

*THE UNION LEAGUE DURING THE WAR.*¹

FROUDE says, in his sketch of Cæsar, "Revolutionary periods are painted in history in colors so dark that the reader wonders how, amidst such scenes, peaceful human beings could continue to exist."

It, as its advocates declare, the war waged for secession, a quarter of a century ago, was only wanting in the one important conclusive fact of final success to make it a revolution, it certainly assumed gigantic proportions; and so long as the issue was in doubt, and there was a period which was "painted in history in dark colors," the line between rebellion and revolution seemed to be shadowy and indistinct. For, philosophically speaking, rebellion is the act overt which leads to and results in revolution, as an accomplished fact: this statement being, of course, in the abstract, and without reference to cause, justifiable or otherwise. Let us thank God, gentlemen, we are to treat of rebellion, and not revolution. And that this "dark period" shall go down to posterity in history as a rebellion, and not a revolution, is the result of *two* important factors, which were closely allied to one another,—namely, first, the glorious triumph of the armies and navies of the United States in an unjustifiable war waged against the just and righteous supremacy of the national government,—which was, and is, and always *must* remain, supreme, over one and *only* one union or confederation of States, and under *one* and only one flag as its national emblem and patriotic inspiration. And, secondly, the loyal, hearty, and unqualified support extended and given to the military and naval arms of the government by Congress, by the press, by the pulpit, by organizations in sympathy with them and with the cause which they championed, and by loyal citizens every where, in their respective spheres and several channels, all working for a common end, the suppression of the Rebellion, and the re-establishment by force of arms of the power of the national government, which had been defied and assailed.

To these combined factors I may add, although it is unnecessary to mention it, the lofty and sublime faith and confidence of the great statesman, Abraham Lincoln, whose patriotic courage never faltered, and who, as the executive power in supreme command, was under the weight of the heaviest responsibility ever placed upon any American citizen in the history of our country.

In such "dark periods" it is singular that there should be "peace-

¹ An address before the United Service Club of Philadelphia.

ful citizens," or citizens who could be inactive; and stranger still that there should be citizens, apparently peaceful and inactive, who, in secret, were plotting and planning to overturn a government which spread over them its benign protection and security.

There was no need to create, maintain, or uphold public sentiment in favor of the Southern States in rebellion. With such isolated instances or exceptions, which only prove the rule, they were a unit in favor of their cause of secession and rebellion. It was only in the Northern or loyal States that the danger lay of a *divided* sentiment; and this, to me, has always been the great inexplicable mystery of that period of the war for the preservation of the Union, that such a divided opinion could exist and be possible.

It was not a political question, to be met and discussed by adroit debates, as, for instance, the propriety of adjusting the duties on imports on an equitable basis, or other similar issues; and that it was not so is amply proven in the distinguished part borne in that critical period by men who, however they might have differed before or since the war, were willing to lay aside all political animosities and unite on the common ground of devotion to the imperiled national unity, the insulted national flag, and the defied and ignored national supremacy. Shoulder to shoulder marched to the front Democrats and Republicans; the former with their inherited policy of constitutional law, which they saw endangered by the refusal of a minority to recognize a regularly and lawfully elected executive, and the latter with a righteous indignation springing from the same cause,—in that Abraham Lincoln, the Republican candidate, representing their Republican principles, which were dear to them, after being chosen by the providence of Almighty God, and the will of the American people, President of the United States, should have his office unrecognized, and a rival President chosen by a sectional minority in his stead. Vast as was the domain of the United States, there was *no room* in it for two executives: one or the other must go to the wall and be dethroned. You, gentlemen, and your illustrious compeers, rendered a decision which was complete and final, and the will of the majority must and shall be respected, by the ballot, if it may be, but by other means if the ballot fails. The ordinary machinery of the body politic failing to work out a peaceful solution, the soldiers and sailors of the republic solved the problem, and the solution goes upon record. Long will they be remembered as magnificent specimens of soldiers who had no political platform but duty, loyalty, and honor.

It has always been found necessary for citizens to band themselves together to aid the government. It is merely carrying on the organization of the army in another form in civil life. The increased power and strength which spring from concentration, organization, and union were demonstrated in the various associations which sprang into exist-

ence during the war, whose object was to aid the constituted authorities of the State and general government and to secure the perpetuity of the Union. It was fitting, also, that in Pennsylvania, which up to May, 1862, had furnished more troops than any other State, and in Philadelphia, which at one time was the national capital, there should be created an organization which was destined to become a most powerful support to the Union side, and to foster and increase a sentiment of loyalty which, next to the military arm in a national crisis, is the most potent factor.

Commercial relations had to be broken, bonds of friendship severed, family ties torn apart, and men were compelled to take a stand and to proclaim their allegiance. In the face of an attempted social ostracism, the patriotic position was taken that the first duty of all good citizens was to sustain the government, and, as Judge Hare recommended, "to withdraw from all social relations with disloyal men, and set up a society of our own." This suggestion gave rise to the formation of the Union Club, which was a small gathering of loyal gentlemen, called together, as the notes of invitation stated, "for a patriotic purpose," and the first meeting of which took place at the residence of Mr. Benjamin Gerhard, No. 226 South Fourth Street, on November 15, 1862, at the dark period of the great struggle, when the result was in doubt, and the enemies of the Union were jubilant and boastful.

One week later, articles of association were adopted, at the house of Mr. George H. Boker, 1720 Walnut Street, by twenty-four gentlemen, and the Union Club, which was at first limited to fifty members, was organized, the condition of membership being "unqualified loyalty to the government of the United States and unwavering support of its measures for the suppression of the Rebellion."

The following were the members of the club :

Morton McMichael,	Frederick Fraley,	Theo. Frothingham,
J. I. C. Hare,	J. Gillingham Fell,	Chas. J. Peterson,
Charles Gibbons,	Alexander Brown,	George Whitney,
Benjamin Gerhard,	Wm. Henry Ashhurst,	Joseph Harrison, Jr.,
George H. Boker,	Dr. W. C. Swann,	Wm. D. Lewis,
A. E. Borie,	Daniel Dougherty,	Joshua B. Lippincott,
John M. Read,	George H. Trott,	John H. Towne,
Singleton A. Mercer,	Fairman Rogers,	Ward B. Haseltine,
E. Spencer Miller,	Robert B. Cabeen,	S. M. Felton,
Horace Binney, Jr.,	John B. Myers,	S. V. Merrick,
Stephen Colwell,	Wm. M. Tilghman,	Gen. Geo. Cadwalader,
James W. Paul,	A. J. Antelo,	William Sellers,
John Ashhurst,	C. H. Clark,	Jos. B. Townsend,
Henry C. Carey,	Ferdinand J. Dreer,	B. H. Moore,
Wm. Henry Rawle,	James L. Claghorn,	James Milliken,
Samuel J. Reeves,	Edwin M. Lewis,	Abraham Barker,
Alfred D. Jessup,	Henry M. Watts,	John P. Verree,
Abraham J. Lewis,	Thos. A. Biddle,	Dr. John F. Meigs,
Chas. L. Borie,	Daniel Smith, Jr.,	John Russell Young.

Among the most ardent and enthusiastic of these patriotic men were the following-named gentlemen, who at that time were or had been (if I am correct) Democrats: Geo. H. Boker, Daniel Dougherty, J. Gillingham Fell, and Antony J. Antelo. There were also such well-known Republicans as Morton McMichael, Horace Binney, Jr., Daniel Smith, Jr., William D. Lewis, Judge J. I. Clark Hare, and others. You will thus observe that the object of the Union Club was patriotic rather than political, and loyal rather than partisan. And at that time it seems to me that the Democrats who came out so nobly and boldly, and cut the party chain which was dragging others into the ranks of the enemy, were deserving of the highest praise. There is a fine old ring of patriotism about the title of *War Democrat* which will cling to those brave and gallant gentlemen so long as memories of the war shall endure, and the history of the great struggle in our nation for self-preservation will never be completely written, read, or sung without giving full credit and unstinted praise to those who not only rose above "Party," but scorned an alliance at the expense of honor and devotion to flag and country in a time when their services were most needed, and therefore doubly precious.

The success of the Union Club proved that a greater sphere of usefulness was required, and a much larger and more complete organization needed. Then it was, by an expansion and enlargement, with the fifty honored names as a nucleus, that, on December 27, 1862, at the house of Dr. John F. Meigs, 1208 Walnut Street, there sprang into existence that powerful factor of liberty and law, which gave to the government and the army such tremendous support and encouragement, that representing, as it did, the loyal sentiment and backing which are so essential in all struggles, and leading the way, as it did, in support of the war for the Union, giving freely in time, in men, and in means, whenever called on, and never wavering when skies were darkest and the issues seemed most in doubt, cheering and urging on, wild with joy when news of victory came, saddened but not disheartened when tidings of disasters flashed across the wires,—the right arm of the great President, in Philadelphia,—the foremost organization in the country at that time, which expressed most openly, most freely, most unreservedly, its devotion to the cause of an unbroken national unity, none other than—and none its equal—The Union League of Philadelphia.

The name having been selected, as proposed by Mr. Charles Gibbons, the new club found its first home in the well-known *Kuhn* mansion, 1118 Chestnut Street, under the following officers: William M. Meredith, President; George H. Boker, Secretary; and James L. Claghorn, Treasurer; and the members were invited to inaugurate the event on Washington's birthday, 1863. From that time the membership steadily increased and the League House became the rendezvous for loyal men, who found in association and organization the potent

means of fostering and strengthening a public sentiment which was of untold importance in upholding the hands of the government in its mighty struggle for an unbroken nationality. This powerful influence was enhanced by the issue of almost countless copies of printed matter by the Publication Committee of the club, composed of men untiring in energy, and devoted to the cause, who thus spread broadcast sentiments of loyalty and stirring words of encouragement. It is difficult to overestimate the influence for good thus produced.

These publications were polemic and argumentative, and were conclusive also to all loyal minds, as well as productive of healthy results in the way of a tonic to the wavering. Among the most able was a paper written by Dr. Charles J. Stillé on "How a free people conduct a long war," and strong documents were prepared by such men as Francis Lieber, Governor Curtin, Salmon P. Chase, Horace Binney, Oliver Wendell Holmes, James Russell Lowell, George H. Boker, Goodwin Smith, Rev. Dr. W. H. Bellows, and Carl Schurz, and rapidly printed in English and German, to be distributed in every direction. Over two million copies were issued during the critical periods of the war, which demonstrates the fidelity and extent of the labors of this faithful body of men which composed the Committee of Publication. And to no one man, in this connection, is more credit due than to Lindley Smyth, who for five years was its most efficient chairman, and whose masterly administration contributed so largely to its signal success. Among his associates were such able men as Henry C. Lea, William Henry Rawle, Samuel C. Perkins, Joseph B. Townsend, W. M. Tilghman, and others, who efficiently seconded his efforts with unremitting support and co-operation.

If the two most prominent figures in the American Revolution were Washington, representing the military power which, after great privations and heroic struggles, was successful in war, and Franklin, the embodiment of patriotism in civil life, as well as the successful diplomatist abroad, who finally secured us our French alliance, so in our late war for the Union the two factors which contributed to its victorious termination were first, *always first*, the armies and navies of the United States, bringing to a triumphant conclusion the great conflict for supremacy; and, secondly, the loyal support behind them rendered by such organizations as the Union League of Philadelphia, which was the first and foremost to strengthen, encourage, and uphold the gallant soldiers and sailors of the republic; and with two such forces working in harmony the issue, although delayed, could not be long in doubt, for when time revealed the end of the struggle, it also demonstrated the irresistible strength of the alliance.

By authority of the Union League, and largely with funds raised therein, the following regiments were recruited under the auspices of the Committee on Enlistments, appointed June 27, 1863.

Under the governor's call for three months' service a Union League Brigade was raised, composed of the following :

First Regiment, Lieutenant-Colonel Zell ; Second Regiment, Colonel McLean ; and Third Regiment, Colonel Gray ; also five companies of cavalry.

In a short time afterwards the Fourth Regiment (One Hundred and Eighty-third Pennsylvania Volunteers) was mustered in for three years. This was followed in July, 1864, by the Fifth Regiment (One Hundred and Ninety-sixth Pennsylvania), Colonel Neff ; and later by the Sixth Regiment (One Hundred and Ninety-eighth Pennsylvania), Colonel Sickel. Again, in December, 1864, the Seventh Regiment (Two Hundred and Thirteenth Pennsylvania), Colonel Gorgas ; Eighth Regiment (Two Hundred and Fourteenth Pennsylvania), Colonel McKibben ; and Ninth Regiment (Two Hundred and Fifteenth Pennsylvania), Colonel Wister, were formed. These regiments were known as Union League Regiments, and performed faithful and meritorious service, and in many instances with conspicuous gallantry, in the Army of the Potomac.

Where all did so well it is perhaps unfair to discriminate and allude to any as deserving special mention. But circumstances may have given to some peculiar opportunities over others, and it is with no desire to be unjust to any that I may perhaps refer to the One Hundred and Eighty-third Regiment (Fourth Union League), Colonel George P. McLean, which bore a most honorable part in the severe fighting in the Wilderness, and continued in the field, with its depleted ranks constantly refilled, until the surrender at Appomattox. The One Hundred and Ninety-eighth Regiment (Sixth Union League), Colonel Horatio G. Sickel, can also with propriety be spoken of in terms of warm praise for heroic bravery in one of the last battles of the war (battle of Lewis Farm, March, 1865), in which its colonel was wounded and Majors Glenn and MacEuen killed.

I have no doubt the other regiments might also be commended for gallantry, efficiency, and discipline, and during their various terms of service, and in their respective tours of duty, they contributed their share to the great campaign in which Pennsylvania soldiers were so prominent, both in numbers and distinction.

In all, about ten thousand men were added to the army through the efforts of the Union League and its capable committees, and during a period when such additions were of value and importance.

And this action also contributed to the fame of Pennsylvania in performing her part in furnishing troops in such numbers as to merit so much praise and commendation. The State of Meade and Hancock may well be proud of her proportion of the army, and Gettysburg will ever attest the valor of her sons. And whether true or not, as a political maxim, that "As Pennsylvania, so goes the Union,"—

and the general election of 1884 seemed to break somewhat the force of the expression,—in war time it was doubly true and forcible, and to this power and influence the Union League largely contributed, and can look back with complacent pride upon what was accomplished in the days now happily only a memory,—but a memory in which there is nothing but satisfaction and honor.

In addition to this evidence of patriotism on the part of the Union League as an organization, its members volunteered individually, at various times, for active service in the field, in large numbers and in different commands. And I feel quite sure that during the critical periods of 1862 and 1863, when the Confederate army invaded the North, many of the younger members of the Union League could not be found at the club-house, but were performing military duty in the field.

The closest relations thus existed between the Union League and the army, which, beginning during the war, have continued from that time until the present, and in no place were the soldier and sailor more welcome, more valued and appreciated, or more thoroughly *believed* in, than in the famous club.

By official action the Union League at various times voted medals to distinguished officers and others for conspicuous prominence and services during the war,—among them were Grant, Meade, Hancock, Rosecrans, Halleck, Banks, Burnside, Gillmore, McDowell, Butler, Hooker, Sigel, Couch, Dana, and Whipple; also Curtin and Crosmen, Farragut, Porter, and Worden; also Josiah Quincy, Laboulaye, Gasparin, John Bright, Richard Cobden, and Cairns.

Most of the distinguished men of the service have been formally entertained at the club-house, and I take great pleasure in referring to the fact that the club has honored itself especially in extending to the Loyal Legion a most cordial invitation to hold its meetings in the League House, which is an invitation extended to no other body, and which is the best evidence of the high esteem in which that military and patriotic organization is held by our members. Thus we are bound up together by the memories and incidents of the past, and by the friendships and associations of the present.

And when the great conflict was over, and although at a tremendous cost of lives freely given up as willing sacrifices, of lives prolonged only from wounds and illness into weary years of pain and suffering, and of many darkened homes where loved ones were missed and mourned, when the one unalterable principle of an unbroken union of States was maintained supreme and paramount, national supremacy triumphantly established, and the old colors, though torn and rent by shot and shell, and stained with blood, waved over a united country from the St. Lawrence to the Gulf, and from ocean to ocean, the men of the Union League of Philadelphia welcomed back to their homes

their friends and allies,—ay, their *comrades*, if you will consent to the term,—the soldiers and sailors who made such a welcome and reunion possible, and who deserved all the joyous greeting they received.

And so together we will go down into history,—the Loyal Legion and the Grand Army of the Republic on the one hand, and the Union League and its kindred organizations on the other,—and together will we rejoice that when, in the dark hours of the past, our services were required to perform a sacred duty, we were *tried in the balance and not found wanting*; and when the story is told in the future, of the peril and danger of the republic during the trying scenes of long ago, we will be remembered *together* as among those who adhered to principle, were true to their allegiance, and in their respective spheres served their country.

EDWIN N. BENSON,
President of the Union League.