

I Am Luther W. Slater

Brethren,

I greet you this evening, in the bonds of that mystic tie which neither time nor distance may wholly sever.

My name is **Luther W. Slater**, once of Loudoun County, Virginia—now long since gathered to my fathers, and laid to rest in the soil I knew in life. Yet by your remembrance, and by the enduring labors of this Lodge, I am permitted to speak once more.

I was born among these hills, and came of age in a community plain in habit, yet firm in conviction. When, in the year of our Lord 1861, this nation was rent asunder, no man was left untouched by the question before him.

Virginia called. The Union called. And each man was compelled to answer.

I cast my lot with the United States, and entered service as a **Lieutenant in the Loudoun Rangers**, under Captain **Samuel C. Means**—a body of men raised in this very county, loyal to the Union, though surrounded by many who were not.

It was a hard path we trod.

We were Virginians, yet oft regarded with suspicion—aye, even with hostility—by our own neighbors. But conscience is a stern master, and we obeyed it.

I recall with particular clarity the affair at Waterford, on the morning of the 27th of August, 1862.

We were encamped near the Baptist meetinghouse, believing ourselves, if not secure, then at least afforded a moment's respite. But war is seldom courteous.

At the break of day—when the light had scarcely touched the fields—there came upon us a sudden and determined assault by Confederate cavalry under **Elijah V. White**, whose command was known throughout the region as “White’s Comanches.”

They fell upon us with great vigor and without warning.

The stillness of that early hour was shattered by the report of carbines and pistols, the thunder of hooves, and the cries of men roused too late to form proper line. The engagement was sharp, confused, and most personal in its character.

We fought as best we might—some from within the churchyard, others taking what cover could be found—but the advantage lay with the attacker. Their surprise was complete, and their numbers pressed us sorely.

I saw men struck down whom I had known not as soldiers, but as neighbors. Fields once tilled in peace became, in that hour, a place of violence and distress.

We were compelled at length to withdraw, leaving behind our dead, our wounded, and some taken prisoner.

Thus did war visit itself upon our very doorstep.

And I tell you, brethren, there is no contest so grievous as that in which familiar faces are seen across the line of battle.

In the course of my service, I myself was wounded, and conveyed northward to recover in the town of **Gettysburg**.

There, whilst I lay in convalescence, the great armies of the nation converged, and that quiet town was transformed into a field whose name shall forever be remembered among the most solemn in our history.

When strength was restored to me, I resumed my commission and again took the field.

It was the strange fortune of that war that men who had once encountered one another in the byways of Loudoun might meet again upon fields far removed—each steadfast in his cause, each persuaded of his duty.

Yet amid the hardships of war, Providence was not without its mercies.

During my recovery, I came under the care of a nurse whose kindness and attentions I shall ever hold in grateful remembrance. In time, that acquaintance ripened into affection, and she became my wife.

Thus, in the midst of strife, there was granted me a blessing which endured beyond it.

My family, like many in this county, bore the marks of division. The war did not conclude its work when the guns fell silent; its effects lingered in households and in hearts.

Yet peace, though imperfect, did return.

Laying aside the implements of war, I entered upon the duties of civil life, and was appointed **Postmaster of Lovettsville**. In that office, I handled not merely letters, but the fragile threads by which a broken people sought to bind themselves together once more.

News of the living... word of the fallen... assurances long delayed—these passed daily through my hands.

But there was another undertaking, nearer still to the principles we honor this evening.

In the year 1865, a number of us resolved to establish a Lodge of Free and Accepted Masons in this place.

We had seen division. We had witnessed its cost.

And we desired to build something better.

Thus was constituted **Freedom Lodge**, under dispensation.

I was chosen to serve as its **Secretary**.

It was my charge to keep faithful record of our proceedings—to set down, with accuracy and care, the transactions of the Lodge and the labors of the brethren.

Yet I tell you plainly: those entries were no mere formalities.

They were, each one, a testament.

Men who had stood upon opposing sides of a bitter conflict now sat together in harmony. The distinctions of the outer world were here laid aside, and we met upon the level, united in purpose.

In those quiet labors—in the reading of minutes, in the conduct of degrees, in the simple act of assembling as brothers—there was accomplished a work of reconciliation no less important than any wrought upon the field of battle.

I did not remain long upon this earth.

But I departed with the firm conviction that the work we had begun would endure.

And so it has.

You, brethren, are the living continuation of that record I once kept.

Each meeting you convene...
each candidate you instruct...
each act of relief you extend...

These are the entries now written—not in ink, but in the enduring
substance of human conduct.

I would therefore commend to you this reflection:

That the divisions of men, however sharp, need not be final.
That brotherhood, rightly practiced, may heal what conflict has
broken.
And that even the humblest duty, faithfully discharged, contributes
to a structure more lasting than stone.

For it is not in the tumult of war that the true measure of a man is
found...
but in the peace he labors to restore thereafter.

I am Luther W. Slater—
A Virginian...
A soldier...
A husband...
A servant of my community...
A Mason...

And once, your Secretary.