



Jefferson Finis Davis (1808-1889)

A TRIBUTE TO
JEFFERSON
DAVIS

The Character and Career
of the Confederate
President

by

Louisa B. Poppenheim

South Carolina United Daughters
of the Confederacy

with appendices

THE CONFEDERATE
REPRINT COMPANY



WWW.CONFEDERATEREPRINT.COM

A Tribute to Jefferson Davis
by Louisa B. Poppenheim

Originally published in 1896
by The Confederate Veteran
Nashville, Tennessee

Reprint Edition © 2017
The Confederate Reprint Company
www.confederatereprint.com
Post Office Box 2027
Toccoa, Georgia 30577

ISBN-13: 978-1945848117
ISBN-10: 1945848111

PREFACE



The following is an able and entertaining paper written and read by an old soldier's daughter, Miss Louisa B. Poppenheim, one of the Maids of Honor of the South Carolina Division, United Confederate Veterans, at the Richmond, Va., Reunion, 1896, before the Daughters of the Confederacy of Charleston, S. C., and published by request of that organization.



Jefferson Davis at an early age.

CHAPTER ONE



His Early Years

The human soul always finds language a weak mode of expressing great love, high admiration and deep veneration, and it naturally shrinks from attempting to put into any form whatever its thoughts on its noblest ideals. Still, to think or speak of a great soul at all is a means of elevating even ordinary men, and “great men taken up in any way are profitable company.” “We cannot look, however imperfectly, upon a great man without gaining something. He is the living light fountain which it is good and pleasant to be near.” In the skies of the Southern hemisphere there is a constellation, sending its dazzling beams out into the silent night, which is known as

the Southern Cross. We of the South have our constellation of heroes, the light of whose great names shines out over the whole world and makes men of all nations better and purer when they contemplate such heroic souls dominated by a devotion to duty which could have been developed only in a Christian civilization.

To-day we will try to get nearer to one of these great men, and in an imperfect, though loving way, attempt to do honor to a man whom we should look upon, not as an unsuccessful leader of a "wrong" cause, but as a stainless, incomparable patriot, whose conduct was such that the people whom he represented can face the whole world with pride in the name, as a man of blameless integrity and of spotless character.

Jefferson Davis, a statesman and patriot, conspicuous in American history, was born in Christian County, Kentucky, June 3, 1808, of a Georgian father who had served as a Revolutionary Captain of Infantry at the siege of Savannah. At the age of sixteen, through the influence of Mr. Calhoun, he entered West Point and graduated in 1828.

Entering active service with the rank of Lieutenant of Infantry, he served on the

Northwestern frontier until 1833, when he was transferred to a regiment of dragoons.

In 1835 he married the daughter of Col. Zachary Taylor, from her aunt's house, near Louisville, Kentucky. After his marriage he moved to Warren County, Mississippi, where he occupied himself in cotton planting until 1846.

In the Mexican War

When hostilities with Mexico commenced a Regiment of Mississippi volunteers was organized at Vicksburg and Mr. Davis was elected its Colonel.

On accepting this command he requested from the General Government one thousand percussion rifles for his regiment. These arms, as yet, had not been introduced into the United States Army, and Gen. Scott is said to have preferred the old flint lock, and even advised that six of Davis' companies be supplied with them. This Col. Davis refused to agree to. The percussion rifles were given his troops, and thus the well-known "Mississippi Rifles" was introduced into the United States' service.

While waiting for transportation for

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his troops up the Rio Grande, Col. Davis wrote a manual of tactics suitable for his new rifle, and even taught his officers personally the use of this manual. It was the usual joke of the regiment to call out at these lessons: "There goes the Colonel with the awkward squad."

Davis and his Mississippians took an active part in the memorable siege of Monterey, and he was appointed by Gen. Taylor as one of the three commissioners to arrange for its capitulation.

The United States Government being dissatisfied with the terms of this capitulation, most of the troops then in Mexico were sent to Gen. Scott at Vera Cruz, leaving Taylor in a hostile country with only one battery of light artillery, a squadron of dragoons and Davis' Regiment of Mississippians.

It was with this handful of men under Bragg, Geo. H. Thomas and Davis that Taylor won the celebrated battle of Buena Vista and forced Santa Anna to retire from the field.

The news of this brilliant victory was received with the greatest enthusiasm in the United States, and Taylor's political success was secured by this military glory.

In this battle Davis, though severely

wounded, remained in the saddle all day and as a result of this enthusiasm was sent home on crutches. His riflemen stood nobly by their intrepid Colonel all through this trying fight, and it was here that they executed that celebrated "V" movement which was afterwards imitated at the battle of Inkerman by Sir Colin Campbell and his troops.

Before Col. Davis returned to Mississippi, President Polk appointed him Brigadier General of volunteers of Mississippi, an honor which he at once declined, as he maintained that volunteers were militia, and as such their officers must be appointed by the State. Here he showed, as in all his subsequent acts, his consistent adherence to the principle of State's sovereignty.