

E 642
.C66
Copy 1

With respects of Coburn

AN ADDRESS

DELIVERED BY

GENERAL JOHN COBURN

ON

MEMORIAL DAY

MAY 30, 1905

AT THE

MANUAL TRAINING HIGH SCHOOL

INDIANAPOLIS, INDIANA

INDIANAPOLIS

JACOBS STATIONERY AND PRINTING COMPANY

142 EAST MARKET STREET

1905

A. S. 24 Apr, 12

AN ADDRESS
DELIVERED BY
GENERAL JOHN COBURN
ON
MEMORIAL DAY
MAY 30, 1905
AT THE
MANUAL TRAINING HIGH SCHOOL
INDIANAPOLIS, INDIANA

MY YOUNG FRIENDS:

It is well that the teachers and scholars, of this High School should forget, for the hour, their studies and recall the history of their country, when the gloom of Civil War hung like the clouds of a vast hurricane over all of this fair land.

It is well that they should go to the graves of the soldiers and cover them with flowers; and thank God; that their labors and sufferings were not in vain; but helped to restore order and peace and perpetuity to this the greatest Republic on earth.

There the little headstone will tell the story of the man who offered his life to rescue his country when it stood on the brink of destruction.

To the eye of the traveler as he wanders over the face of the earth, no work of the hand of man is more striking than the monuments erected to the memory of the illustrious dead. The pyramid, the column, the mausoleum, the tomb—may speak on enduring stone of the names and deeds of the departed. The image of the form and features preserved in marble or bronze, tells to the observer, age after age, and to all the generations of men, as they surge by in mighty procession, of the part played by the sacred dead on the theatre of life. From some of the greatest of these memorials erected to the memory of an event, or life, or sublime act, all traces of their purpose or their builders have been obliterated by the hand of time or of the unknown

barbarians; and they stand the silent tokens of lost memories sunk forever in the waveless ocean of forgetfulness. History, tradition or song give no whisper of the mound-builders or the mound itself, or they, for whom it was piled up. The bones, the decaying pottery, the heap of earth tell no tale that we can understand and teach no lesson to the explorer. The king, the hero, the benefactor, the warrior, the law-giver, the sainted woman have returned to dust and ashes and to the midnight of oblivion. The toil and taxes of nations have been idly spent in the vain effort to perpetuate the memories of tyrants and benefactors alike.

We now offer our fallen heroes, not bronze, or marble, or costly tombs, or tall obelisks, but the freshest and purest products of nature—the flowers of spring. We offer to them our fond remembrance of their deeds. We will come again at each returning spring, with trembling hand and tearful eyes; to deck the last resting place with the rose, the lily and the violet, with the fragile but eternal garments of spring.

They who build only in stone may turn away and forget the dead; but they who bring the gifts of nature, keep alive their remembrance of the departed. They who come here yearly, will not soon forget the deeds, the sacrifices, the sufferings and the bright examples of those who sleep beneath these grassy hillocks. When the father or mother, the brother or the sister, the widow or the orphan, the friend or neighbor come here to do this sacred duty, they breathe again the pure air that surrounds heroic deeds, and those who were too young to have shared in the mighty struggle, are lifted above the level of ordinary life, witnessing these scenes.

What did these men do? Why were they slain? Why did they offer their lives? What was gained by the sacrifice? What do men think of the departed? These questions and the like must come up in the minds of the young, and the answers will implant in their bosoms an undying love and devotion to their country. So that, when the trying hour comes upon them; they will not be found wanting; when the political fabric shall be shaken by the earthquake of revolution, they will not shiver and quail; when the enemies of the country-assail it, they will not flee and hide from the shafts aimed for its destruction.

As these have done before, so hereafter, inspired by the same spirit, the future fathers and mothers will tell their sons to go and perish on the field of honor, rather than that their country shall die, the wife will, with trembling heart; give up the husband to the great cause; fathers will forsake their children, and children their parents, that the Nation may not fail. When again the call goes forth and the flag is shaken out to the breeze, and the drums are beaten, nothing can restrain the young and brave from the defense of our native land. And these are the sentiments we would inspire and hand down from century to century.

The light of their example, gleaming above the glorious dead, will shine far down into the future and blaze along the pathway of our nation forever. Patriotic sacrifices, overlooked for a season, become grander, more impressive and more potent, as time rolls on. Civilized men will never let their memory be obliterated.

Forty four years ago, these, the sacred dead—these men picked out by Providence to die for us all—were about their ordinary business: one after another they heard the call of their country for help; they listened, then stopped their work and went. This one read the President's proclamation; that one the Governor's; this one was awakened by the sound of drums; that one saw the gleaming and fluttering flag; a speech stirred one; an example stirred another; the dispatches of defeat or victory kindled the fire of one; a letter from the field awoke another as by the blast of a trumpet. Forth they went—the man that was plowing; the boy that was dropping corn; the reaper from the harvest; the blacksmith from his anvil; the shoemaker forgot his last; the boatman dropped his oar; the clerk his pen; the doctor forgot his patients; the lawyer his cases; the preacher his congregation; leaving behind them their places to be vacant and silent forevermore. They went out, as lost sailors have gone down to their ships, to drift out on the vast tides of civil war and sink to the fathomless caverns of the lonesome ocean. This one died in the hospital of disease; that one sank down by the roadside on the march; another fell upon the skirmish line; this one languished and perished in a rebel prison; and that one was smitten as the line-of-battle pressed on to victory; this one at noon-day dashed down his life on the breast-works of the enemy,

and that one fell in the lonely woods at the picket post ; when “stars were worshipping around the midnight throne.”

Almost half a million able-bodied men, fit to bear arms, perished in this way. Their hallowed dust, scattered upon distant battle-fields, or where ships foundered in the silent waters, or gathered in National cemeteries ; the people would crown this day, with flowers, and praises and blessings.

Their toils and sufferings have not been in vain. The cause they espoused was successful ; the die has been cast ; the great American Nation is one, and is foremost on earth. Did man ever die for a nobler purpose ? What gratitude can ever repay the cost of such a sacrifice ?

Of these men many were not permitted to see the light of final victory and peace ; they passed away during the battle and the hurricane, amid the harsh clamors of strife, under the shadows of doubt and sorrow. They fell before the last great martyr was smitten from the helm of state by the bullet of the assassin. It was not theirs to enjoy a restored union, a reconstructed Nation, or even a return in triumph to home and friends. Kindred martyrs for liberty, peace and union, the soldiers and their great patriotic leader and apostle, Lincoln, sleep together in the bosom of the country they saved from dismemberment and annihilation. The impersishable record of their deeds will be read and repeated, while devotion to country and respect for free institutions, have a place in the human heart.

But, at best, the fate of the martyr is a sad one. He who dies for religion, or he who dies for the truth, or for liberty, or for his country, or for his fellow-man, whether at the stake, or on the scaffold, on the battle-field, or on the bed of pain and torture, is entitled to the tears of every true hearted man and woman. At last his cup is filled with woe, and the God of mercy alone can rob it of its bitterness. The shadow of death blots out the sun and stars ; blots out the looks of kindness and love ; bolts out all but the hope and faith that the right and just thing will be done ; and that for others there will dawn a better day. I have heard the testimony from the whitening lips of dying soldiers, “It will be all right for you who live, and so it is all right for me.” And the strong wish arose that we could utter a long, last

loud farewell that would reach beyond the portals of death into the Silent Land, that would cheer the vanishing spirit after it had crossed the river and landed on the Eternal Shore.

Jefferson Goodwin, of the 33d Indiana, pierced with a ball, said as he was borne off bleeding; "I am going, but it is all right," and in a few moments, he was beyond the reach of pain.

Sergeant Brown, of the 85th Indiana, with his life current streaming away, said, "Oh, Colonel, save me for my wife, but it is all right if I go." Colonel Gilbert of the 19th Michigan, mortally wounded at Resacca, said to me, "Farewell, I am going; write to my wife that I did my duty and died for my country." Sergeant Anderson Winterrowd, of the 33d Indiana, on the field of Peachtree Creek, falling and dying, said: "Boys, the rebels have got me, but it is all right."

What is all right? Is such a death; such agony, all right? Oh, no. But the result will be all right. Victory will come and peace will come, and both will come to stay. And somebody will live to hail the mighty day, and ten thousand glad hearts, all over the land, will rejoice in the happy beams of that splendid dawn, and call down blessing on the memories of those who freely shed their blood that it might be.

When we recall the scenes of the war, almost the first that arise to the view are those of sickness and death. Life out of doors, a bed on the ground, exposure to rain and wind, the wading of streams and mudholes, bring on their consequences, as surely as bullets and cannon shot. How soon the abject ignorance, in the soldiers, of the laws of health appears! They commit suicide rapidly in their blindness. They seem, for a time, to be thoughtless children, playing with life and death as they do with soap bubbles. They know nothing of how to cook or eat, or what to eat; how to make a bed or where to make it; how to keep tents, clothes and camps clean; how to come and go as rational beings in their new relations. All this must be learned in the hard school of experience; so that death comes to the soldier not only on the battle field, but in the quiet camp, indeed more frequently there than elsewhere.

Fevers, pneumonia, measles, rheumatism, neuralgia, consumption, diarrhoea and homesickness fill the hospitals and graves of the newly

organized army. Careful early training, strength of constitution, prudence in conduct, common sense, patience, cleanliness and temper are all tested by the raw recruit. He must be constantly on the alert against many insidious foes which at home, he never looked for; his usefulness; his very life, depends upon the exercise of the best qualities of his manhood. And it is not in drilling or marching or fighting, but in much homelier things, in the matters I have named, which bear upon his personal comfort and health, and his success.

He who had, through all, preserved his health, comfort and cheerfulness had won more than half of the victory that was completed in battle. The Germans say healthiness is holiness, the old soldier will say, healthiness is victory. The Duke of Wellington, if possible, made his soldiers eat a good meal, wash themselves and put on a clean shirt before fighting. But it is not always possible. Our best soldiers found this out often; and many men are in their graves simply because hardships multiplied upon them, till they could resist no longer. They suffered a martyrdom of hardships.

Perhaps in nothing was the soldier more severely tried than in his patience. The army was a school of patience. The doing of the dull routine of duty; drilling, marching, camp work, picketing, waiting and waiting, week after week and month after month. It was trying beyond measure to submit to petty and tyrannical orders—to do what seemed to be useless—to be a post and stand still; to be an ox, and pull and toil; to be an ass, and bear burdens; to be a child, and obey blindly and implicitly; to be a colt, and be broken and trained; to be a lion, and caged; to be half-fed, half-clothed; half-shod—this is to be a soldier. This is what these men endured and never murmured, but looked hopefully to the end. They were not eager for military glory; or trying to perform brilliant exploits. Their common sense measured military matters, and they would have been ashamed to have had it told of them that they were chasing “the bubble reputation into the cannon’s mouth.” They realized the truth, that war is a very serious business, and affords small opportunities to mere adventurers; that it is the coldest and hardest matter-of-fact; that he who realizes this fully is on the road to victory.

General Sherman well said, before the committee on military affairs,

“I must be a better quartermaster, commissary, inspector and adjutant than any man on my staff; to properly conduct a campaign.” He very well knew that to meet such emergencies as arise; forethought, calculation, calmness, the power of combination, quickness, correctness and firmness are essential. *War is business, in its highest sense, done under the greatest pressure in the most trying circumstances.* The pass of Thermopylæ, the bridge of Lodi, the plains of Waterloo, the heights of Mission Ridge, the hills of Gettysburg, can only tell of great catastrophes and victories; but the preceding preparation, who can recount that?

The rebellion was a surprise to us and to all Union men; unprepared, undrilled, undisciplined, almost unarmed, we were hurried; officers and men alike; into the vast conflict. The dangers, difficulties and disasters were aggravated, but out of it all, grew a most profitable and salutary experience. And before the war closed, we had better arms, better hospitals, better cavalry, infantry and artillery than ever before had marched out to battle. The soldiers put brains as well as bullets into their guns. They did that at Mission Ridge, in perhaps the most signal and complete victory of the war; which was never before performed. They, without orders, stormed the works of the enemy, climbing the heights and almost annihilated his army.

To-day I have no time to recount the labors and achievements of those who died for their country. Could I, in a breath, summon those who are lying here in their graves, to utter in simple words their names, their regiments, their campaigns and the places of their death, in them the history of the war would live again before you. The great campaigns upon the Cumberland, the Tennessee, the Mississippi, the Potomac, the James, the Gulf, the Atlantic, each have their witnesses here. The picket line, the gunboat, the scouts all have their representatives at hand. Every arm of the service: the steady infantry, the wandering, scattering, and yet often tremendous and almost miraculous cavalry; the sluggish and obstinate artillery; the pioneers, of whom their astonished enemies declared “they made pontoons out of their dog-tents,” together with the bummers of Sherman; are here. Whatever there was of courage, or daring, or heroism, or devotion, or glory in the war, has been laid low here. Whatever there was of

toil, or suffering, or anguish, in hospital, on the march, on the field, or in prison is here in view. Whatever wounds, or disease, or starvation, or homesickness (that starvation of the soul) can bring to mortal lips has been pressed to these. Broken hearts, desolate homes, widowhood, orphanage, came too in the train of evils. Let us not forget these, the living, who have been smitten by the hand of war.

We are led to ask, why was all this done? What called for these sacrifices? Wherefore did men so willingly give up all? Why did the people, totally unused to war, suddenly become the most combative and martial on the globe? Was it for a mere abstraction, a mere political sentiment? Or was it for a great purpose? One moment's glance at the condition of affairs forty-three years ago reveals a vast republic; organized upon human slavery, as the corner-stone, defying the precepts of the Revolution and of all our great sages in government. A republic still greater in prospects and projects, aiming at the control of the West Indies, of the Gulf, and of Mexico, as well as the southern and western parts of our own country. Aggressive, insolent; grasping; inflamed with a desire to propagate slavery: resolved to control the central regions of this Western Hemisphere. Had this great central slave republic been allowed to live undisturbed, where would we have been to-day? What flag would have been ours? What law? What policy? What destiny? Would we have become an independent North Western Confederacy? Would we have held on to our Eastern and Northern brethren, or would we have gravitated to the South? As we now stand, far off the brink of the gulf, and look backward into it again; we can see the frightful possibilities that surrounded us then.

Another glance on the other hand reveals the friends of the old Republic standing by all its institutions and all its compromises, and seeing in them the National safety, power and peace: inspired with the idea of unity as well as liberty, well convinced that dismemberment, peaceful though it might be, would be but the beginning of trouble; of civil wars; of the long train of calamities that follow them; of National dishonor and ultimate ruin. The true friends of the country could see a grand future in reserve, the rebellion broken, order re-

stored, peace established, prosperity universal, slavery annihilated, labor made respectable, manhood vindicated.

To put down this slave-holding confederacy, to blot forever the ideas of disunion and secession, to establish on firmer foundations this great Republic, these men went forth joyfully to meet the worst.

Where now is the empire of slavery, the great Central Continental Republic? Where now the grand dreams of Calhoun, Davis, Toombs, Stephens and Breckenridge? Where is the mighty corner-stone that was to uphold all? Gone forever from the face of the earth. Gone like the shadows of night before the rising sun. The whole earth, the whole future of man contains no possibility, amid all the range of chances, for their existence. Never more will these mighty battles be fought again; they were decisive; they were final; there is no appeal.

And upon the ruins of that vast conspiracy behold now standing a free and united nation, reconstructed, absolved from all compromises with wrong, boldly looking all men and all ages in the face and challenging a parallel.

Rest then, I say to the old soldiers, from your labors, brave men. Earth and time can find no brighter achievements than your own. And ye living crown their places of repose with flowers and fill the air with the music of their praises. Let youths and maidens, on each returning spring, gather for them nature's choicest offerings; let ripened manhood and womanhood cease their toils and bend with tender devotion at these shrines; and let white-haired age assemble here and give testimony to the righteousness of the only idolatry the Supreme Being does not condemn.

Let it never be forgotten, that the cause in which these men died is the cause of the human race; that they have aided in rescuing our Nation from imminent destruction, and have succeeded in placing her where supremacy is assured; that they frightened Napoleon from Mexico, and have given spirit and power to the present Republic. Let it never be forgotten that the last refuge for the down-trodden victims of monarchical oppression, has been rescued and delivered by these men in perpetuity for their benefit; and that they have this day an asylum here; because the Union soldier laid down his life for his country and her free institutions. Let it not be forgotten, that the

sons of old Europe, together with the sons of young America, lie mingling their dust side by side; fallen in a common cause, for humanity and the future, and that here, too, the dusky sons of Africa have found a glorious grave, There let them rest forever, shaded by the flag of a free people; honored, blest by every succeeding generation.

Taught by their example, men in distant climes and in long future ages will seize the sword and carve out their freedom. The labor they have performed shall bear fruit not only in this land but in all latitudes beneath the sun, among all races of men. Donelson and Shiloh, Gettysburg and Stone River, Cedar Creek and Five Forks shall outlive the fame of Marathon and Plataea, and be household words when the mosses of many ages shall garland the graves we decorate to-day. Filled with the inspiration that blazed in the souls of our volunteers, the Englishman will yet break the scepter of Alfred into fragments; the Frenchman will be encouraged to sustain the great Republic modelled after our own; the German, the Russian, the Italian and Spaniard will, taking inspiration from our success; replace their strong monarchies, with a still stronger government; the consent of a free people, founded upon equal rights.

But not in the greatest measure by the inspiration of example has the work of these men been effectual. The present prosperity of our Republic; the increase of population; the growth of the territories; the progress of public improvements; the intellectual and moral development of the people; are all the natural off-spring of this great struggle. New emergencies seem to have developed new energies and displayed new resources in our Nation. The soldier came back from the war a better mechanic and man of business than he went away; the professional man drew a deeper and stronger purpose from his experience; the good citizen at home became a more earnest man. Those who fell seemed to have bequeathed to the survivors a double portion of their spirit. The Nation was not exhausted, was hardly weary after the long struggle. The homely virtues of patience, obedience, order and watchfulness, cultivated and made vigorous, gave manly independence and solid strength to many thousands of negative characters. Forty-three years have witnessed a reformation and reconstruction as well as revolution. "*Died in a Holy Cause*" is written, not only on

these tombstones, but on all the temples of learning, business, justice and religion. These are the chief monuments.

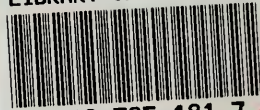
No wreath of flowers, no breath of spring, no memorial stone can sanctify the cause that would tear down a good government; or the wickedness, that would build up a vast scheme of oppression. There is no resurrection or future for that. And yet the valor and devotion of those who suffered or perished in aid of Rebellion, extort from every candid soul a tribute of respect. They, too, exhibited splendid examples of patience, self-sacrifice, courage and manliness. They only verified the presumption in favor of American pluck, energy, vigor and gallantry.

A few men, perhaps twenty, in the Union army, achieved what is called military glory! A million or more only had the satisfaction of a sense of duty performed. Almost a million are silent in the tomb; sad and helpless witnesses of the havoc of treason. In such a presence how empty is military glory. Turning from it, we point to these living and dead soldiers—they wear no laurels—they won no fame—they make no boast.

We look hopefully to the future, believing that the blood that was spilled, the scalding tears that were shed, and all the agony and sorrow that overwhelmed the people, will purify and refine them,

We look to the future over these graves, and over all the mementoes of death, and see the innumerable company of coming generations. There is no smoke of cannon there; no shriek of shell; no fluttering flag; no cheer of charging men; no gleam of bayonets; no rush of horsemen; no bleeding soldier. It is a happy, free, united host, obedient to the law; doing justice; helping the weak; loving mercy.

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS



0 013 785 181 7