

VICKSBURG

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Vicksburg

Mr. Chairman and Gentlemen of the Indiana-Vicksburg Monument Commission:

To you this is no new stage. Its remotest confines were once familiar. You looked upon it, front and rear. You stood before its footlights. You knew its comedy—its tragedy. You had honorable and distinguished cast in the great drama that gave it fame in every land beneath the sun and place in the country's every annal—a drama real as human life in tensest mood—in which every character was a hero, every actor a patriot, and every word a deed—a drama, the memory of which is enduring, fadeless, and the scenes of which take form and color even now and rise before you vivid as a living picture. How clear the outline is:

Time: The Nation's natal day, forty-five years ago.

Place: This historic field; yon majestic river; that heroic city there—a beleaguered fortress, girdled with these hills.

Scene: The river's broad expanse; Admiral Porter's fleet—grim engines of war, with giant guns and floating batteries, facing deep-mouthed and frowning cannon on terraced heights; the intrepid Army of the Tennessee, with camp and equipage, occupying a line of investment twelve miles in length, with sap and mine, battery and rifle pit, marking a progress that would not be stayed, fronting a system of detached works, redans, lunets, and redoubts on every height or commanding point, with raised field works connected with rifle pits, numerous gullies and ravines, nature's defenses,

impassable to troops; all in all more impregnable than Sevastopol; with here and there ensanguined areas where brave men met death in wild, mad charge against redoubt and bastion; or fell, in the delirium of frenzied struggle, on parapets, where torn and ragged battle flags borne by valorous arms, leaped and fluttered for a moment amid cannon's smoke and muskets' glare, only to fall from nerveless hands, lost in the chagrin and grief of repulse, crushing and disastrous.

Denouement: Fortifications sapped and mined! A city wrecked, subdued by want! An army in capitulation! A mighty host, surrendered! Flags furled! Arms stacked! One hundred and seventy-two captured cannon! Sixty thousand rifles taken! Twenty-nine thousand four hundred and ninety-one men prisoners of war—hungry, emaciated, broken, dejected men, worn by sleepless vigil, the ordeal of war, the alarm of siege—men who suffered and endured, but would not yield till dire distress compelled—men whose gallant valor challenges admiration and respect, and gives them equal claim to fame with their invincible captors, whose iron grip and ever-tightening hold they could not break! Victory complete and splendid! And over all—river, field, and city—where crash of musketry, roar of cannon, scream of shell, and all the tumultuous din of war had reigned—the hush and awe of silence, unbroken by cheer or shout or cry of exultation!

Result: The fall of Port Hudson, an impregnable fortress, two hundred and fifty miles below; the disenfranchisement of the Mississippi—unvexed by war, its waters free to seek the sea in peace; the bisecting of the Confederacy—cut in two—severed completely—its doom decreed—its fate forever sealed—all thereafter dying in its defense going hopeless and in vain to sacrificial altars; the establishment of the Union's indissolubility—

its power made manifest East and West—faith in its ultimate triumph, though the pathway led through toil and blood, became assured—the Nation saw the end, distant but sure—it found itself and it found a man, and that man had found himself, and had found others, too—Sherman, McPherson, Logan, Hovey, Osterhaus, McGinnis—a quiet, silent man, of grim determination, who “looked upon side movements as a waste of time”—a man of immovable purpose, who went to his object unswerving as a bullet—a man of sublime courage, who wanted “on the same side of the river with the enemy”—a man of calm confidence, who relied upon himself and the disciplined, hardy men who followed him, who, under him, knew no defeat and who were unwilling to learn what it was—a man who knew the trade of war, its science and its rules, but who dared ignore its long-accepted axioms when occasion required; who, when he could not protect his communications with his base without delay and the diminution of his force, could cut loose from all communications and have no base, though moving in the heart of the enemy’s country—a man of daring brilliancy, who could fight in detail a force superior in the aggregate to his own and defeat in turn its scattered fragments before they could consolidate—who had no rear, whose every side was front—who knew that “time was worth more than reinforcements,” and that delay only gave “the enemy time to reinforce and fortify”—whose strategy, celerity, and rapidity of movement threw confusion into the councils of opposing generals, in a land strange to him and filled with his enemies—a land with which they were familiar and where every denizen was an ally—a man who could keep two governments guessing for weeks both as to his purpose and his whereabouts—who could refuse to obey an order that had been so long in transmission as to be obsolete when it reached him, and ride away to victory and to fame—whose

blows fell so thick and hard and fast that his foe had neither time nor rest nor food nor sleep—a man who was gentle and considerate enough when his foes surrendered to forbid his men to cheer lest they should wound the sensibilities of their captives—who, in the hour of supreme and final triumph, could speak for peace and give back to his captured countrymen their horses that crops might be put in and cultivated.

Time, place, scene, denouement, and result, taken together, and all in all, have no parallel in all the six thousand years of human history.

It was, therefore, inevitable and in accord with man's nobler self, that this spot—the place where the great drama was staged and played—should become hallowed ground to those who struggled here to retain or to possess it; that it should be held forever sacred by the Blue and the Gray—the victors and the vanquished—by the Blue because of what was won, by the Gray because of what was lost—by both because of heroic effort and devoted sacrifice made and endured; because of the new national life begun, the new birth of freedom had, through their spilled blood.

Vicksburg was the most important point in the Confederacy and its retention the most essential thing to the defense of the Confederacy. After the safety of Washington, its capture was the first necessity of the Federal Government. It commanded the Mississippi River, and “the valley of the Mississippi is America.” The control of this great central artery of the continent was necessary to the perpetuation of the Confederacy and indispensable to the preservation of the Union. To lose it was death to the one. To gain it was life to the other. The campaign for its capture was, therefore, the most important enterprise of the Civil War. Its importance was

understood and appreciated by the authorities at both capitals, and no one in authority in either capital understood it more clearly or appreciated it more fully than the commanders of the two opposing armies—Grant and Pemberton. Both knew the stake and its value and both were conscious that the fight to possess it by the one and to retain it by the other would be waged to the last extremity. And each was resolved that the great issue should be with him. They commanded armies equally brave and well disciplined, efficiently officered, and equally devoted to them and to the respective cause for which they fought.

Strength of position, natural and artificial, was with Pemberton. His task was defensive—to hold what he had. Grant's was offensive—to possess what he did not have. But the initiative was with him, and to genius that itself is an advantage.

Pemberton knew the ground—the scene of the campaign. Its every natural adaptation of advantage or defense was to him as a thing ingrained in his consciousness and every denizen of the country about him was the friend of his army and his cause.

Grant was in a strange land, without accurate knowledge of its topography or of its natural difficulties of approach or opportunities of defense, and concerning which such knowledge could be acquired only by the exercise of infinite patience, by unremitting toil, and constant investigation. Its inhabitants looked upon him as an invader come to despoil their country—to lay waste their homes. Among them all, his army had no friend, his cause no advocate.

But, while position and natural advantage was with Pemberton, the ability to command armies, the genius of concentration, to decide

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