

GETTYSBURG ** YESTERDAY AND TODAY

Our ceremony began this morning with the blessing of a ^{NEW} plaque attached to the ^{old} statue of ^{William} Father/Corby, *one of Notre Dame's distinguished Presidents,* standing on a rock raising his hand in eternal absolution on a battlefield now empty of the troops who once stood ~~there~~ before him on that fateful July 2nd morning, one hundred years ago, except for those who rest forever beneath this hallowed soil. Much of the scene is lost in a hundred years. We would do well to listen to one who was there, who saw what happened, and who recorded it. The writer is Major General St. Clair Mulholland, then a colonel in the Irish Brigade.

"Now (as the Third Corps is being pressed back) help is called for, and Hancock tells Caldwell to have his men ready. 'Fall in!' and the men run to their places! 'Take Arms!' and the four brigades of Zook, Cross, Brook and Kelly are ready for the fray. There are yet a few minutes to spare before starting, and time is occupied by one of the most impressive religious ceremonies I have ever witnessed. The Irish Brigade, which had been commanded formerly by Gen. Thomas Francis Meagher, and whose green flag had been unfurled in every battle in which the Army of the Potomac had been engaged from the first Bull Run to Appomattox, and was now commanded by Col. Partick Kelly of the Eighty-eighth New York, formed a part of this division. The brigade stood in column of regiments, closed in mass. As ~~the~~ a large majority of its members were Catholics, the Chaplain of the brigade, Rev. William Corby, proposed to give a general absolution to all the men before going into the fight.... Father Corby stood on a large rock in front of the brigade. Addressing the men, he explained what he was about to do, saying that each one could receive the benefit of the absolution by making a sincere Act of Contrition... urging them to do their duty, and reminding them of the high and sacred nature of their trust as soldiers and the noble object for which they fought... the brigade was standing at 'Order arms!' As he closed his address, every man, Catholic and non-Catholic, fell on his knees with his head bowed down. Then, stretching his right hand toward

the brigade, Father Corby pronounced the words of absolution.

"The scene was more than impressive; it was awe-inspiring. Near by stood a brilliant throng of officers who had gathered to witness this very unusual occurrence, and while there was profound silence in the ranks of the Second Corps, yet over to the left, out by the peachorchard and Little Round Top, where Weed and Vincent and Hazlitt were dying, the roar of the battle rose and swelled and re-echoed through the woods, making music more sublime than ever sounded through cathedral aisle. The act seemed to be in harmony with the surroundings. I do not think there was a man in the brigade who did not offer up a heart-felt prayer. For some, it was their last; they knelt ^{there} in their grave clothes. In less than half an hour many of them were numbered with the dead of July 2nd. Who can doubt that their prayers were good? What was wanting in the eloquence of the priest to move them to repentance was supplied in the incidents of the fight."

Father Corby himself wrote a quarter of a century later: "That general absolution was intended for all, not only for our brigade, but for all, North or South, who were susceptible of it and who were about to appear before their Judge. Let us hope that many thousands of souls, purified by hardships, fasting, prayer and blood, met a favorable sentence on the ever memorable battlefield of Gettysburg."

What does all of this drama mean to us, a hundred years later, as we stand on the same battlefield? The least that might be expected is that we would understand today, what Father Corby called "the noble object for ~~which~~ ^{we too await our Judgment} which they fought" ...and died. As President Lincoln put it so magnificently: "The world will little note nor long remember, what we say here, but can never forget what they did here. It is for us, the living, rather to be dedicated ^{now} to the unfinished work which they have, thus far, so nobly carried on. It is rather for us to be here dedicated to the great task remaining before us, that from these honored dead we take increased devotion to that cause for which they here gave the last

fullmeasure of dévotion--that we here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain; that this nation shall have a ~~new~~ new birth of freedom."

This, I take it, is what the Civil War was all about, it was for fr eedom, and specifically for the freedom of Negro Americans,that it was faught. If we forget this unfinished business, then there well be nothing ~~But~~ mockery in this centennial celebration. We will have ~~missed~~ missed the deep and tragic issues that cost so many lives.

Bruce Catton has put it so well, that I shall not aptempt to improve upon his language: "We know that in a strange, almost mystic way, modern America began to take shape in the Civil War. We also know that something priceless was won for us in it -- that our American horizon was somehow broadened by it, that it left us with a deeper and more challenging responsibility, with a piece of unfinished business which ~~stands~~ demands our most earnest attention.... The Civil War meant that the Negro slave would become an American citizen~~d~~ and it left us with the eternal, inescapable obligation to see to it that that citizenship is made good... Winning that freedom for the Negro, we won it also for all the people who then or ever would become Americans--including ourselves. We can never have, permanently, a second-class citizenship in America. Because of the Civil War, we are n~~ot~~ that kind of country...We bought that committment at the price of 600,000 lives, *more Americans than died in all our wars from the American Revolution to Korea.* It is something we can never ignore."

What better place to ponder our unfinished business this morning than at Gettysburg, where so much of the blood and sweat and tears that are the price of freedom, took place. Gettysburg is not just a battlefield; it is a sacred shrine of freedom won again for a nation "conceived in liberty and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created ~~for~~ equal." The struggle, heroically engaged here, still goes on as we commit ourselves anew to this proposition in every village and city of every State in America. The Civil War did ~~not~~ not solve the tragic issue, it merely reestablished

the proposition and left to us the ~~task~~^{task} of making the promise of our Constitution come true for all Americans.

I am not so sure that President Lincoln always saw this as a moral issue. One of his biographers, Thomas, tells us that when ^{the city of} Washington was ringed around by Confederate troops, and the war ^{seemed} ~~was~~ seemed last, he suddenly realized with new clarity, what the war was all about. At that time Thomas says that Lincoln made a promise to God, that if Washington were spared, he would at the earliest opportunity proclaim the moral issue in its clearest terms. Washington was spared, and with the new year, Lincoln, against the advise of his whole cabinet, made the Emancipation Proclamation. Making it, he flew in the face of practical expediency, and ~~stood~~ stood clearly and unequivocally on the point of morality. That he was right, and the politicians ~~were~~ wrong, might be deduced from his most endearing title here, and especially in all of the new nations around the world: The Great Emancipator.

It may not have occurred to you, but each one of ~~you~~ us must be, in these our times, great emancipators, to finish up, as completely and ~~as~~ ^{as} dramatically as possible, in ^{all} our own communities across the land, the unfinished business of which Lincoln spoke here: the work of freedom. Our President has ~~now~~ spoken out upon the moral issue that faces us all. Our Congress has before it a bill that attempts to hasten the completion of the unfinished business. There may well be another battle of Gettysburg in the Congress, but in the end the issue must be settled as it was settled here; for we are a nation committed to the proposition that all men were created equal. Anything less than that is unworthy of the thousands of men who died here. But when all the ~~laws~~ laws have been enacted, when all of the judgements of the Supreme Court are assessed, when all the Presidential speeches are recorded, there still remains the real unfinished business. Individual Americans died here, and only individual Americans

~~These soldiers~~ at Gettysburg
can make that for which ~~they died~~ died/come true in their own communities.
Moral issues must be recognized ^{and addressed} in individual hearts and consciences. The
appalling dearth of freedom for millions of Negro Americans today, in voting,
in employment, in housing, in education, in public accommodations, and in the
administration of justice, is not something automatic. It is a positive act;
it is freedom denied by one American to another American, and until every
white American decides to act morally ~~towards~~ towards every Negro American,
there is no end to the unfinished business.

The sounds of ~~battle~~ ^{battle} ~~are~~ ~~gone~~ have died ~~away~~ away. The heroic deeds are done.
Gettysburg is cloaked in peace. But the issue raised and ^{bloodily engaged} ~~answered~~ here still
clamors ~~for~~ for a final answer. There are six times more Americans in America
now than there were at the time of the ~~original~~ Civil War. Can we give
a final answer at long last? Can we finally make freedom live for all Amer-
icans? Only if each one of us dedicates ourselves to the great task still
remaining before us, that from these honored dead we take increased de-
votion to that cause for which they here gave the last full measure of
devotion.--that we here highly resolve that ~~the~~ these dead shall not
have died ~~in vain~~ in vain; that this nation shall have a new birth in
freedom."

This, I believe, is the true challenge of Gettysburg today. May
all Americans hear it deeply in their hearts and souls and may they
ponder the real depths of ~~the~~ this greatest domestic challenge of
our times which can be expressed no better than President Lincoln
expressed it in terms of human equality: "Now we are engaged in a
great civil war, testing whether that nation or any nation so
conceived (in liberty) can long endure." Battlefields are like this.
They confront us, as they confronted the brave men who made this
place a landmark of heroism, with the ultimate of all moral tests:
survival.

(over)

but to live in the spirit of this place.
 We are not asked to die, ^{and} but if we are not capable of upholding
 the inner core of what America really stands for, ~~and~~ no one of
 us deserves the blessings of liberty for which these men died.
 Survival, without ^{national wide} liberty, ~~is an empty victory~~
 would be a travesty of the
 victory won here, ^{at} the turning point of a bitter, tragic war.
 It would be ~~that~~ ^a sad anticlimax to the centennial
 that we celebrate at Gettysburg. America, and the
 world deserves better of us, and of these hallowed dead.
 May each of us be equal to the challenge of Gettysburg:
 freedom to the free.