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ADDRESS

OF

SENATOR O. H. PLATT,

OF MERIDEN, CONN.,

To the Survivors of the

Fifteenth Connecticut Volunteers,

At the Dedication of their Monument,

AT

Newbern, N. C.

November 14, 1894.

ADDRESS.

Survivors of the Fifteenth Regiment:

This occasion has a meaning for you to which only one who has a right to speak the sacred word "comrade" can give fitting utterance, and it were better, I think, that I should testify to my interest in what is passing here by my silence. But two companies of your regiment were recruited in the city of my home, from among my friends and companions. I know them intimately. I knew their worth, their courage, their sense of duty, their patriotism, their devotion. I saw them when they enlisted, in camp, and when they marched away to the front. I can testify to their nobility of character, to their love of country, to their self-abnegation, and though it was not your fate to be engaged in as many battles as some of our Connecticut regiments, from my knowledge of those who went from homes that stood near my own, I am prepared to say that no braver body of men, no men of higher character, no nobler citizens left the State of Connecticut to defend the Union than those who marched with the Fifteenth Regiment upon its organization. I would not single out for special praise an individual, but I may be permitted to say that I think that the man who first enlisted as a member of your regiment was a type of all; and the recruiting of Company A comes back to my mind at this hour as clearly and distinctly as if it were but yesterday. A meeting had been called in Meriden from which two full companies had already gone, not counting men scattered through different regiments and companies, or those who served three months. The poster, a copy of which you have preserved in the written history of your regiment, breathes the spirit of the hour. In the afternoon which preceded that

meeting, my associate and friend, Julius Bassett, came to see me and talk of what he felt was his duty to enlist. I shall never forget that conversation. He was a man who had no ambition, no desire for distinction, no thought of self. The life of the soldier had no allurements, but he was a patriot in every fiber of his being. The ties which bound him to home were strong. His domestic obligations might well have been his excuse for remaining at home. He was calm, passionless, and thoughtful, but he felt that the call was to him, that a country in peril needed his help. He talked it all over, the dangers, the hardships, the probabilities that he might not return, and I well remember his concluding remark: "If men must give their lives for their country, I may as well give mine as any one. I shall enlist to-night." When the call for volunteers came that evening, he walked to the table where the roll was to be signed, without hesitation, without remark, without visible excitement, simply wrote his name and retired to his seat. You knew him as a comrade; you know what a sterling man he was, and yet he was but one of a noble band, a type of the regiment. First to enlist in the regiment, fated to meet his death by the bullet of the enemy, I think we may honor him to-day with special mention; and if in that other land where he has gone he can be permitted to know what passes here, I am glad to send him greeting and an assurance that what he did is not forgotten, but is honored in the hearts of the friends and comrades he has left behind.

The reputation and fame which came to corps, divisions, brigades, and regiments, the glory of being victors on hard-fought fields, was often accidental. The most heroic resistance at times was only rewarded by capture and prison. Conspicuous success was often achieved as much by good fortune as by determined bravery. And though other regiments participated in more engagements and rejoiced in more triumphs, yet all who knew the composition and character of the Fifteenth Regiment will measure its worth and sound its praises equally, at least, with that accredited to any other Connecticut regiment.

You come here to-day as veterans, not to exult over the victory won, not to magnify services rendered, not even to glorify the deeds of your comrades, but to dedicate this memorial stone which a grate-

ful State erects to show that those who went from home and returned not are still remembered, and will be remembered while this granite stands uncrumbled.

Thirty years of peace have smoothed over the deep furrows of war, and to the praise of the God of all Peace be it said, have smoothed over the passions of the conflict. But the sense of obligation to the soldier lives on and will live while written history remains. The passing of a generation makes it impossible for men who were unborn or were but children when the strife began and ended, to conceive, much less to understand, what was involved in the sudden change from a citizen to a soldier. How the man of business, the farmer, the mechanic, the clerk, gave up the farm, the shop, and the store, and devoted the best years of life to the unwonted task of defending their country. Such a giving up of self, and such a surrender of all for the good of all, illustrates the highest phase of human character. They were not hireling soldiers, who stood by the flag, the Union, our country and its destiny—they were men of high resolve, of great hearts, of set purpose, heroes, every one as truly as those who have wrought their names in the high places of our history. To-day with peaceful surroundings, with quiet lives and a united country, for whose prosperity and glory all are anxious, with no speck of war in the distance, no rancor or trouble in our hearts, we cannot understand it. The American soldier must always remain the study and the mystery of mankind. He was faithful, obedient, self-sacrificing, heroic, grand. War is always far-reaching in its results, but no result of the war was grander or more enduring than teaching mankind the true character of American citizens. Citizenship means more to us and to mankind because of the magnificent qualities developed in our volunteer soldier. The standard of humanity is higher to-day the world over as a consequence of the transformation of the peaceful citizen into the heroic soldier. Liberty and freedom have always found such defenders, but none more worthy of praise and the admiration of mankind.

The personal aspects of the war have in a large measure given way to the historical. The daily life of the individual volunteer, officer, or private, his valor, his hardships, his endurance, his dis-

couragements and his exaltation have become so blended that the men of to-day express it all when they speak of the soldier in general terms, and of his patriotic service. They have come to regard you who gather here to perform this sad yet pleasing service as you in 1862 regarded the veterans of the war of 1812. As the years roll on and your ranks grow thin, and you at last melt away into the unknown, your efforts in defense of your country will be cherished and regarded as you cherish and regard the efforts of our revolutionary soldiers. Though time has touched some of you but lightly, you may soon be addressed in the words spoken by Webster to the survivors of the Revolution, "Venerable men, you have come down to us from a former generation." But I am glad to believe that the sense of obligation does not lessen with the passing of years, or the merger of the individual in the whole army. You and your cotemporaries will never forget the individual soldier. To us he is a personal hero and always will be. We can never look in the face of the man who stood before the rain of shot and shell and whizzing bullet, his life a willing offering on his country's altar, and forget that we look upon a hero. But as years take us farther and farther from the scenes of the conflict it will be the army rather than the individual soldier which will be remembered especially by those who come after us. What the spirit '76 was to you when your country called you, the spirit of '61 will be to your posterity in the future days when the country may again call for defenders. The personal experience of the soldier now so interesting and so thrilling, the share which each individual took in the conflict and its result will be blended with the deeds of all who faced danger, risked life, mourned defeat, or rejoiced in success.

We define patriotism as a love of country, that overmastering love greater than the love for home, or wife, or child, or life itself. But no one truly measures the meaning of patriotism who does not see and understand how closely the love of the fathers is associated with the love of country. Indeed, our love of country is our love of the fathers—what they did, what they wrought; it is the heritage they left us which stimulates patriotism in the man of the present. It is a mystic sentiment deeply ingrained in human nature, this love of the fathers, amounting almost to ancestor worship. When the

voice of patriotism breaks forth in its noblest strain, it is in worshipful praise of the deeds of our ancestors. It is the "land where our fathers died" to which we give our allegiance, and our native land would scarcely be worth the surrender of life if it were not for the "green graves of our sires." As to the Roman, the hearthstone was the abiding place of his departed ancestor, so that around its fires and ashes the family was perpetuated, so the graves of our fathers who fell in defense of their country are the rallying points of national life. Those of your comrades who have gone before are now revered as being gathered to their fathers, and as one by one you shall take your place beside them, you will join that great body of ancestors, the memory of whose deeds will forever kindle patriotic flame in the hearts of future citizens.

The Republic is not ungrateful. Connecticut is not ungrateful. The men of to-day who know nothing of the great contest, except as they have read the record of the time in which you were actors, are not ungrateful. Your achievement is their glorious heritage, and if they seem less regardful of your individual service than those who knew of your enlistment, who saw you march away and followed your every movement with interest and anxiety, who gave you all the sympathy of their hearts, who upheld at home the cause you maintained in the field, do not for the moment indulge in the thought that the present generation is ungrateful to the soldier. As you revere and honor the soldiers of the Republic who fought its battles before you were born, so the men and women who have come upon the stage since you put down the rebellion revere and honor you. As you ascribe to the efforts of our early soldiers your privilege of participating in the duties and responsibilities of a free government, so they ascribe to your efforts and heroism their privilege of living in an unparalled Nation. I suppose the veteran soldier of the Revolution as the years rolled away and the country grew in its strength and grandeur and he came to realize, as he had a right to realize, that men and women who made no sacrifice, who gave nothing to achieve liberty, were enjoying the fruits of his sacrifice and suffering, must have had sad moments in which he felt that what he had done was scarcely appreciated. It was not so, however; it is not so. The soldier who fought at Bunker Hill or Trenton or Yorktown

was not forgotten ; he never will be. All that he did and suffered, whether he was laid to rest in an unknown grave or came back to the peaceful scenes of his time, was woven into his country's life and his country's glory, and will have the admiration of his descendants to remotest time. Nor is the soldier who fought here and in the war for the Union forgotten. He never will be. New generations may lose sight of the individual in their admiration for all who participated in the contest, but the memory of the soldier will live ; his crown of honor is imperishable and fadeless, and gathers added glory and wealth as the years roll on.

The Nation to-day erects monuments which proclaim the praise it bestows on the men of the Revolution, which mark its heroic battlefields. The States have already begun the work of erecting monuments which shall speak to all the future of the worth and devotion of the men who went out from the States to save the Nation ; and more and more as time goes on will granite shaft and bronze statue voice the Nation's appreciation of the patriotic devotion of its defenders.

We erect monuments, not to the living, but to the dead. A century from now the State and Nation will still be seeking some way in which to testify an increasing regard for the men who saved the Union from dissolution, who made its flag one flag, and its boundaries to encompass one, only one, country. Heroism, achievements, sacrifice are the grand fruitage of humanity, worthy of all honor ; but grander yet and worthy of supreme honor is patriotism. The great significance of this day and occasion is that the living patriotism of our State honors the dead patriots who rest here forever, and honors not only them but their comrades and brothers who in this sacred presence, in this still resting-place of the dead, mourn them as fallen companions and dearly cherished associates. I firmly believe that no patriotic impulse is ever wasted or forgotten, but lives on to swell forever that love of freedom and country and of ancestors which shall at last redeem mankind from all bondage and usher in the day of universal brotherhood. These your fallen comrades were, in the highest sense of the word, patriots, and a patriot's grave can never lose its power. Known or unknown, marked or unmarked, neglected or tenderly cared for, there comes from it an

inspiration subtle and unseen, which nerves the living to devotion and duty. Men may achieve greatness in many walks of life. Costly monuments or splendid mausoleums may mark their resting-place, but the patriot's unmarked grave has a power which no other grave can equal. It is akin to the power of an endless life.

Yet to you and to me who knew these departed ones in life, how different the emotions. Every grave wakens a train of sleeping memories and revives in your mind the scenes through which you passed, the associations which you enjoyed, the trials which you shared. You can trace your regimental history, your soldier life as it was taken step by step with the men whose inanimate bodies rest here. You enlisted with them. You learned your soldierly duties in the same camp of instruction. You performed with them the routine work of army life. You camped and bivouacked with them. With them you marched and fought, with them you endured sickness and pain. In a word, you were "comrades." Is there a term in all our language which signifies so much of manly regard, of unselfish friendship, as that same word "comrade?" Around it must cluster the dearest recollections of life, the sweetest experience of friendship, the most vivid and thrilling emotions ever known. Life was no sweeter to you than to them; but if your fate had been to battle with the unseen foe disease, you would have fought the battle as bravely and succumbed as uncomplainingly when conquered.

Other regiments may mark with their monuments positions on battle-fields where their comrades met the enemy in a fierce and deadly struggle to retain their position and beat the enemy back from the field. These your comrades battled with the death angel on a field which they would have gladly abandoned but from which there was no retreat; their struggle involved no passion, none of the accessories of battle strife bore them up, no word of command, no cheer of comrades, no bugle note, no drum, no sound of cannon or rattle of musketry to lift them out of themselves and to inspire them to heroic deeds, but in silence and in darkness, alone with themselves, and with the invisible destroyer, far from the homes of love, uncheered and unattended, they met their foe and their fate. Bravery that storms the entrenchments of the enemy, or holds our own against the wild and reckless charge, makes our nerves tingle

and our souls expand. We almost envy the fate of the soldier whose life ebbs away with the shout of triumph ringing in his ear, but we bow our heads in silence as we think of the greater bravery, the more heroic death of those who never faltered in their conflict with the "pestilence that walketh in darkness, and the destruction that wasteth at noon-day." All honor to them in their silent struggle. All honor to their noblest courage. We uncover before them this day as we commemorate their unheralded heroism.

Veterans, your regiment is divided. Many of its members have been detailed for the service beyond. You who remain, who have come from far-away homes that you may in spirit again touch elbows with fallen comrades, do but wait the summons to the final complete reunion and the muster for unending service under the banner of the Prince of Peace. There, merit will never be unserved; there, heroism will receive its abundant reward.

From primeval days till now the desire of mankind to voice its regard, its affection, its reverence for the dead has found expression in the monument, the voiceless yet ever-speaking monument. First the rude stone-heap, then the rough pillar, the plain slab, the hewn and pictured obelisk, the polished shaft, and sculptured tomb. Thus man speaks to those who follow him and tells them of departed friends and of noble deeds. The monument is a necessity. Without it, our testimony would cease with the voice and the perishable written or printed record; by means of it, our testimony is preserved. Thus we honor the virtues of our ancestors. Thus the State, uniting the sentiment of its people, proclaims its love for those who gave their lives for the general good. If we might not thus enduringly voice our affection for those we have known and loved and lost, we should be poor indeed. Our great want is to tell the future of our friends, our heroes. The monument supplies this deepest want. It speaks for us. Its voice is ours. Who journeys here and looks upon this monument, reads its inscription, and sees graven upon it the flag with its undimmed stars, the musket, the knapsack, and the canteen will hear repeated the story of our sorrow and our reverence. So to-day, for your State and all in your State, you set this stone in earth that it may speak our love for those who gave life and all for us, of our pride in their deeds. We can do no more, words fail, but this stone for all time, shall speak.



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