

Civil War History

Volume 50, Number 4, December 2004

E-ISSN: 1533-6271 Print ISSN: 0009-8078

DOI: 10.1353/cwh.2004.0068

Faust, Drew Gilpin.

"We Should Grow Too Fond of It": Why We Love the Civil War

Civil War History - Volume 50, Number 4, December 2004, pp. 368-383

The Kent State University Press

Drew Gilpin Faust - "We Should Grow Too Fond of It": Why We Love the Civil War - Civil War History 50:4 Civil War History 50.4 (2004) 368-383 We Should Grow Too Fond of It": Why We Love the Civil War Drew Gilpin Faust If war were not so terrible, Robert E. Lee observed as he watched the slaughter at Fredericksburg, "we should grow too fond of it." Lee's remark, uttered in the very midst of battle's horror and chaos, may be his most quoted—and misquoted—statement. His exact words are in some dispute, and it seems unlikely we shall ever be able to be certain of precisely what he said to James Longstreet on December 13, 1862. But in every rendition of the quotation, the contradiction between war's attraction and its horror remains at the heart. War is terrible and yet we love it; we need to witness the worst of its destruction in order not to love it even more. And both because and in spite of its terror, we must calibrate our feelings to ensure enough, but not too much, fondness. It is Lee's succinct, surprising, and almost poetic expression of a too often unacknowledged truth about war that has made this statement so quotable. Lee, the romantic hero of his own time and the marble man of ages that followed, displays here a complexity, an ambivalence, a capacity for irony that suggest cracks in the marble. His observation seems to reach beyond his era and its sensibilities into our own. Lee was not alone among his contemporaries in articulating a...