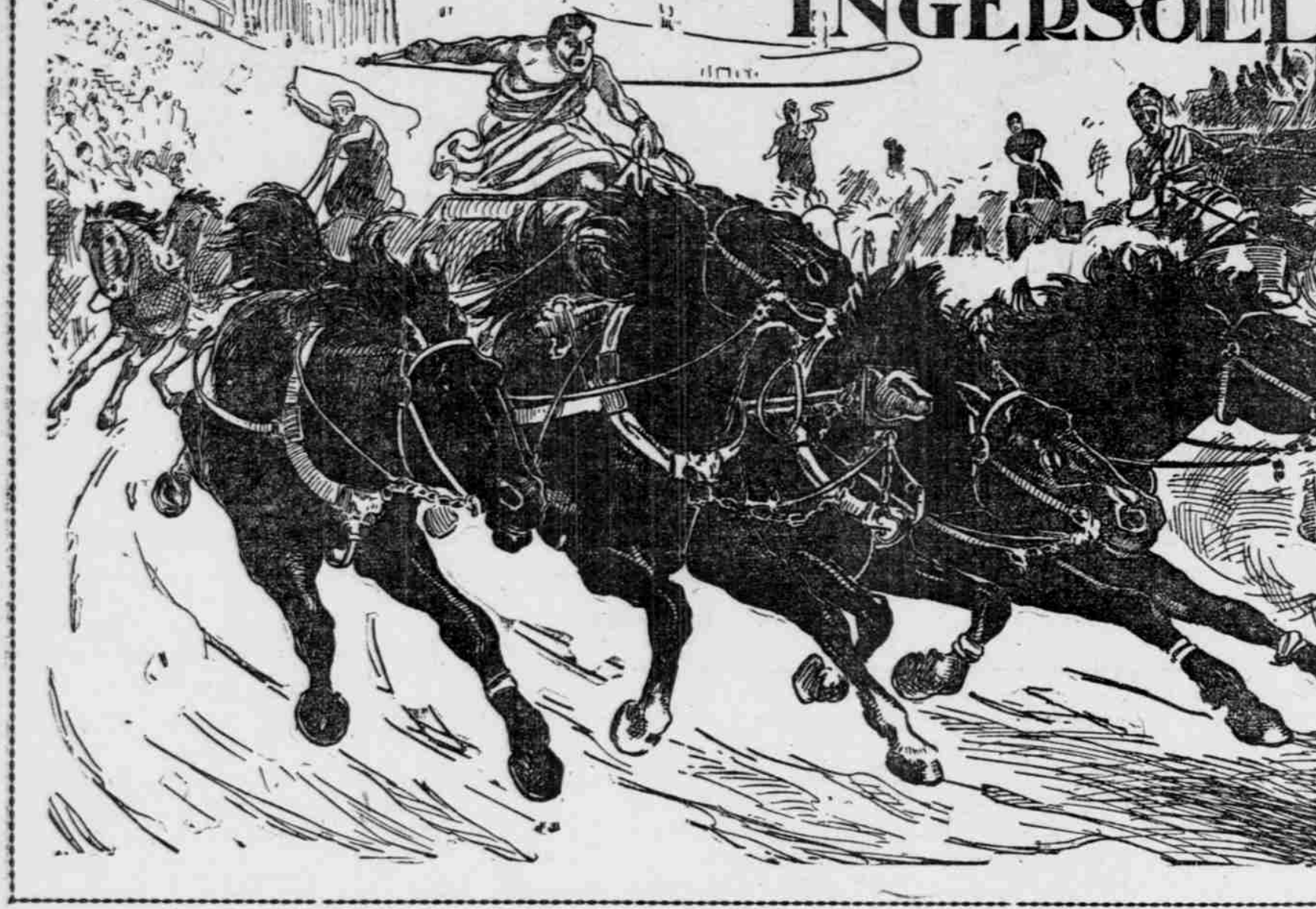


"Ben Hur" - General Lew Wallace's Reply to Ingersoll



- BEN HUR AND MESSALA -

Forty years ago a mortal combat waged between North and South. On the field rode a distinguished-looking man whose broad shoulders bore a Major-General's state. His flowing hair, long mustache and imperial were raven black, his eye piercing, his imposing presence inspiring, his voice commanding—an ideal beau sabreur.

Peace at last. The dashing soldier lays aside his sword. He becomes Governor of a territory, a Minister to a foreign power, and, finally, a writer, and an author of books. Notable as had been his achievements in the civil conflict, still more so was to be his works in later life in the field of literary endeavors, till who can say that the words put into the mouth of Richelieu by Bulwer Lytton do not apply to General Lew Wallace, the author of "Ben Hur," which, in book form, has been read in many tongues by hundreds of thousands of people, and, as a drama, has been seen in 331 weeks, or 105 performances, by more than a million and a half.

Our broad land, beside the Bible, the most revered of all books, rests a copy of "Ben Hur," the beautifully written creation of fiction, which for forty years has held a place in the highest esteem of all lovers of pure and inspiring literature.

The influence that lead one to achievements are always of interest to a reader, and how General Wallace came to write "Ben Hur" is especially so to every one who has read his story or who has seen it as translated to the stage. The first chapters of the novel, the book that refers to the meeting of the Wise Men, Balshazzar, Casper and Melchior, and the appearance to them of "the Star of Bethlehem," was written and published before General Wallace had conceived the idea of writing "Ben Hur."

He was journeying from Chicago to Indianapolis many years ago. In passing the door of a stateroom in his sleeper in the early morning he heard a familiar voice. He rapped and partly entered in response to a cheery "Come in!" Colonel Robert G. Ingersoll was the occupant. "I will come in," said General Wallace, "if I may choose the subject of conversation."

"You certainly may," replied Colonel Ingersoll, undoubtedly thinking that the "mistake of Moses" and "creeds" were to be barred from the conversation.

General Wallace seated himself opposite Colonel Ingersoll. Looking him squarely in the eye, he asked:

"Without an instant of hesitation Colonel Ingersoll replied:

"I don't know, do you?"

"Is there a future life?" asked the General.

Again the reply, "I don't know; do you?"

"Was Christ divine?"

Again, "I don't know; do you?"

"The floor is yours, Colonel," remarked General Wallace, setting himself back in his seat in anticipation of the brilliant discourse he was to listen to and for which he had laid a foundation.

It was many years before General Wallace spoke of this conversation and not fully until after the production of "Ben Hur" as a drama at the Broadway Theater, New York City, four years ago. He then said that he was amazed at his own ignorance of the subject he had led Colonel Ingersoll to discuss. When he parted from the Colonel it was with the determination to know more of it. It was this study of Christianity that led him to believe in the divinity of Christ and inspired him indirectly to write "Ben Hur."

Strange indeed that a conversation with the greatest agnostic of the nineteenth century should inspire him to write a book that has proved the foundation for a drama of which a writer has said in reference to the book:

"Nothing in all literature could so profoundly bring home to one a realization of Christ's living presence on earth as these two wonderfully realistic scenes, presented with such vivid respect for the greatest Name in all history."

And stranger still, considering the prejudice against the theater that has always existed among church people, that believers should at last accept from the stage one of the most powerful Christian lessons that can possibly be conveyed—a representation of Christ's time on earth so realistically presented that His merely suggested presence inspires one with awe.

Yet this has been brought about by the soldier's story, by the pen in the hand of "the truly great," translated to the stage with most marked reverence for its religious side—so emphasized as to call forth the unqualified commendation of clergymen of every denomination, Catholic, Protestant and Hebrew.

Many years ago General Wallace was besought for the right to present "Ben Hur" as a drama. Lawrence Barrett was particularly anxious to produce the story, but General Wallace declined to entertain any proposition. No one who approached him could explain a practical way in which the great sea fight and the rescue of Arris by Ben Hur, the chariot race and the miracle scene could be presented as incidents in a dramatic story, or how the religious atmosphere of the tale could be maintained in its integrity without offense to Christian people. For 30 years he turned a deaf ear to all applicants, until nearly six years ago, Messrs. Klaw & Erlinger began negotiations with him.

They approached him in a practical way and could demonstrate how the sea fight and chariot race could be presented as realistic, or so cleverly mimicking reality as to satisfy realists.

"But what about the Nazarene?" the story of "Ben Hur" cannot be told in a play without the miracle scene," remarked General Wallace.

His main objection to the dramatization of his work has always centered in this incident. He would never consent to the story being dramatized in a form that involved the appearance of the Christ as a personality. The difficulties attending the presentation of a realistic sea fight and chariot race he had always made

secondary to a reverent interpretation of the touching incident of the healing of the lepers on Mount Olivet, where he believed the tale of "Ben Hur" for dramatic purpose should end.

It was the reply to the General's inquiry: "We have a plan which will be perfectly effective and yet treat the subject with all possible reverence and respect. We would present the miracle incident, but instead of the Nazarene appearing as a personality, we would simply suggest his presence by a shaft of light."

General Wallace sat for some moments in deep study. Finally he raised his head. "Gentlemen," he said, "I think you have described plans which will lead to a perfect presentation of 'Ben Hur' on the stage. For years I have refused to consider such propositions, because those who made them could not demonstrate to me how my own conception of what this story should be as a play could be realized. You have done so completely and I will accept your proposition."

The contract signed that day has re-

sulted in the greatest artistic and financial success the world has ever known—in an exhibition of most exalted dramatic and scenic art that has held the stage in 21 cities and which attracts great crowds wherever presented.

William Young, a scholar of great attainments and a dramatic writer of force and dignity, made the dramatic version of "Ben Hur" which is presented in six acts and 15 scenes. The scenes representing the Wise Men in the desert and the appearance to them of the Star of Bethlehem; the roof-terrace of the palace of Herod in Jerusalem where the quarrel between Ben Hur and Messala and the incident of the falling tile changes the fortune of the hero and his mother and sister, and brings them under the crushing hand of Gratus, the new Roman procurator; the rowers' deck on the galley of Arris, the Roman tribune; the rescue of Arris by Ben Hur; the house of Simonides in Antioch; the temple of Apollo in the Grove of Daphnet; the fountain of Castalia; the dowar of the Shiek Ilderim in the orchard of Palms, the lake in the

great arena at Antioch; the chariot race; the victory of Ben Hur; the Palace of Herod in Jerusalem; the tombs of the lepers in the Vale of Hinnom and Mount Olivet.

It will be observed that this scenario retains every vital incident of the story to the crucifixion, which, of course, could have no place in any dramatic performance except the Passion Play, performed abroad every ten years solely as a religious rite. It omits only, with this exception, the fight between Ben Hur and the companion of Thord, the Northman in the palace in Antioch, where the victor in the chariot race is hurled after the combat by the crippled Messala, who plots his death.

What a contrast between the dramatic version of "Ben Hur" and some others that have been based on "popular novels" during the past seven years. Both from a literary and dramatic standpoint, without reference to the merit and interest in the story on which it is founded, it possesses a true ring that is not even echoed in the slightest degree by the carpenter-shop creations which have been inflicted on the public as "dramatizations" of late.



- BEN HUR AND HIS MOTHER AND SISTER -

RECOLLECTIONS OF THOMAS FITCH No. X. Birth of the Republican Party and Personality of Fremont

History consists of grouped biographies. It is possible so to state facts as to construct them into an edifice of falsehood. The camera may be so adjusted as to distort its object. The writer of biography should, in the performance of his task, be untroubled by love or hatred, fear or favor. I have known the persons and to some small extent participated in the events. I shall attempt to review in these articles, not as a narrator I hope to be able to divest myself of all personal and partisan likes and dislikes, for time wears out prejudices, tranquillizes passions and induces men to respect the integrity of motives of those from whom they have radically differed. If Wendell Phillips were alive today, he would incur no risk of personal assault in addressing an audience in New Orleans. If Jefferson Davis were still in the flesh he would be accorded a patient hearing in Boston. Such was not the case in 1850. The men of this generation can scarcely realize that less than half a century ago slavery was not only powerful but popular in the North as well as the South, while those who proclaimed themselves in favor of its abolition incurred the risk of social, political and business ostracism in the North, and assault and expulsion in the South. Few postmasters south of Mason and Dixon's line would have delivered a copy of the New York Tribune to a subscriber, and few subscribers in that section would have ventured to receive a copy of it except in a sealed envelope. The Northern man who journeyed southward tucked his lips when he crossed the Potomac or the Ohio. In the streets of Southern cities slaves marched to the auction block with the clank of their manacles untroubled, but the voice of freedom was hushed in silence, her dramas were unrepresented, and her songs unsung. A despotism more drastic than that of Russia ruled in 15 states. The vast amount of capital invested in slave property was apparently safely entrenched behind barriers of judge-made law, bastions of commercial power, and batteries of social prestige. In all of the Southern and in many of the Northern States the great forces in society were enlisted in the interests of the slaveholders. The conservative influence of the churches—always exercised in favor of existing authority—was allied to the prejudices of the slaves against the negro. The power of the banks—millions of whose money was loaned upon the security of human chattels—was linked to the ambition of politicians, whose nomination and election depended upon the favor of the slaveholders.

For the existence of these conditions imperial history will not hold the people of the South responsible. Slavery in

some form existed somewhere in the world up to the very day of the present century. The fortunes of battle, the accident of birth or the color of the epidermis was each in its time a potent factor in determining which man was a slave and which was a freeman. The Hebrew with the awl mark of bondage in his ear was of the same race as his master. The iron-collared thrall of Coleridge was of pure Saxon blood, and the white Goth was the slave of the dusk-browed Roman. The early emigrants to the new world, whether they landed at Plymouth or on the shores of Chesapeake Bay, were craftsmen or traders, or soldiers, or farm proprietors, or tenants, or men of gentle blood, who came to America in pursuit of freedom or fortune, and among them was not included any great number of unskilled laborers. The need of hewers of wood and drawers of water was supplied by white convicts, and by kidnapped Africans, and in the early part of the eighteenth century the lash was applied to the back of labor as freely and as frequently in Connecticut as in Carolina.

Cotton culture and not conscience swept slavery-out of New England the Middle States into the country south of the Potomac, and it remained there long after England and France had banished it from their West Indian colonies, and even after the half barbaric Russian had emancipated every serf from the White Sea to the Black Sea, from the Baltic to the Pacific.

At the close of the Revolutionary War the existence of slavery was defended in the South on economic rather than on moral grounds. Slave-holding abolitionists were not uncommon, and Washington and Jefferson left on record as strong denunciations of slavery as were ever penned by Garrison. But as the area and the profits of cotton culture and the facilities of inter-communication increased, so did the necessity for the protection of slave property, and slavery became more aggressive by that very necessity of its nature which demanded expansion as a condition precedent of continued existence. Where it ceased to grow, it began to die. It refused to believe that the Southern States were in the wrong, and it precluded the fact that the moral sense of the North, no longer denuded by the opiate of profit, was intolerant of further alliance with it. It refused to understand that agitation for its preservation, restriction and ultimate abolition could no more be suppressed than could the waves be stopped from dashing when the storm king rides the seas, or the earth be stopped from quivering when internal fires throb in her furnaces. Unmindful or disregarding of the fact that the dormant and drowsy hostility of the North to slavery was sleeping but not dead, the slave holders rudely awakened it by

repealing the Missouri compromise, which they themselves had enacted 34 years before.

For that which followed let no man unduly and unjustly censure the Southern people. They were and are brave, sacrificing, generous, hospitable, chivalric people of the best type of American manhood and womanhood, and that is the best type of manhood and womanhood in the world. From causes beyond their control and almost beyond their comprehension the fibers in the woven shroud of their life of their body politic, and they were as helpless slaves to the institution of slavery as the black people were slaves to them. Slavery could not, as the advocates of compensated emancipation proposed, be bought out of existence—it had to be fought out.

When the Missouri compromise line was destroyed the freemen of the North awoke with the spring and roar of lions aroused from slumber. Out of the farms and factories, out of the forests and mines, out of the shops and counting-houses they came. They formed the grandest organization of freemen that the world has ever known, and they named it the Republican party. For it and its beneficent purposes the tongue of the orator has been kindled with fire from the altar. For it the strain of the poet has swelled to the sweetness of song. For it the sword of the soldier has flashed along the line of victorious armies, and whatever the future may have in store for it, its glorious past will live as long as the English tongue.

The Republican party may not always have been infallible in its selection of measures, and it may not always have been wise in its choice of representatives, but its purposes have ever been high and patriotic. It was offered at its inception by capitalists whose names now stand high upon the roll call of Sumner and Wilson, and Fessenden and John F. Hale in New England, Seward in New York, Winter Davis, and Cassius M. Clay and the Republicans in the Border States; Chase, and Wade, and Giddings, and Trumbull, and Chandler, and Doollittle in the Northwest, Baker and Tracy, and the Shafers on the Pacific. "There were giants in the land in those days," intellectual carriages who upheld their age. Small men with large bank accounts had not then excluded large men with small bank accounts from the high places of state. The Pretorian guards of politics had not then inaugurated the practice of shamelessly selling Senatorial togs to metallic accounts from the high places of state. The Pretorian guards of politics had not then inaugurated the practice of shamelessly selling Senatorial togs to metallic accounts from the high places of state. The Pretorian guards of politics had not then inaugurated the practice of shamelessly selling Senatorial togs to metallic accounts from the high places of state.

for caucus manipulation and a fortune which he was willing to expend to gratify his absurd ambition, would never have aspired to a Senatorial seat. No Kentucky distiller would have attempted to supersede John C. Breckenridge. No Massachusetts cotton spinner could have bought Charles Sumner's seat from under him, and a syndicate of state legislators organized to sell the votes of its members on all bills in a job lot for a round sum for the session would have expected to leave the state immediately after adjournment.

The history of the organization of the Republican party is a history of patriotism and of unselfish devotion to principle. It has often been aptly described as a party of high ideals. The passage of the Kansas-Nebraska bill made no longer available the honeyed glue of compromise which Henry Clay had so often linked repellent atoms in inharmonious alliance, and in 1850, for the first time in our history, the forces of freedom and slavery were engaged for battle. Candidates for Democratic nomination for the Presidency were numerous, but the chief contest was between Douglas and Buchanan. Douglas was comparatively young, his fidelity to slavery had not been tested, the slaveholders needed the Keystone state, and they selected the morally cartilaginous and mentally unsatisfied Pennsylvanian as an affable availability.

Out of the ultimate West came Fremont to lead the forces of freedom. Pathfinder he was, seeking untrodden ways in politics as in the exploration of mountain and desert. With the light of freedom in his loyal eyes, and the bronze of Western suns in the face that never feared a foe or shirked a contest, he led the Republican party in a battle which, though lost, yet proved the Bunker's Hill of a new revolution. The contest of 1856 was the midnight sun of an emancipated North, for its setting for below. Can it be the preface of a victory that was to bring the illumination of freedom to a Nation.

Thirty-four years after his nomination for President, at the ripe age of 77, after a life of more than ordinary vicissitudes, John C. Fremont journeyed on. It was my privilege to know him intimately in his later years. He combined the tireless energy and the adventurous spirit of the frontiersman, and the close application and analytical mind of the scholar, with the suave and cultured courtesy of the diplomat. Whether hunting grizzlies, fighting Apaches, exploring secrets of the mountains, or presiding with exquisite grace at social gatherings, he was equally at home, and was ever the same brave, unassuming, generous, manly, loyal gentleman. His dauntless yet unobtrusive courage, his comprehensive grasp of ideas, his painstaking attention to details, his strict performance of all

duties, his generous surrender to others when only his own interests were at stake, his tenacious loyalty to principle when the public interest was involved, his sacrificing adherence to purposes and plans when the interests of his friends were concerned, his exquisite manners and his sweetness of disposition especially endeared him to all who were admitted to the inner circle of his friendship, and these were not many, for he was naturally reserved and retiring.

The paths which the pioneer hewed through the passes and over the summits of the mountains are now resonant with the push of iron feet, and about the angles of his campfires titles have grown yet not for many generations will his name and his fame be forgotten in the land he served and loved so well.

Jessie Benton Fremont was not only an inheritor of the genius of her father, but she was the inspiring spirit of her husband's undertakings. They were not merely husband and wife—they were close companions, coworkers, friends, and the admiration of each for the other seemed fresh and untroubled to the last.

From some letters of Mrs. Fremont to Mrs. Fitch, select a few extracts which in some small degree illustrate the home life and thought of this remarkable woman.

Prescott, March 13, 1879.—I would give two cents not to be such a coward about horses, for this is weather in which driving is indispensable. I used to think no one (meaning myself) could be unhappy who can command the sea, plenty of music and flowers, and an open carriage. Behold me destitute of all these props of the mind, and not even loneliness.

Washington, January 30, 1887.—I fancy if Noah had sent a telegram from Arrarat he would have simply said, "The rain has ceased to fall," other words would have been below the fact. Into my life the rain has ceased to fall, for my sons are with me again. Is there anything so dear as the "talks" when years drop into the background and the home is again complete? I am more busy than is reasonable. I go nowhere and see only near friends, and they in the evening, for this right hand of mine is too useful to the General for me to waste any nerve power. You will get by mail some collected papers written for a young people's magazine. You will please remember nursery puddings cannot have any flavor but nutmeg or cinnamon, so they are not harmless (my papers and the puddings), but I know you will find both to please you, and it pleases me to send it to you. Breaths up some soft sea air for me—flowers, fruits, sunshine and sea air. Why must I live inland so much?

Los Angeles, May 6, 1887.—We are in that sort of Nirvana that has but little foreground and a lovely background, so we rest on what has been. More than content

in the soft ease of climate and flowers, and true friends who keep us well reminded that we are pleasant to them.

Los Angeles, January 20, 1896.—Your husband has Cleopatra's charm, for there is no wittier or staler to his continued power to put things common into fresh most convincing light. I have been reading with more than usual pleasure his lucid, compact, common-sense view of possible results between us and England, if there should come actual war out of the Venezuelan question.

You spoke the beautiful true appreciation of the General's delightful simplicity of courtesy—the courtesy of the heart as well as of training. You will feel what it was to him to write his resignation from the army and send it to my father before he raised the flag "in case the Government wished to disavow the act."

I am not so dark as I am depicted in the enclosed photograph. I see my shadow, but when one has survived one's self and the past is forever past, what matters the picture.

And now the "Jesse" for whom in the campaign of 1856 I held a blazing brand aloft, and whom it was our good fortune to welcome to the General to our Arrarat home in the little world of our own. "In the brave days of old," when Prescott was 300 miles from a railroad, had journeyed on to meet her husband on the other bank of the ultimate river, whose roar deadens all sound to mortal ears. For years she waited, neither weary of this life nor fearful of the next, tranquilly and cheerfully, recalling all that was sweetest in the past, and waiting for that is best in the future. For her as for all who comprehend the true philosophy of life and death, old age does not exist for that part of us which alone lives. Time may plough furrows in the face and make the joints rickety, and dull the senses, but our ego is beyond his puny malice. It will surely flourish in immortal youth, unharmed amid the wreck of matter and the crash of worlds." It needs no priest to establish this, and no skeptic can deny it, for we know it with an intuition higher than reason; we know it from the testimony of our own souls, and thought is a witness never subdued.

Both General and Mrs. Fremont were keenly appreciative of the humorous side of life, and incidents were not left unrelated because the joke was upon the narrator. Mrs. Fremont was fond of gardening for all that she had employed a French gardener who understood his trade but who was exceedingly averse to receiving orders from a woman. His peculiarities were overlooked as much as possible, but on one occasion Antoine flung and insolently refused to execute an order given by Mrs. Fremont. It was impossible to condone such deliberate insubordination, and the man was discharged.

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