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MEMORIAL ADDRESS

BY

HON. J. SLOAT FASSETT

ON THE

BATTLEFIELD
OF GETTYSBURG

MAY 30, 1910.

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Memorial Address

Today is a day of remembrance all over this broad land. Thousands of Americans are gathering together to show their love and honor for their soldier dead. They are recalling the stirring events that led us to a deadly war fifty years ago. There rises in retrospect a clearer view of the true meaning of the conflicts of those days than was possible for us to have at the moment they occurred. The color of passion and prejudice has faded; the bitterness of personal bias has sweetened; minds inflamed with the wrath which moved men to slaughter have recovered their normal calm and judgment. The storm was terrific. The tempest was sublime. The destruction was appalling. The suffering was unspeakable. But these things passed away and now what was then seen but dimly, being obscured by the very violence of contest, stands revealed in all its beautiful proportions. A new generation may now join with the survivors of

the older days in a saner and a truer view of what the struggle meant. These days of remembrance are fruitful in lessons of love of country and of devotion to the common good. Nothing interests Americans more than the welfare of America, and nothing concerns us more intimately than the means whereby that welfare may be preserved. As we gather here to-day surrounded on every hand by the mute witnesses of a mighty contest waged here nearly half a century ago; as imagination endeavors to reconstruct the sublime spectacle of the three days' fight of Gettysburg, I seem to hear from out the rushing squadrons, the shouts and shrieks of men, the rattle of musketry and the thundering reverberations of the iron-throated guns, the words spoken to Moses from the burning bush: "Put off now thy shoes from off thy feet for the place whereon thou standeth is holy ground," for this, too, is holy ground, con-

secrated to liberty and union, and hallowed by the martyrs for truth's sake who sleep beneath its sod.

We are here as loyal citizens of the United States to mourn and praise our dead. We are here to celebrate the spirit of liberty and those who fought for it; to honor the spirit of equality and those who died for it; to dedicate ourselves anew to the spirit of the Union and to those who saved it; to reverence the spirit of obedience to duty and those who heeded it. We are standing on one of the mountain tops of history and have come to get a clearer view of what has gone before, and to learn how best to chart our journey for the future. Annually we return here to strew these graves with flowers, and to consider the deeds done here in the flesh, and to ponder in our hearts the messages voiced from this field of ten thousand memories. Here we yield ourselves to reminiscence of events long passed and con-

template with satisfaction this monumental field, conscious that a monument more enduring than those which meet the eye, not built with hands, has been erected, eternal in the heaven of human gratitude and love.

We are the heirs of all that was here wrought. We have come by the inexorable law of succession into a mighty heritage. As we have received so also must we in our turn bestow. The trust is vast and sacred. Our responsibilities are co-extensive with the trust. To-day we may well search our hearts and search the intervening years and contemplate the future that confronts us, and ask ourselves if we have kept the faith.

The battle of Gettysburg was one of the great battlefields of history, notable for the number of men engaged, the long list of the dead and wounded, the illustrious names of the leaders on both sides, the distinguished bravery of the combatants,

and above all, for the mighty issues which were here involved; the integrity of a nation and the emancipation of a race. Here the tide of rebellion reached its highest flood. Here was recorded the decisive verdict of the God of Battles, establishing manhood as the basis and liberty as the universal condition of citizenship. Here the blood of brethren in gray mingled with the blood of brethren in blue that the sins of the fathers might be expiated, and the welfare and unity of the children be guaranteed and consecrated. Here we were taught once more the fatal certainty of the truth of the words of the Holy Writ: "Be not deceived, God is not mocked, for whatsoever a man soweth that shall he also reap." Here was sealed in blood and tears the compact of an indissoluble union; here throbbed the heart of the nation in the agonies of war, and here throbs the heart of a nation in the grateful remembrances of peace; and here

are buried the hostages by which we are pledged in the words of the immortal Lincoln to the high resolve that government of the people, by the people, and for the people shall not perish from the earth.

In the long years which preceded actual warfare the resources of debate and legislative compromise had been exhausted. The irreconcilable forces of union and disunion, of liberty and slavery could not be compromised; they could not live together side by side. One or the other must surrender. When this truth finally made itself manifest, when all other resources had failed there came at last the inevitable call to arms, the age-long court of last resort, a cruel and a savage court. Some day, pray God, we shall learn a better way. Some day the principles of justice and of truth will be established in reason and adjusted in a spirit of sanity and love, and there is great comfort in

the thought that the people of the United States will never again find it necessary to adjust their own differences by the sword. When the fatal gun was fired at Sumpter the response was quick and fierce. As God gave each side to see the light so each side followed the call, and these conflicting ideas of union and disunion, freedom and slavery in the forms of men in the bodies of our fathers and our family kin rushed into the maelstrom of a devastating war. From North and East and South and West came the hurrying multitudes. They came from shop and field, from factory and counting house, from all callings and all professions, men of one blood, men of one God, men of one country, men of one speech, leaving behind them the comforts and securities of home, led by no hope of personal advantage, moved by no expectation of selfish reward, but inspired, each man, by a belief in the righteousness of his own

cause, determined to do and die, if need be, that the truth as he understood it might be established.

In that contest, as so often in the history of wars, those ideas which made for the widening of human opportunity, which made for the establishment of human equality and freedom, which made for an equal chance for each man to expand manward and Godward, each one after his own inherent powers or latent capacity, were triumphant over the conquered forces of privilege and disunion.

The history of man has been but the history of conflicting ideas and ideals struggling against each other in the forms of men, throwing man against man, tribe against tribe, nation against nation, and race against race, building up new philosophies, tearing down old forms, creating new religions, destroying old ones, wearing away old civilizations and building up new ones, and in the process winnowing

out higher ideals, truer ideas; making for richer opportunities for individual men. In the long view right forever triumphant; in the short view wrong forever on the throne, but never at any time any advance forward or upward save at the expenditure of enormous exertion and sacrifice and suffering and death.

There has never been any primrose path to victory; there has never been any painless conquest of great advance of universal benefit. The precious plants of liberty have been watered by the tears and nourished by the blood of countless generations. No great freedom has ever been established by spontaneous growth, nor has it ever been self-sustaining or self-protecting. Liberties are rare plants demanding eternal vigilance and continuous defence. No great expansion of human opportunity has ever come to pass by accident. Sometime, somehow, somewhere, some man has paid the price. This is the

inexorable and unchanging law. The advance of truth across the world has been marked by little circles of blackened earth where yesterday the martyr stood.

Mankind has been consecrated from the beginning to emancipation, to liberty, to equal opportunity, to a chance for growth and development. There has always glowed in his bosom an inextinguishable spark of divine fire which would not be denied. This great struggle here at Gettysburg was but one of a thousand similar struggles to the same end, but Gettysburg was decisive. The backbone of the rebellion was broken—here across these ridges and in these fields, and here it was decided forever that the union though a compact was indestructible; that the country was a nation and not a confederacy, that men were men and not chattels. Gettysburg converted this Government from a great experiment to a great certainty. As America had been settled

through the need and agitation of men for equal opportunity for individual expression, by the urgency in men for liberty to grow, by the necessity for men that political conditions should respond more nearly to the urgings of man's inner and spiritual nature; so Gettysburg was fought in response to the same necessities appearing in a different form.

It was necessary to make the circle of individual freedoms complete. Before Gettysburg man had conquered for himself many of the great freedoms which we proudly claim as American institutions, not that they are not found elsewhere, but because nowhere else in all the world are they so complete. Before Gettysburg was fought our citizens had enjoyed freedom of education, freedom of expression by thought and word and pen and press, freedom to worship God each after the dictates of his own conscience. And here at Gettysburg the circle was made com-

plete. Once and for all labor was emancipated from the shame of slavery, and for the first time man was free in head and heart and hand, and in all this land forever and forever more the only stripes shall be the stripes upon our flag.

The men whose deeds we commemorate here to-day fought unselfishly, they fought for no increase of wealth or extension of dominion, for no personal advantage or individual gain, but for their country and their Constitution. They fought not so much for their rights as for their duties, not so much for themselves as for others. Their cause was the increasing cause of all the ages that have gone before, and the imperative need of all the generations that were yet to come. Their consecration to their cause led them to sacrifice, to battle and to death. Not every great cause leads to battle and to death. Only a few are called upon to die for their country, but all of us are called

upon to live for our country. These men taught us how to live as well as how to die. Heroism is not confined to the tented field. Courage is not required exclusively for war and death. To die nobly is heroic. To live nobly is magnificent. The one demands instant courage, the other unfaltering devotion.

The welfare of our country depends upon the courage and the spirit in which we meet and discharge the ever-recurring, homely duties of every-day life. The triumph of right over wrong, of liberty over slavery, was not completed by the victorious outcome of the rebellion. The war between the forces of light and the forces of darkness is a continuous and never-ending war. Every day is its own Gettysburg, and every man a soldier. Every day opposing forces meet on the great battlefields of life. Every day in every human enterprise a victory must be lost or won. The arms of peace never can

be laid aside. The past has pledged us to the future. That which our fathers began we must continue. Finished it never will be until man's destiny is complete.

Each new freedom develops new foes, each new liberty is threatened by some new license. In an ever-growing country with ever-changing conditions there is a continuing field for the display of the loftiest virtues and the highest gifts. The obligations of citizenship may change in kind but never change in quality. To-day may require the soldier, tomorrow may require the priest, the next day the statesman, but every day requires courage, resolution, unselfishness and a willingness justly to serve the common good. Whether we are willing or unwilling each must lend a hand, each must either help or hinder, we cannot be eliminated. The responsibility is not to be denied, the obligation is not to be evaded. As civic privileges are common to all, so civic duties

are common to all. They are not and ought not to be transferable. No man has any right to share the peace and security of organized society unless he devotes his share of effort toward securing that peace and maintaining that security. Civic duties are not assignable any more than are civic privileges. The deadliest foes of the permanence of our institutions are civic indifference and civic apathy, the one is a treason and the other is a crime. Universal individual interest in and aggressive participation in public affairs is the price we must pay for present welfare and future prosperity. It is suicidal folly to look to some exceptional man, no matter how highly gifted he may be, to see to it that the republic suffers no harm. That way lies dictatorship. Just in proportion as each citizen meets this duty of interest in public affairs will the stability of our institutions be assured. It has cost the effort of ages to secure the right to

each citizen for an equal voice at the ballot box. This right must be exercised that it may produce its finest fruits. There are more good men than bad men in every community, but inert men no matter how lofty their private virtues are of no public utility. Common honesty demands a common exertion for the common good. No conception of public duty is complete which either belittles or ignores this obligation. The highest civic duty of every American citizen is to be a practical American politician with an undying interest in and an unflagging participation in all public affairs with an unwavering devotion to the principles of a square deal and fair play. Each public duty shirked adds just so much to the burden of the faithful. The needs and the benefits of good government are universal. We may have just as good government as we will to have. We must move forward like an army with banners, each

man in his own place faithful to his own duties in his own way according to his strength.

This great Government of ours of which we are all so proud is in many ways the most complicated in its forms and organisms. It is not a pure democracy, and could not endure long as such, and tendencies in that direction should be viewed with a most hostile eye. It is a republic of the representative form wherein each man has an equal right with every other man to an equal voice in governmental affairs. It was inevitable that our institutions should take this particular political form because it affords the best chance for individual growth, and requires the highest qualities of individual citizenship, and under it human liberty would find itself the most at home. Here the responsibility is upon all alike. The expressed will of the majority properly ascertained in the various civic divisions

is the supreme law of the land and the foundation of all authority. It is established by the experience of the centuries that the opinion of all of the people is a stronger foundation for justice than the opinion of some of the people. Here the aggregate good of all is determined by the aggregate will of all, and in the exercise and expression of that will each man has his equal chance. Equal power implies equal responsibilities, and equal responsibilities necessitate equal preparation. To each American comes with an urgency unknown elsewhere in the world the need of the cultivation of the highest conception of civic duty and patriotism. We cannot forever be receiving from society all its various forms of assistance and protection and never give back any contribution of our own. No man has any right to demand any better government than he himself is willing to contribute to effect. It is this unescapable personal

responsibility which must be faced and accepted by every American citizen. Just so far as we are willing to pay this price just that near shall we come to being a nation rejoicing in equal opportunity to all founded in choice and established in justice.

We commemorate here to-day not alone the death of the men who fell here for liberty; other men have died before. We celebrate not alone their bravery; other battles were as bravely won. We extol not simply the virtues and the results of the bravery of the heroic dead, but consciously associate them with the grandeur and nobility of the cause. We celebrate here to-day the spirit of Gettysburg, the spirit of unselfish service, the spirit of fidelity even unto death. We celebrate here devotion to the cause of humanity, determination which against all odds, setting self aside, sacrifices self that others may live. The spirit of Gettysburg is the

spirit of the square deal and fair play, the spirit which resolves to do no wrong and to suffer none, the spirit which puts self last and duty first. This is the lesson spoken from these voiceless graves. We are here reminded that no man lives to himself alone, but each for all. Some must suffer that others may enjoy. Some must sow that others may reap. The man who lives unto himself alone has only one soul's welfare for his incentive, the man who lives to serve others has for his beneficiaries all mankind. The lesson of Gettysburg in a word is service, the noblest word in the English language describing the noblest thing in human life, breathing the humblest and yet the loftiest spirit; entering into all good works and true living; inspiring all the lives of all the greatest men and women of all times; adorning the crowns of monarchs and lifting the humblest above kings. It sweetens the toil of the laborer and justi-

fies the accumulations of the wealthy. It constitutes the sole foundation of enduring greatness, for greatness implies service, and service implies unselfishness. It is all wrong to think that greatness comes from making the world serve us. All genuine greatness is based upon service to the world. The quality of greatness is derived from the quality of the services rendered. This is the master secret of the ages. It is the essence of the golden rule. It is the law and the prophets. Already there are evidences that the world is coming under the dominion of this law. We are certainly coming into a new age. Whether consciously or unconsciously, directly or indirectly, we shall acknowledge more and more the binding force and experience the marvellous efficiency of this law of service. No longer should the youth of America be taught to develop all their capacities in order to be great, or to be rich, or to succeed. No longer

should the keynote of the appeal to the coming generations be selfishness. It is right that youth should develop every manly grace. It is right that youth should cultivate every intellectual capacity. It is right that youth should seek to grow to its uttermost, but the inspiring incentive should be not expectation of selfish rewards, but the hope of the largest capacity for rendering service to others. The solution of all great political and social national problems depends upon national character, and national character is but the aggregate of personal character. Where the keynote of individual inspiration is selfishness, the national character will be selfish. Where the individual keynote is altruism, the national character will be pitched to the harmony of the music that thrilled above Bethlehem, the sweet music of "Peace on earth, good will to men." So the solution of all great problems in the last analysis is to

be found in the bosom of the individual. The choicest asset of a nation is the average character of its citizens. Spencer has well said there has never yet been found any political alchemy whereby we can get golden results from leaden instincts.

There has been too much talk of rights and too little thought of duty. From the cradle to the grave we have shouted for our rights, but as to our duties we have talked in whispers. There is no right without a corresponding duty. There is no privilege without a corresponding obligation. They are correlative, they go hand in hand, they are the two sides of the same shield. Appreciation of and submission to the rights of others is not to be considered a surrender of individuality. It is a practice of the golden rule. Society must move to accomplish great results as a unit, and this can only be accomplished through the co-ordination of individual units. The higher the quality

of the individual, the more effective the co-ordination. The thinking unit in civil life, as the thinking bayonet in military life, obtains the best results by intelligent submission to the expressed will of a properly constituted majority for a common purpose.

This is a marvellous age in which we live. Society is quivering with expanding life, problems of gravest moment as to the proper creation and distribution of wealth, as to the proper relations between capital and labor, between employer and employee, between public and private corporations and civil communities, as to the proper care of the socially inefficient, confront us at every turn. The world is in a ferment, mighty armaments are being constructed. Vast armies are being gathered together, nations are shivering with apprehension of mighty upheavals, external and internal. There are prophecies of weird wonders in the political and in-

dustrial skies, and there are arising in all lands strange prophets shouting lo here is the solution, and lo there is the solution, and terrifying us with lurid forecasts of swift destruction and universal disaster. A distinguished clergyman the other day in a sermon before a large and cultivated audience asserted that the life of our nation was in peril through money madness, and that vice threatened our destruction, and he painted an alarming picture of the imminence of the dissolution of our institutions, but money madness is only one form of danger and this has always existed, but never so little dangerous as now. Money madness, power madness, ambition madness and luxury madness and many other forms of excessive zeal have always threatened society. but somehow the world has moved onward and society in general has moved upward. It is a false and superficial view that sees only the intense activity of

modern forms of evil and is blind to the unprecedented activity and aggressiveness of the forms of good. Let us not be alarmed. Let us not be discouraged. Let us turn a deaf ear to all false prophets preaching new doctrines. We need no new moral codes. We need only old-fashioned morals for new-fashioned times: We need only the lesson taught here at Gettysburg, fidelity to duty, a touch from the hand of unselfish love, a voice from the graves of the nameless dead. Denunciation of the errors of others is a waste of time. Uncreative criticism is a loss of strength.

Great things against great obstacles have been accomplished in this land; greater things remain and greater obstacles will be removed. Man's destiny is to reach out forever with increasing insistence toward the ever-approaching, ever-receding perfection of human opportunity. There will be forever an ideal beyond the

actual. This is the condition and the sign of growth. There must and should be a noble discontent; there must and should be enlightened selfishness. This is and always will be the mainspring of enlightened action. Perfection is a dream, but the dream prophesies the fact. The golden age is not behind us, it is before us. This is a better world to live in to-day than it was when Gettysburg was fought, and it will continue to improve, never doubt it. To think otherwise is to regard all history as a fable and God as a myth. The world's life read day by day in the columns of the daily press seems to justify the belief that hysteria, unrest, unreason, unfaith, immorality and crime are in the ascendent, but the world's life read by decades and centuries so that we can get a truer perspective of the real trend of the mountain chains of human achievement irradiates hope and is beautiful with promise. Troubles there are, and

troubles there always will be. Difficulties there are and grave dangers and there always will be, but faced with calm self-poise and the spirit of fair play, met with unselfish courage and a devotion to the common good they will be smoothed out and disappear. Each heeded noble impulse helps us forward, each temptation resisted, each injustice repressed, each wrong righted, each equity established, helps us on the way. We are soldiers battling for the truth's sake. Sometimes we have our Shiloh and Bull Run, but more frequently our Gettysburg and Appomattox. Sometimes the sweat and dust and noise of conflict blind and deafen us and the darkness of night overtakes us, sometimes we feel faint and discouraged, and sometimes fall out by the wayside and are reported absent or not accounted for; sometimes we desert and betray, but the great army of America is brave and strong and true, sound of body, clear of

sense and sweet of heart, and answers promptly and victoriously to the command of conscience for fair play and equal opportunity.

Never was charity kinder, never was conscience more dominant, never was justice surer, never was appreciation of truth and good morals and right living higher, never were loftier standards required of men in all positions of private business or public trust, never was opportunity for all men freer, nor more equal than to-day, here, now, in this country, governed by the sons of those men who here at Gettysburg were faithful unto death. They purchased free government by their deaths, we secure good government by our lives. They won their victories by the sword, we must win our victories by the Word. The good work has gone forward, the message from these graves has been heeded year by year.

Each new victory entails new opportu-

nities and new obligations. Higher citizenship demands a higher consecration. The methods, the needs, the aims of the twentieth century are not to be realized by stagnant content with nineteenth century conditions. The gathering momentum of the forces of to-day is not to be controlled by the slender restraints of yesterday. Twentieth century conditions require twentieth century men with twentieth century preparation.

“New occasions teach new duties,
Time makes ancient good uncouth;
He must upward still and onward,
Who would keep abreast with truth.”

New methods are not necessarily better because they are new. Old methods are not necessarily worse because they are old. Every change is not reform. Every departure is not into better ways. Every new proposal should be put to the trial of the test tube and the hammer and judged

by the results in the light of the immutable laws of equity and justice.

We must believe with Tennyson:

“That through the ages one enduring
purpose runs,
And the thoughts of men are widened
In the process of the suns.”

We are too near some events fully to measure their deep significance, and no doubt the future will correct many false impressions we now have of ourselves, our country and our work, but of this we may be sure, that when in their turn our children and their children in some distant time stand as we are standing by the graves of those who are making the America of to-day, they will say of us as we are saying of these:

“They were faithful to their trust,
They fought a good fight,
They kept the faith.”

“They added to liberty.” “They increased opportunity.” “They advanced justice.”
“They served mankind.”

Humanity passes but the humanities remain a heritage of increasing value from age to age. Each generation adds its contribution and thus we are forever at the crest of the wave of the fulness of human achievements.

To these sleeping heroes we are much indebted. To them our children also shall be much indebted if we are faithful to our trust. There need be no fear of the mighty engines of modern life if the same spirit which invented them and applied them is devoted to their regulation and control. There need be no fear for the life of our republic for our institutions will endure so long as love of justice endures as a stronger force than indifference to justice; so long as a passion for freedom and equality of opportunity shall be stronger than greed for privilege and selfish advantage. So long as each citizen for himself with firm resolve can say in the words of that noble hymn:

"I live to greet that season
 By gifted men foretold,
 When man shall live by reason,
 And not alone by gold.
 When man to man united,
 And every wrong thing righted,
 These whole world shall be lighted,
 As Eden was of old.

I live for those who love me,
 For those who know me true;
 For the Heaven that shines above me,
 And awaits my coming, too.
 For every cause that lacks assistance,
 For every wrong that need resist-
 ance,
 For the future in the distance,
 And the good that I can do."

And as we bid these heroes again our
 annual hail and farewell, we renew with
 the great President the high resolve that
 through no fault of ours shall those who
 died here have died in vain.

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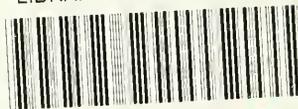
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