



Jefferson Davis: Ex-President of the Confederate States of America (Volume 1)

Varina Davis

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An excerpt from the CHAPTER I. ANCESTRY AND BOYHOOD:

Jefferson Davis was born in 1808. He died in 1889. During the intervening period of over fourscore years, by his stainless personal character; by his unflagging and unselfish devotion to the interests of the South; by his unsurpassed ability as an exponent and champion of her rights and principles, as well as by his distinguished public services in peace and war, and his high official station, he was universally regarded, both at home and abroad, as pre-eminently the representative of a great era, a great cause, and a great people.

The era is closed, the cause sleeps, but the people survive, and revere the memory, and mourn him dead, whom, living, they delighted to honor. It is for them that I write this memoir and vindication of his political action. In vindicating him I also vindicate them; for he spent his long life in their service, and was rewarded with their love and confidence from his cradle to his grave.

In the fulfilment of this sacred task I shall endeavor to be guided by the spirit that inspired him during his whole life—a spirit of unswerving devotion to truth and duty, of unyielding antagonism against all assailants of justice, without regard to their prejudices or their numbers, but-mindful of the fact that every opponent, even to the death, is not necessarily an enemy, and that sincerity of belief is entitled to respectful consideration even when found arrayed against us. I shall endeavor to do exact and equal justice to the antagonists of the South, as well as to her leaders; "naught to extenuate, nor set down aught in malice." If I fail, it will be because my love for the Southern people, and their lost cause and leader, may unconsciously influence my judgment of the men and beliefs that were arrayed in deadly conflict during the war between the States.

As to the plan of the work, I shall endeavor, as far as possible, to make the book an autobiography—to tell the story of my husband's life in his own words; to complete the task he left unfinished. For, during the last year of his life, after having spent the summer in preparing "A Short History of the Confederate States," he yielded to the repeated requests, both of his personal friends and publishers, to write an autobiography.

Shortly before his last journey to Briarfield he dictated to a friend, as an introductory chapter, this account of his ancestry and early boyhood. He was too weak to sit up long at a time, and lay in bed while his friend and I sat by and listened. No verbal or other change has been made in the dictation, which Mr. Davis did not read over:

"Three brothers came to America from Wales in the early part of the eighteenth century. They settled at Philadelphia."....

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