

www.genealogy-books.com
Library of Southern Literature, vol. XII (1910)

A TRIBUTE TO HILL

A memorial address delivered in the United States Senate, January 25, 1883.

MR. PRESIDENT, in November, 1861, I first met Mr. Hill in the provisional congress of the Confederate States.

The Confederacy was just entering upon its brief and stormy existence. Its capital had recently been removed from Montgomery to Richmond, and Jefferson Davis, by a majority of only one vote in the provisional congress, had been elected president over Robert Toombs.

Surrounded by unexampled difficulties, moral and physical, isolated and alone, with the prejudices of the entire civilized world against them, and confronted in battle with overwhelming odds, the Confederate Congress was called upon to meet, not only the ordinary questions and emergencies attending the formation of a new government, but to grapple also with the exigencies and demands of a great war, a war not for conquest or policy, but for existence.

Mr. Hill had earnestly opposed secession up to the last moment, but finding that the people of Georgia were de-

terminated to separate from the Union, he surrendered his personal opinion, and pledged himself fully and unreservedly to the cause of the Confederacy.

Opposed to secession, with habits of thought and education utterly averse to revolution, the strange vicissitudes of this stormy period soon found him the leader of the administration party in the Confederate Congress.

Within the limits of an address like this, it would neither be possible nor proper for me to attempt an analysis of the causes which placed Mr. Hill in this position; but chief among them was the fact that, having once pledged himself to the Confederacy, he could see no hope of success except in supporting the president chosen by the people; and having so declared himself, his great ability naturally made him the exponent and defender of the policy of the administration.

Although surrounded by difficulties and dangers almost without parallel, and confronted by a common peril, it was very soon evident that personal rivalry, the attrition of diverse opinion, and the fierce passions of a revolutionary era had built up most determined opposition to Mr. Davis among the leaders of the South.

That the president of the Confederate States was loyal to the people he led, in every fiber of his nature, cannot be doubted, save by the blindest prejudice; and this being granted, whether he was mistaken in the conduct of the war or in the policy of his administration should be a sealed book to all those who sympathized and suffered with him. It is enough to say now that there never was any public man assailed by opponents so formidable as those who attacked the president of the Confederate States.

Toombs, the Mirabeau of the revolution; Yancey, whose lips were touched with fire, now the honey of persuasion, and then the venom of invective; Wigfall, brilliant, aggressive, and relentless—this was the great triumvirate which assailed Mr. Davis's administration. No power of description can do justice to the ability, eloquence or bitterness of the debates in which Mr. Hill, single-handed but undaunted, met his great opponents. As the war progressed and the fortunes of the Confederacy became each year more desperate, the bitterness and violence of this parliamentary conflict increased, until

scenes of actual personal collision occurred on the floor of the Confederate Senate.

The participants have passed beyond this world's judgment, and the issues which stirred those fierce passions are dead with the government they affected, but the few who heard these debates can never forget the matchless eloquence and logic that mingled with the roar of hostile guns around the beleaguered capital of the Confederacy.

Reluctant to embrace the Confederate cause, Mr. Hill was the last to leave it, and I well remember that on my way from Richmond, after preparations had been made to abandon the capital, and it was well known that the cause was lost; I met him in Columbus, Georgia, engaged in the task of rallying the people of his State in what was then a hopeless struggle. When I told him of recent events, of which he had not heard, he said, "All, then, is over, and it only remains for me to share the fate of the people of Georgia."

How well he redeemed this pledge the hearts of his people will answer. Thrown into prison, stripped of all except life, his courage never failed, and in the darkest hour, when the wolves were tearing the victims of the war as the coyote the wounded deer, his eloquent voice was never for one instant silent until Georgia, torn and bleeding, but yet splendid and beautiful, once more stood erect in the sisterhood of sovereign states. Nor did he ever under any temptation so far forget his manhood and honor as to

Crook the pregnant hinges of the knee
 Where thrift may follow fawning.

Accepting fully and without reservation all the legitimate consequences of defeat, and resolutely turning to the future with its duties and obligations, he still retained his self-respect, and never did he

Bend low, and in a bondsman's key,
 With 'bated breath and whispering humbleness,
 Say this—
 Fair sir, you spit on me on Wednesday last;
 You spurn'd me such a day; another time
 You call'd me dog; and for these courtesies
 I'll lend you thus much monies.

I knew Mr. Hill well, and under circumstances which enabled me to judge accurately his attributes and qualities. Like all men of great intellect, he was often accused of inconsistency because he absolutely refused to be governed by the routine thought of others, and had always the courage to change an opinion if he believed it erroneous. His courage, indeed, both of conviction and expression, was not excelled by that of any man, and his fortitude under the greatest misfortunes extorted the admiration even of his enemies.

In an age when calumny and slander are the ordinary weapons of political warfare, and personal scandal the most delicate morsel for the public appetite, Mr. Hill was not exempt from the attacks of the foul and loathsome creatures who crawl about the footsteps of every public man, but he bore himself always with a dignity which commanded the respect of all.

And what can be said of the heroism, the uncomplaining and unfaltering courage with which he met the irony of fate that brought him the torture of a lingering death in the destruction of that tongue and voice which had so often awakened with their eloquence the echoes of this Hall!

In all public and private history there is no sadder page than this, and from it we turn away in silent awe and reverence.

In his political opinions Mr. Hill was governed by the teaching of Madison, and no one who heard his speech in the Senate on May 10, 1879, the greatest speech, in my judgment, delivered here within the last quarter of a century, will ever forget his tribute to the statesman who can be justly termed the father of the Constitution. "Sir," said Mr. Hill, "I want to say here now—and I feel it a privilege that I can say it—I believe all the angry discussion, all the troubles that have come upon this country, have sprung from the failure of the people to comprehend the one great fact that the Government under which we live has no model; it is partly National and partly Federal; an idea which was to the Greeks a stumbling block, and to the Romans foolishness, and to the Republican party an insurmountable paradox, but to the patriots of this country it is the power of liberty unto the salvation of the people. And if the people of this country would realize that fact, all these crazy wranglings as to whether we live under a

Federal or a National Government would cease; they would understand that we live under both; that it is a composite Government; that it was intended by the framers that the Union shall be faithful in defense of the states; that the states shall be harmonious in support of the Union, and that the Union and the States shall be faithful and harmonious in the support and the maintenance of the rights and the liberty of the people."

Mr. Hill was not only an orator, but a lawyer in the front of his profession. His mind was broad, yet analytical; and he was averse to all radical and revolutionary methods. In my conception of his intellect and eloquence, I always associate him with Virgnaud, the leader of the French Girondists. While neither will stand in history with the greatest party leaders, yet as orators and parliamentary debaters they are entitled to places in the first rank.

Ended are his conflicts, his triumphs and defeats. The strong, aggressive intellect is at rest. The clarion voice which could "wield at will the fierce democracy" is hushed forever.

Out upon the shoreless ocean his bark has drifted; but it has not carried away all of the life that has ended. Never to mortal hands was given a legacy more precious than that left to the people of Georgia in the memory of her great son who gave his life to her service and his latest prayer to her honor and welfare.

Orator, statesman, patriot, farewell! Let Georgia guard well thy grave; for in her soil rest not the ashes of one whose life has done more to illustrate her manhood, whose genius has added such glory to her name.

EULOGY OF THE DOG

Excerpt from a noted speech in a jury trial.

"GENTLEMEN OF THE JURY: The best human friend a man has in the world may turn against him and become his enemy. His son or daughter that he has reared with loving care may prove ungrateful. Those who are nearest and dearest to us, those whom we trust with our happiness and our good name may become traitors to their faith. The money that a man has he may lose. It flies away from him, perhaps, when he needs it most. A man's reputation may be sacrificed in a moment of ill-considered action. The people who are prone to fall on their knees to do us honor when success is with us may be the first to throw the stone of malice when failure settles its cloud upon our heads. The one absolutely unselfish friend that a man can have in this selfish world, the one that never deceives him, the one that never proves ungrateful and treacherous, is his dog.

"A man's dog stands by him in prosperity and in poverty, in health and in sickness. He will sleep on the cold ground where the wintry wind blows and the snow drifts fiercely, if only he may be near his master's side. He will kiss the hand that has no food to offer. He will lick the wounds and sores that come in encounter with the roughness of the world. He guards the sleep of his pauper master as if he were a prince. When all other friends desert he remains. When riches take wings and reputation falls to pieces, he is as constant in his love as the sun in its journeys through the heavens. If fortune drives the master forth an outcast in the world, friendless and homeless, the faithful dog asks no higher privilege than that of accompanying, to guard against danger, to fight against his enemies, and when the last scene of all comes and when death takes the master in its embrace and his body is laid away in the cold ground, no matter if all other friends pursue their way, there by the graveside may the noble dog be found, his head between his paws, his eyes sad but open in alert watchfulness, faithful and true even in death."