthright as an integral and inseparable part of the American Union.

DUDLEY MILES.



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