

ADDRESS

DELIVERED BY

MR. JAMES J. HILL

AT THE

MEMORIAL DAY EXERCISES

AUDITORIUM ST. PAUL, MINN.

MAY 30, 1908

James J. Hill Papers
Minnesota Historical Society

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Of all our national anniversaries, none comes so near • the hearts of the people as this. We keep the birthdays of our great men who helped to found or to save our free institutions, revering rightly their memories and their services. Yet they do not come so close to the hearts of the people as the great rank and file whose lot was to stand and serve. In the honors today conferred there is no distinction of persons. Every man shares in them who loved his country and died for it. Memorial Day fittingly commemorates the living nation that death has kept alive.

The sacrifices that these men made it is not easy for us to measure now. They were no fancy soldiery. In those days there was hardly any leisure class. In the North, every man was a worker; and when he went

forth to fight the battles of his country, the pledge he gave \\-as not only that of life and limb, but of the maintenance <>[those dear ones at home, and all their material future. There was more heroism in many a "goodbye" in the early sixties than it took to face the muskets of the enemy.

War then did not mean comfortable transport to the seal of hostilities, ample rations of nourishing food, completely equipped Held hospitals and all that modern progress has provided for the soldier. It meant hard living and constant work. It meant forced marches over long distances without modern means of transportation. It meant hard fare and poor clothing, hunger and thirst, and bodily exhaustion and a blanket for a bed; the horror of the hospital in the days before antiseptics were generally used and a prison death in case of capture. These were the conditions, impossible to the soldiers of any civilized country today in any combat, which the heroes of less than half a century ago must face and \\which they accepted with con rage. And these things must be in our minds today if we are to estimate aright file gift they gave, or hold them in fitting memory.

While all the mm who went out from Minnesota did their full duty, and in doing so shed a lasting lustre upon the fair name of the slate, it fell to the lot of the Old First Regiment to make a record for bravery in action which stands alone in the annals of modern war-

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fare. Tennyson has immortalized the charge of the Light Brigade at "Balaklava, where they lost in killed and wounded 36 per cent. The Imperial Prussian Guards at Gravelotte lost 50 per cent and the First Minnesota in a single charge at Gettysburg successfully stopped the advance of a Confederate division with a loss of nearly 84 per cent, and this record stands the highest of any successful effort since Thermopylae.

More ancient than the pyramids is man's desire that his memory shall not perish from the earth. Knowing the certainty of death, and the triumph of the grave wherein, as a wise man of old has said, "all things are forgotten," man's strength has been squandered and his ambition lavished upon some perpetuation of his name and fame. These men who are in the thoughts and hearts of nearly ninety millions of people today have come near to the achievement of earthly immortality. For while the nation that owes them existence endures, its very name, its institutions and all the place and power it holds among the peoples of the earth, they cannot be forgotten.

Nothing could be more terrible than the possibility which hung like a shadow in the background of Lincoln's mind when he made his immortal Gettysburg address, that these lives might have been given in vain. The duty and the sacrifice are reciprocal. If the men upon whose graves flowers are scattered today, and in honoring whom all people, high and low, are proud to partici-

pate, gave something to this age, the age owes them something in return. It must be a country, a government, worthy of the price they paid. And it must be we who make it so.

It is, then, the forward rather than the backward look that Memorial Day suggests. The men of the Union Army paid the full price that they might bequeath a united country to us and to our children's children forever. Unlesswe should lose our patriotism, unless the recurring ceremonies of this day are to become either mummery or falsehood, we must, then, be faithful to the charge they have committed to our hands.

It is for us to see that our country remains united and free. It is for us to tolerate nothing that shall stir or embitter differences of race, of section, or of interest. It is for us to turn our backs upon the spirit of faction, the growth of envy and the rise of class feeling that must, if fostered, more truly cleave the land asunder and leave it forever disunited than it would have been had the soldiers of the Union lost their cause. It is for us to see to it that the great ideas of nationality, of unity, of equal opportunity, of the maintenance of law and order among all men in honorable citizenship be not forgotten or corrupted.

It belongs to us to make the most and the best of the heritage bequeathed to us by the heroism of the dead. This must be developed to the utmost; so that

for each of our people there may be ever more and more of the things that make life happier and remove us further from the savage and the brute. All that it offers or can bring to strengthen and renew the better life of man must be used as a trust for the future; must be wisely husbanded for the race that is yet to be. There must be freedom for each man to make of himself the best of which his nature is capable. There must be for each the open path to success if he can achieve it; without hindrance on the one side from jealousy or superior power, or on the other the handicap of senseless demands that no man shall be permitted, whatever his qualities, to rise higher than his neighbor. The republic does not mean a dead level of forced mediocrity.

.In humility and patience, and with steady effort of hand and brain, are we to work out the problem of equality without identity, since no two individuals are equally endowed; of justice that shall favor neither the strong for their power nor the weak for their clamor. If we are to become and remain worthy of the deeds we celebrate, we must develop as a nation the highest attributes of a self-governing people, or the end will be disorder and destruction.

It will be well for us today, while we pay tribute to the soldier dead, to question ourselves how far we are treading in the footsteps of these souls that are still marching on. From the cemeteries and the halls where

we gather on Memorial Day, from the thoughts that it stirs in the breast of every true American, we must turn to the business of the morrow as a part of the same obligation that brings us together today. To be good citizens; to uphold the justness, and purity of the law in its making as well as in its keeping: to resist every influence.' commercial, political or personal that makes for a confusion or a revolution of the best national ideal, —'this is to make eternal the work and the memory of the dead to whom this day is dedicated. Tins only can insure that the nation for which they died shall achieve the immortality they struggled for; this only can rescue our country from the company of those dim and un-remembered nations of the past who have fallen from their high possibilities into the decay of eternal sleep.

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