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Army Series.]

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TO THE COLOR.

BY

JOHN F. W. WARE.

BOSTON:
AMERICAN UNITARIAN ASSOCIATION.
1863.



TO THE COLOR.

THE soldier's pride is his country's flag. There is a magnetic, mysterious power in that to touch and rouse him which nothing else has. It nerves him to the loftiest deeds, and his own death is better than its disgrace.

What is a flag? It is a piece of cloth or silk painted or woven with some device. In itself it is only that,—a painted cloth. But, soldiers, you never think of that. You would spurn him who should stand before you and say that of your *flag*, and ridicule you for your devotion to it.

And it is something more than a piece of cloth. The moment that it wears the device, the emblem, chosen as your country's symbol, it is forever another thing. Wherever the eye sees it, it blesses it, and whenever the need shall be, the man will die for it.

It has always been so with all people. One of the first things in national existence has been the selection of some symbol which should stand as the type of the country, which should concentrate the

affection and devotion of the people, and be recognized and respected as the nation itself. The Roman had the eagle, the Mussulman the crescent, France the *fleur-de-lis*, England the red cross, America the stars and stripes. Wherever these are seen, they are recognized as the nation. They are not only the sign of its presence, but the token of its power. They are saluted as the crowned head would be, and to insult them is to insult the dignity, the supremacy, of the ruler or people themselves. Rend or trample or pull down a national flag, and it sets every nerve to quivering, every heart and brain on fire, and rouses every man to resent an injury that is more than personal. You surely have not forgotten how it was when the flag on Fort Sumter fell!

The flag is the centre about which your line of battle rallies. Upon it your battalions form. When it advances, and "*To the color!*" is beat, you know that in order of company you are to take your place at its side. In the battle it is as your guiding star. Where it goes, you go. While it waves aloft, it cheers and animates you; when it wavers, you know the hour for prompt and desperate energy is come. When it falls, then men die, and count their own lives nothing if they may save it. There are no deeds of high daring and self-sacrifice like those around an imperilled flag. The rally cry for it is the shout that makes a giant and a hero of each,

and where it has not become wholly impossible, it restores the desperate fortunes of the day. It is said that Sir Charles Napier, in his war in the Scinde, found himself in the presence of a horde of native robbers who had been unsubdued for six hundred years. "They dwelt in a crater-like valley, surrounded by mountains, through which there were but two or three narrow entrances, and up which there was no access but by goat-paths, so precipitous that brave men grew dizzy and could not proceed." It was necessary to dislodge them, but the service was too hazardous, and volunteers were called for. One hundred men sprang to the front. They were of a native Bengal regiment which had lately been disgraced for mutiny, and their colors taken from them. Soldiers, you know what such disgrace must be! The commander knew how to touch their hearts. "Soldiers of the Sixty-fourth! your colors are on the top of yonder hill!" What were precipices and dangers and deaths to them as they swept toward the crest and won there the coveted prize? — At that terrible assault on Wagner, where a raw black regiment was put at the front, and received its baptism of fire and of glory, the regimental flag as it fell from the hands of its bearer was caught by a comrade, and by him carried through all that fearful night. The next day, as he was brought in, bleeding, to the hospital, the flag still grasped in his feeble hand, every soldier white or black, lifted

himself from his bed, and cheer upon cheer saluted him. "Boys," said he, "I have only done my duty, but the *dear old flag never touched the ground!*" I do not ask the color of that man. He was a hero. His deed, his words, are among the immortal things of the war. And what a power there must be in a flag, when it wakes such sentiment, such devotion, in one of a despised, inferior race, who may, possibly, have been beneath its folds — *a slave!*

But, soldiers, glorious as all this devotion to the flag, ennobling as it is, there is another symbol that ought to be dearer to us, and call out even more of the spirit of reverence and self-sacrifice. The flag symbolizes your country, and all that is dear and hopeful in it. But the *cross* symbolizes the Christian faith, and it ought to inspire with a deeper love and hope. You owe it your first allegiance. You were called to be soldiers of it, before you were called to defend the flag. Your service to the one ends with the present peril. You return to your homes, to your old duties. You are soldiers, defenders of the flag, only for the occasion. Your service to the other is never done. It is not to-day's work, or to-morrow's work, but life's work. It is a warfare from which there is no release but death. Just as much as the Apostle said he was, is each one of you, "set for the defence of the Gospel." There is something you can do and you ought to do for the cross, for the flag of the Chris

tian faith. It ought to fill you with an ardent love, it ought to inflame you with unfailing zeal, its interests, its success, its defence, ought to be every man's first thought and purpose. For we owe everything to the cross. If the flag of our country condenses and expresses all that our country is to us, has done for us, so the cross condenses and expresses all that the life, the words, the love of Jesus have done for us; and they have done everything. They changed the face, the power of the old; under them everything is become new.

Are you a loyal soldier of the cross? Do you love it and proclaim your love by the purity of your life? Do you defend it when bad men attack it with their lips or scorn it by their deeds? Do you rally about it in its dangers? Are you ready to die for it rather than see it trampled on and desecrated? Have you the spirit of Paul, who gloried in it and counted it his great joy and honor to die for it? Have you the love of martyrs who, in dungeons, at stakes, upon scaffolds, under persecutions and obloquy, have suffered for it? Would you to-day offer yourself to a forlorn hope for its rescue with the same calm, determined resolve you would mount "the imminent deadly breach" for the honor of your flag? If you knew it were in deadly peril, would you give your all for it? I have seen the enthusiasm with which you have received your colors as you left home, and went out, consecrated, to battle.

I have felt your resolve within myself, as the hallowed ensign fluttered in the breeze, and lifted up all eyes and nerved all hearts. Should some one advance to-day and lift the cross above your serried ranks, and intrust it to your keeping, would it receive such homage, rouse such resolve? I know what music does in camp and field. I have marked men when some patriotic strain fell on their weariness or depression. The faltering ranks have been re-strung to power and valor as the "*Star-Spangled Banner*," or "*Rally round the Flag, Boys!*" has caught their ear, and the music has given them the victory. Were some one to chant to you to-day sweet songs about the cross, of him who died upon it, of the Father he revealed, and the new life he laid before us, should you become all glowing with new desire, and spring into the great conflict with sin and self, so armed, so shielded, so resolved, that the crown of the victor would be yours? These are questions to test yourself by, to gauge your loyalty with; and if it be that you love your flag, your country, better than the cross, your Saviour, — if your loyalty to it stand before your loyalty to God, — no matter how true and faithful your service to the one, have you not failed, are you not recreant in that first duty and loyalty which is owed the other?

Rally round the cross, boys! It is in peril. This nominal allegiance is more harmful to it than open

treachery. Decent men as much as bad men injure it. Every wrong life, every wrong act, every low passion, every evil habit, every selfishness, is an injury to it. You can do something to help it. Show amid the temptations of the camp that you own allegiance to the principles of the Gospel, resist all evil, do every duty, neglect not prayer, feel the presence of, submit yourselves to, the law of God; mark this period of your life, so grand in its opportunity for all good, by the solemnity and entireness of your devotion to the cross, the symbol, the standard of faith; become a good soldier of the cross, let men see that nothing can lure you from the love and service of it, and it will not only be lifted up, you will not only be safe, but others will be made better, and there will be joy in heaven. That fidelity you give your country, give your God. Before the flag plant the cross, and in that conquer.

"In the cross of Christ I glory,
Towering o'er the wrecks of time;
All the light of sacred story
Gathers round its head sublime.

"Bane and blessing, pain and pleasure,
By the cross are sanctified;
Peace is there that knows no measure,
Joys that through all time abide."

"HARK! 'tis a martial sound!
To arms! ye saints, to arms!
Your foes are gathering round,
And peace has lost its charms:
Prepare the helmet, sword, and shield;
The trumpet calls you to the field!

"No common foes appear
To dare you to the fight,
But such as own no fear,
And glory in their might:
The powers of darkness are at hand;
Resist, or bow to their command!

"An arm of flesh must fail
In such a strife as this;
He only can prevail
Whose arm immortal is:
'Tis Heaven itself the strength must yield,
And weapons fit for such a field.

"And Heaven supplies them too,
The Lord, who never faints,
Is greater than the foe,
And He is with his saints:
Thus armed, they venture to the fight;
Thus armed, they put their foes to flight.

'And when the conflict's past,
On yonder peaceful shore
They shall repose at last,
And see their foes no more:
The fruits of victory enjoy,
And nevermore their arms employ."