



HOUSE REUNITED

by

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A Book Review and Oration

By

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"Dedicated to those Freemasons who practiced without their Lodges those lessons taught within their walls."

The aftermath of the Civil War has been called Reconstruction and repercussions have continued to the present day.

Eleven states formed the Confederate States of America. On April 12, 1861 at 4:30 p.m. bombardment of Fort Sumpter began and the U S was torn asunder. The only organization to remain undivided was Freemasonry.

The proceedings of many Grand Lodges showed beyond a doubt that Freemasons and Freemasonry were in the fore front of those who tried to prevent the Civil War. The role of Freemasonry can best be summed up by repeating the words of Gen. and later Gov. and GHP John W. Geary: "To Freemasonry the people of the country are indebted for many mitigation's of the suffering caused by direful passions of war."

The merciful role Freemasonry was to play during the bitter years of reconstruction started on the day Confederate Gen. Robert E. Lee was forced to evacuate Petersburg, Va. Union Gen. Godfrey Weitzel, a Freemason marched his troops into Richmond and ordered them to fight fires set by fleeing Confederates; subdue the rioting and looting mobs; guard the homes of women whose husbands were fighting with Southern troops; and ordered food rushed to the starving city. These actions were talked about throughout the South and undoubtedly caused many Southerners to cease fighting earlier than if the inhabitants had been treated brutally.

The Army of Northern Virginia, under the command of Robert E. Lee, surrendered on Apr 9, 1865 at Appomattox Court House and after a sorrowful farewell he left for his home in Richmond. Ulysses S. Grant left for Washington, leaving behind the Freemason from Maine, Gen. Joshua L. Chamberlain to accept the surrender of the Confederate forces. Chamberlain turned humiliation for the Southerners into some thing they could recall with pride. As the Confederate soldiers marched to stack the weapons, the General ordered his men to give the Confederate soldiers a full military salute.

Chamberlain's brotherly act was remembered and talked about wherever the former soldiers of Lee's army traveled. The South learned there were men who were not vindictive, but were ready to lend a helping hand.

At 11 AM Apr 15, 1865 Andrew Johnson, a member of Greenville Lodge 119 became the 17th President. From that day on he became the target of radicals in Congress. They set out to ruin him as they had almost ruined Lincoln and his ideas of moderate reparation and they succeeded!

For many years he stirred up discussion and inspired more people to hatred, then had any earlier President. His enemies effectively managed to make the public believe he was a drunken sot, vulgar, illiterate, an intolerable fool, and a tool in the hands of "Copperheads" and traitors.

He was none to those things. He was not a drunkard. Far from being illiterate or a fool, he knew more about the Constitution than most of those who denounced him. His defense of that Constitution was the main reason the radicals hated him.

Johnson possessed few of the assets of personal charm which causes men to be popular. He could impress individuals, but rarely succeeded in making men love him. Yet, he was endowed with the attributes of tolerance and love for people. It was his overabundance of toleration that resulted in his defeat in his quest for a conservative Congress.

He wore a look of distress and determination. When he spoke his speeches were works of art, but when read in cold print they were not impressive. Through his earnings as a tailor he managed to become a man of property. His political career began as an Alderman of Greenville. He was mayor for three terms. Served in the State Legislature. He was Governor of Tennessee for two terms but refused a third, so the Tennessee Legislature sent him to the U S Senate.

In the Senate he stated: "I am opposed to secession. I believe it is no remedy to the evils complained of. Instead of action with that division of my Southern friends who take ground for secession, I shall take other grounds while I try to accomplish the same end." The Southerners despised him for this stand and many Northerners hated him because he tried to "accomplish the same end" by taking "other grounds."

The shooting war had ended but a war of words had taken its place. Freemasonry was to have an uphill battle during the decade of reconstruction. Grand Lodge and Grand Chapter records are replete with Freemasonry's efforts and actions. I will but mention two examples. J.D. Landrum, Grand Master of Kentucky, when asked about Masonic funerals and charity towards Confederate widows and orphans, replied: "Let not politics be mentioned in your Lodges, and know no difference in men because of political or religious distinctions. Masonry should take no part in civil strife, except to throw the broad mantle of Masonic charity over the faults of our brethren, succor

the needy, and apply the oil of consolation and the wine of joy to the afflicted, especially to those of our own household." Our own Grand Master A. J. Van Deren, said: "Let us exercise due Masonic charity towards to those who have been separated from us by recent national difficulties, and promptly stretch forth the hand of fellowship, and give every facility and offer them every inducement to return to their former relations of friendship, fraternity and union, and enjoy with us, the prosperity and blessings of our Ancient Order, and of a free and united people". President Johnson made 3 demands of the Southern States: repeal the Ordinances of Secession, ratification of the 13th Amendment, and repudiation of the Confederate and State debts. Through the early months of 1866 the leading Union generals, unbiased leaders of the country, and the vast majority of the people supported Johnson's program. But this situation was to shift drastically. Many politicians and some Northern clergymen were demanding retaliation against the citizens of the former Confederacy. This caused President Johnson to state: "You denied in the beginning of the struggle that any state had the right to go out. You said that they had neither the right nor the power. The issue; has been made, and it has been settled that a state has neither the right nor the power to go out of the Union. And when you have settled that by the executive and military judgement, you turn around and assume that they are out and shall not come in."

The President pleaded with the people to read the Constitution and promised them: "I will be found standing by the Constitution as the chief rock of our society, as the palladium of our civil and religious liberty." And he did, although he knew he was committing political suicide.

For the first time in history Congress, overrode a Presidents' veto of a major bill. Many such overrides followed. One bill in which the President's veto was upheld was The Freedman's Bureau Bill which would prolong military measures into a time of peace; and it would create tribunals for the trial of offenders without a jury and without the right of appeal. But Johnson's main objection was the taxation without representation clause.

The radicals now began their work toward impeachment. Congressman Thaddeus Stevens, a bitter man, who was never troubled by reverence for the Constitution, assumed leadership of the Congress. He accomplished his goal by setting forth a program which claimed the whole subject of reconstruction as the exclusive business of Congress. He proposed that all that had been done by Lincoln and Johnson for the 11 former Confederate States be rescinded; that a committee of 15 be established as the sole judge of who should be admitted to Congress. It should be remembered the 3/5's rule no longer held, i.e. each slave would be counted as 1 person. Consequently these new population numbers would result in more Southern Congressmen and the 83 Southern members along with any Democrats from the North would always give them a majority in Congress and the Electoral College. The South would now win in defeat what they had been unable to do before.

Johnson replied to Steven's program; "...So long as the Constitution of the U S endures, the states will endure; the destruction of the one is the destruction of the other; the preservation one is the preservation of the other, ...The States attempting to secede placed themselves in a condition where their vitality was impaired, but not extinguished their functions suspended, but not destroyed."

The bitterest Congressional campaign in our history took place in 1866. All of the radical's plans depended on getting rid of the Freemason who occupied the White House because of an

assassin's bullet.

Andrew Johnson would not back down on his principles. Any supporter of the President would have to withstand the wrath, scorn and social ostracism of his neighbors by voting for a man whom the vast majority of Republican preachers had condemned.

Outright lies were spread about the President. Those who spread them knew his plan was one of conciliation and forgiveness for the people of the South (but not its war time leaders). Johnson's adversaries fought for a policy of coercion. He insisted the Constitution be followed to the letter, so his opponents replied with sweeping amendments. Each time the President vetoed a bill it was overridden with shouts of exultation. But Johnson was not intimidated or discouraged by threats or obstructions. He was grimly determined to fight for his principles until the bitter end. And the end came.

Johnson fought back with his power of patronage. He began by replacing office holders loyal to his opposition with men of his choosing. The House and Senate found themselves attacked on their flank. Party discipline was being destroyed. Unless they did something quickly they might have to compromise with "the great criminal of the White House", or even capitulate. So, the Tenure-of-Office Act was quickly passed. The Act left the President powerless to remove any official without the approval of the Senate.

The President determined to test the constitutionality of the Act and fired the Freemason Edwin M. Stanton, Secretary of War who was an ally of his opponents. Gen. Ulysses S. Grant was appointed. Grant later decided to back Stanton and didn't accept the office.

At last the President "violated" one of the obnoxious bills which had been forced upon him. His opponents went to work on a bill of impeachment. But it did not stop with reciting only the removal of Stanton. The bill embraced all of the President's alleged offenses, "from the misdemeanor of malfeasance in office to the high crime of bad manners." It was so all embracing many people in the country then, and even today did not know exactly what Johnson was accused of doing or not doing.

On Feb 24, 1868 the House of Representatives resolved to impeach Andrew Johnson. The Senate was advised and Mar 31, 1868 was set for the trial. A person in Washington on that day would have thought that there was a great social event. Fashionable dressed women were arriving by the hundreds and strangely enough they occupied most of the gallery seats. A ticket system had been arranged for the trial. It was claimed that Congressmen and Senators had disposed of their tickets to the highest bidders.

The Chief Justice of the U S, Salmon P. Chase, a Freemason who had campaigned against Johnson presided over 52 Senators, of whom 44 were lawyers, representing 27 States and nearly 40 million people. There were 6 Honorable House Managers, led by Freemason, Benjamin Butler who hated the President. They walked in pairs with arms linked.

Ben Butler gave the opening address which was a three hour tirade against the President. He stated that the Court of Impeachment was not bound by precedents. He then proceeded to quote precedent after precedent to support his contention that precedents were not required.

Unrelenting pressure was exerted on the Senators who the radicals felt might vote to acquit the President. Their actions were shameful. Each Senator was allotted 15 minutes on May 11 to tell how he intended to vote on the Articles of Impeachment and why.

On Sat, May, 16, 1868 the Senate quickly agreed to vote first on the 11th article, as the impeachers felt it held the best chance of passing. The vote stood 35 guilty, 19 not guilty. Johnson was saved by one vote. Sixteen Senators were Freemasons; 11 voted guilty, 5 not guilty. The Freemason in the White House should have left all America proud of him, but it was to take years before his greatness was to be recognized and then only by a few.

The over riding of the vetoes of the President helped bring in to existence the Ku Klux Klan. Gen. Nathan Bedford Forrest, a Freemason, was one of its leaders. It's stated purpose was to protect Southern women and property from unscrupulous "Carpetbaggers" from the North. It soon became apparent that they were vicious Southern thugs. Long before Congress passed its "force bills", Forrest and other fare minded men endeavored to revert the Klan to its original purpose. When their attempts failed, they left the Klan.

Johnson said he would not be a candidate to succeed himself. He decided not to attend the inauguration of Grant on Mar. 4th, "to witness the inauguration of a man whom he knew to be untrue, faithless, and false". In July he visited Washington where he was greeted by large crowds who roared when he denounced both Congress and Grant.

In Mar. 1875 he returned to Washington as a Senator from Tennessee. He lost no time in attacking the corruption and unethical conduct of the Grant administration. In July he suffered a stroke and died.

The former President had requested that no minister of religion be called to conduct his funeral. It was a highly understandable request when the bitterness incited from far to many pulpits of the country against him is recalled. The family called upon the Fraternity he loved to make arrangements for his funeral. A tremendous crowd came to Greenville to pay their respects to the tailor who had been President and championed the Constitution.

Andrew Johnson's body was wrapped in a new silken American flag with 37 stars; symbolizing the Union he loved and for which he had bravely fought. "Pillow my head on the Constitution of my country", he had requested. "Let the flag of the Nation be my winding sheet". The first copy of the Constitution he had ever owned, bought in 1835 and full of notes and comments, become the pillow he desired.

Freemasonry, as an institution, and individual Freemasons, after many years of charitable work, helped cement and heal the wounds caused by the Civil War. It helped end that crisis as it had many before it, and with the aid of God, will solve those of today and tomorrow.