

R. J. DAVANT

Tribute of the Beaufort Bar

At a meeting of the members of the Beaufort Bar, held on the 11th of February, 1873, for the purpose of paying a becoming tribute to the memory of their recently deceased associate, Mr. Richard J. Davant, on motion of Mr. W. F. Colcock, Mr. R. DeTreville was called to the Chair, and Mr. C. J. C. Hutson requested to act as Secretary.

Mr. DeTreville explained the object of the meeting in a few feeling and appropriate remarks, in which he alluded to his long acquaintance with Mr. Davant, his great admiration for his sterling integrity, his unswerving rectitude, and his rigid adherence to the path of duty under all circumstances, both in his public and private life. Mr. DeTreville said, if Mr. Davant had any fault, it was that he was too rigid in the discharge of his duties.

He further said that it was meet that the Bar, of which he was so long an able member, should express their appreciation of his many virtues, and should pass appropriate resolutions in token of their sorrow in his death, and their heartfelt sympathy with his bereaved family.

Mr. W. F. Colcock then rose and said:

Mr. Chairman.—Richard J. Davant is dead. How strange, how sad, how solemn do these words fall on our ears, and with what icy coldness do they touch our hearts. There is a feeling within us that almost prompts us to exclaim, "Oh! it is not, it cannot be so! Has death indeed robbed us of our friend? Will we never again behold those lineaments which are so freshly daguerreotyped on our memories? Will we never more hear that voice, whose echoes have scarcely died away within these walls? Is that form which but a little while ago filled *that* seat now enfolded in the cerements of the grave!" Alas! alas! The answering voice of the sepulchre proclaims, "Yes, he is here! Death is the conqueror and the victory is mine!"

Awaking to the conviction of this sad reality, we accept with bleeding hearts the mournful truth, and bowing with submission to the decree which separates us from our brother, we seek for consolation in the sweet retrospect of his virtue and his worth. He was, indeed, a good man, loving mercy, doing justice, and walking humbly before God. To all of us his death is a deep affliction. To me it is a supreme personal bereavement, for we have been knit together for nearly half a

century, in the closest ties of brotherhood. In 1825 we commenced the study of the law together in the village of Coosawatchie, then the County Seat of Justice. There the tree of our friendship was planted; there it put forth its tender leaves in our youth, blossomed in our manhood, and spread its verdant foliage over our heads in our old age. Few—may I not say *none*—outside that sacred circle which enshrined him, knew him better or loved him more; and, in this sad hour, it is my pride and pleasure to say that during all that time not an unkind word ever passed between us—not a momentary shadow ever eclipsed the sunshine of our love. I gave him all my heart, and received his in return. Of deep convictions, earnest nature and independent thought, he examined, weighed and decided everything for himself. And it was an honor to be numbered among his friends. An overshadowing sorrow has befallen us, Mr. Chairman, and I would say to each of our mourning friends:

"Oh, faint not in a world like this
And thou shalt know ere long,
Know how sublime a thing it is
To suffer and be strong."

I beg leave to offer the following preamble and resolutions:

Death has again invaded our ranks, and another toiler sleeps by the wayside! When

this great enemy sends his heralds in advance, and sickness, disease and lingering decay announce his approach, we are in some measure prepared for his coming; but when he steps suddenly into our midst, without note or warning, and strikes down his victim, we then realize that he is indeed the "King of Terrors." Such has been his recent work amongst us! It seems but as yesterday that our well-beloved friend was with us in the full enjoyment of all his faculties, and actively engaged with his accustomed diligence in the duties of his profession, and to-day he is numbered with the dead! What a commentary upon the uncertainty of life, and what a loud warning to us all! But if we, like him, are ready for the summons, "better is the day of our death than the day of our birth."

Richard James Davant was born on Hilton Head, in the District of Beaufort, on the 22d June, 1805. He was educated at home among the friends and companions of his boyhood and his youth, and in 1825 he entered the law office of the late Judge William D. Martin, and was admitted to the bar in 1827. In 1833, at the early age of twenty-eight, he was elected by the Legislature to the important and responsible office of Commissioner in Equity,

which office he continued to hold for thirty-one consecutive years, when in 1864 he declined a re-election. In 1860 the Port Royal Railroad was chartered, and soon after, though then filling the office of Commissioner in Equity, Mr. Davant was solicited by the friends of that enterprise to accept the office of President, which he filled until 1866, when he resigned. In 1864 he was appointed one of the board of visitors of the State Military Academy, and was elected by his associates to preside as their Chairman. In 1865, the parish system of representation was abolished, and instead of four senators from Beaufort District only one was to be elected. Mr. Davant was chosen without opposition to fill this honorable and responsible position, and held it until the adoption of the new constitution.

It will thus be seen by this brief sketch that our lamented friend was marked immediately as he assumed the obligations of manhood as one whom his country and his friends needed for duty. And well and faithfully did he perform every task that was ever assigned him. Of clear and vigorous intellect, sound judgment, unspotted integrity and unwearied industry, he accomplished all he undertook with eminent success, and has left behind him

as a public man, a name which will be ever honored and cherished by his fellow-citizens.

And now when we turn to the contemplation of his character and private life, we see there everything to love, admire and respect. United from early life in those holy ties which alike bless and consecrate life, he enjoyed an unusual share of domestic happiness and peace. Surrounded by a large and devoted family, his home was the seat of love, order and cultivated refinement. Of him it may be truly said that "hospitality stood porter at his door." As a husband, father, friend and neighbor, he illustrated with exemplary fidelity, every virtue which can adorn these endearing relations of life. Confessing from an early age, his Saviour before men, he added to all these the crowning graces of the Christian character.

Last of all it was here in our midst that we, who are now assembled to lay our humble offerings on his tomb, knew him best and mourn him most. As a member of our noble profession he did everything to elevate its character, preserve its purity, and maintain its influence. Learned in the law, liberal in practice, true to his client, yet generous to his adversary, "with noble ends by noble means pursued," he was, in

the truest sense of these words, a lawyer and a gentleman.

But he is gone; no more shall we see that calm, quiet, dignified form amongst us, or receive that cordial greeting with which he ever welcomed us to his presence. Long, aye, long will we mourn his death, and feel that a void has been left in our circle which it will be hard to fill. But we are not left to mourn without comfort. We have a well-grounded assurance that our lamented friend has "exchanged the bankruptcy of earth for the heritage of heaven," and has entered into the rest that remains for the people of God. Let us ever have before us his shining example, and humbly pray that we may be re-united to him in eternal fellowship, when we shall stand impleaded at the bar of "hoodwinked justice."

Resolved, That in the death of Richard J. Davant the bar has lost a most valued associate, the State an eminently useful citizen, society one of its noblest members, and his family and friends one who was inexpressibly dear to them in all the relations of life.

Resolved, That as members of this bar we will ever hold in affectionate remembrance his ability as a lawyer, his virtues as a man, and his long career of usefulness and distinction.

Resolved, That we tender to the afflicted widow and children of our dear friend our heartfelt sympathy in their irreparable bereavement, and that a copy of these proceedings be transmitted to them by the Secretary of this meeting.

Resolved, That his Honor Judge Maher be requested to order these proceedings to be entered on the minutes of the Court, and that the Secretary do publish them in the Charleston and Beaufort papers.

These resolutions were seconded by Mr. James W. Moore, who rose and said:

Mr. Chairman.—It is with feelings of profound sorrow that I rise to second the resolutions which have just been read. With the exception of our honored friend who has introduced these resolutions, I stood in closer and more intimate relations of friendship with Mr. Davant than any other member of this bar. I have known him all my life. In my boyhood I listened with reverence to his teachings. In my youth I began to appreciate the great powers of his intellect. In my manhood I learned to admire his talents, to esteem his character and to love the many noble traits of his nature. I was a welcome guest in that home of his, where it has been so fitly said, "hospitality stood porter at the door." He was my neighbor, he

was my friend; and the bonds of friendly intercourse were drawn as closely between us as they could be between two whose ages differed by more than thirty years. And I understand that because of these intimate relations of friendship which existed between our departed brother and myself, by the common desire of my brethren of the bar, has devolved upon me the duty of seconding these resolutions.

I accept this duty with feelings of intense sadness, and in discharging it I endorse freely and fully, in spirit and in letter, every word, every thought, every sentiment contained in, and expressed by those resolutions.

Our associate and friend has passed away from among us, and we owe it to his memory that we meet together here and make this open expression of our approbation of his character and conduct while living, and our sincere regret at his death.

Were I to speak of his learning, his talents, his great intellectual powers, his unwearied industry, and his many virtues, I could only repeat what has already been so eloquently and so truly said. He was here with us, he was a great part of us, and we all knew him well.

The dockets on the desk before you, Mr. Chairman, speak more plainly and clearly,

than any words of mine could tell, of his ability as a lawyer, and the confidence and trust reposed in him by his clients. The fact that his name appears on the record in one-third of the cases on those dockets; the fact that the juries were discharged on the morning of the second day of the term, simply because he could not be here in his seat, show unmistakably the reliance placed by the citizens of this county in his attainments as a lawyer and his integrity as a man.

I always regarded as the great beauty of his character, his true and sympathetic heart. Call on him in the day of your need, go to him in the hour of your misfortune, and the warm grasp of his hand, the kindling glance of his eye ever responded, and told you that he made your cause his own; that he entered heart and soul into your troubles and sorrows.

Mr. Moore then spoke most feelingly on the subject of his personal relations to Mr. Davant, which had ever been of the most cordial nature. He said that there was a warmth of attachment which he had always felt towards the deceased, that rendered his death to him a keen personal bereavement. He then added:

Mr. Chairman and Brother Members.—My emotion will not allow me to dwell

longer on these sad memories, so intimately associated in my mind with the remembrance of our departed brother.

He has left us never more to return. He acted well his part while here. And he has passed from this Court of limited jurisdiction, to that from which there is no appeal, the Tribunal of the Great Jehovah. He has laid aside the robes of the advocate, and bows reverently himself, an humble suitor, at the footstool of the Great White Throne. But he has left an example, which we should all strive to imitate. Let us follow the path he pursued, so that we too may be ready when the summons shall come. So that when the setting sun of our day of life shall throw his last rays upon us, we may gladly lay aside the heavy armor worn in this world's turmoil and strife, and joyfully prepare to "pass over the river and rest beneath the shade of the trees."

The preamble and resolutions were then unanimously adopted. After the adjournment of the bar meeting, the following communication was sent to the Secretary, who now appends it as a part of the proceedings:

Mr. Hutson.—I cannot permit the opportunity of offering my tribute of respect to the memory of our venerable and much-

loved elder brother, R. J. Davant, to pass by. I would most willingly have tendered it at the meeting of the bar, of which you were the Secretary, but my feelings at that time prevented me from doing so. It is true that I did not enjoy as close and intimate relations with Mr. Davant as existed between him and the mover and seconder of the preamble and resolutions adopted by the bar, but my acquaintance with him has been of long duration—over twenty years—and during a portion of that time of a very intimate character. I can truly say that during the whole of that period there was never the slightest discord between us. I knew him before the evil days came upon us; I knew him after our fortunes were shattered, and no one could, or did, more truly appreciate all the estimable qualities of his character in the various relations of life, both public and private, than I did. All who knew him as well as we did, must unite in saying that his life was unblemished, and that he performed his public duties with eminent zeal and ability, and discharged his social and domestic duties with exemplary fidelity.

His affection for his family was striking, and the chief end and aim of his life seemed to be to make them happy. His

home affections were a part of his nature. I remember meeting him in 1866, standing amidst the heap of ashes, all that remained to mark the spot where stood that happy home, around which so many memories of those happy days, gone to return no more, are gathered; and upon my asking him what he intended to do, replied, "I want to build a home for my family upon the foundations of their old home before I die." It was a labor of love, and lovingly did he attend to it. Early and late he pursued his object. Hardly a nail was driven or a brick laid but under his supervision, and he lived long enough to accomplish the wish of the evening of his life. Hardly was it completed, when he was called to "the rest" which we are taught, awaits the righteous man. He lived a long life, surrounded by loving and loved friends. He died not in the bloom of youth or in the flush of manhood, but when his "three-score and ten" had been nearly attained—leaving behind him a record pure and free from stain or spot. May we, living, remember his example, and, dying, leave behind us a memory as dear to all who knew us.

Respectfully, CHARLES E. BELL.

On the next day (the Court of Common Pleas being in session) the Chairman of

the meeting presented the preamble and resolutions, adopted by the bar, to his Honor, Judge Maher, who responded as follows:

Gentlemen of the Bar.—The Court is painfully sensible of the irreparable loss which the profession and the country have sustained in the death of Mr. Davant, and realizes with profound sorrow the great vacancy which it has occasioned here. It shares the burden of your grief, and is gratified for the opportunity of uniting with you in paying appropriate honors to the memory of your departed brother. The Court feels that it can add nothing to the just and eloquent tribute which the bar have offered, and adopts the language of the resolutions as expressive of its own sentiments. It is meet that the records of this Court should bear testimony to the worth of one who, as an officer of the Court and a member of the bar, illustrated here, for the greater part of his long and useful life, all the sterling virtues which adorn and ennoble man.

The resolutions will be entered in the journal of the Court, in accordance with your request, with this response.

RICHARD DETREVILLE, *Chairman.*

C. J. C. HUTSON, *Secretary.*



*Long years have passed, more than a score
Since a band of airmen who helped win a war
Held council, decided, and began then and there
To foster the spirit of travel by air.
A few had ambition to circle the sphere
And many an aerial problem to clear
Some spread their wings and crossed the foam,
Now in all skies of the world they roam.
Some started building all-weather planes,
Some flew to charter commercial airlines.
Many a field other maintain in green,
So that all airmen their feathers may preen.
Though some have made their last flight to the West,
They know we know they did their best,
And that as they met their Eternal Host
Their fellows would stand in a silent toast.
So the "Quiet Birdmen" wherever they be
High in the air, over land or sea,
No matter how fate with all of them jests
Wear an emblem pinned high on their breasts
In the honor place over other things—
Their tiny, silvery "QB" wings.*