

Dear Genl. Robbins:

You once asked me to define Patriotism to you.

It is as easy to define Spirit or Life— All reasonable beings understand. No definition of either has ever suited all men.

The Roman said:

"Dulce et decorum est pro patria mori,"

and it pleases the man who has the blood of martyr or soldier in his veins.

Others say:

It is sweet and becoming to live for the country and this please the mild and gentle creatures whose hope it is sometime to take the places of all martyrs and all soldiers. May they be long in arriving!!

I like Stephen Decatur's proud phrase:

"Our country! In her intercourse with foreign nations may she always be in the right; but our country, right or wrong."

That suits me with the word "foreign" stricken out and it does not seem improbable.

I love my country because in it and with it I may in manly fashion maintain high debate as to its duties; but when the debate is done and the sword is drawn it is treason to stand against the imperial will lawfully ascertained and duly declared.

The constitution of the United States says that "treason . . . shall consist only in levying war against them, or in adhering to their enemies, giving them aid and comfort."

This definition evidently was framed for a period of war, flagrant and actual: it was intended to allow the fullest discussion and the broadest freedom of speech.

The experience of a self-governing people shows its wisdom.

A narrow but perfect legal definition of patriotism might be by converse: Patriotism shall consist in adhering to the United States in time of war and in all ways opposing and

discomforting its enemies. But this is not satisfactory to him whose bosom is aglow with the love of country.

Nor can a general, altruistic creed like that of Tom Paine--

"The world is my country; to do good is my religion," be called the equivalent of patriotism: it leaves out of the great equation that sublime something which Scottish Scott wrote of:

"Breathes there a man with soul so dead
"Who never to himself has said
"This is my own, my native land!"

Fitz-Greene Halleck, writing of Red Jacket, said:

"Love for thy land as if she were thy daughter;
"Her pipes in peace, her tomahawks in war."

We approach a general definition.

Patriotism is that something, part of the normal man, that makes him love unselfishly above any other land the land where he was born and dwelt until fully conscious of himself; that makes him more desire its good and growth and security than those of any other; that makes him her fearless teacher in debate, her intrepid and obedient soldier in war, living for her and when need comes dying for her. Amen.

Somewhere there is a passage which has this in it:

"If I prefer not Jerusalem above my chief joy--"

You can look it up at your leisure.

Very truly yours,

John C. Black.