

[Unidentified newspaper clipping]

AN ELOQUENT SERMON

Dr. Edward's Address Over the Late Captain B. G. Casler

Extract from a sermon delivered by Dr. J. F. Edwards, Dec. 19th, 1883, at the funeral services of Captain B. G. Casler, conducted under the auspices of Posts of the Grand Army of the Republic:

“The strong men shall bow themselves.” — Eccles. XII—3.

* * Left to battle with the world at an early age, he manfully gathered around him the younger members of his father's family and sheltered and cared for them. He was buoyant, strong and hopeful; a pleasant vein of humor gave, at times, an almost boyish air to an otherwise striking physique. Living and doing business for years close to the reservation, few men knew the Senecas better, and none were more highly esteemed by them. This large delegation from their number attests their sincere sorrow at his death. The intimate acquaintance which he formed with them admirably fitted him to sympathize with them when he became Indian agent, and I know from frequent conversations with him, that his whole soul was in his work, and that night and day his mind was revolving questions pertaining to their welfare.

What he was to this wife, this son and daughter, these weeping relatives, is known in the hallowed chambers of their hearts, nor would I invade those sacred precincts. Such sorrow invokes our silence.

There is, however, one part of Mr. Casler's life of which I should speak more at length. This is a soldier's funeral. His brave comrades have come to lay him to rest. It was his wish. Like most gallant soldiers of the war for the union, all other years seem tame and unimportant in comparison with those thrilling, soul-absorbing days of conflict. One feels again, in thinking of them, the throbbing, sublime abandon of the words. “A day, an hour of virtuous liberty is worth a while eternity of bondage.” Ah! brothers, happily the strife is long since past. Many harvests have waved o'er the southern battle fields. Forgiveness has come! “Peace and order and beauty draw 'Round our symbol of light and law.”

But still we pay the heavy price of such blessings. Here lies another victim. He always

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claimed, and his physicians agreed, that the vicissitudes of a soldier's life and the horrible sufferings of twenty months' imprisonment, fastened upon him the disease of which he died. This was a manly form, in the prime of life. He was but forty-six. But who could withstand Libby, Salisbury and Andersonville? Of the thousand men who went out with him there was not, perhaps, his equal in physical strength and endurance.

But "the strong man hath bowed himself."

The silver cord is loosed, the pitcher broken at the fountain.

In the fall of 1862 Mr. Casler assisted in raising a company for the 154th regiment and was commissioned as lieutenant. A few months later he was promoted to a captaincy. Of the five regiments, the 37th, 85th, 64th, 154th and 9th cavalry, which contained large numbers of Cattaraugus men, not one surpassed in amount of service and heroic courage this noble regiment, whose career began at Chancellorsville and closed with Sherman's glorious Atlantic seaboard victories. Higher praise could not be given. This county furnished the thirty-five hundred men, distributed through one hundred and eighty regiments, and their courage was displayed on almost every field from Bull Run to Appomattox.

I believe that I shall do a service which would be grateful to the dead soldier before me, if I dwell briefly on the battles of Chancellorsville and Gettysburg, the two struggles in which he was engaged, in the first of which he was wounded and in the second taken prisoner. This task is the more agreeable because these are the only conflicts in which the courage of this gallant regiment has been brought in question; and yet, not even on Lookout Mountain or at Rocky Faced Ridge was its conduct more honorable. Chancellorsville was a battle won and lost. Documentary history has now shed new and ample light upon it. Hooker, by consummate strategy, outgeneraled Lee and might have closed the war. Through unaccountable weakness and folly, he threw away his opportunity. The striking figure in the conflict is Stonewall Jackson. With an audacity and skill never surpassed, he swung around our whole force of ninety thousand men and hurled thirty-four thousand veterans upon the right flank of our army. Unprepared for the attack, the comparatively small number of our troops at that point could not possibly resist the onslaught of such a host, marching three columns deep, under the guidance of such a leader.

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Amid that wild confusion in which, alas, many battalions were covered in disgrace, history has declared that the 154th showed a noble courage. The ablest historian of the war says: "Some of the regiments made a stand to stem the torrent, but it was in vain.[""] Which were those regiments? Let a distinguished Confederate General answer. In one of the best records of the battle published in the Philadelphia Times, he says: "The first check came upon the plank road. Bushbeck's column fired into the head of Thodes columns, and these, broken somewhat by their impetuous charge, halt for reformation." Of Bushbeck's brigade the 154th constituted an important part. Two hundred and eighty of the regiment were killed or wounded. Their colors had been rent twenty-three times. Living witnesses still speak of the immortal charge made by Keenan on the right of this regiment, who, when he answered Pleasanton with a smile, "I will do it," knew that it signed his death warrant. "Blood like this, so holy is, it would not stain the purest rill that sparkles amid the bowers of bliss."

July 1st, 1863, the brave Reynolds destined soon to fall, sent word to Howard, marching towards Gettysburg, to hurry forward to his rescue. Eagerly the Eleventh Corps responded, swept forward at double quick, on through the village and into the thickest of the fight. But the enemy closed in upon them and captured many prisoners. Among them was Captain Casler. Here began that slow torture which has closed at length in the calm of this solemn presence. Of the fourteen of Captain Casler's company who were captured with him, but four lived to return, and but two are living now, and they are invalids. He was in eleven prisons. Oh! brothers, I do not wish to stir your hearts in mutiny. The treatment of our brave defenders is the blackest page in the annals of war. My heart is inexpressibly sad as I weep for the tears of thousands who starved and died and filth, disease, wretchedness and cruelty. The rank and file of the Confederate army were most gallant men, who would have scorned to treat their enemies in this barbarous manner, but in the dark council of mad ambition, we must believe that this horrible iniquity was deliberately concocted. History has placed the responsibility where it belongs. The waters of the "multitudinous seas" indeed cannot wash out this stain.

While we sadly turn away from this picture of suffering and cruelty, let us, citizens, soldiers and friends, all learn from three lessons.

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First, let not our hearts turn with wrath against the brave but misguided people, who, as a whole, would have scorned this systematic cruelty.

Second, may we resolve that such shall be the universal enlightenment and virtue of the whole people that no selfish schemes of proud aristocrats shall ever again plunge this land into the horrors of fraternal strife.

Third, with infinite pity and tenderness, let us this day remember that homeless, hopeless, haggard company of martyrs who in the stockade, by the dead line, or making one brave though futile effort to escape, perished far away from home and kindred. Spread your banner over this brave, patient sufferer. He has fought his last battle. No sounds can awake him. Reverse arms. With solemn step bear him to a soldier's grave. Happy are we that he can at last sleep under the friendly sod where loving hands may plant roses and myrtle. Thousands slumber in unmarked graves. But their spirits are with us. A shadowy host, they seem to hover o'er us. They march in our procession to the grave today. Comrades of camp and mess,

Left, as they lay, to die
In the battle's sorest stress,
When the storm of fight swept by;
They lay in the wilderness.
Ah, where did they not lie?

In the tangled swamp they lay,
They lay so still on the sward;
They rolled in the sick-bay,
Moaning their lives away.
They flushed in the fevered ward.

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They rotted in Libby yonder,
 They starved in the foul stockade,
Hearing afar the thunder
 Of the Union cannonade.

But the old wounds are all healed,
 And the dungeoned limbs are free.
The Blue Frocks rise from the field,
 The Blue Jackets out of the sea.

They've 'scaped from the torture den,
 They've broken the bloody sod;
They've all come to life again.
The third of a million men,
 That died for thee and their God.

A tenderer green than May,
 The eternal season wears.
The blue of our summer's day
 Is dim compared to theirs.