

P703

ADDRESS

— OF —

W. T. WILLEY

— BEFORE —

MEADE POST OF THE GRAND ARMY

— AND —

A LARGE ASSEMBLY OF CITIZENS,

— AT —

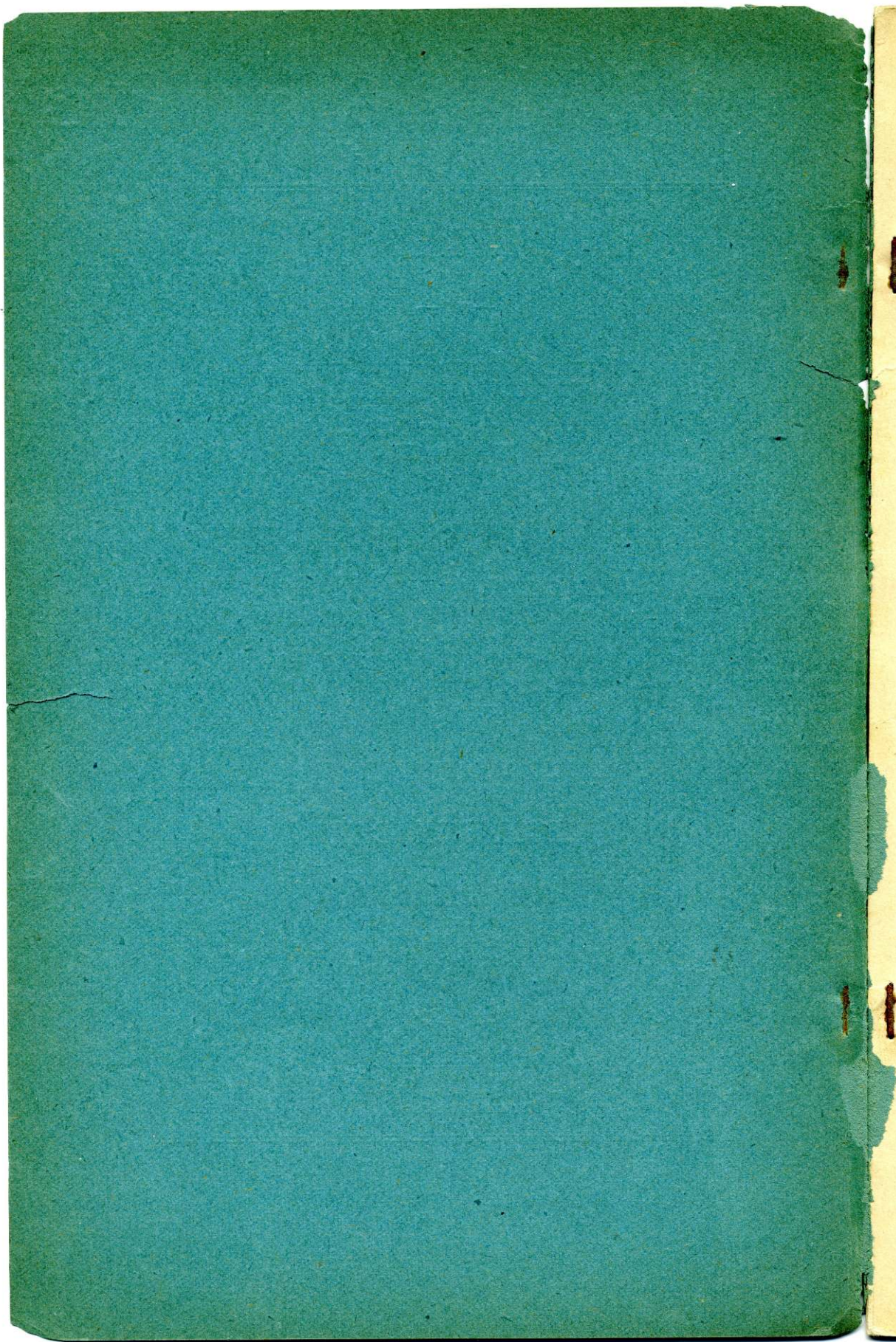
FAIRMONT, MARION COUNTY, W. VA.,

“DECORATION DAY,”

MAY 30, 1893.



Morgantown:
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Soldiers, Fellow-Citizens :

More than a quarter of a century has elapsed since the close of the late civil war. A majority of those who participated in it are dead. A new generation has appeared.—The footsteps of time are fast effacing the vivid impressions made by the cotemperaneous knowledge of the events of the war. Besides, benefits received are sooner forgotten than the sense of injuries done, real or imaginary. Bitter animosities survive where friendships perish. I regret to have to say that we are finding confirmation of all this in the condition of the public sentiment regarding the soldiers who fought for the preservation of our Federal Union. Not only is there the increasing ignorance of the character and extent of their services, necessarily resulting from the lapse of time, but there is a manifest disposition, less or more prevalent, to disparage and depreciate them. The time has come, I think, when it may be well to review those services, and to remind the country of its obligations. And, therefore, let me inquire: For what are we indebted to our soldiers in the late civil war? What did they accomplish for us?

I. We are indebted to them for the preservation of the national unity. Is it not so?

Suppose that these soldiers had refused to respond to the call of the patriotic Lincoln; or, having responded, suppose that they had been finally defeated. What would have followed? What the present condition of this happy land? Yonder to the north of us, along Mason & Dixon's

line, less than 20 miles away as the bird flies, a foreign hostile nation; garrisoned forts commanding every important passway; armed guards, perhaps, patrolling the line, night and day; your former unobstructed intercourse and trade and traffic arrested and burdened with customs duties and whatever hindrances and annoyances the greed and caprice of an independent hostile government might see proper to impose; our foreign national commerce greatly diminished; the public credit at home and abroad seriously impaired; our national rank and prestige minified, degraded, humiliated; and we, here in our geographical "panhandle," left as the mere "tag-end" of an imperious and arrogant slavocracy.

But, thanks to Divine Providence, the Union remains integral. And who can measure all the meaning of that great fact? Who can estimate its value? One country! One nation! One people! One flag! A flag as sacred and resplendent to-day, in the eyes of true patriots, as was the heavenly banner described by Milton, in the sight of the angelic host who—

"from the glittering staff, unfurled
The imperial ensign, which, full high advanced,
Shone like a meteor streaming to the wind."

The old flag of our fathers! For awhile, and in some places, trampled beneath the unhallowed feet of its enemies, but rescued from the dishonor, and made more glorious than ever by these soldiers. And here it is to-day continuing to answer the immortal words of America's great statesman and orator—"still full high advanced, its arms and trophies streaming in their original lustre, not a stripe erased, or polluted, nor a star obscured." It was the central banner yonder at New York a month ago, among the ensigns of all of the great naval powers of the earth.— And to-day it crowns the world's collected civilization and progress at Chicago. Who made these displays possible? These soldiers. The soldiers whose graves grateful patriots are decorating to-day.

We made some conjectures a moment ago as to what would have been the results following the destruction of our national union. We need not appeal to the imagination as to our actual condition, with the Union preserved. We see it. We see such progress in population, in wealth,

in power, in all the conditions of national prosperity, as has no parallel in the history of any people. Our foreign commerce vexes every sea, and is rapidly advancing to the foremost place among the competing powers. Our internal commerce, unobstructed and free from the Atlantic to the Pacific ocean, from Alaska to the Gulf of Mexico, is blocking our railways and burdening all our rivers and lakes, surpassing all example. The public credit is above *par* in all the money markets of the world. The Republic is honored and respected by all mankind. For all this we are indebted to the soldiers whose memory we celebrate to-day.

II. There was slavery, a perpetual menace to the public peace, and disturber of the harmonious relations of the States, to say nothing of its moral character. How was that abolished? Our colored fellow-citizens, with hearts full of gratitude to their great benefactor, Mr. Lincoln, will be apt to answer: By the Proclamation of Emancipation. But it required a great battle to be fought, to give Mr. Lincoln the courage to issue the proclamation. Being urged to do so, in July, 1862, he replied: "Had we not better wait until our armies obtain something like a victory?"—And afterwards, when Gen. Lee had crossed the Potomac, the President said that he promised God that if He would vouchsafe a victory to the Union army, and drive back the invader, he would send such a proclamation after him.—God gave the victory at Antietam, and Mr. Lincoln kept his promise. Doubtless the proclamation had great moral influence; but it had little present effect in the actual liberation of slaves. It was little more than *brutem fulmen*, until after the surrender of the enemy at Appomattox.—Many a poor soldier had to "bite the dust" before it became practically effectual. Indeed, the ordination and adoption of the 13th constitutional amendment were still deemed necessary to settle the question beyond cavil or dispute. It was one of the great privileges of my life to vote for that amendment. But neither the Congress which proposed it, nor the States which ratified it, are entitled, primarily to the credit of that great transaction. That belongs to the loyal soldiers of the Union armies. They had to make it possible, and in doing so they fought 330 battles, in each of which not less than 100 were slain, and in many

of which several thousand fell. They fought 1935 minor engagements where less than 100 men were killed in each of them. An aggregate of not less than 500,000 perished in battle, in the hospitals, in prison pens, and by other casualties of the service. All these—all the defeats—all the victories—all the toils, and suffering, and sorrow of four years of terrible war, had to precede the 13th constitutional amendment abolishing slavery.

III. The 14th amendment to the constitution of the United States—I call your attention to that. This, in my opinion, is the crowning result of the war. I do not believe its importance is duly appreciated. Few seem to comprehend its full scope or purport. It is the great charter of Civil Rights. The famous Declaration of 1776 enunciated the general principles of civil and political liberty in abstract terms. The 14th amendment gave to them practical application. It defined American citizenship. It made every citizen equal before law; and required that adequate provision should be made to enforce the rights it conferred. It squelched *caste*, and incorporated in the organic law in operative form the spirit of the apostolic declaration that "God hath made of one blood all nations of men." The sponsors of the monstrous heresy of secession had submitted the matter in controversy to the arbitrament of the sword. The 14th amendment recorded the final award. It put a new soul into the body politic, and placed the capstone on the federal constitution.

IV. Usually, civil wars leave behind them bitter animosities, requiring centuries, sometimes, to eradicate. But the hostile feelings excited by the late civil war appear already to be passing away. The relations between the belligerent sections are more cordial and reciprocal now than they were before the war. There are several reasons for this. The antagonism between slavery and freedom was absolutely irreconcilable. But slavery is now irretrievably gone; and 25 years of unexampled prosperity under a restored Union and free labor, have demonstrated beyond controversy that it is better for all sections, and for all parties, to be rid of slavery, and to be united as one people. The elementary forces of our common civilization have become more homogeneous. Prior to the war, moreover, an amazing misapprehension existed in each of the sections as to the real

character of the people living in the other. The North regarded the South as effeminate, all "sound and fury, signifying nothing." The South spoke of the Northern people in this wise: "They don't know how to load a gun, and look contemptible on horseback. * * * * They never produced a general or a statesman. That is an effort beyond their ability. But for organizing hotels, working machinery, and other base mechanical contrivances, they are without equals in the world."—(Richmond *Whig*, June 14, 1861.) Those delusions were thoroughly expelled on many "a well fought field." In the end there was mutual respect; and mutual respect is the basis of friendship and harmony between communities as well as individuals.

Besides: On the part of the victors, the war was fought in the spirit of their great and humane civil chieftain—"with malice toward none, and charity for all." At its conclusion, not one life was required as a penalty; not one estate of the enemy was confiscated. But in the very hour of final triumph, the hand of conciliation was extended to the vanquished but gallant foe, inviting him to a joint and equal participation in all the blessings and benefits of a common country restored again to unity and peace, and yonder he sits to-day in the cabinet and chief council chambers of the government, dictating the policy and controlling the destiny of the nation. "Let us have peace."

V. One of the problems which has perplexed our statesmen from the beginning, has been how to provide for the security and strength of the national government especially in time of invasion and insurrection, without endangering it by the means employed. All history protested against a large standing army. But the public safety must have a guaranty of security somewhere. In what should it consist? The answer hitherto has been, in the virtue and patriotism of an intelligent people. Fortunately no severe test of this guaranty was required until the great insurrection of 1861. In the meantime, the people had been educated in the science and discipline of popular government. They had developed the moral power of a free press and of free speech, and learned how to enforce a redress of their grievances through the influence of public opinion upon their legislatures. "The school-master had been abroad," especially in the Northern States. A more general and in-

telligent comprehension of the principles of free government, and a better knowledge and appreciation of the duties and obligation of the citizen had been secured.

But what a tremendous test it was when it did come! Will the wisdom of the fathers, in leaving the public safety in trust to the patriotism of the people, be vindicated?—May our “citizen soldiers” be relied on to solve the great problem? Let us see.

Let us go down to Washington in 1861. Stand on Pennsylvania Avenue. Listen to the undisciplined tread of regiment after regiment of volunteer troops, trying to keep step with the music of the song they sing

“ We are coming, father Abraham,
Three hundred thousand strong.”

Whence do they come? From the prairies of the West and the Lakes of the North; from the banks of the Hudson and Ohio, of the Delaware and Merrimac; from the pine forests of Maine, and the far-off valleys of Oregon; from the shores of the Atlantic and the Golden Gate of the Pacific.

They come from the farm and the shop; from the mines and the factory; from the city and the hamlet; from the stately mansion and the lowly cottage; from the bench and the bar; from the pulpit and the pew; from all classes and conditions.

How many will come? Mr. Blaine says, in his “Twenty Years in Congress,” that “On the day the task of disbandment was undertaken, the army of the United States bore upon its rolls the names of 1,000,516 men. The killed, and those who had previously retired on account of wounds and sickness, and from the expiration of shorter terms of service, aggregated, after making all due allowance for reenlistments of the same person, at least another million.”

Fellow citizens, the magnitude of the task imposed upon the armies of the Union, and the merits of its final accomplishment, are not to be measured, alone, by the power and resistance of the insurrectionary States, great and formidable as these were. They had to encounter the active enmity of a large part of Europe—especially the Napoleonic dynasty in France, and the aristocratic and manufacturing classes of Great Britain. The former, with premature haste, in anticipation of the overthrow of popular government here, proceeded at once to inaugurate imperialism in this

hemisphere. The latter, equally eager for the destruction of the great Republic, were outspoken and flagrant in their hostility. The leading members of Parliament omitted no occasion, opportune or inopportune, to defame the U. States, and to give aid and comfort to its enemies. They subscribed liberally to the Confederate loan. The British ministry permitted, nay, covertly encouraged, the construction and equipment, in British ship-yards, and ports, of cruisers and piratical vessels, manned with English sailors and crews, to prey on our commerce on the high seas. In the eloquent language of Charles Sumner: "When civilization was fighting a last battle with slavery, England gave her influence, her material resources, to the wicked cause, and flung a sword into the scale with slavery." If she had sent an army of 30,000 troops into the field against us, she would not have more effectually aided the enemy than she did. But all these forces, internal and external, went down before the valor and patriotism of the soldiers of the Union armies. And now when their great task has been completed, will they disband in peace? Flushed with victory, conscious of their power, justly entitled to the encomium of Gen. Grant, when he said: "I doubt whether an equal body of men, take them man for man, officer for officer, was ever gotten together that would have proved their equal in a great battle"—will they voluntarily lay down their arms as they voluntarily took them up? Or, like the Roman legions sometimes did, will they turn their sword against the bosom of their own country? The event has gone into history. Promptly, quietly, without the least friction gladly they surrendered their arms. As the gentle showers of spring are received back again into the bosom of earth, stimulating all the gracious processes of vegetation, so these great armies spreading and dissolving all over the land were silently absorbed in the common mass of American citizenship, resuming the peaceful and beneficent pursuits of civil life from which they had been taken. Then, I imagine, liberty clapped her hands; and the genius of popular government soared on loftier wings.

Possibly the inquiry may suggest itself: If the virtue and intelligence of the people in one section of the country were the principal factors in the preservation of the gov-

ernment, how do we account for the efforts of another section of the same country to destroy it? In other words:— Why was there any civil war? I answer, that if the same degree of education and intelligence had prevailed in the South among the masses of the people, which existed in the North; and, especially, if the same moral sentiment which dominated the Northern conscience had been equally forceful in the South, there would have been no war. Public opinion would have accomplished what had to be done by the sword. And so, instead of there being any inconsistency here with the great principle of popular government so happily illustrated by our soldiers in the late civil war, we may find, in fact, a confirmation of it.

But let us make no mistake here. A true analysis of the courage, and constancy, and valor which distinguished our armies, and our statesmen, too, through the long and bloody conflict, will find their true explanation and force, in a deep moral conviction of the rectitude of the cause for which they were contending. A mere intellectual comprehension of the issues involved would hardly have endured the terrible ordeal. They believed that God was with them. That made them invincible. Moral sentiment is essential to all true courage. Every virtue which excludes it is defective and unreliable. Do not understand me as under-rating the importance of the popular intelligence.— Nevertheless, you must permit me to say that the greatest possible degree of it will not always prove to be the best guaranty of the public welfare. It is vastly useful, indeed, to give force and effect to the administration of public affairs; but uncontrolled by the principles of moral rectitude it may become all the more dangerous, in proportion to its capabilities. And when I speak of morality, I mean Christian morality. For, as Mr. Webster so forcibly said in his great argument in the Gerard Will case, it is “a fundamental truth that religion is the only solid basis of morals.” And, therefore, I think I am justified in saying with all possible emphasis that Christian moral sentiment is “the only solid basis” of Republican form of government. De Tocqueville in his admirable analysis of our American institutions, expresses his conclusions on this point in these terse words: “Despotism may govern without faith; liberty cannot.” An eminent American statesman, Mr. Winthrop,

was still more concise, but no less emphatic, when he said "The bible, or the bayonet."

VI. I beg leave to add one more item to the great sum of our obligations to these soldiers.

By the removal of the old *ante-bellum* antagonisms of principles and policies which constantly disturbed the harmonious administration of the Federal Government; by the perfecting of our national organic law, by incorporating into it, in practical and obligatory form, the cardinal truths of the "Declaration of Independence;" by the introduction into our political system of new and better elements of civilization; in short, by all the results of the war the nation has been lifted to a higher and broader plane of civic and moral achievement, where it is confronted with such future possibilities as never before inspired the hopes or challenged the patriotic ambition of any other people.—Who can measure our material resources? Who can prescribe limitations to the extent of our national growth and grandeur, so long as we are true to our country, to ourselves, and to our God? What an outlook these soldiers have preserved unto us! What a sublime, inspiring spectacle to behold such a nation, with such resources and capabilities, co-operating with God's providential purposes, grandly marching on to the accomplishment of its destiny!

I know how difficult it is to speak in commendation of one's own country without transgressing the bounds of propriety and good taste. But I think it is neither vain-glorious nor audacious to say, that the United States, with all its favorable environments; with all the wisdom and experience of the past to begin with; with all the advantages of the science and arts of the past ages in its possession; as Emerson says, in a style all his own—

—— "owners of the sphere,
The seven stars, the solar year,
Of Plato's thought and Bacon's brain,
Of Lord Christ's heart, and Shakespeare's strain."

—I say, that from such a vantage ground, this country *ought* to aspire to a higher and better civilization than the world has, hitherto, ever seen; a civilization that should be distinctly American in its character; emancipated from all foreign thralldom; broad, generous, cosmopolitan, Christ-like; in harmony with the principles and spirit of our

Republican institutions; no longer subordinate, but predominant, leading the nations in all the achievements of human progress.

Thus, I have attempted to answer the inquiry with which this discussion was commenced—"for what are we indebted to the soldiers who fought for the Union in the late civil war?" Summarized my answer is:

They preserved our national unity.

They destroyed human slavery.

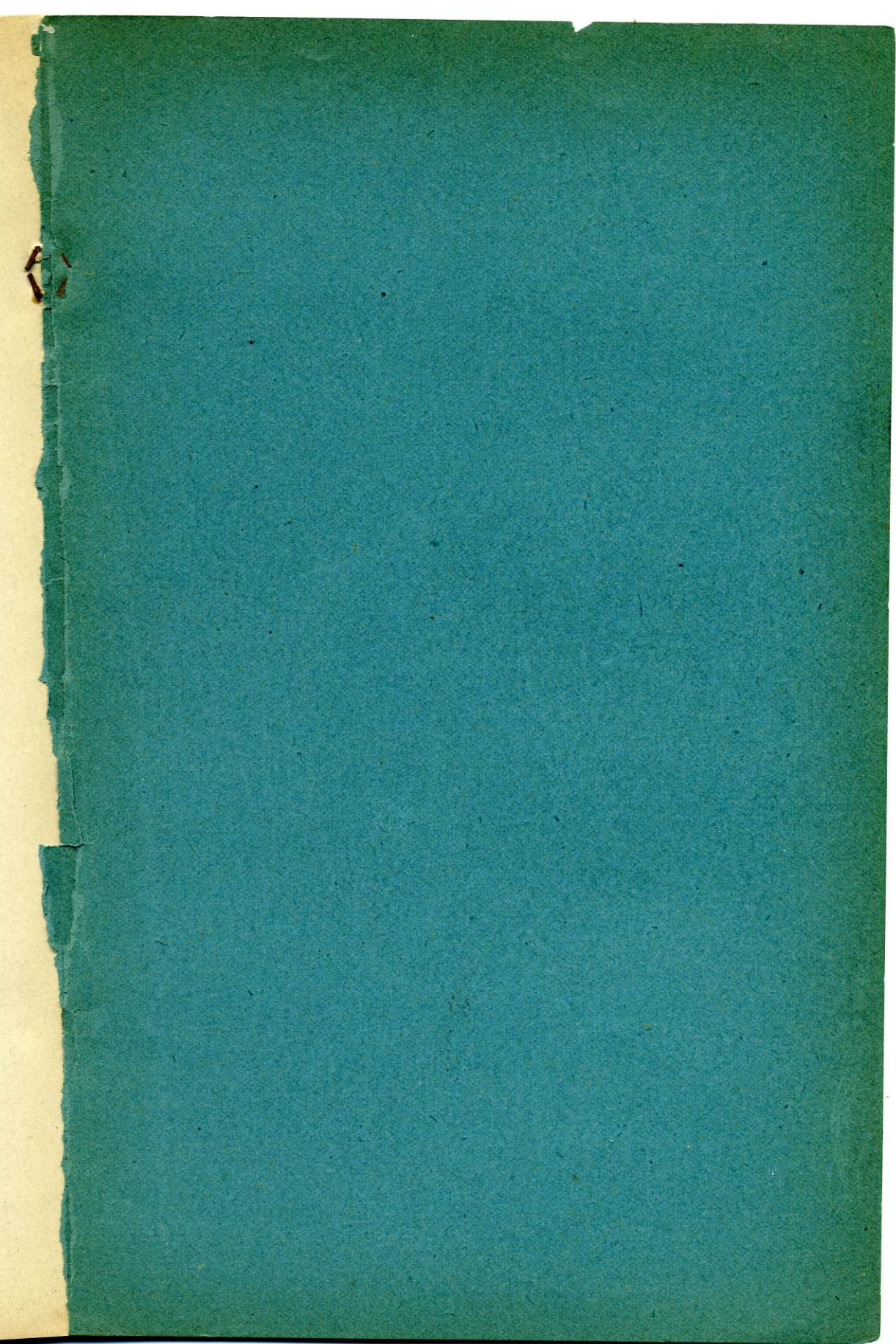
They completed the work of civil liberty, inaugurated by our fathers, and made all men equal before the law.

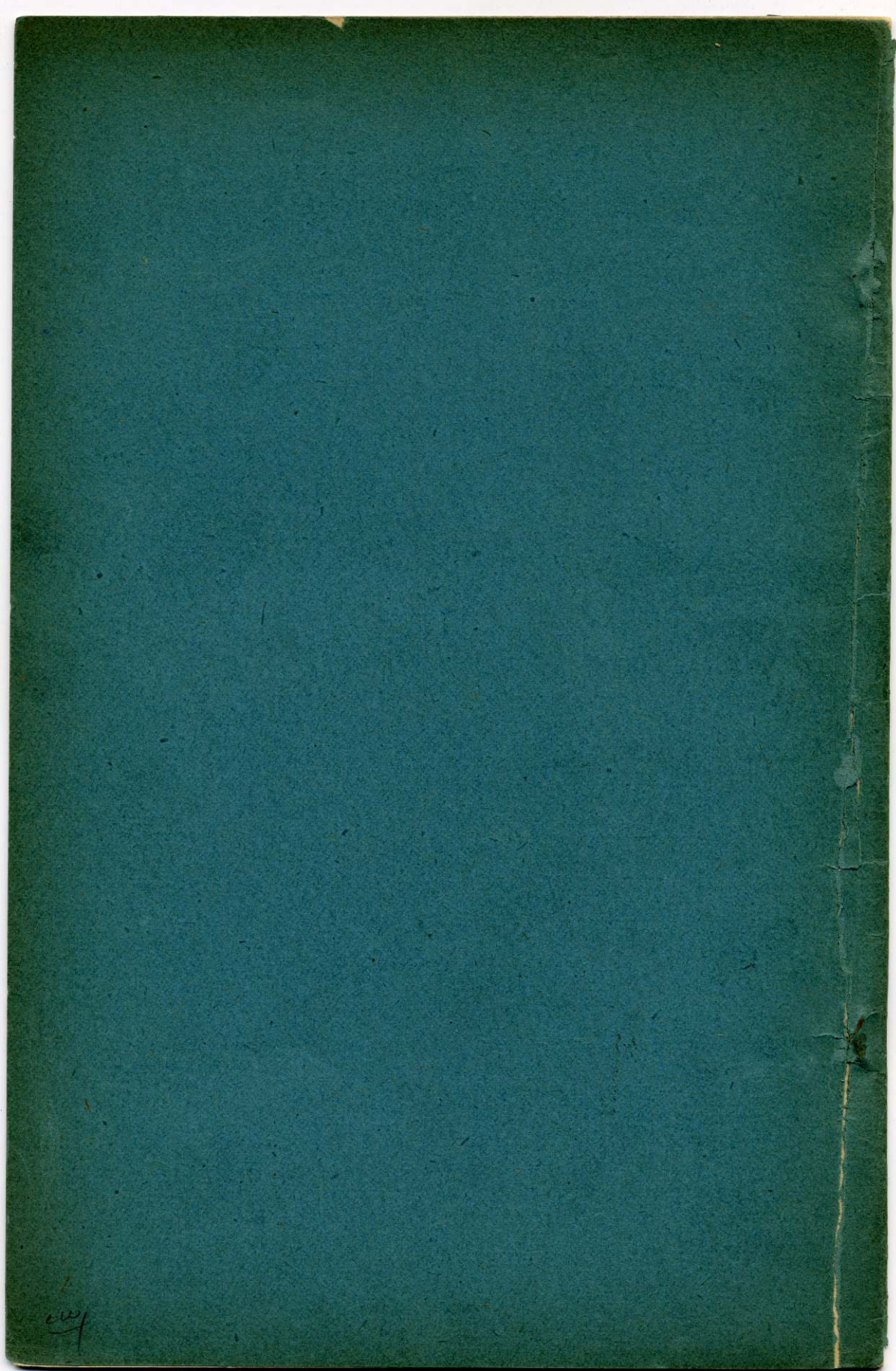
They removed the causes of sectional, social and political discord which had, theretofore, distracted the nation, and thus prepared the way for more harmonious relations.

They solved the great problem of man's capacity for self-government; and we owe it to them that we yet have "a government of the people, by the people and for the people."

They endowed the republic with immeasurable possibilities of growth and greatness. And,

They made a record in history which will be an inspiration to liberty, and an example to patriotism forever. And, therefore, I have to say, in conclusion: Very ungrateful, indeed, very flagrantly deficient in the sentiment of genuine patriotism, must that American citizen be, whether of high or low degree, who could regard such benefactors as these with indifference, or who would refuse to those of them who survive, the most adequate and generous relief for their disabilities incurred in the service of their country. No pretext of public economy could ever hide the iniquity of such a refusal.





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