

David Wexley's story

May-September, 2017

No sir, I am not he. David Jennings is not present or familiar to me. Perhaps he will come by later, Captain.

This is a strange place not familiar to me either. This is the year 1892, is it not?

Hi Folks,

I'm David Wexley from Aspen, Colorado.

(play *The Minstrel Boy*)

A lot of us in both armies played that song during the war. It is *The Minstrel Boy* and was written by Thomas Moore, an Irish poet, singer and songwriter from Dublin in the early 1800's about the 1798 Irish rebellion

I am Irish. So first I want to tell you about my people - the ancestors. Generations ago in 1798 one of them said:

*I am come of the seed of the people.
The people that sorrow; that have no treasure but hope,
no riches laid up for the memory of an ancient glory.*

*My mother bore me in bondage; in bondage my mother was born.
I am of the blood of serfs.*

*The children with whom I have played,
The men and women with whom I have eaten,
Have had masters over them, have been under the lash of masters,
And, though gentle, have served as churls.*

*And now I speak being full of vision.
I speak to my people and I speak in my peoples named to the masters of my people.
I say to my people that they are holy, that they are august despite their chains,
That they are greater than those that hold them, and stronger and purer.*

*And I say to my peoples' masters, beware; beware of the thing that is coming;
Beware of the risen people who shall take what ye would not give.*

*Did ye think to conquer the people or that law is stronger than life and then mens' desire
to be free?*

*We will try it out with you, ye that have harried and held
Ye that have bullied and bribed; tyrants; hypocrites; liars.*

That is what it means to be Irish. That is the nature of me and my people who came to America in waves as Ulster-Scots and as potato famine Irish over the centuries; emigrant warrior poets - proud men - who rose from the bottom to become politicians, policemen, writers, poets, musical artists, generals and presidents and workers who built this country.

I'm here tonight to tell you my story. But before I do that, I want to tell you that there will be a writer in the 21st century, your time, who will publish my story.

His name is David Claire Jennings, no relation to me. He will have been something called an Electronics Engineer and when he retired he began writing essays about our country – America. Then he went back to college – Columbia College of Missouri – as an old man to study American History and Literature. He will write three books about me he will call *After Bondage and War*, *Hanna's Promise: A Story of Grace and Hope* and *The American: A Man's Life*. Then he will bundle the three books together in a 19th century American trilogy he will call *Slaves, Saints and Soldiers*. I was the soldier in his story.

The short version of my life is pretty simple. I followed the fates placed before me in my time. I was born in 1832 in Baltimore, fought at Antietam (the rebels called Sharpsburg) in Maryland in '62 and The Battle of The Wilderness in Virginia in '64. There I was shot and taken to Richmond and then Andersonville. After the war I wandered the South and spent time with my new friend Joe who was just freed from a plantation. We visited Shiloh together in '65 and it broke my heart.

We settled in Ohio, but after some 20 years of troubled spirit, I struck out for the West. I wanted another chance for redemption and forgiveness and a happy life. It would be my last chance and it worked out as well as I could have hoped for. Finally I was killed and brought back on the train to Cincinnati where my best friend Joe buried me on his land. But that is another story.

Would you like to hear about my experiences that day at Antietam? Or The Battle of the Wilderness? Or Shiloh? It is beginning to get easier to talk about it.

You know men have said I look like Bobby Lee. I don't agree with that. I think I look more like Abraham Lincoln, only more handsome than he, maybe more like General Grant.

Gods and Generals ladies and gentlemen; it was about Gods and Generals. We are so fervently and profoundly a Christian country in my time. Both sides believed incongruously that God was on their side. You will know that when you look back at the history of that time. And you will know that we did not act accordingly.

I learned so many things, many of them not so glorious, from my time there. I was just a foot soldier but I heard stories from the men and junior officers.

Would you like to hear what I found out about Presidents Abe Lincoln and Jeff Davis or the Generals - Ulysses Grant and Bobby Lee or Jeb Stuart, Uncle Billy Sherman, that

killer Little Phil Sheridan, or Ambrose Burnside, George McClellan, George Meade or Nathan Bedford Forrest, Thomas (Stonewall) Jackson, or James (Old Pete) Longstreet?

There were almost a countless number of generals on both sides. Many were West Pointers who were graduated about the same time and fought together in the Mexican War, the Indian conflicts and “Bleeding Kansas”, starting as Brevet Lieutenants. Of course Tom Jackson came from VMI where he was a professor of mathematics. He was a bit touched in the head.

Others were non-professional military men who were politicians and raised a regiment from their own region. They all became Brigadier Generals on the spot.

The generals that were formally trained as officers for the most part hated the politicians and newspapers. Why the newspapers even called Grant a drunk and Sherman a lunatic. Maybe that is why they got along so well. They understood each other and knew who their common enemy was. Sherman particularly hated the Secretary of War since Edwin Stanton was always on his ass trying to tell him what to do at every turn. But Grant got along well with Lincoln and could sidestep Stanton for the most part.

Like George Washington, Grant served his country and believed in what he was doing. While he disliked politics, he served as President after the war. Others, like McClellan, aspired to political office. And like I said, some of the generals came from politics in the first place.

Most of the men had a sweetheart or a wife and family back home and were reluctant to go. Not me. All I had was my father back in Baltimore. My family was my comrades in arms and my best friends Geoff and Pat. Both of them were killed or died before I got out of Andersonville.

Since both sides of my war fervently believed God was on their side, that has been one of the greatest causes of my troubled feelings all the years since then – God, the Generals, the Politicians, the truth about glory and honor. For me, it was more about mud, rain, misery, starvation and depravity.

I’m here to tell ya. Well all right, you are interested in the battles, so I will tell you about my war experience at Antietam (the rebels called it Sharpsburg) in Maryland. And I will tell you about our overland campaign in Virginia coming from the north and east in the Battle of the Wilderness as we tried to take Jeff Davis’ capital in Richmond. The ending will surprise you and I did not even see it. My future biographer will have to tell you that astounding account. I’ll tell you of Shiloh that I did not participate in, but visited just after the conclusion of the war.

So let me refer to my biographer, David Claire Jennings who wrote in your time during the 21st century about me and my events and the people I met and heard about in the 19th century. I’ll read you his excerpts. Please do not judge us by your perspective from your time, but try to feel for what it was like for us back then.

References from *Slaves, Saints and Soldiers*-

Antietam- pg. 82

Battle of the Wilderness- pg. 88

Andersonville- pg. 97

Shiloh- pg. 145

Abraham Lincoln- pgs. 81, 159, 168, 171, 212, 394, 400, 432

Jefferson Davis- pg. 435

Ulysses Grant- pg. 81

William T. Sherman- pgs. 147, 148

Robert E. Lee- pgs. 75, 76, 138, 306, 378

J.E.B. Stuart- pg. 85

Phil Sheridan- pg. 137

Ambrose Burnside- pg. 82

George MacClellan- pg. 83

George Meade- 78, 88

Nathan Bedford Forrest- pg. 273

Thomas (Stonewall) Jackson- pg. 378

James (Old Pete) Longstreet- pg. 504

There is no need to pray for the forgiveness of the sins of those that came before. He has forgiven them. There is no need to pray for their protection or safety. They have been gathered together with all those who love them, enfolded in His loving arms. We need only to remember them and honor them with our love and gratitude for their just duty and sacrifice.

So that we may never forget him or the many others who have served and have given their last full measure of devotion, who lived on to the end of the time given them, or died in the moment of service, who must be honored and remembered to the end of our time, and by all those who follow us, here are words better than I could ever express them from the old book:

*All these were honoured in their generations
And were the glory of their times
There be of them that have left a name behind them
That their praises might be reported
And some there be which have no memorial
Who are perished as though they had never been
And are become as though they had never been born
And their children after them
But these were merciful men
Whose riches hath not been forgotten
With their seed shall continually remain
A good inheritance and their children are within the covenant
Their seed standeth fast and their children for their sakes
Their seed shall remain for ever
And their glory shall not be blotted out
Their bodies are buried in peace
But their name liveth for evermore*

Ecclesiasticus, chapter 44, excerpt
