

THE SOCIETY

OF

Kearny's First New Jersey Brigade.

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FIFTH ANNUAL REUNION HELD AT KEARNY'S

HOMESTEAD SEPT. 14, 1886.

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ORATION

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THE FIRST NEW JERSEY BRIGADE

By SAMUEL H. BALDWIN,

PRIVATE, CO. K, 2D REGT.

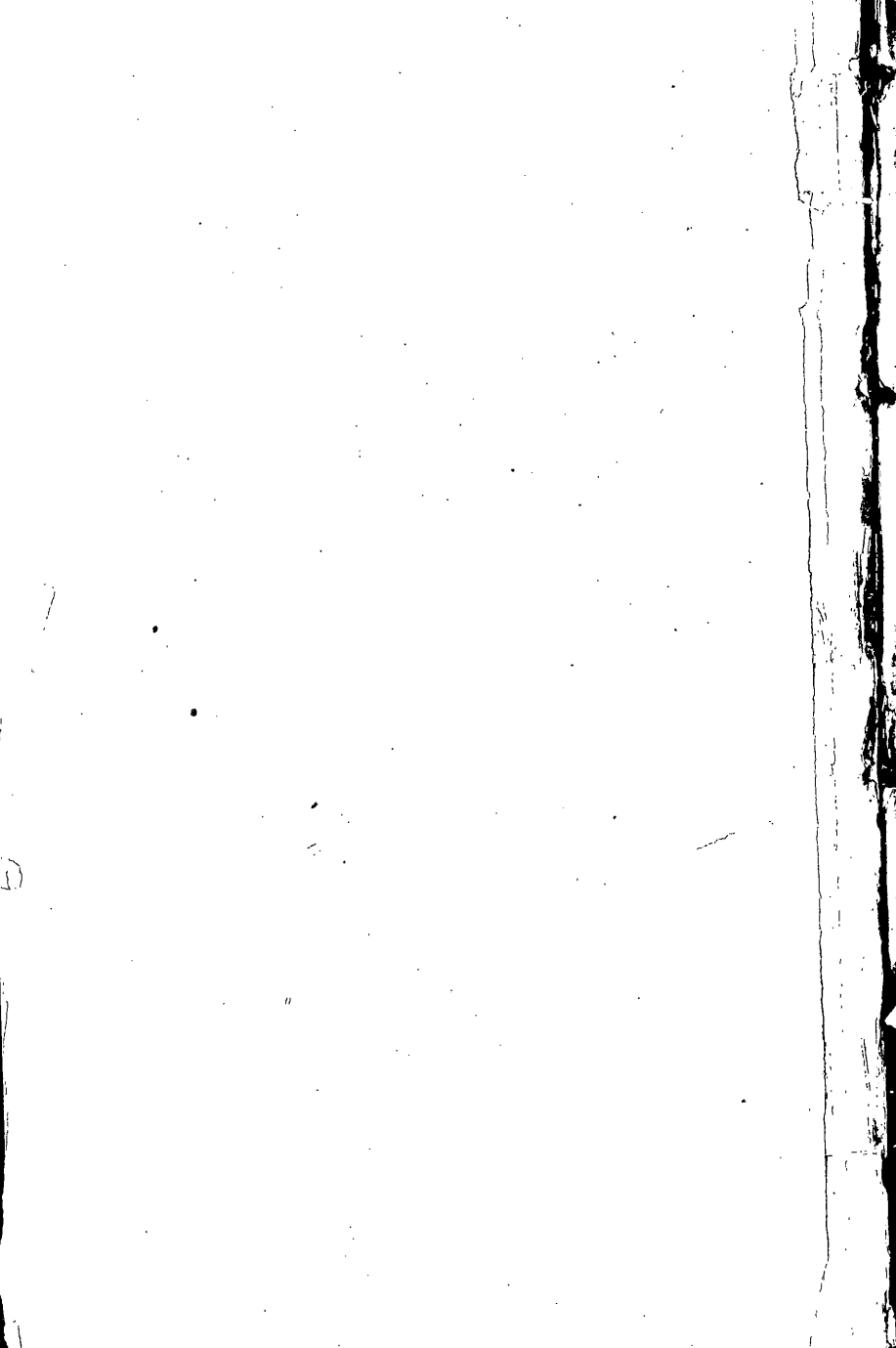
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## THE FIRST NEW JERSEY BRIGADE.

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It seemed on entering this paradise, inhaling the balm and fragrance, bathing in the sunshine of this perfect memorial day ; listening to the sweet notes of remembered music from our old, own band, exchanging greetings and experiences with comrades not seen in years, that nothing could touch one more, nothing of pleasure or of pathos be added to the occasion, itself a benediction to us all ; but the voice of a living Kearny, at our board, has evoked memories and emotions that carry us all away out of and beyond the hour and ourselves. I know not whether the call is for silence or response—I cannot answer the call. But at least, before entering upon the set formalities of prepared and appointed speech let me utter what beats in every heart, “ God bless our host.”\*

THE object of this Society, as declared by its constitution, shall be to “ cherish the memories and associations of the brigade ; to strengthen the ties of fraternal fellowship and sympathy formed by companionship in that brigade ; to perpetuate the name and fame of those who have fallen, either on the field of battle or in the line of duty with that brigade ; to collect and preserve the record of its great achievements, its numerous and well contested battles, its campaigns, marches, and skir-

\*Responsive to Kearny’s speech of welcome.

ishes." And in fulfillment thereof the successive executive committees are charged with the duty of selecting "an orator from the members of the society to deliver an address appropriate to the occasion, at each annual meeting." A comrade, that he may narrate with the off-hand freedom of one who has been and had a part of and in his story; out of the fulness of his heart, to those who know; designated orator, that his discourse may recognize, if it fail to express, that element of the heroic which is the soul of such organizations; that his high theme may inspire him, and he shall feel the dignity of one who speaks to the living for the dead.

#### KEARNY'S BRIGADE!

The title is an eulogy; membership is fame; survivorship a glory of recollection.

As one stands face to face, eye to eye, with those whose fortune it is to have been a part of that army, what reminiscences throng upon him, grave, gay, tender, sad, thrilling; what strange, eventful experiences; what changes wrought by the quarter of a century that has gone; what gaps in our ranks; what voices stilled and faces vanished; what sturdy friendships, whose warm hands have frozen in death's congealing touch.

Never seem words so vain, language so weak, speech so cold, rhetoric so hollow, or oratory such a sham, as when we attempt this, the impossible task that you have set.

That was a wise, as it was a touching, custom

of the French company that kept upon its roster the name of its chief hero, killed in a "forlorn hope," and when the roll was called and that name reached, one, himself bearing the Cross of Honor, stepped to the front, and with grave salute responded, "Died upon the field of honor!" That was recognition of the dead; it was ~~an~~ invocation to the living; it was eloquence linking mortal valor to deathless fame.

And here, "Each heart recalls a different name;" but every lip, of some comrade proven by the tremendous tests of war, a man, shapes itself to the utterance of the words: "Died on the field of honor!" recalls, aye, brings *them* back; the shades live, are with us; fancy peoples the vacant spaces with real forms, actual voices greet us.

Almost, I thought our Chieftain sat where his son bade us welcome to the ancestral home.

Who dare say that he and they whom we name "*the absent*" are not here?

But let us briefly turn to the records; take a leaf from history.

When, on the 12th day of April, 1861, the batteries in Charleston Harbor were turned upon Moultrie, it was, in the language of one of their leaders, "to fire the Southern heart." That inflammatory organ needed no special incentive. The shot but emphasized a purpose already formed, and carried out an ambitious scheme, fully matured in every detail, to form a new nation within the territorial limits of the United States of America;

a nation under the form of a republic, separate, in all respects distinctly rival, if not hostile.

Such a challenge and menace to national supremacy could not be overlooked ; an attempt was made to reinforce and provision the fort, unsuccessfully ; the siege continued until it was untenable, it surrendered, and its fall was followed by a call for volunteers.

It is one of the marvels of history that the attempted provisioning and reinforcement of an United States fort by the orders of two presidents as Commanders-in-Chief of the Army and Navy, was denounced as a breach of faith ; that Anderson's removal from Fort Moultrie to Fort Sumpter for better protection was likewise criticised in the Southern press, and the same journals and many at the North declared the call for volunteers usurpation and violence to the constitution.

Without argument or discussion of the causes that led to the war, your spokesman, with the example of your deeds, may declare the action of the South without justification and treasonable ; the action of President Lincoln strictly within the scope of sworn duty as Chief Magistrate, and reiterate, without underrating either the manhood or the valor so conspicuously shown by our foe on many a field, that they were absolutely wrong ; and that we triumphed because we were absolutely right.

A later and saving sense of the value and necessity of Union seems to have removed all danger of future internal wars.

There was presented the singular spectacle of

two great confederations, one already a nation, fighting for continued life ; the other for a place ; entering upon the contest for these great stakes, neither of them having an army ; the North, without munition, equipment or navy.

The South was the better prepared and her people more quickly adapted themselves to the pursuit of arms. They were on home soil. They were undoubtedly better led at the outset. Never were temporary advantages on the one, or great resources upon the other side more speedily and energetically utilized ; never was displayed that peculiarly American ability to rise to the occasion, as then.

North, troops fully equipped, leaped into the field. Organization, military, medical, commissariat, with adjunct citizen sanitary commissions never surpassed, if equalled, was but the work of weeks. The South was one vast camp, and every port and harbor swarmed with her workers. Within a twelve month an iron clad, under a confederate flag, had sunk two of the best frigates of the United States Navy, and she in turn was forced to flee before the newly invented Monitor, a craft, by comparison, utterly insignificant, but seemingly invulnerable.

And when, a few weeks later, McClellan took his march up the Peninsula, the whole Southern country was a network of fortifications ; every hillside bristled with abattis ; cannon surmounted every crest ; every road and defile was subject to enfilading fire ; at each step of advance earthworks

frowned from the heights, and across every level or depression rose like exhalations in a night.

The original revolutionary works at Yorktown had been raised, strengthened and augmented, until they were well nigh impregnable. As prodigies of labor, these defenses were marvelous. As examples of engineering skill, Todtleben did not surpass them at Sebastopol. It is safe to say that the genius of the practical on both sides was developed as never before or since in the world's history. In defence, armament, manual, tactics, evolution, the whole art of war, we and our enemy seemed to have stepped clear in advance of existing schools, systems and science.

Responsive to the call of the president, we whose remnant gathers here, went. We were not soldiers; aggregated, we were no army; we were but a patriotic mob, enthusiastic as youth and loyalty always are, but raw, not only unused but unprepared to receive military training. The dread significance of war had not come home to us. We knew we were sacrificing something, expected to meet privations, run risks, thought often of battles to be won, sometimes of wounds and death, never of defeat, certainly not of a long struggle. We laughed to scorn the boast that "One Southern could whip five Northern soldiers," but with equal egotism and ignorance did we misjudge our foe. We thought the greater weight of the North would tell at once; that before the resistless onset of our superior numbers all must go down. The "sixty days" of a great but too sanguine statesman,

the "on to Richmond" slogan of an equally sanguine press, these were in our thoughts. These, and conquest and glory and return. Well fed, uniformed, fairly drilled in steps and facings and wheels, marching under gorgeous banners of every hue and device, proudly stepping to splendid music, sped by the cheers of the people, touched by the tears and prayers and kindnesses and partings of friends, we went forth to do duty as we understood it.

A few weeks in camp, with drill, guardmount, dress parade, no actual hardship, and we pass in review at Washington. There we actually joined the army. Then we began, only began to see what the life of a soldier was. We still retained our knapsacks, containing everything from a cook-stove to a pack of cards, no man without a small stationery store; we wrote letters on the tombstones of departed Congressmen, and rejoiced that we were warriors, not politicians. We took newspapers, were extremely democratic in our views, commented freely upon and to our officers; we were a republic in uniform. Some of the kinks had been straightened out by the picket and scout duties that immediately preceded the first Bull Run. But the later troops that came to us on the field of actual conflict and were absorbed and assimilated by the veteran regiments, were better soldiers at the end of a week than we were on the very eve of that battle. And we were of the flower of the volunteers, the pets of camp visitors, the pride of our officers. We joined or followed that host under McDowell, magnificent in externals,

in the insignia and pride and circumstance of war, in the personnel of its rank and file, in the spirit that animated it, in its courage and devotion.

Another great host of distinguished men went as to a show, to see the overthrow and surrender of Beauregard's army, to march with us to Richmond and witness the collapse of the Confederacy.

The afternoon sun shone upon a scene of disaster, a confused retreat, a rout. Senators, statesmen, soldiers, teamsters, mingling in a living stream that for hours had frantically fled, no man pursuing; stripping itself as it went of baggage, arms, every impediment to speed. The sun went down on a nation disgraced, her capital in peril. But the Jersey troops marched forward. Green and raw they were, but neither blood or training led them in the line of retreat. The panic they could not stay they pushed through or skirted, and on for weary miles until they were alone at the front. They slept on Bull Run, and when morning came, marched back without the loss of a button. No panic seized them then, nor did any regiment of this brigade ever yield to anything like it.

As men, many times they have known their danger, the shadow of dread has hovered chill above them. Fear may have invaded their stout hearts, but no pallor or tremor or reluctance ever shamed their lineage or manhood.

After Bull Run, to the new camp of the Jersey troops, freshly brigaded, came one equipped for leadership by almost a life spent in camp and field;

spare, gaunt, bronzed by the sun of every clime, who had left an arm at the gate of Mexico, and risked limb and life in the French wars in Africa ; of medium height, not a marked figure on foot, yet everywhere bearing that subtle, peculiar, indefinable but palpable impress which nature puts on every man she means to call "great ;" imperious, with an eye that pierced like a sword thrust and took in everything ; of few words, stern, resolute, rigorous, exacting. The brigade was conscience at once that a master had come, speedily conscious that it was being made over, remodeled, braced, strengthened, welded together. Individuality yielded to cohesion, unity ; personal, to that pride in regiment, brigade, corps, which is the health of armies.

We gave up our ideas of a republic in arms. One by one our faults were corrected, excrescences lopped off. He was no respecter of rank, officers must conform as well and as thoroughly as privates. He was a terror to skulkers. He was merciless to shirks. He was familiar with every want of camp life, he knew all about provender and meat and beds, what the men ought to have, and insisted upon their rights as strenuously as upon their duties. Cleanliness of person and of quarters was enforced, shoes and arms must shine, clothes must be put on right, health must be guarded, even the cooking must satisfy. He had a horror of fried meat, like that of the Ottoman for the accursed pig. The sinewy epithets that scared negligent or dirty camp cooks, were not more

pointed than the picturesque vocabulary in which to their faces he set forth the shortcomings of commissaries or captains or colonels. He had no favorites save as they earned favor. It was an iron but a just, an inflexible but impartial rule. Under it soldierly carriage, habit and thought came. Men grew self respecting, as they were taught respect for their officers; they took pride in the distinctions of rank that had been hateful. The millinery was eliminated, style gave place to stride, the bulging knapsacks shrank until they looked like wallets of stockholders in Keely Motor. The companies became compact, the regiments solidified. The republic in uniform had vanished, a despotism had succeeded it with one purpose, one head, the vitality, force, impact of thousands at the volition of that one. When fall and winter had passed and spring came, our eyes had been opened, our faculties developed, we knew at last why we were there, and what lay before us. We had measured the strength of the Confederacy, the road to victory had lengthened before us, its conflicts had multiplied, we knew what hosts had massed and drilled to oppose us, that they would be overcome only by the most strenuous efforts, that all the resources of our country would be taxed for seasons, if not for years to come. We construed anew the "Three years unless sooner discharged," and sorrowfully postponed the date of return three years hence.

We settled minds and hearts and purposes and ambitions to our present avocation, as a business.

We had become soldiers, and in the consciousness of new-born powers and efficiency, we were ready; we had come to know our leader, had confidence in his prowess, we trusted his skill, with the faith and fatalism that seem part of a soldier's life, we believed in his destiny. He rode before us an heroic figure; dashing along our front on a charger shod with flame he appeared to our eyes the incarnation of war. The invisible genius of victory had put on mortal shape, and he bestrode the steed and wore the form of Philip Kearny. Kearny believed in and was proud of his Jersey Brigade, they were worthy of him. And, so mutually exulting, he in his command, they in their chief, he and they went away up the peninsula in that great army that was to win no victories, whose slain from Williamsburg to Harrison's Landing were to outnumber the returning, whose wounded and disabled were more than the slain, whose missing and unaccounted for more than both. An army that experienced every form of privation, that looked upon death in every phase; an army that with malison upon pick and spade drudged in unsoldierly rivalry with slaves, dug trenches and threw up breastworks and then fought the masters of the slaves. An army that slowly and painfully forced its way, every step contested, to a point whence could be seen the spires of Richmond, and then laid itself down in the swamps of the Chicahominy; burned with the fever, and froze with the ague, and rotted with the pestilence of that awful region, poisoned itself with water

thick with the decay of men and horses, took its rations and made its rounds in the presence of another army of unburied dead men, slept in the dew and woke out of spectre-haunted dreams to sweep from worn blankets the worms that whitened the ground where it had lain ; that suffered all these things, and an hundred fold more never to be told, but without a murmur ; that did its duty uncomplainingly, obeyed its leaders, gloried in its martyrdom, was loyal to its cause ; unflinchingly, nay, gayly marched to certain defeat as to assured victory. An army that held fast through all to its faith in ultimate success, that from the seven days' contest, in which the hours of light were consumed in desperate battle and the nights in painful retreat, emerged at Harrison's Landing, worn, exhausted, breathless, and sank to rest, if rest that might be called, which was disturbed by the processions, the music and volleys and the returning music of continuous burial ; that thence in two divisions, one weakly staggering across to York River, the other a hospital fleet floating down the James, landing with skeleton regiments of skeleton men at Alexandria, moved undaunted to victory at Antietam.

The story of that peninsula campaign, its hopes and promises, its toils and hardships, its battles and its sorrows worse than battles, its valor, its devotion that equalled its valor, its retreats and disappointments, its slain, its lost and its loss, this is indeed the pathetic chapter of the war. It is the story of most stupendous blundering, or the

most stupendous misfortune that ever befell men. And through it all Kearny and his brigade bore themselves as became them and him. They had parted at Yorktown, where he had been assigned to another and higher command, but neither lost sight of the other, and when in May on the disastrous field of Williamsburg, Kearny without orders rushed his men through miles of swamp, and at the critical moment and spot turned the tide and drove McGruder back, his success was theirs, and they applauded and rejoiced for him, and wished that they might have been with him.

They were with him a month later, for an hour, to his rescue, at his call. At Charles City Crossroads, this brigade having passed on, Kearny found himself out-fought; fresh troops against his wearied, driven back at this point, hemmed in there, flanked, all but surrounded; and he was holding the post of honor, the left wing, the extreme rear, the cover of the retreat. The enemy knew it and pushed him yet harder. Sore beset, prestige, fame, the thick clustering laurels gallantly, if quickly won, honor itself in peril! A word to an aid, and then a grim but confident smile, tells his men that help will come. And they stubbornly hold their place. The aid performs his mission, delivers his message, not an order; but "General Kearny desires the help of his old brigade." As one man they rise, erect, ready, elate; knapsacks, blankets, the last prized treasures and necessaries flung away. They form, they follow the messenger with steps that

hurry his swift horse, they break and hew their way to their beleaguered chief and his imperiled squadron. There is a brief but desperate struggle, the fast tightening coils are loosed, and together Kearny with his later and his first troops cut their way through two armies back to our line.

It was their last service to him. The "boys" had paid their debt. They had preserved his honor. They had woven Charles City Court-House in the chaplet of their mutual fame. And their General acknowledged it.\*

A new bond united them, a bond that held, strengthened and brightened, until a sorrowing nation sat with them in the gloom of Chantilly. Even the enemy paid tribute to our fallen hero, and sent his body back with ceremonial appropriate to the majesty of death. Well may we cling to that name for our association, an immortal synonym for honor, a pledge of patriotism, a passport to the respect of all who love our flag, or have faith in our country.

Our first instructor, best beloved of our leaders, his name embalmed in memory, is printed upon the books, lives in the legends, and is graven upon the heart of the First Brigade.

I shall not follow its later course. Why play historian to those who made history? I shall pronounce no eulogy. You have made me your voice for this occasion. Why boast among ourselves? It is needless; it were hopeless if there

\*At Harrison's Landing he formally thanked the regiments successively. The responsive cheers were heard across the James, and messengers were posted in hot haste to inform Lee that Federal reinforcements had come.

were need, for the world knows our story by heart. The day we celebrate has been described to our honor a thousand times. A million school children can tell over the list, three score and over of our battles, quicker than we. The record is made up; it is blazoned upon the walls of time.

Bull Run, Charles City, Malvern, Chantilly, Crampton's Pass, Fredericksburg, the Wilderness, Spotsylvania, New Market, Appomattox — not Time himself can rob us.

But they are past. They are texts for themes. They are memories. Thank God that they are no more, that the years between them and us have borne healing upon their wings. The beneficent influences of nature and of time have wrought together almost a generation. The declivities and hillsides are wooded once more, the gashed sides and wounded bosom of earth scarce show the scars where ditches seamed, and old defences rose in swelling ridges; nature has spread over the dead of Chickahominy, the dead everywhere, that green mantle with which she covers so many of her solemn secrets. Where the wave of battle broke in a spray of blood upon Gettysburg, billows of grain are chased by summer breezes across the sunlit seas of harvest. "The Northern pine and the Southern palm" are rooted in common soil. Old foes are kinsmen. "The mystic cords of memory, stretching from many a patriot grave," have been "touched by the better angels of our nature," and there is harmony, sympathy, brotherhood.

Charleston in her hour of desolation finds New

York nearer than Richmond;\* and in the advance to her aid the legions of Hill and Kershaw are out-marched by Kearny's old Brigade.†

And we? So busy Time's effacing fingers that the past, which seems just now so vivid, might well be a dream! Its events so far back, its scenes and forms and faces so misty and distant, its voices so muffled and indistinct.

We, the First Brigade?

They went out 4,000 strong, we are but an handful. They were fleet, light hearted, rejoicing in their strength; we have passed life's meridian, and bend more and more to the increasing weight of years. Theirs was life's morning, theirs its enchanted air, theirs the purple and golden splendors with which hopeful youth decks its gay romance; ours, the ashen and sober skies, the dun and russet hues. Under the feet of the youngest of us rustle the leaves of life's autumn, as we tread the pathway that leads along life's western slope. For some the winter scenes are set, round the hearth from which the boys were called five-and-twenty years ago, cluster their grand-children, looking timidly at treasured relic, drum or gun or sword, which will one day be priceless, and with their childish prayers learn that patriotism is piety. And yet we are *boys*; no other name holds so much or is so fit. The immortal youth of the republic we served seems to have entered into our veins. Our hearts are young. Across

\*Richmond Common Council refused, New York sent aid.

†Brigade at business meeting voted \$100 toward rebuilding Confederate Soldiers Home destroyed by earthquake at Charleston.

the board friendly voices ring out their challenge  
gaily as of old ; the story, joke and song go round ;  
stories of those days and of these, songs that link  
one to the other.

Autumn has its glories and its fruits, and frosty  
winter lacks not its sunshine and its cheer.

Then let us meet as eve draws nigh,  
While life matures and mellows,  
Till Nature whisper with a sigh,  
Good night, good night, good night old fellows.