

Eulogy in Memory of Civil War Veterans

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(The following eloquent address was delivered by Rabbi Aaronsohn on the Memorial Services Program of the forty-third national encampment of the Veterans of Foreign Wars, in the Taft Auditorium, Cincinnati, Sunday evening, August 30, 1942.—The Editors)

April 1861, April 1865: four years, one thousand, four hundred and sixty days.

Four ordinary years in the history of a nation might not be regarded as indispensable. But there are years and days in the life of a nation which are as indispensable and precious as is a gram of radium to the tons of ore from which it is extracted.

Between April 12, 1861 and April 9, 1865 the pages of American history include a revolution in naval warfare, an upheaval in the social structure of the nation, a complete overthrow of an economic order. These one thousand four hundred and sixty days witnessed the end of a political dynasty, the emancipation of several million human beings, the death or disablement of hundreds of thousands of citizen soldiers in the prime of their manhood.

These 1460 days brought forth men of lofty spiritual and moral stature, men of unrivaled valor, and men of unexcelled military and political leadership. Such names as Foote, Porter, Farragut and John Worden of the Navy; Grant, Thomas, Mead, Sherman and Sheridan, Jackson, Johnston, Stuart and Lee of the Army; Shilo, Vicksburg, Gettysburg, Chattanooga, Chancellorsville, Cold Harbor and Savannah match those of Nelson and Napoleon, Marathon and Waterloo.

During these one thousand four hundred and sixty days, men of the same speech, the same religion, the same customs and traditions killed and maimed one another in a veritable deluge of blood. They were not giants pitted against dwarfs. They were not Mongols or Huns sweeping down upon the innocent and the unarmed. They were not

invincible Macedonians or Romans joining battle with the weak and the effete.

They were giants against giants. They were Macedonians against Romans. They were Spartans against Hannibal's Carthaginians.

About six hundred thousand men were battle-slain during these 1,460 days. About five billion dollars, more than the market value of all the slaves, were spent for those four years of war. Grant and Lee both called it an unholy conflict. Sherman styled it the work of Satan. Lincoln said: "The judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether." Julia Ward Howe sang, "Let us die to make men free."

What did those four years of bloodshed, terror, destruction, desolation, hatred and sacrifice of human life decide? The institution of slavery was already on its way out. England and Russia had freed millions of black and white slaves without shedding a drop of blood. These 1,460 days did what four score and seven years of bitter debate and compromise and philosophic and even theological disputations could not accomplish. This, then, was written in the hearts of men everywhere, engraven on the records of nations everywhere; that government of the people, by the people, for the people must not perish from the earth.

Not government by kings, nor by oligarchy. Not the rule of a political dynasty, nor the sway of a military conqueror. Not government by absentee landlords, nor the invisible dictatorship of planters, prelates or plutocrats or the proletariat. Out of the carnage of Shiloh and Cold Harbor, out of the mortal ruins of the heroes of Chancellorsville and Chattanooga, out of the enriched soil of Antietam and Atlanta, out of the fresh graves of Vicksburg and Gettysburg, the voices of the hosts of Liberty, carried on the wings of the wind throughout the world rang out:

"We the people do ordain"

Six hundred thousand men! Six hundred thousand men of valor, six hundred thousand men of intelligence, free men, were battle-slain to teach the world the truth, that the basis of our political system is the right of the people to make and to alter their constitutions of government. Cities were burned, commonwealths were ravaged, great arteries of trade and commerce were severed, a confederation of states was crushed in order that other nations also might see and fear the jealousy, wrath, and titanic strength of a truly free and enlightened people.

It is not for me here to plead for a better understanding of this fundamental principle of liberty. It is not for me here to warn you of the evils ever present in our democracy and of the adversaries ever watchful of the moment to overthrow our republic.

Let the mystic chords of memory, stretching from every battlefield and patriot grave again stir the better angels of our nature. Let the supreme sacrifice of those 1,460 days strengthen our resolution and our faith in liberty. Let the majestic spirits of Grant, Lee and Lincoln guide us as a pillar of cloud by day and as a pillar of fire by night through this great World War. And may the Almighty Ruler of nations move in the midst of our camps today, in every part of the world, as He did in those 1,460 days and nights of woe and wondrous vision and courage.