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ADDRESS  
OF  
THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY  
TO THE  
SOLDIERS OF VIRGINIA.

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SOLDIERS OF VIRGINIA IN THE ARMIES OF THE CONFEDERATE STATES:

It is now nearly three years since you left your homes and firesides, at the call of your state, to repel the invasion of her soil. Before taking up arms, every effort to obtain the peaceful enjoyment of your rights under the constitution had been exhausted, your appeals for justice spurned with contempt, and a war to subjugate our sister states of the south commenced by Abraham Lincoln.

By this lawless proceeding, the federal administration threw off the mask it had hitherto worn. In such a contest Virginia could not remain an indifferent spectator. Bound by every tie of blood, sympathy, common interests and common wrongs to the states against whom this hostile preparation was set on foot, she withdrew at once from an association which no longer respected a written constitution, and resolved to receive on her own bosom the threatened shock of invasion. She invoked you to rally to defend your homes, your altars and your honor: and this appeal was not made in vain. Promptly and generously you responded to the call of duty. Most faithfully have you performed it. In your long and arduous service you have shrunk from no toil, no danger and no sacrifice. During your absence in the field, your wives and little ones may have suffered want; your homes been ravaged, and the fruits of industry destroyed by a ruthless and barbarous enemy. But, in despite of every temptation, you have never looked back. Your eye has always been fixed on the foe, and your ear waiting for the summons to battle. Amid the toil of the march, the weary watch, the labor, the hunger, the cold, the privations of the camp, you have never complained, but have always rendered a cheerful obedience to the state which honors and cherishes you with a mother's love.

You have been present in most of the important battles of the war, and in all your valor has been conspicuous. It has made you the theme of praise by your heroic companions from other states, and by the whole civilized world.

Many of your comrades have fallen in battle, or from disease contracted in service, and been transferred from the roll of life to that of immortality. There are many more, whose mutilated forms attest their honorable devotion to their country. In your prolonged absence from home, your sacrifice of personal interests and of all the enjoyments of life, has indeed been great. The war, forced upon us by the malice of a people whom we had not injured, has entailed upon us all deep sorrow and cruel suffering. Its unavoidable calamities have been greatly augmented by the refusal of the enemy to respect the laws of civilized warfare,

and by their fiendish attempt to wrest submission from us, by visiting the most relentless barbarities upon women and children, the aged and the helpless. Unbridled license has been given to their cupidity. Untold millions of property have been wantonly destroyed by their malice, or swelled the coffers of the pampered villains, who, unwhipt of justice, have been openly rewarded and promoted for their crimes. Aged and unoffending men have been dragged from their beds to dreary prisons and solitary labor. Refined and virtuous women have been brutally insulted, and, manacled by rude unfeeling soldiery, have been led captive from their homes as hostages for negroes. Farms have been desolated; dwellings laid in ashes; unprotected women and helpless children have been turned out from their homes without bread or shelter. The tombs of the gallant dead have been robbed and desecrated by fiends, who have ruthlessly invaded the sanctity of the grave, and outraged the sensibilities of the living.

Under the hypocritical guise of liberating from slavery a population happier and more virtuous than themselves, they have sought to subject us to a yoke more galling than they have essayed to remove.

Within a few days past an expedition has been projected and an abortive effort made to carry into execution, with minute instructions emanating (as we have reason to believe) from the government at Washington, to sack and fire the city of Richmond, and in the darkness of the night to consign its inhabitants, without a moment's warning, to flames and to death. For this purpose, a special "burning party" was organized, provided with implements of destruction, and orders to carry into execution their fell designs. Amid its blazing ruins the released prisoners from "Belle Isle" and "the Libby" were to unite with the bands of Dahlgren and Kilpatrick in dealing out death and slaughter upon unoffending and peaceful citizens, and inflicting outrages upon pure and unprotected women, more horrible than death.

The heart sickens at the contemplation of the enormities that would have been committed, had this nefarious scheme succeeded. No prayer for mercy would have been heard; no scream for help would have been heeded. Fire, rapine, slaughter and lust would have held undisputed dominion in this fair city.

We forbear to enlarge, but make this recital, that you may know more clearly the character of our foe, and that he may be held up to the odium and execration of mankind.

In shameless disregard of all the rules of civilized warfare, your chief magistrate and his cabinet were, by special directions, to be denied the rights of prisoners of war, and killed in cold blood. Every species of public and private property was to be destroyed, and the entire country within their reach laid waste.

Stimulated and encouraged by the precepts and example of their leaders, this band of robbers and murderers entered private houses; broke open ladies' wardrobes; destroyed of their rich contents what they could not appropriate; carried off jewels and plate; consigned to the flames stores of provisions; burnt mills and other houses; desolated some of the fairest homes of the state, and left whole families without food.

Thanks to the gallantry of a citizen soldiery, they were routed and repulsed, in the midst of this carnival of crime, which must outrage the sensibilities of the civilized world. Many of them, with awakened consciousness of their deserts, now contemplate their doom within the walls of the prison from which they hoped to release their companions.

An avenging God suddenly summoned their atrocious leader from the scene of his wickedness to the bar of judgment, and on his slain body were found his atrocious instructions, stained with his own blood. The name of Dahlgren will be handed down to history as a fit associate in infamy with Butler, and a host of lesser criminals, who have disgraced humanity, and shocked the moral sense of the world.

But in these very atrocities you will discern the motive, if any were needed, for continued services and fresh sacrifices. Virginia takes no step backward. Every consideration of honor, interest, duty and safety demand that we shall go forward in the grand struggle for human rights and human liberty, so bravely begun, and so manfully maintained.

After all that we have suffered and endured, subjugation or submission to the cruel foe would reduce us to a degree of degradation and misery which has no parallel in the history of civilization.

The sacrifices of blood and treasure that we have expended, the memories of the noble martyrs who have freely given their lives for the achievement of our independence, forbid that we should needlessly throw away what has been already won, in the vain hope of obtaining peace or security.

Nothing but wretchedness and untold misery await us, if we stop short of the unconditional acknowledgment of our independence. This your valor will surely command.

Men of Virginia! you are soldiers of a renowned commonwealth, whose fame you have illustrated and borne aloft on every battle field. We need not unfold to you the muniments of your right to self-government. We are assured that you fully comprehend the necessity of a successful assertion of that right, and that you will never lay down your arms until you have secured it. Born to an inheritance of freedom, you cannot hesitate to choose between slavery or death. Submission to an enemy, who has exhausted every infamy, is not endurable even in thought; but were we base enough to desire peace upon any terms less than the unqualified recognition of our independence, self-interest alone would teach us the folly of relying upon the forbearance of a nation who have shown in every step of the war, that their faith is perfidy, and their only policy is rapine, plunder and oppression. The whole history of our former association with the northern states admonishes us that in a common government they will never fail to employ their power to take away our property. Their present malice springs chiefly from baffled cupidity. But for this master passion of their nature, an honorable and speedy peace would be easy. The war has fully developed all their purposes, and you now know the fate that awaits you in the event of subjugation. Your liberties will utterly perish. Your state organization will be blotted out. All your property of every description will be confiscated, for all of us have participated in the revolution. Your lands will be divided out among the banditti from the north and from Europe, who have invaded our state. A free negro population will be established in your midst, who will be your social equals and military governors. Negro guards will, at their pleasure, give you passes and safe conducts, or arrest you to be tried and punished by negro commandants and magistrates: and to these, yourselves, your wives and children will be menial laborers and slaves, except those of you whom the malice of your enemies shall reserve for the dungeon or the gallows.

Such is the doom denounced for the people of the south by the wicked race now warring upon us. But we know it can never be executed. An army of veterans have resolved that their country *shall not* be enslaved; and while their purpose stands, the enemy's designs will continue to be baffled. Among you there is one spirit—that of eager and resolute determination. The temper of the army has reached the people at home, and inspired them with a fresh courage and a more assured confidence. Every where we see multiplied evidences of energy and enthusiasm. In all the states we find the resolution to endure every extremity rather than submit; and with this spirit our people are invincible. The armies are filling up their ranks, and the legislation of congress has added still further to their numbers and efficiency. Those citizens who remain at home to carry on the industrial pursuits essential to the support of the army, will see to it that you shall not want for food while you are exposing your lives to protect their property and homes from rapine. The defence of the country has become its business, and every citizen is required to contribute to it in his proper sphere. The general assembly of the commonwealth has taken steps to aid those families of her soldiers who may be in want, and it will not fail to do all in its power to provide for and cherish them. They have authorized and directed the purchase or impressment of unlimited supplies for their maintenance; appropriated one million dollars for the relief of such as are within the lines of the enemy, and half a million as a hospital fund for the sick and wounded. An organized agency of the state distributes the voluntary contributions of patriotic citizens. Individually and collectively, in county, city

and state organizations, the people with one accord are determined to feed, clothe, sustain and cherish the army.

On the other hand, your enemies are appalled by the magnitude of the task before them. The loud boastings which a few weeks since they so freely uttered, have been silenced by your unanimous re-enlistments, for the war, and the stern and resolute bearing of the south. Dissensions exist among them. Eager to possess the spoils of their corrupt and profligate government, they hate each other nearly as much as they do us. The war is no longer popular. The rich are allowed to buy an exemption, and thus cast all the burden and risk upon the poor. The laboring classes have already revolted against the draft. To escape its odium, enormous bounties have been offered to volunteers; but all these expedients have failed, and again a heavy draft has been ordered. The armies of the enemy are every day diminishing, and it is evident they cannot recruit them to the numbers with which they began the struggle. A large and growing party are for peace. A still larger party have discovered that the war has so far only served to entail upon themselves a despotism which tramples down every public and private right. They feel and acknowledge that they are the slaves of one whose character has made him odious to the world. Torn by party and personal strife, and conscious of the impotence of their scheme of conquest, the ranks of your enemies are already beginning to waver. One more resolute effort, and the day is ours.

God will strengthen your arms in the hour of battle, and give his blessing to a just cause. Independence and peace will be conceded by your enemies, and you, the defenders of the commonwealth, may return to your homes to receive the welcome due to the brave, and to enjoy those honors which will grow brighter as your years shall be prolonged. And when our ears shall be no longer startled by the "clash of resounding arms," and a happy, prosperous and permanent peace shall succeed, returning from the fields of your fame, you will be greeted with tears of joy by the loved ones at home—the heroes of every circle—to receive the smiles of the fair and become the theme of gratitude and praise around every hearthstone, protected by your valor.

Then every heart shall rejoice in that quiet which your courage has secured. Not the quiet of deserted homes and desolated farms; of sacked cities and rifled churches; of villages in ashes and towns in ruins; but the quiet of smiling farms, when the blue smoke shall curl again above the ancestral trees, to welcome back the long exiled refugee to his home. The quiet of thriving villages, when the old man on his crutch and the brave and warworn veteran with his armless sleeve, shall tell of bloody battles and scenes of privation to smiling children around him. The quiet of prosperous cities, whose wharves shall whiten with an opulent commerce; whose shops shall hum with a busy industry, and whose spires point to that haven of rest which is far away. Then from a thousand happy hearts and happy homes shall arise thanksgiving and praise to the God of battles, as of grace, while tears of gratitude will embalm the memories and bedew the graves of the brave men whose blood has been shed as a libation to liberty.

A. D. DICKINSON, *Chn.*

A. J. MARSHALL,

ANDREW HUNTER,

*Senate Committee*

B. H. SHACKELFORD, *Chn.*

R. W. HUNTER,

F. B. DEANE,

A. C. CUMMINGS,

R. H. BAKER,

*House Committee.*

[Adopted March 9, 1864.]

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