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Shall the Rebel Barbarities be Remembered or Forgotten?

The government agent sent out to give Christian burial to the thousands of our soldiers murdered at Andersonville, writes to Washington in favor of preserving the prisonpen as a monument of the wickedness of the rebellion. This recommendation raises a serious question. There can be no good reasons for saving this memorial of the fiendishness of the Richmond Government that will not apply with equal force to many others. The decision must, in consistency, initiate and establish one of two definite policies: either the policy of keeping up, for ourselves and our children, the memory of the abominations of the rebellion, or the policy of consigning them all, as far as possible, to oblivion.

We use the word policy, for it is purely a question of public expediency. No one, we take it, would go for perpetuating the remembrance of those iniquities for the mere sake of nourishing spite and keeping alive old grudges. None but an evil nature -- a nature savage, not Christian -- will treasure up injuries for vindictive or malignant purposes. Quick forgetfulness is a duty unless some positive good is to come from the remembrance.

We believe that such a positive good is to be gained by preserving the memorials of rebel cruelty. The thing most needed since the prostration of the rebellion is to make it odious and infamous. It is not so now in the South. The great body of the people there yet speak of it with respect. They look upon it as a gallant, though ill-fated struggle, to secure Southern rights and interests. They have submitted to the power of the National Government, but for the most part, simply because physical force has compelled them. There is, as yet, no general show of real heart-felt repentance for the rebellion. The South, as a whole, is still proud of it, rather than ashamed of it. There can be no genuine loyalty until this spirit is changed. It is morally impossible that loyalty should spring up in the soul which still admires the rebellion.

But how shall the Southern people be purged from the sympathies that have possessed them for the last four years. The mere military failure will not do it, for there is no discredit in being overcome by superior force. There is no power in mere material coercion to accomplish it, nor will it be effected by any revival of the debate about the right of secession. All that can be said upon the subject was said to the South before the rebellion, without any good result. What we must rely upon to sicken the South with the rebellion, is not physical force or intellectual controversy, but moral influence. We must so show up the real infamy of the rebellion, as carried out by the Jeff. Davis Government, that the Southern people will be constrained, in sheer moral self-defence, to disavow it. When the Southern people once come up to the point of repudiating the action of the Jeff. Davis Government as dishonoring them before Christendom, they will find it very easy to renew their allegiance to the old government with their whole heart and soul. It is a mistake to suppose that the Southern people are indifferent to the opinion of the civilized world. They are

exceedingly sensitive to it. One great reason why they have acquiesced so completely in the abolition of slavery by the National Government -- not opposing that abolition even when their Northern sympathizers were protesting against it -- is the fact that they have been made sensible, during their rebellion, that slavery is hated not only by the North, but by all Europe. It has been brought home to them as never before, that the institution made them a reproach to the world; and, great as are the troubles that emancipation will bring upon them, they yet feel a positive relief in finding themselves clear of the old opprobrium. When President LINCOLN was assassinated, they made haste to denounce the act, recoiling from the chance that they would be held morally responsible for it. If it could be clearly proved that the Richmond Government was privy to that assassination, every Southern man would consider it a disgrace to be known longer as its friend.

This wholesale violation of the laws of war in the torture and murder of thousands of our prisoners, carries with it an infamy that the Southern people will never consent to live under. If the facts of the case, in all their infernal blackness, are exposed to the view of the world, the South will never accept any responsibility for them. It will sooner shift them upon the Richmond Government. But that government was the embodiment of the rebellion. Its public acts make up the history of the rebellion. The world only through its measures and policies, judges of the rebellion. Whatever brings shame upon it brings shame upon the rebellion. It is not possible for the Southern people to repudiate it without repudiating the rebellion.

We say, then, that it should be the policy of the National Government to bring out into the boldest relief all the abominations of the Jeff. Davis rule. It has great piles of Confederate documents and letters in its possession; these should be searched with the closest scrutiny. No pains should be spared in any direction to get the completest exposition of the secret history of the Confederacy. Throw all the light possible upon the concern; it will not bleach, but blacken. We have not one particle of doubt, that if the Southern people were brought to a complete understanding of all the doings of the Richmond Government, especially for the last two years of its existence, they would contract even a greater hate of it than exists in the North. It was their interest and their honor specially that were betrayed by the turpitude of that government.

Undoubtedly the trial of the Superintendent of the Andersonville Prison pen will take a very wide range, and bring out all the general system of barbarity practiced wherever Union soldiers were in the power of the Confederate Government. The world will get an exposure, not made up from newspaper reports, and other sources that may be called irresponsible, but from sworn testimony of a quality and quantity that will satisfy the most incredulous, and defy even the most brazen effrontery to gainsay. The barbarities, unprecedented in Christendom for their infernal character and the persistency with which they were kept up, will be brought before the moral judgment of the world in all their hideous reality; and unless human nature changes, they cannot fail of evoking universal execration. The Southern people must join in that execration, or else be considered approvers and participants, and share in the infamy of the crime. They have still, we trust, good sense and good feeling enough to keep them from any such infatuation.

Until the Southern people are thoroughly cured of all esteem for the rebellion -- until they learn to shrink from the very name of it, the government should take care that every proof and token of its real character should be preserved. All loyal men, too, should aim to keep alive the remembrance of its infamy. The public sentiment should consolidate itself into the severest shape of abhorrence and detestation. This perhaps may not now suit the South. They may prefer that everything calculated to bring the rebellion

into disrepute should be at once and forever cast out of mind, so that they and their children may in peace keep up the flattering fancy that all this fight against the government, though it turned out badly, was after all a very heroic piece of business. "Show me what you admire," said a wise philosopher, "and I will show you what you are." So long as the South has an admiration for the rebellion, so long will the South be rebel at heart. When this admiration ceases, and the memory of the rebellion becomes gall and wormwood to the Southern spirit, then will be the time when every trace of the rebellion should be swept from existence. True patriotic devotion should redeem any portion of the Republic from reproach. It should bury forever every memorial calculated to perpetuate dishonor and disparagement.

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