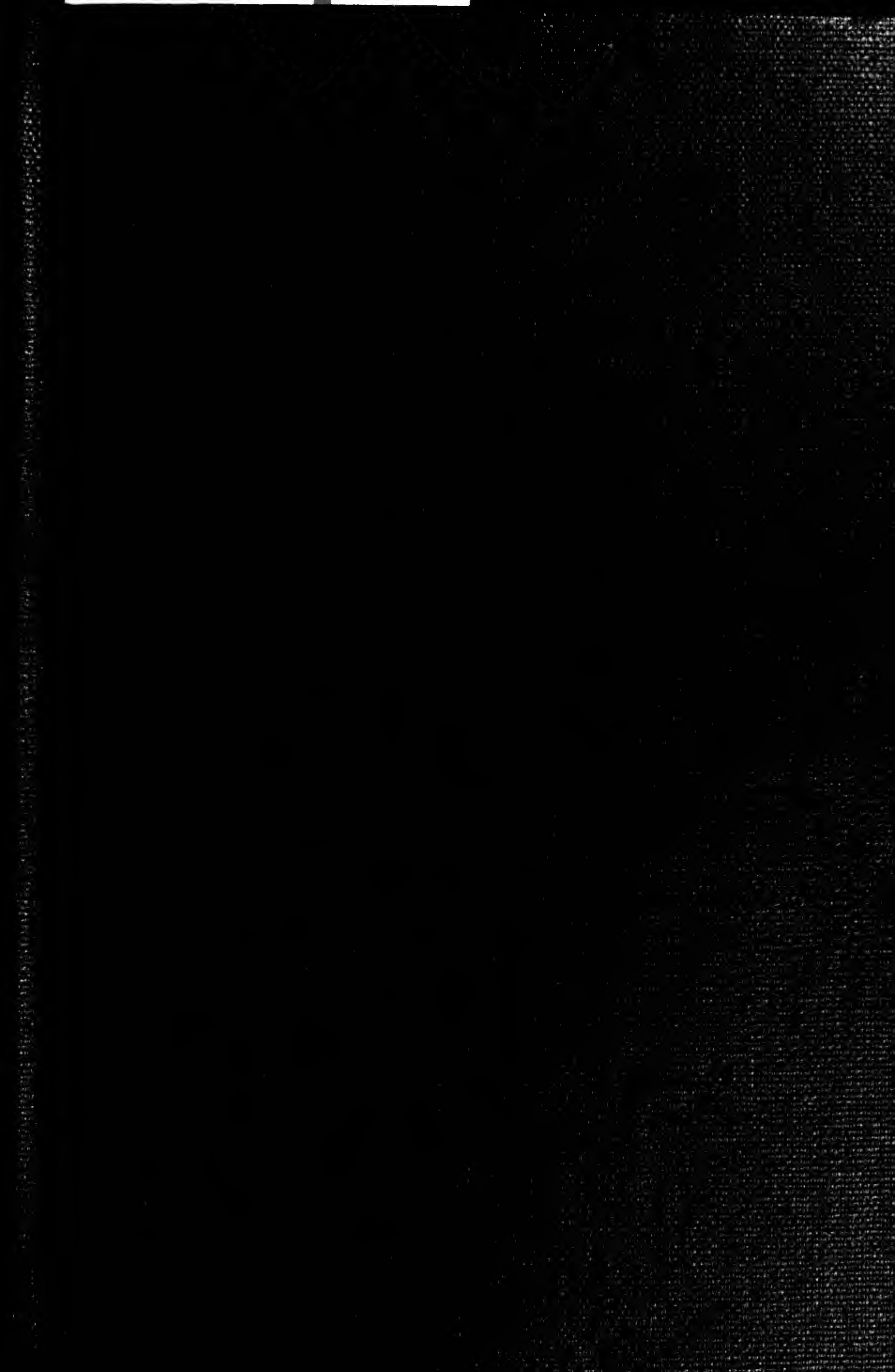

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JAMES A. GARFIELD.

MEMORIAL ADDRESS

BY

ANDREW D. WHITE, LL. D.,

PRESIDENT OF THE CORNELL UNIVERSITY.

DELIVERED AT A MEETING OF THE CITIZENS OF ITHACA, N. Y., ON MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 26, 1881.

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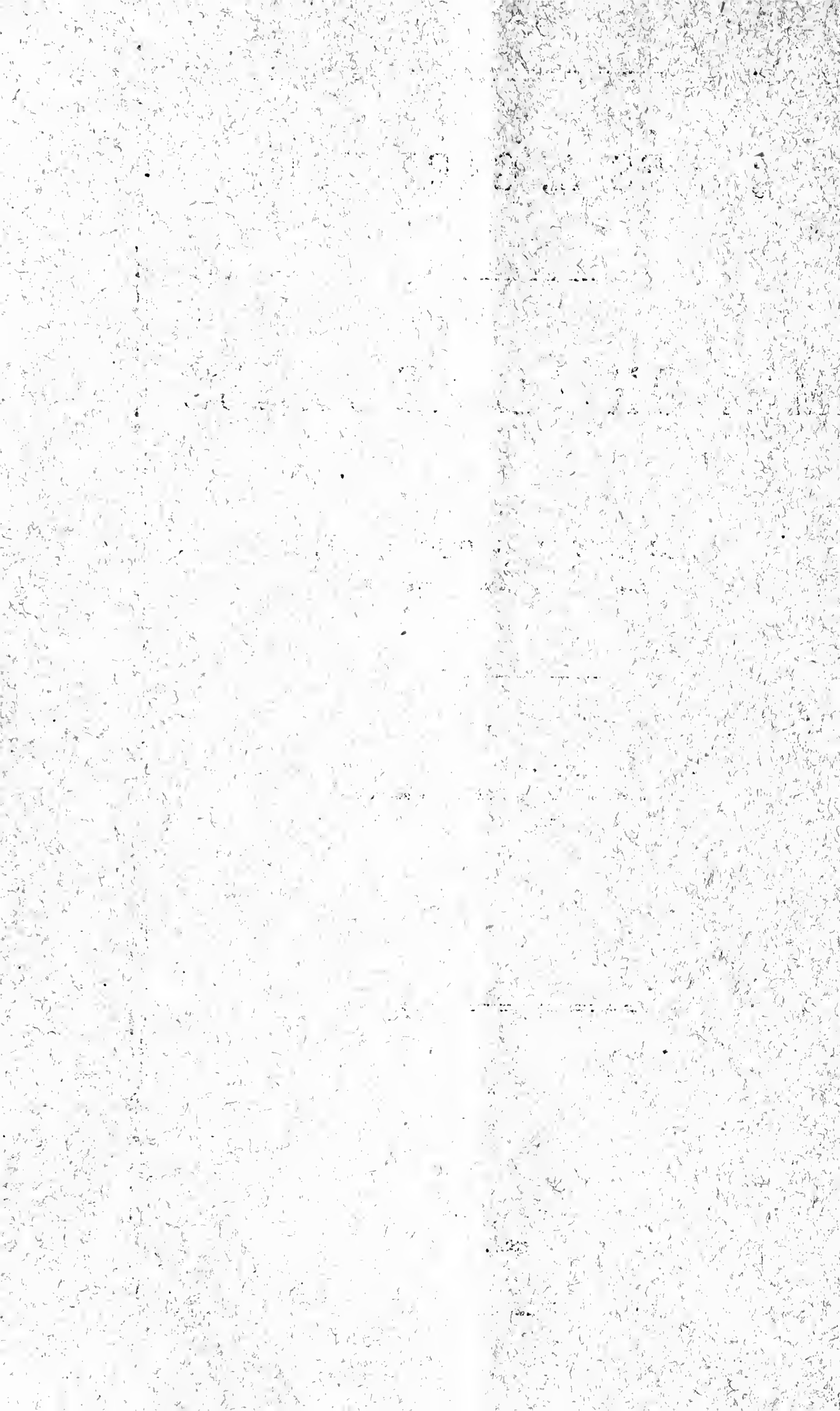


THE last man who, ages hence, shall pore over what shall then be called ancient history—over the annals of this republic, its triumphs, its reverses, possibly its crimes—shall feel a bitter pang as his eye lights upon this day.

As when the citizen of France, in the record of what men call the glories of the old French monarchy, comes upon the sacrifice of Henry the Fourth to fanaticism,—as when the citizen of Holland, in the records of the struggle by the Dutch republic against oppression, comes upon the sacrifice of William of Orange to tyranny and bigotry, —as when the citizen of the United States, in the records of the struggle against disunion, comes upon the sacrifice of Abraham Lincoln to anarchy and human slavery,—so, in all future time, as long as men shall respect virtue, or love manliness, or revere godliness, or preserve even a lingering, glimmering idea of the meaning of patriotism, so long shall men's hearts ache as they recall the sacrifice this day consummated—the sacrifice of James Abram Garfield, President of the United States, to a system of administration which is the greatest present disgrace and the greatest future danger of this republic.

The main features of the late president's life are known to you all. I shall glance at them briefly—not as a record but as an inspiration. Cradled in poverty, in his childhood an orphan struggling against penury and adversity, we find him in his boyhood already courageous, self-helpful, his hand turned to hard labor, his mind seeking strength in thought and study. In his early manhood we see the dawn of a worthy ambition; he determines to fit himself for a career useful and honorable. He works on under great difficulties, many lions in the path, but ever steadily, vigorously, structurally. More and more the

man develops nobly his body, mind, heart, and soul. He prepares for college under great difficulties, enters college and shows the same thoroughness, steadiness and determination. He loves athletic sports, and gives fitting time to them, but refuses to sacrifice higher purposes to them. He makes his career as a student broad and thorough, supplements it by the best reading, gets into the current of the highest thinking. He is rapid in attainment, but there is no haste, no waste; all is steady, thorough, systematic.

As a graduate, he devotes himself to education, and ripens into the sagacious instructor, the friend and guide of youth, beloved and trusted by all about him.

But his State needs him; and, as the crisis of the nation's fate in the civil war approaches, he is summoned to the highest council of the Commonwealth of Ohio. He is the youngest member, but it is soon seen and felt that here is a true statesman. In national affairs and State affairs he shows himself quick of apprehension, full of resource, eloquent in appeal.

The struggle of the great civil war deepens. All that the nation holds dear is in peril. Calmly, thoughtfully, as usual, but with decisive vigor and force, he organizes a regiment. It was an army such as that which the historians of the English struggle between the King and Parliament love to portray—God-fearing, liberty-loving--a regiment of young scholars, of skillful artisans, of thinking farmers, of men who knew what the struggle meant, who had fathomed its deep meanings by virtue of intellectual ability and moral conviction.

He studies the art of war, as he had studied other things—thoughtfully, vigorously. It was a time when a world of unreason was afloat as to the uselessness of the study of military science,—when mellifluous orators insisted that special training was not needed. Garfield knew better. He studied war as a science, and practiced it as an art; and, while elsewhere disaster after disaster usually met civilian generals, he added laurels to our military annals. The regular military commanders saw in him a shining exception. They honored his exploits; they prized his counsels. His reports are among the treasures of our military archives. The seal of our national approval was set upon him when, after two years and a half of service, he was made a major-general.

But he was needed elsewhere. Abraham Lincoln saw in this young

man the spirit, the thought, and the knowledge requisite at Washington. Garfield's fellow-citizens also saw this; and, against his own preference, he was sent to Congress. The House of Representatives contained at that time a great body of strong men; but among these he rose speedily to be a leader. His breadth of view, his keenness of insight, his vigor in study, his power in statement, and, not less than these, his deep earnestness and truthfulness, made him soon a power in Congress, and extended his influence out into the nation, far beyond the walls of the Capitol.

As the questions which involved the national life had to be settled in the popular political contests, his voice began to be heard and his presence became familiar in various parts of the nation; and now the gifts which aided so greatly his career at home were felt in all the great Northern States. With the foresight of the true statesman, even in the midst of the seething tumult of civil war, he had seen that the urgent questions immediately after the declaration of peace were to be financial questions. To these he gave thorough study, as his wont was with every important question. The whole range of the financial history of the principal modern nations became known to him. The history of experiments, successes, failures, in our own country and in others, seemed present constantly in his mind. Entering Congress, he had been an acknowledged authority upon military matters, and was placed on the Military Committee. Scientific matters and public instruction found in him a constant champion. The Smithsonian Institution, the National Bureau of Education, the provision for distributing the proceeds of the public lands so as to stimulate the Southern States to provide education for their illiterate classes and especially the freedmen, the provision for supplementing the system thus created with institutions for higher scientific instruction—all the main measures regarding these were either initiated or most vigorously supported by him. But, while giving constant labor to such great subjects as these, he saw clearly that the two pivots on which the future of the United States was to turn, for good or for evil, in the immediate future, were the financial question and the question of the relations of the South to the general government. On both these classes of questions his influence was exercised with power for justice and for peace. As regards the questions between North and South, he was steady and firm, outspoken but at the same time large, broad, fair, evidently

not wishing to deepen any of the wounds made by the war, evidently wishing to aid time in the healing of them. Yet any real infringement of human right, any precedent likely to be dangerous to liberty, found in him always a most stubborn and eloquent opponent. As to the other great question—that of finance—there is no brighter record in our history. Against enormous pressure, against a flood of unreason, he stood firm as a rock. He alone, out of the representatives of nine States, stood firm against what the whole world now sees would have been, not merely a prodigious financial error, but also an eternal national disgrace. In Congress, among the people at large, he steadily battled in favor of the system which financial science, the experience of our own and other nations, and his own sense of justice revealed to him as the only safe, the only honorable system. Doing this, he took his political life in his hand. Many of his political friends supposed him lost. But he persevered, and before long his State and the nation at large declared him right. There are many within sound of my voice who heard his address to us here. They can hardly forget the depth, clearness and vigor of his arguments, the homely and quaint cogency of his illustrations, the lessons so admirably presented from the history of our own country and of others. And certainly no young man who heard the last part of his discourse is ever likely to forget it. He took up the famous letter of Macaulay, the English historian, to Randall, the biographer of Jefferson. He showed the reality of the danger which the English historian had indicated. He showed what relation to those dangers was borne by the great question of honesty or dishonesty, justice or injustice, then to be decided by the American people. Evidently inspired by the presence of so many young men engaged in study of the sort which he had known so well, whose aspirations and hopes he could so fully appreciate, he rose to a height of eloquence which certainly no one present had ever known excelled.

He was now in his ninth term of Congressional service, when, in obedience to the universal feeling in Ohio, without intrigue, standing aloof from all factions and afar from the State capital—not even in communication with it, he was elected by the unanimous voice of his party to the Senate of the United States. But even before he took his seat the crowning honor awailed him. The great party for which he had done so much assembled in national convention. The names

of cherished leaders were vigorously put forward. A long wearisome struggle succeeded, such as, it is to be hoped, may never occur again. There seemed no hope of any good result, when the name of Garfield seemed to occur to every heart. It came in upon the telegraphic wires from all parts of the country. He was speedily and triumphantly nominated; and, after a spirited contest with a soldier of great services, of high attainments, and of spotless character, he was elected. The time during which he occupied the presidency was brief—alas, how brief!—but he had time to show in it his patriotism and statesmanship. Summoning about him men whose fitness the whole nation recognized, strong measures were begun and pressed forward vigorously. A firm hand was laid on great abuses. Thanks largely to the policy which he had advocated, years before, in Legislature, in Congress, and in popular assemblies, a tide of national prosperity began to flow in upon the nation. God's blessing seemed to be upon him and upon us. And then came the blow of the assassin. His had been a good and true and noble life. The future historian will declare him the most thorough student of political problems in the presidential chair since John Quincy Adams; the mind of most scholarly breadth in statesmanship since James Madison; the most eloquent parliamentarian since John Adams. His had been a life, a career, a character, which would have satisfied the highest hopes of Washington and Jefferson for their successors in the chief magistracy. Yet, grand as his life was, it may be well said that "nothing became him like the leaving it." His calmness in the face of death, his patience under suffering, his cheerfulness amid discouragements, his faith that all was in any event to be well—all this has endeared him to every sound-hearted man and woman in this country. Nay, more than this—never has a ruler come to be so cherished by the people of other nations. I speak what I do know, when I say that, in the most monarchical nations of the old world, all classes, from the highest to the humblest, have come to love and honor him. While the manner of his death has given new weapons to all supporters of absolutism, has enabled them to point the finger at this republic, and to show that free election by the people and the spotless life of a magistrate are no safeguard against the assassin, those last weeks of his earthly career have led myriads of men to scan carefully the records of his life, and they have risen, not only with increased love for him, but with new respect for the country and the institutions which have fostered and developed such a son.

There is no time here for anything more than this rapid summary. Yet, out from the life of our lamented chief magistrate, as the world stands this afternoon at his grave, let us select a few of those more salient characteristics which have made him precious to the nation. First of these I would name his *breadth*—breadth of knowledge, of thought, of sympathy. No one could read or hear his speeches, or converse with him, without being struck by this. His mind ranged through the greater literatures, ancient and modern, through finance, general political economy, law and various sciences. He was a great reader, but something far more than this: he was a student and thinker in all these fields and remained so to the last. It was to this characteristic that was due my good fortune in meeting him during the early part of his Congressional career. He came into my library in a neighboring city to see some works that had been used by a great modern historian, little known by the public at large, only known to historical scholars. And I was delighted to find in him not only a knowledge and appreciation of this historian, but also of many others who, little known to the general public, have added to the real treasures of historical literature. It was my good fortune to meet him on various other occasions; and, in every case, I was especially struck by this wide range of study and thought. As I last left Washington to go officially to Europe, he asked me to make some investigations for him with regard to the mode of dealing in Europe with sundry questions of administration. During my former residence in Europe, he had written seeking information as to European public opinion upon American financial problems. During my late residence just terminated, he sent for books which would throw light on current German politics; and the last message from him, brought by a common friend, had reference to the selection of various works for his readings in ancient classical literature. These appeals for material in researches so varied are but slight indications of his breadth of study. In this scholarly largeness of thought lay one source of his powers. From these stores, collected from every region of enlightened thought and action, he drew tools for the committee-room, weapons for debate. Hence came those illustrations which flashed light into questions which others had befogged. Hence came much of that chastened richness of phrase which entitles many of his writings to a place among the treasures of our political literature. This breadth of study and thought did much to give him

that largeness of view which prevented his becoming a mere partisan, which absolutely forbade his becoming a mere leader of faction. This breadth of intellectual experience gave largeness and nobleness to his purposes. It led him to bring the little things aud the great things into their proper relations, to feel the indescribable pettiness of mere factious triumphs. To him, these petty glories of an hour upon the field of his ambition appeared but as mushrooms upon a prairie.

But it would be a great mistake to suppose that the only characteristic of his mind was breadth. His was no superficial knowledge. His treasure was not beaten thin that it might be spread wide. Even more striking than his breadth of knowledge was its *depth and thoroughness.* To any worthy subject of thought or study which came before him, he applied his mind with all its power. A college classmate, who knew him well, tells us, that, hampered as he was by insufficient preparation for college, he became one of the two or three leading scholars of the institution; that he held his high place in everything—classics, mathematics, political economy, natural sciences, metaphysics; and that, whenever any new subject of study was taken up, it always seemed to his classmates that Garfield had at last found the subject in which he would become a specialist. This was another great source of power in Congress and before the people. Those of you who heard him here, whether you agreed with him or not, can not but remember with what thoroughness he went far down into the strata of political, social and legal principles underlying the questions then before us.

Another of his great characteristics was *moral earnestness.* It was evident, even to those who differed from him, that there was in him far more than the desire to serve a temporary purpose, to win applause, to satisfy a low ambition. He threw himself into the struggle between free and forced labor which preceded the civil war, because he loved liberty and hated oppression. He threw himself into the struggle for the Union, because he loved constitutional order and hated anarchy. He threw himself into the work of education, because he loved intellectual light and hated intellectual darkness. He threw himself into the struggle for the nation's plighted faith, into the struggle for redeeming fully and promptly the nation's pledges, because he loved righteousness and hated iniquity. His championship of the right in all these questions was the result not of a mere languid preference for

right over wrong, not of a delicate sentiment, but of a robust love of what was good and true and just and honorable, and as robust a hatred of the contraries of all these. It was because his feelings were thus firmly rooted in moral earnestness that he was able to withstand the tides of popular unreason which at times threatened to overwhelm him.

Another of his characteristics was *faith*—faith that there is a Power in this universe that works for right—faith in the triumph of that Power—faith that a people, properly instructed, can in the long run be trusted to do justice.

Still another of his characteristics was *courage.* And I am well aware here I may be met with a shade of doubt. This doubt is based, not upon the charges made by heated political enemies, but, it must be confessed, on fears whispered among his friends. Many of us heard, before he entered the presidency, the half-suppressed words: "If Garfield had only as much courage as he has of all other great qualities required, he would be perfect." To me, then and now, such words have always seemed ineffably absurd. As to personal, physical courage, he proved it throughout the war, and especially at the battle of Chickamauga, where he showed an entire willingness—nay, at times, an apparent determination—to lay down his life. And as to political courage and steadfastness, I am stating what I believe will be the sober verdict of the future historian when I say, that in all our recent legislative history there are no better examples of the highest political courage than he showed at two turning-points in our history since the war. The first of these was in the question of trial by military tribunal of offenses committed when the ordinary civil tribunals were still in force. Here he dared take his position against his party—dared to stand for eternal right against a great tidal wave of indignation—to support principles most necessary, though at the moment most unpopular. Come what would, he determined that the liberties and rights inherited from our Anglo-Saxon ancestors should not in American hands be diminished or abridged—and he succeeded.

But the second example dwells still more vividly in the memory of all of us. It was in the struggle for the national honor against those who, intentionally or unintentionally, in one way or another, sought to bring the nation to open or virtual repudiation. He alone, as the nation will long remember, among the representatives of nine States,

stood firm on the question in Congress. He alone, when others bent before the hurricane of unreasonable public opinion, firmly breasted it. While others yielded to what they knew to be fallacies most dangerous, he, almost single-handed and alone, went out into his State and into the nation to combat them. When others took refuge in silence, he poured forth cogent argument and appeal to the nobler side of men's natures. I shall never forget how, in the evening after he addressed us here in the hall hard by, he gave me, quietly seated in my library on yonder hill, and in answer to my questions, some insight into the unwritten history of that struggle. Quietly, without boasting, he told me of the warnings he had received from friends,—of the threats he had received from foes,—of commendations in secret by men who denounced him in public. And yet, the explanation of the feeling I have alluded to regarding his lack of courage is not difficult. It is too much the habit, especially in legislative circles, to estimate a man's courage by his quarreling capacity, by his determination in achieving personal revenge. The miserable misuse of Dr. Johnson's noted dictum, that "a good hater is to be loved," has led men to mistake vigorous personal hatred for force of character, and bitter personal attack for courage. Of this he had little, if any. To his mind, evidently, life was not long enough to quarrel in. He was tolerant in judgment, mild in manner; on this account, not pleasing to the more bigoted partisans and factionists. But, to speak of the man as lacking courage, who, almost alone, dared oppose at one time the great majority in his own and surrounding States upon questions in which political passion was combined with personal greed, is to state a fallacy which bears its refutation upon its face. It often seems to men that the rude, massive column of rough-hewn stone from the quarry, in all the ruggedness and apparent strength of nature, is the strongest of all supports in architecture; but the architect knows better,—he knows that the Corinthian column, beautiful as it is, slender as it is, a delight to the eye by its beauty and to the mind by its proportion, well-poised, put together of selected stone, all flaws carefully worked out, is stronger than the rough, rugged pier as it comes from the hand of nature. Garfield, in the great temple of our constitutional liberties, was one of the Corinthian columns, well-based, well-built, towering loftily, adorned with all that culture could give, and for all that the stronger.

I might speak of other noble characteristics—of that religious feel-

ing, in the highest sense, which, though not formulated into a creed, was bedded deeply in his nature. But I must turn now for a moment to speak of his *aims* and his *methods*. As to his aims, no one will deny that Garfield was ambitious; but his ambition was that of statesmanlike service of his country, of one who cares alone for that honor that comes from high service. Above all personal aims, as is abundantly shown throughout his career, was the desire to fitly serve his country and humanity. A word also as to his methods. They were never those of the demagogue. Search his speeches through and you shall find there no appeals to popular prejudice or passion, or dishonorable self-interest. Look his life through, and you will find in his method of preparation nothing slipshod, nothing hap-hazard—all is steady, straightforward, systematic, vigorous. In this, among young men especially, where so many legends are extant of men who achieved greatness by force of genius and not of work, his example is a most healthful one.

And now as to *the lesson of his life*. It has more than once been repeated that the great lesson of his life is as to the possibilities given in this free land of ours to her poorest sons. I must confess that this seems to me a very inadequate statement of the lesson of a life like Garfield's. It is a mere popular superstition that other countries, even monarchical countries, do not offer opportunities to young men of exceptional abilities and of strong character to rise to high positions. The annals of the old world show many such cases—popes, cardinals, bishops, marshals, ministers of state, legislators, who have risen from the very lowest stratum of society. No; the lesson taught by Garfield's life is something greater than this. Poor young men in many countries have risen by chicanery, by treason to the weak, by flattery to the strong, by pandering to popular prejudices, by fattening upon popular errors, by coining base thought and gilding it to make it pass as precious. But here was a man who rose by none of these arts—nay, who rose by the very contrary of all these—through a series of triumphs, to the highest position in the gift of our people. Here is the lesson of Garfield's life—a lesson to be forever held in remembrance.

And now there remains *the lesson of his death*. Were I standing before an audience of men and women, whose ideas are formed, whose careers are made, who are to be mainly in the future what they have been in the past, I should say nothing of this lesson. But standing as

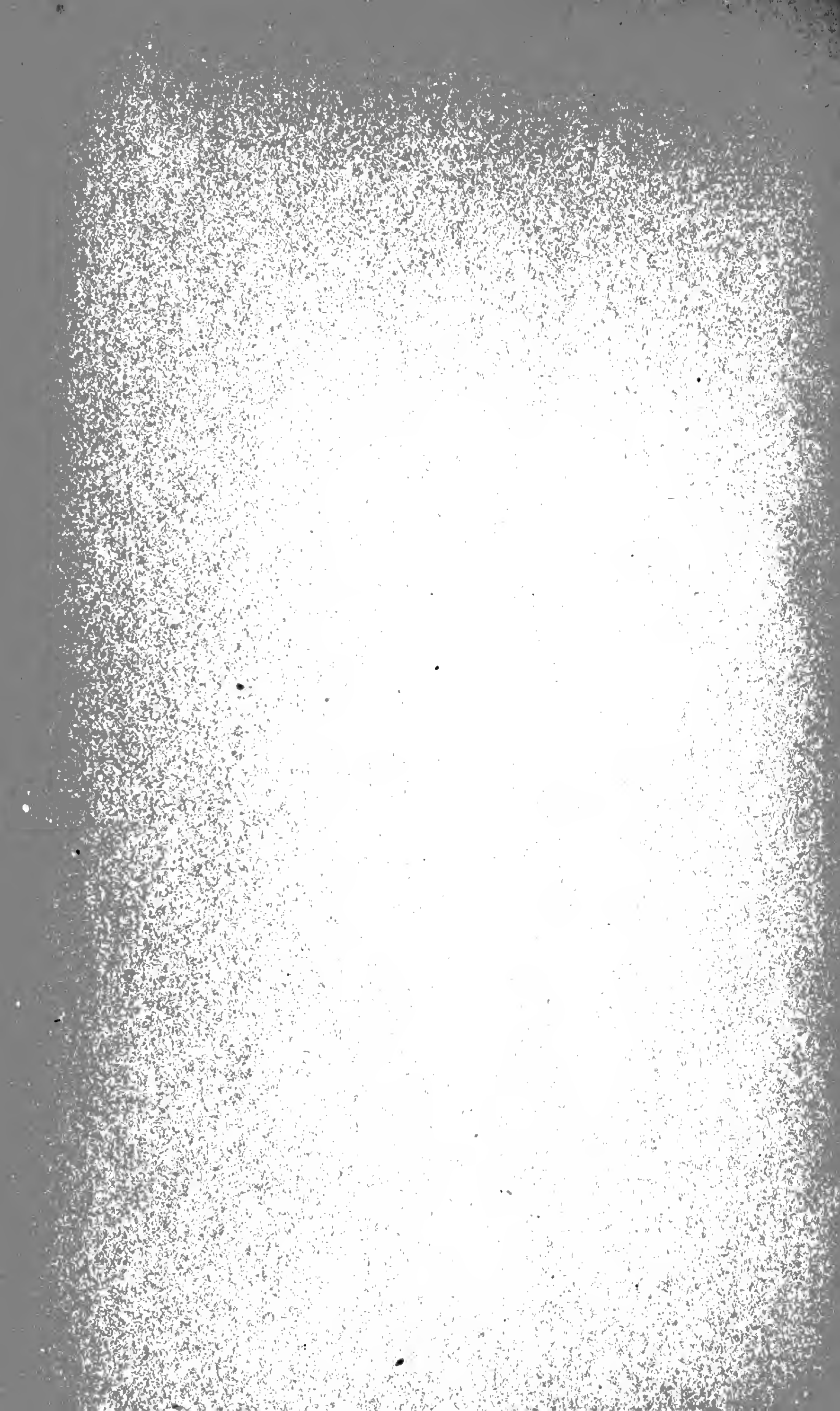
I do now, before so many young men and young women, whose careers are just beginning, from many of whom I have hopes that they will make the world better because they have lived, I cannot forbear touching upon it. Garfield died by the hand of an assassin. I have no wish to heap hatred and contempt upon him. I leave him to the laws of his country and to the execrations of mankind through all future time. But I cannot forbear saying here, that there is a cause to be thought of other than the hand and the heart which accomplished this unnatural murder. The foul slime, the deadly ooze, in which this moral monster was engendered, from which he crept forth to be recognized as a curse to his country and mankind, is the system by which the public service of the United States is recruited—a system which is known as the spoils and plunder system. This gave the environment in which the base qualities of the assassin—his love for place, his passion for notoriety—were nourished and developed. James A. Garfield came to the presidency in the fullness of his strength and courage and ability. He surrounded himself with men whom the nation knew to be worthy advisers. Great problems confronted them at the outset; but how was their time occupied? The contagion of office-seeking led to a sort of barbarian invasion of the capital. To this cause one president certainly, and two probably, had previously owed their death. It has been stated on very high authority that there were placed on file a million of applications for petty offices, and mainly backed by the influence of myriads of other men who felt obliged to press these applications from friendship or policy. It is needless here to go into the manifold evils caused by this system—the destruction of the proper independence of the legislative and executive branches of the government, the thwarting of just public sentiment in nominations by men supporting unworthy candidates in the hope of receiving the reward of office, the unsettling of myriads of active-minded men, drawing them from steady and useful pursuits into this worst of all lotteries. It is a fact which every one conversant with foreign countries knows well, that no system is more constantly harped upon in foreign countries by the enemies of free constitutional government than this; that nothing so disheartens in those lands the friends of constitutional liberty. I but speak the words of truth and soberness, when I say to you here in the presence of this open grave, that, while foreign nations wonder at our prosperity, admire our skill, and respect our numerical strength,

they have simply contempt for the system of appointment to office in which fitness passes for so little and effrontery passes for so much. It was not given to our beloved statesman whom we this day lament, to grapple fully with this question. He came upon the stage when the question was whether this republic should be the home of free labor or of slave labor. He had next to grapple with the simple, naked question, whether this nation should continue to exist. When this was settled, close upon it came the question whether this nation should be forever dishonored and degraded among the nations of the earth by repudiating the principles of common honesty. But these questions, thanks, under Providence, largely to him, have been now most happily settled. The question as to a fitting civil service for the country yet remains. It is a question which can be settled only by the people. Utterly useless is it to blame politicians, legislators, executive officers. They are simply what public opinion makes them. There must come a new birth and a new growth of feeling on this subject among the people, which shall command its public servants to devise a great reform and to carry it out. It will be no easy task. It cannot be done suddenly. It will not be so long a struggle or so bitter as that which rooted out human bondage; but it will be a serious struggle, worthy of the highest powers of the young men now coming on the field of action. All such can take part in it in one way or another. May the example of Garfield's steady, thorough, and structural preparation for public life lead young men to prepare themselves for the coming question in like manner; and may the record of his faith, his courage, strengthen them to grapple with the evil. And if this shall be, if this great example of his life, this terrible lesson of his death, shall give inspiration to this reform, we shall see that our beloved chief magistrate and friend has not died in vain.

And now let us look no longer into his grave. That is closed. The clods and stones have rattled upon his coffin. His tired, wasted body lies on the shore of Lake Erie, among the people he loved and served so well; his spirit has returned to God who gave it. I bid you look upward. I have pictured Garfield's character as a Corinthian column in the temple of constitutional history. But, as his whole character opens before me, it takes a form in my vision grander and nobler. It expands as some vast Gothic cathedral, spreading wide, striking deep, springing high, based in the granite rock of truth, over-arched with

justice, buttressed on every side with study and thought, pinnacled with manly aspirations, every stone well-chosen and well-wrought. Rising high at its front are massive towers of fixed principles, standing four-square to all storms of unreason that blow; and, piercing the heavens above, twin spires—love of God and love of man—and above them, crowning all, the symbol of suffering and of martyrdom but of redemption, shining amid the clouds, Heaven's own light reflected from it upon the nation and upon the earth.

To this edifice, thus built, thus braced, let the eyes of the people look up amid their tears. Let it not merely suggest high resolves, but let it strengthen us to keep them. And thus shall the nation be worthy of this great man's great life. Thus shall it stand in our history as a priceless jewel in a setting of pure gold.



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