

THE HOME COMING OF SHELBY'S MEN

BY WALTER B. STEVENS

The first reunion of ex-Confederates of Missouri was held at Roanoke in August, 1871. It was an historic postlude to "Shelby's Expedition to Mexico." Readers of that fascinating narrative by John Newman Edwards, which has been running as a serial in *The Missouri Historical Review* will appreciate the significance of this gathering at Roanoke and what was said there.

Roanoke, as a community, is scarcely known to this generation. It gave to Missouri its full quota of distinguished sons, chief among them Dr. Isidor Loeb, formerly of the University of Missouri faculty, where he served as professor, dean, and acting president, lately of Washington University, St. Louis. Located in Randolph county, near the borders of Chariton and Howard, Roanoke was famous for an annual fair in the Seventies. The people of these three counties came together in great numbers. Fairgrounds and buildings on an extensive plan were situated in a fine grove half a mile from the town. Yearly the owners of the splendid farms of Randolph, Howard and Chariton brought to the Roanoke Fair their choicest livestock and crop products. But in 1871 the feature which overshadowed all of the usual attractions was this gathering of the ex-Confederates. It was the home coming of those Missourians who had felt when the Civil war ended that there could be no home again for them in Missouri. They had gone away to Mexico and, as told in the book of John N. Edwards, had planned new homes in that country. But Maximilian had died on the hill at Queretaro. Juarez was at the head of the new republic. The life in the foreign country had palled. Missouri had called with a movement to rehabilitate the ex-Confederates in full citizenship. And here in Roanoke the expatriated were home again.

In the throng of five thousand were twelve hundred ex-Confederates indicated by the white silk ribbon badges.

Among the speakers were General Shelby, Colonel A. W. Slayback, Captain Collins of battery fame. All disclaimed any political significance in the gathering and in all that was said was breathed a spirit of fervent loyalty to the Union. One of the resolutions adopted with hearty unanimity was this:

"Resolved that from this time forward, as citizens enjoying equal rights with all other citizens, we shall be guided in our political action by the present and the future attitude of public affairs, giving our support to men of uprightness, merit and liberality, regardless of political antecedents."

Another of the resolutions read:

"Resolved that in the present situation of affairs in this state, we recognize a new order of things rendering it proper for all men of progress to turn their backs upon the past, and grasp manfully the duties and possibilities of the future."

But in public expression the feature of the day at Roanoke was the address of Thomas C. Reynolds. Elected lieutenant-governor on the ticket with Governor Claiborne F. Jackson, and succeeding him as the governor of Missouri in the recognition of the Confederates, Governor Reynolds was one of the earliest and most aggressive of the secessionists. In his advocacy of this he was carrying out his South Carolina nativity and education in ultra states' rights. During the war he became involved in controversy with General Sterling Price and left a "memoir" full of bitter criticism of Missouri's chief Confederate. But at the Roanoke gathering Governor Reynolds said:

"Our aim is to live in friendly harmony, as peace-loving citizens, with all. To do so we must of course be harmonious among ourselves. We Missourians are not more given than others to differences and controversies; but we conduct them with an openness and vigor which tend to make them appear greater than they really are. However, when they are ended we harbor no malice. Unavoidably there have been differences among ourselves during the late war, but we should now consign them to the past. As evidence of my own sincerity in this counsel, one of my motives for attending this reunion

is to have an opportunity of saying, as I now do, in the district in which he passed most of his life, and in the presence of so many of his old friends and neighbors, that, adopting the sound maxim that a great man should be estimated according to the merits of his career as a whole, and regardless of whatever differences may at one time have existed between him and me, I shall ever cheerfully and fully acknowledge the many excellent qualities and eminent abilities and public services of Missouri's foremost soldier, General Sterling Price."

Governor Reynolds then expressed the appreciation of the ex-Confederates for their restoration to full citizenship in Missouri and declared their attitude on several pending political questions. He called these "certain ghosts of dead questions." One of the ghosts was the fear of some people that ex-Confederates might oppose payment of interest on the public debt or might endeavor to have the Confederate bonds made valid by the United States. And a third ghost was the possibility that the ex-Confederates might some time oppose the payment of pensions to Union soldiers. In the plainest possible words Governor Reynolds declared full acceptance of the war's results by the ex-Confederates. He said:

We meet together for the first time in the six years which have passed since the close of the war, and one of the first impulses of every one of us must be to congratulate ourselves on the course of events which has led to our re-enfranchisement as citizens of Missouri. We, of course, find not a few who claim our special gratitude to themselves as the authors or engineers of the movement which resulted in that change. Without denying to any one the praise he may be entitled to for his course in advocating a measure which had become inevitable, we must be permitted to remember that we owe it mainly to ourselves; to the wise, patriotic and self-respecting conduct of the Missouri Confederates in quietly attending to their private affairs during the period of our disfranchisement, and thus convincing our late foes, by deeds rather than by words, that there was no danger to the peace and welfare of the state in restoring us to political equality with themselves. By a like course in use of our recovered birth-right we can and should contribute to the peace and prosperity of our noble state and of the whole Union. It is solely with that view that, believing that I well know your feelings and opinions, I venture to indicate them on some few points.

While all merely political questions of the day are by our own free decision excluded from consideration, on this occasion there are other subjects not yet brought into the arena of actual political strife, but specially referring to us, on which it is almost a duty to ourselves and the country, that our views should be known. There are certain ghosts of dead questions which haunt the imagination of some of our people, and in aiding to lay them we contribute to the welfare of our common country. Senator Morton, in a very able and candid speech, has expressed apprehensions which, as the discourse was delivered last week in the chief city of our own state, it will not be out of place for us to notice here and now. They were that at some future period the existing settlement of the issues of the late war might be disturbed by a refusal to pay interest on the United States debt, or an assumption of the debt of the late Confederate states and compensation for emancipated slaves; by a refusal to pay the pensions granted to Union soldiers or a grant of like pensions to those of the Confederacy.

It may, with almost absolute certainty, be asserted as far as the Confederates of Missouri, and I am confident those of other states, are concerned, these fears are wholly groundless. We have played at the grand game of civil war, and so ably as to gain the admiration of the world, and the respect of magnanimous opponents. We lost it for want of trumps, but we drew at least our fair share of the honors. Confederates, and especially Missourians, are not the men to attempt afterwards to filch the stakes from the winners. The payment of the interest on the U. S. debt, and of the principal of it when due, and both as contracted for, is secured by a principle stronger than any constitutional amendment. The prosperity of all the people as individuals is so intimately connected with the preservation of the public credit that on a mere calculation of profit and loss, it is better to preserve the latter as a basis of the former. We confederates have as much interest in preserving both as any other citizens. No one who is familiar with events in the confederacy in the last years of the war will ever dream of an assumption by any one of any of its obligations, whether in bonds or for loss of property in slaves, or anything else. Not only by general public law, but also by the express terms of the contract, every creditor of the Confederacy made his repayment dependent upon the establishment of its independence, and as it failed to secure it he has no claim, either legal or moral. You, soldiers, know that even when success was possible, the common talk in the camps was that the amount actually received by the Confederacy for its bonds and notes was in such ridiculous disproportion to the amount promised to be paid that no sense of abstract law or justice would ever secure their payment. How, then, would you receive a proposal now to tax yourselves to pay anything whatever on them when brought up, as they certainly would be, on any prospect of gain on them, by sordid speculators, for a mere song? With regard to losses of property, from the horses which many of you whom I now see

before me had killed under you in some gallant charge, up to millions lost in slaves by some unionist or lukewarm planter who denied you their labor to aid you in erecting breastworks against Federal balls, all must go alike the road which universal public law marks out for the unsuccessful in civil war. One pays his stake in life or limb, another in loss of property or exile or both. Let each one support manfully the adverse fortune of war, and not degrade the cause for which he fought by going about, to the victors, whining for compensation. You, at least, and I believe nearly all Confederates, will not countenance any one in doing so. The pension question would be summarily disposed of by any one who knows the Confederate soldier. For us to accept any compensation from the government, against which we fought, would be to receive alms; it is to be hoped that no demagogue will ever insult us by proposing to us any such meanness. To the Union soldier his pension is an honorable distinction conferred on him by the government he served, and according to law or usage a part of the compensation pledged to him before he entered its service. Opposing armies have a certain feeling of fellowship, as even the general public began to notice in the intercourse between the Federal and Confederate outposts; if any demagogue proposes to take the pension from Union soldiers, let them call across the line to us, if they need help, and we shall march with them in solid column to the ballot box to put the swindle down.

For the newspaper account of the Roanoke reunion, giving the foregoing facts, *The Missouri Historical Review* is indebted to Hon. Enos Clarke, of Kirkwood, who took an influential part in the Liberal Republican movement resulting in the enfranchisement of the Missouri ex-Confederates.

In the winter of 1877 these ex-Confederates who had expressed so frankly at Roanoke their acceptance of the war issues took a position in the Hayes-Tilden contest for the Presidency which was of widespread influence. As the weeks went by, following the November election of 1876, with no settlement, conditions grew threatening. Henry Watterson announced that there would be 100,000 Kentuckians in Washington the 4th of March to see that the right man was seated. Investigations of the elections in several southern states were long drawn out. The electoral commission of fifteen was sitting but there were reports that the Senate and House, one Republican, the other Democratic, might refuse to abide by the commission's finding. In that event civil war might follow. At the crisis, General Joseph O. Shelby gave an interview to the *St. Louis Globe-Democrat* in which he

declared his intention to stand by President Grant in whatever course he might take regarding the contest. General Shelby deprecated the talk of violence. If there was a failure to decide the election in a lawful and constitutional manner and President Grant decided to exercise the power of the chief executive in favor of the one he regarded as duly elected, General Shelby intended to support the President in his action whether that action be favorable to Tilden or Hayes.

Shelby's interview was published far and wide. The next day Colonel Alonzo W. Slayback, who had offered the resolutions at Roanoke in 1871, and Colonel Clay King, also an ex-Confederate of distinguished record, came out in indorsement of Shelby's position. Other southerners of Confederate record fell in line with the Missourians. The talk in the north of organization to seat Tilden by force, if necessary quieted down.

There were still later echoes of "Shelby's Expedition to Mexico" and of the Roanoke lovefeast. In 1874 Governor Reynolds was elected to the Missouri General Assembly. He was a linguist of extraordinary ability and if he had chosen education instead of politics he would have ranked high in some college faculty. His experience in Mexico and his familiarity with other languages recommended Governor Reynolds to President Arthur when the commission was appointed to investigate possible improvement of commercial relations with Latin-American countries. Governor Reynolds was made the Democratic member of the commission. The late William E. Curtis, traveler and writer, was a colleague of Governor Reynolds in that Central and South American tour. He told of the surprise which Reynolds caused, as the commission went from capitol to capitol, by his responses in several languages to the addresses of welcome. Governor Reynolds replied officially in English and then translated his remarks into one language after another until everybody present understood him. The result was to give a most favorable impression of the commission at the outset of its negotiations in each country visited. Senators Cockrell and Vest had made no mistake in bringing Governor Reynold's

unusual qualifications for this work to the attention of President Arthur.

During the second Cleveland administration the name of General Shelby was presented for the appointment of United States marshal of the western district of Missouri. Major William Warner, former commander-in-chief of the Grand Army of the Republic, who served in both branches of Congress as a Republican, wrote a letter indorsing Shelby for the appointment, and then wrote Shelby a personal letter of congratulation when the appointment was made. Ex-Governor Thomas C. Fletcher, the war governor of Missouri, went to the attorney-general in Washington to say to him that no mistake would be made in the selection of Shelby. Missouri Union veterans joined with ex-Confederates in manifestations of good will toward Shelby. Old Roanoke looms as an historic spot in Missouri's Civil war convalescence.