One of the Ten Commandments delivered by Jehovah to Moses on Sinai, and not the least of the ten, is this: “Honor thy father and thy mother, that thy days may be long in the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee.” Like all the other commandments of God to his children, this applies not only to the individual man, but to men in the aggregate – men in organized societies forming governments, constituting peoples. Just as the boy who does not honor his father and mother is apt to bring his own life to an untimely end, as a consequence of experimenting in new and foolish paths to the neglect of the advice, accumulated experience, and teaching of those who have seen the world before him, so a people who forget the history, despise the traditions, ignore the ideals, and fail to share the aspirations of their ancestry are a people not apt to conserve anything – neither their own power nor greatness, nor their very living in the land itself.

We hear much about a “New South.” There is no New South. What there is of change is a change to the direction of the energies of the people; and if there be anything great and good in the so-called “new” South, as far as I have been able to ascertain, it is always something whose growth has its roots in the soil of the Old South. Everything admirable in the so-called “new” South is built upon the old, as a house is builded upon the rock of its foundation. We hear much of letting the “dead past bury its dead.” No poet who was a philosopher, and perhaps no real poet, would ever have uttered that sentence. There is no such thing as a dead past.

Ladies and gentlemen, thirty-nine years ago there occurred near the little village of Appomattox, in the State of Virginia, one of the most memorable and pathetic scenes in all history. A few ragged and half-starved men were surrendered, and with them there was seemingly surrendered a cause for which they had fought for four years. This seeming made it sadder. It is useless to picture the scene; Lee for the first time for many months in bright new uniform, with new sword; Grant, rough from the field, with his officers about him; the few brief words spoken around the table, where the terms were agreed to; the silence and sadness which pervaded the minds and marked the conduct even of the Federal officers and men; the scene a few minutes later when the Confederate chieftain was among his men; the tears coursing down rugged cheeks, that had perhaps never felt them before; men returning, with no vision of hope to cheer them, to lives of hardship and of labor; a despairing people and a desolate land! It is useless to picture all this, I say, because the imagination of each old veteran here pictures it all for himself, and every child has heard it told so often that it presents itself in vivid coloring even to his mind. This marked really the war-close of a great struggle, and when we gather, as we yearly do, upon the anniversary month of that event, on our decoration day, the celebration, in its beauty and in its sadness, is a fitting one.

But in everything which rational men do, in which there is either beauty or pathos, there must also be reason. What is it, then, which we celebrate on an occasion like this? Is it mere physical courage? If it were, the world in all of its history could not find a physical courage superior to that of the men who died or surrendered under Lee, Jackson, and the Johnstons. But mere physical courage is a thing too common amongst the men of the race to which we belong to be worthy of any sort of celebration.
ISSUES OF THE WAR DISCUSSED.
By John Sharp Williams, cont.

for its own sake. Mere fighting is no virtue; far from it. Indeed, the man who is not great enough and brave enough not to fight when he ought not to is a poor excuse for a man. Speaking for myself, I have no admiration of the professional fighter, whether he be a Texas cowboy or a West Point graduate. . . . Why do we meet? What is the purpose of coming together? Is it to keep alive the memory of a “lost cause?” Is it the “lost cause” which we celebrate? Not a whit of it, for, if it is, we have no cause to celebrate. In the economy of God, there are no lost causes in this world, except wrong causes. In every cause which has ever existed, whether it has apparently prevailed or apparently gone down, there have been some things – mere accompaniments, perhaps – which were wrong, but in every cause worthy of celebration there have been things which were not wrong but right, and which, being eternally right, have not gone down as lost forever, though, perhaps, temporarily eclipsed. . . .

We meet to celebrate the cause and the men of the sixties. What was the cause? Was it secession? Not a whit of it. Secession was merely the remedy which was invoked for the assertion of a right, for the maintenance of a cause. It had been twice before virtually invoked in these United States, though the sword had not been drawn to support its invocation – once by New Englanders, in opposition to what they considered the tyranny of the Embargo Laws, and once by the South Carolinians in denial of the constitutional right of a government of all the people to levy tribute upon all the people in order to make the capital of a part of the people more profitable, or the labor of a part of the people better compensated. War determined that the remedy should fail, and I think we are all agreed that it is well that the remedy failed. I think we are all ready to go forward, marching shoulder to shoulder, with an eye to the possibilities of the future, rejoicing in the lusty strength of a great and reunited people. What was the cause, then? Was it slavery? Not a whit of it. Slavery was undoubtedly the occasion of the quarrel and of the fight; but had the South been attacked in any of her other property or civil rights, she would have defended them just as readily; in fact, more readily than she did in this case. It was merely upon the side of slavery that our right to local self-government was attacked. . . .

But there was something else, and even a greater cause than local self-government, for which we fought. Local self-government temporarily destroyed may be recovered and ultimately retained. The other thing for which we fought is so complex in its composition, so delicate in its breath, so incomparable in its symmetry, that, being once destroyed, it is forever destroyed. This other thing for which we fought was the supremacy of the white man’s civilization in the country which he proudly claimed his own; “in the land which the Lord his God had given him;” founded upon the white man’s code of ethics, in sympathy with the white man’s traditions and ideals. Our forefathers of the forties and fifties and sixties believed that if slavery were abolished, unless the black race were deported from the American States, there would result in the Southern States just such a condition of things as had resulted in San Domingo, in the other West Indies Islands, and in the so-called republics of Central and South America – namely, a hybridization of races, a lowering of the ethical standard, and a degradation, if not loss, of civilization. . . . Slavery is lost, and it is certainly well for us and the public – perhaps for the negro – that it has been lost. But the real cause for which our ancestors fought back of slavery, and deemed by them to be bound up in the maintenance of slavery – to wit, the supremacy of the white man’s civilization, the supremacy of the ethical culture, which had been gradually built up through countless generations – has not been lost. We have not had the experience of the countries to the south of us; but I ask you, my friends, in all soberness and candor, to ask yourselves how and why we escaped the evils which befell others from identical causes, under similar, though not identical, conditions? What prevented the Africanization of the South? We
escaped, but those of you, even no older than I am, will remember by what a slender thread we held to safety. You will remember the ten long years of so-called reconstruction which made the four long years of war itself seem tolerable by comparison, the ten long years during every day and every night of which Southern woman hood was menaced and Southern manhood humiliated. . . .

The brethren of our own race, in our own country — the country whose pen had been Jefferson, whose tongue had been Patrick Henry, and whose sword had been Washington — were against not only us but the race itself — its past, its future — were seemingly bent only on two things — our humiliation as a race in the present, our subordination as a race in the future. . . . There is no grander, no more superb spectacle than that of the white men of the South standing from '65 to '74 quietly, determinedly, solidly, shoulder to shoulder in phalanx, as if the entire race were one man, unintimidated by defeat in war, unawed by adverse power, unbribed by patronage, unbuyed by the prospect of present material prosperity, waiting and hoping and praying for the opportunity which, in the providence of God, must come to overthrow the supremacy of "veneered savages," superficially "Americanized Africans" — waiting to reassert politically and socially the supremacy of the civilization of the English-speaking white race. But what gave them the capacity to do this sublime thing, to conceive it and to persevere in it to the end? To wait like hounds in the leash — impatient, yet obedient to the call of the huntsman’s horn — which came upon the heels of the autumn elections in the Northwestern States in 1874? What gave this capacity to the "easy-going, indolent, life-enjoying" Southerner? What if not four years of discipline, training, hardship? Four years which taught the consciousness of strength and mutual courage, the consciousness of capacity for working together, the power and the desire of organization, and which gave them, with it all, a capacity for stern action when required by stern events? But for the war — the lessons which it taught, the discipline which it enforced, the capacity for racial organization which was born with it — I, for one, do not believe that conditions in Louisiana, South Carolina, and Mississippi today would be very far different from what they are in Haiti, Cuba, or Martinique.

Neither of these causes is a lost cause. . . . The very men who told us in the sixties and the seventies that "one man was as good as another," no matter what the state of his civilization, no matter what his race traits and tendencies, are the very men who now, in establishing new governments in the new insular possessions, not only admit, but strenuously contend for the necessity of making such provisions of law as will prevent the white men in those possessions from being ruled by other races. The act of Congress for the government of the islands of Hawaii is almost identically the Mississippi constitution reenacted, and the reason for its passage was the same — namely, to secure, as far as possible, without violation of the Fourteenth and fifteenth Amendments, the white man’s supremacy there, and this, too, although the native Kanaka’s in the Hawaiian Islands have a percentage of illiteracy less than that of any State in the Union except one, and although the white men in the islands do not constitute one-fifth of the population.

My friends, there is no other instance that I know of where men having apparently lost a cause by four years of fighting subsequently preserved it by ten years of untrifled solidarity, superb patience, and magnificent common sense. I believe the world knows about us now these two things: First, that we have the strength of a giant; and secondly, that we can be trusted not to use it like a giant — brutally and irrationally. So much for the cause of the sixties. . . .

And yet, my friends, there are people who say that all this sort of talk is "sentiment;" that what we want to do is to "come down to cotton and corn and pork;" buying and selling, negotiating bank
exchange; that everything else is "sentiment," and that sentiment is "rot." Let it be a point with you, young boys and girls, to remember that the only thing in this this world which is not "rot" is sentiment. That thing is rot which can last a man only a lifetime—which rusts and corrupts and decays—that thing, in other words, which can rot. Your cotton and produce are "rot;" your bank exchange is "rot;" your talk about mere material prosperity, as the chief aim and object and existence of man, is "rot," because when you come to lie down and die and be placed within your narrow habitation, six or seven feet by three or four, not one of these things, nor things gained in this way, can you carry with you, nor present as a part of yourself at the chancel of God. They are well enough—we want them, and plenty of them—but they are of the earth earthy and exceedingly temporal. It is only your sentiments and the principles upon which they are based, as a house founded upon a rock, and the purposes, aspirations, and ideals which grow out from them, as a tree does from its sub-soil roots, that you can carry with you, because they have become a part of your immortal souls. . . . Business is all right, so is moneymaking. Every man should be diligent in business. We have apostolic authority for that. Every man should want to make money, in order that he may look all other men straight in the eye, with the independence of a true manhood, owing no man anything, saying with poor Bobbie Burns:

"Not for to hide it in a hedge.
Nor for train attendant;
But for the glorious privilege
Of being independent."

But the man who subordinates his nature, who prostitutes his chief energies, to the business of piling one dollar upon another, who forgets that there are flowers and poetry, a past and a present for himself and for his race, on earth and in heaven, who has narrowed himself to the point where everything but money-making and so-called business has become "rot," would be bored to death in the kingdom of heaven in twenty-four hours. ... A country without memories is without history, a country without history is without traditions, and a country without traditions is without ideals and community aspirations, and a country without these is without sentiment, and a country without sentiment is without capacity for achieving noble purposes, developing right manhood, or taking any truly great place in the history of the world.

I have talked about your leaders, but, my friends, what makes leaders? . . . The greatest leaders must have followers worthy of them. . . .

I have mentioned some of the great leaders on land and at sea of the great army of the Confederacy, but have failed as yet to mention its crowning glory, which was the private soldier.

Taken all in all, no body of private soldiers like that of the Confederacy has ever existed or fought under any leadership. They were equally great on the march; on the defensive; on the attack, when the order to charge came; in prison, where "durance vile" and suffering for food on the one hand, and the temptation of offered freedom on the other, were equal inducements to desertion.

I remember the Confederate soldier best of all when he was on the march. I can see him now winding his way through the dust, shoe-mouth deep, unwashed, unkempt, but jovial still. I can hear his voice as he passes the big gate: "Buddy, does your grandma know you are out?" "Sissy, who painted your lips so red?" No wonder that, with all the raiding and counter-raiding, passing and counter-passing of war, the boys of my age—nine, ten, or eleven years—thought that the jolliest life in the world must be that of a soldier, and looked forward to the time when they might be permitted to participate in it; not as a day of great responsibility, inaugurating a life of much danger, but as a sort of holiday, when fun would be unending and jokes ever recurrent.

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There existed once a man by the name of Hannibal; later a Corsican, Napoleon Bonaparte by name; earlier another Italian from Rome, of the genus Julius, surnamed Caesar—all of whom thought they knew something about the importance of time in military operations, something about marching infantry, so as to be "at the point of crisis with the largest numbers first," but one Thomas Jonathan Jackson, surnamed "Stonewall," because he could, when that was the thing to do, stand still like a stone wall, might, in this game of marching, have given either of these world captains an advantage of three out of five and beaten them to the goal; and an unlettered man, guiltless of military training, untutored in the service of war, half West Tennessean and half North-Mississippian, by name Bedford Forrest, could not only have taught them how to move cavalry quicker than they knew, but could have revolutionized for them, as he did for the modern world, the art of war by changing cavalry into "mounted infantry," with all the advantage of cavalry on the march, and all the advantage of infantry in the fight. One of the inexplicable things to me about the Southern soldier is this, that he seemed to have been, for the most part, without a sufficiency of anything in the world except guns and ammunition. He developed a marvelous and unparalleled capacity for starving and going naked, but somehow he seems never to have been without guns and ammunition, at least enough to start a battle on.

I have said the Southern soldier was great on the march, but marching, after all, is only "getting there." Critics were right when they said the Southerner would be great on the charge. The world has witnessed some great charges in its day.

But where, in all the history of all the charges, do you find exploits comparable to that beginning at Savage Station and continuing on through the seven days and ending at Malvern Hill? To that of the Texans, when they told Lee to go to the rear, in the Wilderness? To that suicidal, murderous, and unavailing onslaught of the Confederate infantry upon the breastworks of Franklin? And, above all, to that of Pickett and his men at Gettysburg? I can see them now, the reluctantly obedient and sullen corps commander sitting upon the fence, Pickett saluting and asking: "General, shall I carry my men in?" Longstreet's bowing without a word. I can hear the Virginian giving his orders, see him in his place with head bared, see the sweep of the line without a break, as it goes across and up the long slope, the orders almost noiselessly passed to close up as the artillery, and later the musketry, tear the ranks ???????? I can see the long slope from one end of that gray line to the other. In the course of its march by the dead and dying. I can see the few who attained the height vaulting, sword in hand, or with clubbed musket, into the enemy's trenchment. I can see them looking about to find themselves surrounded by bluecoated soldiers—more than enough without arms to have tied them with pocket handkerchiefs. I can see those few—O, so few—looking back over that long, long slope to find not one gray coat in sight for a support—Lee's orders not carried out. I see them then, despair of desperation settling upon them, some surrendered and some beginning to break back to the Confederate line; I can hear later the anguished and agonizing reproach of Pickett, when he states to Gen. Lee that his magnificent division has been swept out of existence, and I can hear Lee, with a greatness of soul, a magnanimity of which he alone was capable, saying, "Never mind, General, it has all been my fault," and to the men: "You must help me get out of this as best we can." In comparison with this demonstration of the courage of the soldier and the magnanimity of the leader, what could you quote from all history? . . .

But if this Southerner were a great soldier, what made him so? There must be some reason for it, or else it cannot be true. What are the private soldiers of a volunteer army? They are simply the plain people in uniform. The soldiers of the Confederacy were great then, because they were a great people,
because they were a free and equal people, an ultra democratic people. Free, proud of their liberties, proud of their determination to maintain them; equal, no man daring to assert, throughout all the Southern land, any inherited or acquired superiority over his fellows, except that given by character and knowledge. ... In the Confederate army there marched, 'shoulder to shoulder, men whose fathers owned their hundred negroes and their five thousand acres, and the sons of overseers or of poor yeomanry, who owned nothing except the crops they made each year. The Confederate soldier, when off duty, if intimacy in private life justified it, as it nearly always did. called his colonel "Henry," his captain "Jim" or "Jack." I have frequently heard men up North especially, talking about "Southern aristocracy." Except in the early days upon the tide water of Virginia and in the low country of South Carolina, nobody in the South ever assumed to be an aristocrat, for if he did the balance "jes' luffed," and even in those localities the assumption owed its birth to colonial conditions and died nut, or was dying out, with them. Talking once in the cloakroom at Washington to a gentleman from the North, who had said something about Southern aristocracy, I said: "It takes just two things to constitute an aristocrat down South: one is to be white and the other is to be decent." Being white costs nothing—a man is born that way. Being decent is not expensive—water is cheap, all that is necessarily added is to be clean in thought and speech, as well as in person. Thus, we can all be Southern aristocrats whenever we choose. Our people were always democratic; in fact, slavery had that effect in the South, which it has had in all countries where one race has held another in slavery. The line of demarcation between the slave and the free man was a line so broad and so marked that it virtually wiped out all other lines of demarcation in society. . . .

In enforcement of what I said to my Northern friend in the cloakroom. I added that in my own town I had seen a citizen paint the outside and paper the inside walls of a fellow-citizen and afterwards dined at that fellow-citizen's house, with the Governor of the State, and the bishop of the Episcopal Church, and that he dined there as the admitted equal of his host and of the guests, without condescension of any sort, simply because he was a good citizen and had been a good Confederate soldier. . . . This plain people, such as I have described them, being put in uniform, constituted what a generous-minded Northern officer has called "the incomparable infantry of Northern Virginia, with bare feet and tattered uniforms, but bright muskets." Well might he use the word "incomparable." What other soldiery in the history of the world, viewed solely in the cold, historical light of actual accomplishment, has been comparable to it? . . . The "plain people in uniform." the private soldiers of the Confederacy, were great, because of their democracy, race pride, and environment. But in addition to environment there are other things which determine the character of a man or of a people. Heredity is one, perhaps the chief. . . .

Their ideal was all that was highest and best and bravest and most chivalrous among the acquirements of the race to which they belonged—the culmination of duty and personal honor.

Men are made great soldiers by what they fight for as much as by what they are, and you old veterans, growing daily older in years and fewer in numbers, do not imagine that you and those who fought with you deserve all of the credit for the magnificent courage, the superb fortitude, whichyou displayed. You showed the "mettle of your pasture." You ought to have fought better than anybody else. You fought for more than anybody else ever did. You had more to fight for. You not only fought for the right of local self government, for the supremacy of the race, and for the very life of your civilization, but you went forth to fight for them at the bidding of a pure, home-keeping womanhood, the very flower and fruit of it all; the sweetest, gentlest, purest womanhood that the world has ever seen, and, too,
a womanhood which encouraged lo action and
pointed the finger of scorn at the laggard. You
fought for all these and, last but not least, for your
land. The land itself was and is a glorious thing. The
land we live in. The land we love! God sinkisses
the heights and throws shadows upon the valleys of
no sweeter land in all this world. It is a land to live
in, a land to die for. . . .

The Southern people present the unparalleled
spectacle to the world of being the only people who,
for four years, bore upon the points of their
bayonets a cause which apparently they lost, and,
coming forth from the struggle ruined and
despairing, came forth at least not discordant. They
alone of all men under such circumstances have
failed and refused to make a scapegoat of a single
great man in their military or civil employ, who led
them to the unsuccessful issue. They know,
whatever the world may think, that it was they
themselves who led themselves. They and their
children will brook no word of reproach of Lee, of
Jackson, of the Johnstons, of Hampton, of Stuart,
and their paladins, nor upon their military leaders,
nor of reproach or censure of "The Great
Mississippian," who, in his person, bore the
sufferings of us all, and who lived at the conclusion
for only one purpose—to draw up and give to the
world a dispassionate and true account of the cause
for which you fought and of the manner in which you
fought it—Jefferson Davis. . . .

Once upon the floor of the House of
Representatives, while paying but scant attention to
the running debate, there fell upon my ears from the
lips of a Northern Representative a contumacious
reference to the "poor white trash of the South."
The remembrance of all they had been, and all that
they were, was in my heart. I said as I would have
you all say: "We have poor men in the South, as
you have in Massachusetts, but the poor men are
not always, nor generally, 'trashy.' We have 'trashy'
men in the South, as you have in New England,
but some of the trashiest of them are the richest . . .

They are the only body of so-called "common
people," of whom it may, as a rule, be said that they
can neither be bought nor can they be scared." I
might have said that if the poor people of the white
race in the South are to be designated as "poor
white trash." the gentleman himself and all Northern
men might find cause for serious reflection. It there
was a class in the South to whom the application
might have been applied, it was the class from
which Abraham Lincoln sprang—the poorest of the
poor, and the thriftless poor, at that. Bone of our
bone and sinew of our sinew, he received from a
Southern ancestry on both sides—and especially
upon his mother's side—his patient courage, his
imperturbable perseverance, his loyalty to his
ideals, and, above all, the characteristic common
sense and sense of humor of the Southerner. I
might have told them that they got not only the head
of their civil government and the chief of their land
captains from our blood or territory, not only Lincoln
and Grant and the Rock of Chickamauga—George
B. Thomas—but that when they wanted a sea
captain worthy of the Vikings of the race they got
him in the person of Farragut, of Tennessee, raised
out near Knoxville, amidst and one of the class
which they contumptuously call "poor white trash."

This sentiment, which some people say is "rot," is
the heritage which came with disaster and with
many ruins. As a great orator has said: "A land
without ruins is a land without memories, a land
without memories is a land without history." . . .
Father Ryan has better expressed it, taking
as his text the words of the orator whom I have
quoted. .

"Yes! give me the land where the ruins are spread,
And the living tread light on the hearts of the dead;
Yes! give me a land that is blessed by the dust
And bright with the deeds of the downtrodden just.
Yes! give me the land where the battle's red blast
Has flashed to the future the fame of the past;
Yes! give me the land that hath legends and lays,
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That tell of the memory of long-vanished days;
Yes I give me a land that hath story and song,
Enshrining the strife of the right and the wrong;
Yes ! give me a land with a grave in each spot.
And the names in the graves that shall not be forgot;
Yes ! give me the land of the wreck and the tomb,
There is grandeur in graves—there is glory in gloom;
For out of the gloom future brightness is born.
And after the night comes the sunrise of morn;
And the graves of the dead with grass overgrown
May yet form the footstool of Liberty's throne.
And each single wreck in the war-path of might
Shall yet be a rock in the temple of right."

The Confederacy had its poets, as it had its land
captains and its sea captains—Timrod and Hayne
and Thompson—but he who came nearest touching
the very heart of the people was Father Ryan. . . .

Now, my friends, I have spent over an hour in trying
to "utter the thoughts that arise in me," and yet I
might have uttered them better in a much shorter
time, without wearying your patience, had I quoted
the words, rising to a climax, of one verse of that
great poem which every Southern child should learn
by heart, "The Sword of Robert E. Lee," written
by this same "Priest-Poet" of the Confederacy, from
whom I have read. Speaking of the sword of Lee,
the very flash light of the cause, as its wearer was
the very type of the men of the sixties, he says:

"Never hand
Waved sword from stain as free,
Nor purer sword led braver band.
Nor braver bled for a brighter land.
Nor brighter land had a cause so grand.
Nor cause a chief like Lee!"