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S P E E C H
OF
JUDGE JOHNSTON,
ON THE
LIFE AND CHARACTER
OF
R. B. HAYES.

DELIVERED AT AVONDALE, OHIO.

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SPEECH OF JUDGE JOHNSTON, AT AVONDALE.

Mr. President, and Ladies and Gentlemen :

BAYLE, in writing of Mahomet, says he never could decide whether his friends or his enemies told most lies about him; and so it might too generally be said about candidates for office. In the case of R. B. Hayes there seems to be no reason for perverting the truth. His friends have no occasion to exaggerate his merits; and his enemies, unless they are ruffians outright, will not assail his character as a gentleman, a patriot, and an honest man.

I have had rare opportunities of knowing him for the last twenty-seven years, and I propose on this occasion simply to answer a few questions which have been put to me in regard to him, and I do this chiefly for the information of a numerous circle of my early friends who have not had the pleasure of his personal acquaintance.

WHO IS HAYES, AND WHAT OF HIM?

He is a plant of the Ohio soil; was born in Delaware, Ohio, in 1822, and grew up a boy of promise. He was educated at Kenyon College, Ohio, and graduated with the first honors of his class in 1842. He studied the law in Columbus, Ohio; and afterward, in 1845, took his degree in the law school of Harvard University. In 1845 he was admitted to the bar at Marietta, and commenced the practice of the law in Fremont, Ohio. In 1849 he removed to Cincinnati, Ohio, and practiced his profession about nine years, in the meantime declining a nomination for Judge of the Common Pleas. From 1858 to 1861 he held the important office of City Solicitor, first by appointment, and afterward by election. In 1861 he enlisted in the Union army, and, with the rank of major, took the

field, and served till the fall of Richmond and the close of the war, having been repeatedly wounded in battle and had four horses killed under him; and, in the meanwhile, rose by merit from the rank of major to that of major-general. While he was yet in the field, in 1864, he was nominated for Congress, in the second district, and elected by a large majority, notwithstanding his refusal to leave his post to canvass the district. At the close of the war he took his seat in Congress and served two years, and was again elected in 1866. In 1867 he was elected Governor of Ohio, served his first term, was re-elected, and served the second. He was again elected Governor in 1875, and is now in the midst of his third term. He has been in the public service, with one brief interval, eighteen years, and is now, in the fifty-fourth year of his age, a candidate for the last and highest office in the nation. And here it is proper to notice two peculiarities in his history: First, He was never known to solicit an office or a promotion, great or small, in his life. Second, In all the offices he has held, whether civil or military, he has never failed, not even through accident, to perform his duty with fidelity, wisdom, and success. You are ready to exclaim,

LUCKY MAN!

Call it what you will. If this success is the result of good luck, be it so; I want a lucky man for President. If it is the result of wisdom, be it so; I want a wise man for President. If it is the result of an overruling Providence, be it so; I want a chosen instrument of Heaven for President.

* There's a Divinity that shapes our ends,
Rough-hew them how we will!

And if, by a chain of unforeseen events, a young man of a big heart and large common-sense, making no pretensions to genius, with no ambition for power or place, is led in safety through the trackless maze of human accidents for eighteen years—four years of the time in the “valley and shadow of death”—all the while performing important public duties,

without a blunder in his affairs or a blot on his name, is not this a man of destiny?

He had four horses shot from under him in battle. I do not refer to this as a proof of his courage—that needs no proof—but as a proof that the “Divinity that shapes our ends” was with him, and “covered his head in the day of battle.” Not because he was better than thousands who fell on his right hand and on his left, but that his life was preserved for the accomplishment of something more for his country.

On Braddock’s field, Washington had two horses shot under him: and many a time and oft, when I was a child, have I heard our good old mothers teach their children, from this fact, that Washington was a chosen instrument of Heaven to achieve our independence. It may be asked, whether this man of destiny has any

MARKED PECULIARITIES.

I answer, none whatever. Neither his body nor his mind runs into rickety proportions. Place him on a platform together with one hundred distinguished men, and call in an able connoisseur, who has neither seen nor heard of any one of them, and he will point him out as a model man; neither too large nor too small, nor too tall nor too short, nor too fat nor too lean, nor too old nor too young. A man in the prime and vigor of healthful manhood, with blood in his veins and marrow in his bones; able to endure any labor, either of body or of mind, which may devolve upon him.

His face seems made to match his form. No painful, care-worn wrinkles, indicative of infirmities or misfortunes, to provoke a grudge against nature, or engender sourness toward mankind. Nor does he wear a smirking face, as if he were a candidate for admiration; but a fine sunny countenance, such as men and women respect, and children love—such as the good old farmer wore, of whom the little boy said, “That old gent wo n’t lick a little teller for gettin’ on behind him on his sled.”

His manners, like his countenance, are simple and sincere.

He don't run to meet you, and call you "My VERY DEAR *sir*." He takes you by the hand, with a cordial kindness which recognizes the universal brotherhood of man, and impresses you that he is a man who gets above nobody, and nobody gets above him.

Let us take a peep into

HIS DOMESTIC LIFE.

It is a sad truth the world over, that nearly every distinguished literary man has had domestic troubles, resulting in separation from their wives. Politicians have had but little better luck. A hunger-bitten, seedy scrub marries a wife who is only too good for him. By and by the wheel of fortune turns him up in Congress, or some other respectable post. The lift is too high for his weak head. He imagines that he is a great man thrown away on an inferior woman, and takes on swells. He sets the world to talking about his idle gallantries, and forfeits the affections of his own family, and domestic happiness is sacrificed to the shams of artificial life.

But here is a thoroughly domestic man, whose cheerful spirit does not require the dissipations of artificial life—whose own home is dearer to him than any other spot on earth—whose affections never wandered from the lode-star of his life—who loves his wife and children with a tenderness unknown to a weak and vulgar heart; and whose wife and children, and even his domestic animals, love him.

'Tis sweet to hear the watch-dog's honest bark
 Bay deep-mouthed welcome as we draw near home;
 'Tis sweet to know there is an eye to mark
 Our coming, and look brighter when we come.

It is a moral grandeur of which a nation may be proud to have at its head such an example of conjugal fidelity and domestic happiness.

Allowing Mr. Hayes to be a good man, and a fortunate man, the common question still recurs,

IS HE A PARTY MAN?

Unquestionably, in a certain sense, he is. From the hour the Republican party was formed to resist the repeal of the Missouri compromise and the encroachments of slavery in the new territories, he has stood in the foremost rank of the party, battling for the great principle that all men are created equal, and that all men should be equal before the law.

Like the good Zachary Taylor, he would leave the evil alone where it was established by law, but would not allow it to overspread one acre more of the public domain. In this faith he lived till treason raised its baleful head—appealed from the ballot to the sword—and commenced the work of destruction—till, according to Stephen A. Douglass, the nation was divided into two parties, “the *Patriots* and the *Traitors*.” Then he belonged to the party of Patriots, and pledged his life in support of his faith; and so was a party man.

When the war was over, and the broken fragments of a once glorious country were to be collected and again united under the old banner, he was among the active laborers in the blessed work of reunion, and in such amendments to the constitution as were deemed necessary to secure to all men equal rights and equal protection under the law.

Others, who had “run well for a season,” became tired of private life, and impatient of delay, and turned their backs on their old friends. But R. B. Hayes stands fast in the faith—a *party man*.

But when you speak of a partizanship like that of Tammany Hall, which declares that the spoils belong to the victors—a doctrine worthy only of pirates—he is no longer a *party man*. In the platform on which he stands, and in his letter of acceptance, he distinctly and emphatically repudiates this barbarous system; laying down as a principle in civil service reform, that honest and capable men are to be chosen for the civil service, regardless of party names, and, when chosen, shall hold their places so long as they do their work faithfully.

Nor is this a new idea with Mr. Hayes. When it became his duty, under the law, to appoint commissioners to relieve the Supreme Court of an overcharged docket, he had before him both personal and party friends enough to fill all the places. But he did that which was both wiser and better—made a fair division, appointing able and honest men of both parties.

This is magnanimous, to be sure, but

IS HE A GREAT MAN?

Answer, no; not in the vulgar sense of the term. What is it to be a great man? Is it to be a victorious orator, teaching lessons of wisdom to-day, and committing acts of folly to-morrow? Is it to be a ruthless conqueror, desolating half the globe, and bringing ruin on his own head at last? Is it to be an ill-balanced genius, partly strong and partly weak, like the feet of Nebuchadnezzar's image, part of iron and part of clay? I have read of a hero so strong that he carried away the gates of a city, posts, bars, and all, on his shoulders; and so weak that he revealed the secret of his strength to a graceless woman, and then went to sleep in her lap, to be shorn of his locks and have his eyes gonged out. A fair sample this of heroes, from Nimrod to Louis Napoleon. And what of the Alexanders, the Cæsars, the Tamerlanes, of Charles XII. of Sweden and Napoleon I. of France, these destroyers of nations and scourges of human kind? Call ye these great men? They were great men vulgarly so called. They terrified the nations of the earth, as comets used to do, but they shed neither light nor hope on the cause of humanity. From such blazing meteors the republican heart fondly turns to the modest but untading lights of our own Washington and Lincoln.

* Constant as the Northern star,
Of whose true fixed and resting quality,
There is no fellow in the firmament.

Pardon me, I do not mean to compare Mr. Hayes, or any body else, with Washington or Lincoln. If he had all the

great and good qualities of both these men together, he never had the opportunity to be their equal. To be the chosen instrument of Heaven in winning and establishing the freedom and independence of four millions oppressed colonists, and erecting on the ruins of despotism a great and free republic, was an opportunity which could happen only to one man in four millions, and but once in a thousand years. To be the instrument in saving from ruin the structure which Washington and his compeers had built, and striking the fetters from four million slaves, was an opportunity which could only happen to one man in forty-two millions, and but once in a hundred years.

According to my poor notion of greatness, in a republic, recognizing the principle that all men are created equal, the man who in trying times performs with wisdom, fidelity, and success, every duty, great and small, to which the providence of God has called him, is a great man. If I am right in this, then Mr. Hayes is a great man now, but *you* can make him greater. If you make him President, which I believe you will, and, following the uniform bent of his character, he discharges the duties of the future as well as he has discharged the duties of the past, his title will be complete; and who can doubt of this, considering his character as

A MAN OF PURPOSE.

"No man having put his hand to the plow, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God." Nor is he fit for any other kingdom. That man alone is fit to rule, who when he sees the line of duty before him, pursues it—not with headlong zeal to-day, lukewarmness to-morrow, coldness the day after; but with steady and unflinching step to the end. If I was in search of an illustration, I would find it in the military life of R. B. Hayes.

This man had no natural bent to military life—no fondness for bloodshed. No Quaker ever loved peace and harmony more than he. But when the alternative of live or die, sink or swim, was presented to the country in which he was born and reared—when the glorious fabric of republican freedom reared by our fathers was assailed by

traitor hands, and menaced to be laid in ruin, and the hope of the world blasted: when this broad land, mapped out by the finger of God as the site of freedom's empire, was about to be torn asunder, and a new empire erected on its ruins, with slavery for its corner-stone: when English aristocracy proclaimed the American Republic a failure: then this unpretending young man buckled on his sword and marched to the field, asking no questions what was to befall *him*, if his country could be saved: and having "put his hand to the plow," never for a moment looked back, till he saw the capitol of treason fall, and the traitor chief an exile, hiding in female attire from the vengeance of his country.

While he was yet in the field, he was nominated for Congress in the Second District, and urged by a friend to come home and canvass the district. His reply was short but characteristic: "Any man that would leave his post in the field to canvass for Congress ought to be scalped." After he was elected I wrote to him from Washington that I had a nice suit of rooms at his service, and asked him when he would come to Washington. His reply was that he never would come to Washington unless he could come through Richmond. And he did come through Richmond—came, not as a Roman conqueror claiming a triumph, but as a republican citizen, who had finished his work in the field, and was ready to enter on his work in the council of the nation.

I relate these anecdotes not to prove the patriotism of Mr. Hayes—that needs no proof—but to illustrate his character as a man of purpose—a man of stability.

I have known a man of great ability, in some respects, to devote a quarter of a century to denouncing slavery and slaveholders, and when the legitimate consequence of his logic came to the tug of war, to give the contest up—to be willing for the sake of peace to deliver over the better half of the continent to the dominion of slavery, and consign four million human beings and their posterity to the fetter and the lash forever. Not so R. B. Hayes. The logic of his tongue and the logic of his sword spoke the

same language. "The Union must and shall be preserved." The wicked rebellion must be abandoned or the cause of it rooted out forever. And it is rooted out, thanks be to God, and thanks to the instruments under God who accomplished the work.

But has he the ability to defend himself and his doctrines? In short,

IS HE AN ORATOR?

How much oratory does it require to make a good President? Judging by what I have read of others, and what I know of Hayes, he is a better public speaker than George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, or Andrew Jackson—all of whom seem to have held their own. True, he is not a metaphysical gladiator, like Calhoun; he lacks the graceful eloquence of Clay, the massive logic of Webster, and the moving pathos of Corwin. He can not "roar you" like Governor Allen, nor "tear a passion to tatters" like Gen. Carey. But he always understands his subject, and speaks with logical clearness and classic accuracy. When you go to hear him, you are not transported by his eloquence to the regions of imagination; but you understand him, and when you go home, you can remember and repeat every point of his argument; and I believe he understands the principles of our federal government as well, can state them as clearly, and defend them as ably as any man of my acquaintance, in or out of public life. All the shining qualities of the orator belong to the department of genius, and may, and often do, exist without wisdom. But

IS HAYES AN ABLE LAWYER?

He will not compare with Marshall, or Pinkney, or Hamilton, or Burr, or Webster, or Curtis, or Ewing. But he is a sound and able lawyer; at least I always thought so. About twenty-two years ago I chose him from amongst the able bar of Cincinnati to manage a cause of my own, in which I felt some interest; and about the same time the bar of Cincinnati recommended him to Governor Chase to fill a vacancy on the bench of the Common Pleas.

Of his sharpness as a special pleader I know nothing.

Special pleas are but the handmaids of justice in the outer court; and I should hardly think he wasted much time in dilations with them. Nor do I suppose he remembers as many decided cases by their titles as our late Judge Storer, or Mr. Justice Swayne. But he knows the great fundamental maxims of the law, and the great principles of moral ethics which underlie all law, as well as the best of them.

We have never had for President what the world esteems a great lawyer. It is even doubtful whether the hair-splitting distinctions of the special pleader, the unseemly wranglings of the nisi prius court, and the blind devotion to musty precedents, do not dwarf rather than enlarge the understanding; and whether the simple rules of reciprocal justice, known as the law of nations, are not better understood by the candid student of history than by the *great lawyer*, more especially the *great railroad lawyer*.

But what is to be said of the general

SCHOLARSHIP OF MR. HAYES?

Scholarship is an accomplishment rather than a qualification for the office of President. That of George Washington consisted of a plain, common English education, with a knowledge of surveying. That of Abraham Lincoln was precisely the same. Yet Lord Brougham does not hesitate to say that Washington's education was better adapted to the duties he had to perform than the learning acquired at the universities. And the same observation has been made in regard to Lincoln by some of the first scholars in Europe and America.

In addition to large stores of common sense, and common information, and common honesty, which are the chief qualifications, it is desirable that the chief magistrate of the nation should write and speak the national language with propriety; and nobody who knows him doubts the ability of Mr. Hayes to do this. But I make no apology for his lack of scholarship. At twenty years of age he took his degree of Bachelor of Arts at Kenyon College, with the first honors of his class. Shortly after, he took his de-

gree of Bachelor of Law at Harvard University, and he has been a diligent student ever since, except when the arduous duties of the camp absorbed his time. Of the fifteen Presidents who have gone before, Thomas Jefferson and John Quincy Adams only have surpassed him in scholarship; while neither Washington nor Jackson nor Lincoln were his equals in this respect. But

HAS HE EXPERIENCE?

Something more than his antagonist, who never served the United States in any capacity, civil or military; but whose experience has been limited to the politics of Tammany Hall and railroad lawyering, neither of which tend to increase one's stock either of wisdom or honesty. But history is somewhat sarcastic as to the value of experience. In looking back, we find the longest experience and the worst President uniting in the person of James Buchanan; and the shortest experience and the best President (Washington excepted) uniting in Abraham Lincoln.

What I have said under the head of scholarship, I repeat under the head of experience. A large store of common sense, and common information, and common honesty, applied with patriotic solicitude to the wants of the country, are worth more than whole encyclopedias of learning and ages of experience. But is it true that

GOVERNOR HAYES IS RICH?

So I am told, and if it is so, I am glad to learn it, but far gladder to know that he came by it honestly. That he did not acquire it by gambling in the gold room at New York, nor by trading in crooked whisky, nor by absorbing railroad subsidies, nor by receiving fabulous donations in the name of fees, nor by jobbing in the stocks of decayed corporations; nor by watering railroad stocks, nor by credit mobillier.

A French writer says there are but three ways of acquiring a fortune: By inheritance from an ancestor; by persevering industry; or by stealing. By the first and second of these modes Mr. Hayes has acquired his fortune, he the

same more or less, and left the third mode of acquisition to whom it may concern.

In a great and rich and growing country, like ours, it is appropriate at least that the chief magistrate should have the means of sustaining his position before the world without disreputable shifts, or dependence on the liberality of his friends: and when we consider the ruinous extravagance into which the ladies of the capitol plunge themselves and drag their husbands, a reasonable degree of independence in the executive mansion may have its reformatory influence. If the excellent lady who presides over the *lou* should rebuke this folly by attiring herself in Christian simplicity, it can not be ascribed to poverty: and if she should add richness to simplicity, we shall know that it is paid for. — But I must close.

I have been a great idolator in my day. When I was young I had a great admiration of great men, at a great distance: but on near approach they dwindle down to the common stature of my neighbors: some of them lower. Some vice, some folly, or some weakness, to mar the perfection of the god, and teach me that they were mere men; some of them bad men. Give me a man without rickety proportions, a sound mind in a sound body—a man whom I know to be honest and believe to be capable.

Some days since a gentleman, not himself above mediocrity, asked me if Mr. Hayes was not a mediocre man. Well, we shall not dispute about words. I have weighed in the balance of history the Theocrat, the Autocrat, the Aristocrat, the Democrat, and the Mediocrat, and of all these the Mediocrat suits me best. He is the man who represents most nearly the common sense, the common honesty, the common wants, the common wealth, and the common prosperity of our common country. — And without admitting his inferiority to the great railroad lawyer and railroad speculator, on the other side, Rutherford B. Hayes fits the bill.

I shall next speak of the platforms, but not this evening.

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