



CHAUNCEY M. DEPEW.



CHAPTER VIII.

THE LESSONS OF HEROIC LIVES.

McKinley a patriot—Oration—Piety and patriotism—Lessons of heroism—Influences of Chautauqua—A fighting patriot—The grand review—A generous eulogy—Illustrious names.

THE oration before the Chautauqua Assembly, Grand Army Day, Monday, August 26th, 1895, is an example of the simplicity and elevation of McKinley on a patriotic theme—and is worthy of study for purity of style and force of expression.

"ORATION BEFORE THE CHAUTAUQUA ASSEMBLY, ON GRAND ARMY DAY, MONDAY, AUGUST 26TH, 1895.

"Mr. President, Comrades of the Grand Army of the Republic, Ladies and Gentlemen: It would have given me pleasure to meet this splendid Chautauqua Assembly at any time, but my gratification is the greater because I am invited to participate with you on the day which you have consecrated to country,

the day you have devoted to patriotism and the memories of the past, with all their precious lessons. What could be more fitting on the part of this association, whose chief objects are to exalt Christianity and promote sound learning, than to set apart a day to the brave men whose service and sacrifice preserved unimpaired the liberties we enjoy, for ourselves and posterity? Piety and patriotism have always been closely allied. My older hearers will recollect the fervent words, and recall with fond affection the matchless voice of dear old Bishop Simpson, who said in 1861: 'Nail the flag just below the cross! That is high enough—Christ and country, nothing can come between nor long prevail against them.' [Applause.]

"The lessons of heroism and sacrifice are not confined to any age or people, nor are they limited to the participants or the survivors, but are for all the people living, or who may come hereafter. Fortunately, in the economy of the Most High, the influence of any duty nobly done, or of courage or devotion in any good cause, is never lost. It strengthens with the ages, blessing and consecrating as the years recede, and inspiring others to suffer, and, if needs be, die for conscience and country. This was the spirit which animated the soldiers of the Revolution and the Rebellion, and distinguished both. They battled neither for commerce nor conquest, but for immortal principles, involving alike human rights and the highest welfare of the human race. What

was lost to America in the first great struggle was nobly regained in the last.

"These patriotic assemblages cannot, therefore, be too frequent, which invite a proper study of the past, not in hatred, passion, or bitterness, but to teach and enforce more plainly the blessings of peace, union, and fraternal love. They bring us closer together, as a reunited and happy people, guided by the example of the Master, whose life was one of sacrifice, and who is glorified as the Man of Peace and Son of God.

"It is easy to decry the events and institutions with which we are familiar, but, after all, we have many—very many—patriotic altars, and should have many more national celebrations. All along the pathway of our national life, from Lexington to Appomattox, we breathe the incense of heroism. We are not unmindful of the mighty deeds of the past, nor indifferent to the heroes who achieved them, nor can we be oblivious to the glories of the present, and the bright promise for the future. In a certain sense our churches and schools, our newspapers and literature, are constantly inspiring us with new and greater love of home and country. The work and influence of such great popular assemblages as this, not only here at Chautauqua, the fountain head of them all, but in other and distant States, are of priceless value to the people. [Applause.]

"You have builded wise and well. You have not only given to the world's vocabulary a new, beautiful.

and significant name, but to the world itself a new and holy zeal in the good cause of Christianity and scientific and literary study. You are to be congratulated that the religious, educational, and fraternal influences of Chautauqua are greater, far greater, than you know, and everywhere, at home and abroad, are beneficial and elevating to mankind. Liberty of thought, speech, and conscience hold full sway on these congenial grounds. Bigotry is neither encouraged nor tolerated, but, in the true spirit of the fathers, liberty and learning go hand-in-hand. In such an atmosphere American patriotism must burn with full flame, and as a light to the feet of all. [Applause.]

For what is patriotism? Did you ever stop to reflect upon what it embraces? There is born in every manly breast the determination to defend the thing he loves. We strike down the enemy who would invade our homes, and guard family and fire-side at the peril of our lives. There is no sentiment so strong as love; no sacrifice too great for those we love. This is the underlying principle of genuine patriotism; the foundation of true loyalty to country. The patriot is he who, loving his country, is willing not only to fight, but, if need be, to die for it. It is this sentiment which gives to human governments their strength, security, and permanency. It is this sentiment which nerves the soldier to duty, and gains his consent to service and sacrifice. The strongest and best government is the one which rests upon the

reverent affection of its own people; and the nearer the government to the people, and the people to the government, the stronger becomes the sentiment of patriotism, and the stronger becomes the government itself. The laws are of little or no value if they do not have behind them the respect and love of the people. When patriotism is gone out of the hearts of the masses the country is nearing dissolution and death. [Applause.]

"Did you ever seriously reflect what it means to be a fighting patriot? Many people preach and profess patriotism, but the true patriot is he who practices it, and he can seldom practice it by proxy. Patriotism is the absolute consecration of self to country; it is the total abandonment of business; it is the turning away from plans which have been formed for a life's career. It is the surrendering of bright prospects, and the giving up of ambition in a chosen work. It is the sundering of the ties of home and family, almost the snapping of the heart-strings which bind us to those we love. It may mean disease contracted by exposure or from wounds in battle. It may mean imprisonment, insanity or death. It may mean hunger, thirst, and starvation.

"In our own Civil War it meant all of these. With all these hard conditions there were nearly three million men who so loved liberty and union that they were willing at any cost or hazard to follow our flag. The blood of a half million men was exacted

in that fearful conflict to save the country; and there are to-day tens of thousands who are suffering from disease contracted in the service of the government, and many thousands more bearing wounds from which they suffer every hour in the day, and some of these, alas! are in distressing poverty. Our asylums contain many more of the poor fellows whose hard service dethroned reason and unbalanced mind forever. The demands of patriotism meant for many wives widowhood, for many children orphanage. They took from many a mother her whole support, the love of the son, upon whose strong arm she had counted to lean in her declining years. There was nothing personally attractive or promising about any of the features of enlistment in the War of the Rebellion; it was business of the most serious sort. Every soldier took dreadful chances. His offering was nothing short of his own life's blood, if his country should require it. This, however, then seemed insignificant in that overmastering love of country, in that burning patriotism which filled the souls of the boys in blue, in that high and noble purpose which animated them all, that they were to save to themselves, to their families, and their fellow-countrymen the freest and best and purest government ever known, and to mankind the largest and best civilization in the world. [Applause.]

"With that spirit nearly three million men went forth to accept any sacrifice which cruel war might demand. The extent of that sacrifice far exceeded

human expectation, but it was offered freely on the altar of their beloved country. Can we ever cease to be debtors to these men? Is there any reward in reason they should not receive? Is there any emolument too great for them? Is there any benefaction too bountiful? Is there any obligation too lasting? Is there any honor to these patriotic men which a loving people can bestow that they should not extend? What the nation is, or may become, we owe largely to them.

"In the Grand Review, at the end of the war, which stands unchallenged as the greatest ever witnessed by human eyes, stretched across the great marble capitol at Washington, greeting the sight of every soldier who passed, was a banner bearing this inscription: 'There is one debt which this nation never can pay, and that is the debt it owes the brave men who saved this nation.' That was true then; it is no less true now.

"If there is one of those old patriots sick at heart and discouraged, should not the cheerful and the strong, who are to-day the beneficiaries of his valor, comfort and console him? If there is one who is sick or suffering from wounds, should not the best skill and the most tender nursing wait upon and attend him? Fortunately, our people have so far never failed in the most generous response to all such demands upon them.

"We are not a martial nation, but no government of the world can boast a more devoted, self-sacrificing,

or patriotic citizenship than that which has established and maintained our free institutions for the past one hundred and nineteen years. Nor are we a nation of hero worshipers, but the men who fought and suffered from the Revolution to the Rebellion for independence, freedom, and union, are devotedly cherished in memory by the American people. The soldiers of no other country in the world have been crowned with such immortal meed, or received at the hands of the people such substantial evidences of national regard. Other nations have decorated their great captains and knighted their illustrious commanders; monuments have been erected to perpetuate their names; permanent and triumphal arches have been raised to mark their graves. Nothing has been omitted to manifest and make immortal their valorous deeds.

"In the United States we not only honor our great captains and illustrious commanders—the men who led our vast armies to battle—but we shower honors in equal measure upon all, irrespective of rank in battle or condition at home. Our gratitude is of that grand patriotic character which recognizes no titles, permits no discrimination, subordinates all distinction; and the soldier or sailor, whether of the rank and file, the line or the staff, infantry, cavalry, or artillery, on land or sea, who fought and fell for liberty and union—indeed, all who served in the great cause—are warmly cherished in the hearts and

are sacred to the memories of a great and generous people. [Applause.]

"From the very commencement of the Civil War we recognized the elevated patriotism of the rank and file of the army, and their unselfish consecration to the country, while subsequent years have only served to increase our admiration for their splendid and heroic services. They enlisted in the army with no expectation of promotion—not for the paltry pittance of pay, not for fame or popular applause, for their services, however efficient, were not to be heralded abroad. They entered the army moved by the highest and purest motives of patriotism, that no harm might befall the republic. While detracting nothing from the fame of our matchless leaders, we know that without that great army of volunteers—the citizen soldiery—the brilliant achievements of the war would not have been possible. They, my countrymen, were the great power, the majestic and irresistible force. They stood behind the strategic commanders, whose intelligence and individual earnestness, guided by their genius, gained the imperishable victories of the war.

"I would not withhold the most generous eulogy from conspicuous soldiers, living or dead; from the leaders—Grant, Sherman, Sheridan, Thomas, Meade, Hancock, McClellan, Hooker, Howard, Logan, and Garfield—who flame out the very incarnation of soldierly valor and vigor before the eyes of the American people, who have an exalted rank in history.

and fill a great place in the hearts of their countrymen. We need not fear, my fellow-citizens, that the great captains will be forgotten. No retrospect of the war can be had, no history of the war can be written, which shall omit the name of the gallant Sheridan, who made the scene of Stonewall Jackson's stronghold in the Shenandoah Valley his field of glory; and no contemplation of the war can be had that shall pass unnoticed the name of the illustrious Hancock, whose brilliant achievements at Gettysburg and upon other noted fields covered him with fame. And no history of this war can be written which will omit the name of the glorious Sherman—that grand old soldier who delved into the mountains at Chattanooga and came out splendidly triumphant at the sea. No, we can never forget that majestic triumvirate, nor especially the great captain who commanded all the grand military divisions of the grandest army of the world—for Grant will be remembered forever. That silent, sturdy soldier, who closed his lips on the word 'victory' at the Wilderness and refused to speak, but fought it out on that line until the complete surrender at Appomattox, and who, while looking into his own open grave, summed up in history the matchless work of the Grand Army of the Republic wrought under his glorious leadership. [Applause.]

"Nor can any retrospect of the war be had which shall omit the names of the gallant naval officers who contributed such distinguished service to the Union

cause—Porter, Dahlgren, Goldsborough, Dupont, Foote, Ammen, Rowan; and,

"While old Ocean's breast bears a white sail,
And God's soft stars at rest guide through the gale,
Men will ne'er thy name forget, O heart of oak,
Farragut, Farragut, thunderbolt's stroke."