

ADDRESS BY NEWTON CHAFFEE

DECORATION DAY, 1896

VERSAILLES, CATTARAUGUS COUNTY, NEW YORK

To my old Army Comrades who have so kindly invited me to address you at this time upon this occasion, that I look upon as one of the most sacred days of the year, This day appointed to Decorate the graves of Army Comrades, that have answered to the roll call, and have moved over the river and are now resting under the shade of the Trees upon the other side, this day set as a mile stone on our pathway of life to keep sacred and fresh the memories of those who gave the best & most heroic of services that this Nation should live, for this privilage of Speaking to you, and assist in these Decoration services I thank you. But as you have without doubt aranged for an address to be delivered to you by competant Educated polished and professional Speakers, I will leave this duty for them, and I will make no attempt to give you an Address such as you have a right to expect, fitted for an occasion like this. But in accord with a suggestion of some of my Army Comrades, I will simply give you, in as plain practical manner as posible, just a little history of my Army life, some things that came under my personal observation and knowledge, belieaving that in that way I can at least make my plain talk more interesting to you, and much more agreable for my self, and let the result be what it may. I can have the sattisfaction of Knowing that I will not have made a failure in attempting to make an Address. The history of the causes that led our country up to that Terable and most causless of all Rebelions, The heroic deeds of daring The sacrafises made, The long and bloody Years That followed, The out brake & Firing upon our Nations Flag at Sumpter The Glorious and permanant Victorys that crowned our Efforts, I leave all this to the Oritor of the day, and that you may see a little of the other or Humurous side of our army life, for there were times among the sorrow and suffering indured, now and then there were incidents of mirth and sport and amidst the most trying hours, bursts of wit was indulged in, and sometimes unexpectedly so, and without wit and laughable incidents, many a man that is now alive and spaired to you would be laying in the dust of Virginia. I contend that wit and mirth was a necessity, in many cases it had more beneficial results then all the medicines and treatment that the Surgeons and Doctors was able to give, it was needed in those hours of suspence and anxiety, it helped to brake the terable strain and monotinay that surrounded us. I think I speak truly when I tell you that many as brave a man as ever lived broke down and died from sadness Homesickness heart broke, despondant and thoroughly discouraged they were pronounced unfit for duty, sent down to the Hospitals and

died. The Doctors unable to give the true history of the disease that was consuming them, finally the drum beats, the funeral march is formed, and they are carried out and buried. While I speak case after case of this nature comes to your minds now my Comrades. I dare not trust myself to think and speak wholly on the dark side of the war for when I do those scenes and life of privation and suffering comes over me like a flood and over whelms me. we have sadness enough in life at its best, and if from out of its scenes of Gloom we can pick here and there a little sunlight and gladness let us do it. So I will give you a glimpse of my experience of the first battle we were engaged in namely Chancellorsville. it is a well known fact that at Chancellorsville our Army met with defeat. the 11th Army Corps to which my Regiment the 154th New York Infantry belonged was thrown into a panic, and if they excelled all the other Corps of the Army at that time it was in the unsurpassed burst of speed they exhibited and the fastest and longest running record made at that time. The history of how this part of the Army was so unexpectedly surprised and the peculiar position they occupied on that Field on that day, is fully set forth in history, and while humiliating defeat was the results of that campaign that gave so many promises of success all honor is due to that Grand Old Hero, Fighting Joe Hooker, and the masterly manner he maneuvered his troops and put his army upon that Field. The surprises of having Stonewall Jackson, with his peculiar and dashing methods of warfare as he hurled his Corps upon and around the right flank of the 11th Corps, that occupied the extreme right of the Union Forces, it would take too much of your time to explain, suffice it to say that our Corps was taken by complete surprise. This should not have been, right here a great neglect or mistake was made by some of the Officers in charge of our out post line. Who this mistake or worse a grievous error rests upon, I do not know. Many a criticism and censure has been heaped upon this and that General Officer, for the unpardonable blunder, for a blunder it was, whether intentional or from the grossest carelessness, Time can only tell. before we had any intimation that the enemy was so close to us, without a moments warning, wholly unprepared to receive them they came through our ranks and works and around us on every side. many Regiments at that time were cooking and eating their suppers, and with their Guns Stacked, on came the Rebs with that peculiar and death sounding Yell, so well remembered by us all--and while a few Regiments fought and stood up against their overpowering numbers, what could we do, fighting you might almost say alone against Jacksons whole army, but to brake and run. Remembring the old saying that he who fights and runs away, lives to fight another day. I can safely say that your humble servant done the best stepping there and then I shall ever do. I remember that yell as I was fast leaving there, and ignoring their hospital invitations to stop and spend the coming Summer & Winter with them, leaving them at such a

rate of speed that I have no doubt but that a good game of checkers could be played on my coat tails, and I could not just then see the point that it was sweet to die for ones country. We did not stop to multiply any words nor to argue the question with them at all, nor did we even stop to invite them to call on us. We ignored their entreaties to stop with them, and they continued to hurl their compliments after us done up in iron packages. While sadness and death and heroic deeds was witnessed on every side I wish I could make you see the many laughable incidents of that never to be forgotten flight. While thinking of this Battle and the many true and brave men that was lost that day, brings to my mind the names of many of my own Regiment, and among them the name of Hiram Vincent, who went from the town of Persia as Pure and as true a man as ever lived. True to his Family, True to his Country and true to God. I remember only a few days before we started on that march that Mr Vincent and myself received a Box together sent to us from our Friends at home. how we prized it, how those articles spoke to us Volumes, of Love and thoughts of Mother Father and to him of Wife and Children how our hearts filled with gratitude and Joy. how little we knew what a few days more was to do with us, and that those two men bending over that Box with hearts so full of thankfulness and Gladness, was to part never to meet again in this life. he was taken prisnor and died on Bell Island and there is no doubt but Homesickness was the imediate cause Oh! The Thoughts and visions of home Wife and Children that must have came to his mind in those hours of sadness.

The 11th Corpes to which my Regiment was asigned was mostly composed of German Regiments and had been untill a very short time before this Battle under command of Genl Seigle, but was now under command of Genl O. O. Howard. it is known that the Germans as a rule was very angry and provoked at the change, and we often heard the cry of We fight mit Seigle, But run mit Howard. how much this feeling of resentment entered into and had to do with the Spirit and actions of that Army Corps that day, no one can tell. But we always belieaved, and we still think it was a very unwise move, the changeing of those commanders. This Corps had always done good service under Seigle, and while Genl Howard was a true and Brilliant Commander he was none of their Choseing. Seigle was from their Fatherland and was their pride. My Regiment were all new men, we only a short time before this had entered the army, and this was their First Babtism of Fire and after almost the entire Corps had broken and fled, We still stood there and fought untill nearly surrounded. We did not realise the condition and danger we was in, and the danger of all being captured untill by Genl Howard himself we was commanded to retreat, and not untill we marched back into the Old Camp that we had marched from near Stafford C.H. did we fully realise the sad havock of Death that had been made in our Ranks and the many comrades

we had lost by being captured by the enemy. our Empty huts in all the Company Streets told part of the story.

I never shall forget the First Roll Call at Stafford C.H. after our return from this Campaign. I never want to hear nor be present at another one like it, name after name called and no reply, over one third of my Regiment gone about 400 men not present to answer to their names, and the only reply or explanation was given by some comrade from each Company as Dead, Taken Prisoner, or missing and unaccounted for. Unaccounted for. What did that mean Oh it ment every thing, it ment death by Starvation, by prisoners while attempting to escape to Union Lines, it ment no end of suffering and Death to many a wounded man, unable to escape the Carnival that Fire held, while sweeping over that Field all that night and the next day, wounded unable to crawl out of that Flood of Fire that swept past and over them, poor victims of Fate. What did it not mean. it ment horrors beyond what your pen and mine is able to describe. Oh God didst thou from thy heavens lean and witness such sceans and call this earth a footstool of thine. Back memory back. let us turn those pictures to the wall, and let us try to look upon more cheerfull pictures then those and try to learn to forgive and to forget if we can--

"When the great world its last judgments awaits
When the blue sky shall swing open its gates
And our long colums march silently through
Past the Great Captain, for final review
There for the blood that has flown for the right
Crowns shall be given untarnished and bright
Then the glad ear of each war martyred Son
Proudly shall hear the good judgment Well done.

At one of our late meetings held at our Army post a Thought was suggested that has struck me as worthy of more then a passing thought a sentiment profitable for us all to consider and that is this, that while it is all right and proper to Remember and Decorate the graves of our dead comrades for they are entitled to all the respect and honor we can show them, and let our Children never forget the debt of gratitude this country owes its defenders and preservers. let us not forget to remember to decorate the graves of the Mothers of the Soldiers of the Rebellion how true this is, when we stop and think of it, how much hangs upon and clusters around that name of Mother upon whom did the tenderest chords of affection and sympathy draw the closest in those dark hours. Whose hearts and feelings went most with you my comrades when you went to the front, into whose heart did this bitter knife go the deepest, and who followed your every foot step with their prayers and tears more then your Mothers. it was hard for others to give you up, but it was nothing to be compaired with the love of that Old and sainted Mothers. Whose eyes was it that followed your form down the road the furtherest when you marched away, who the

most anxious for tidings from the front after every battle. Whose lamp burnt the longest and brightest in hopes for the return for that Boy who all others had given up, and whose ears listened for footsteps the longest that never came. God alone is the witness to the anguish and anxiety of Your Mother. Who more than they made the greatest sacrifice upon the altar of our Country, in giving up their own flesh and blood. Was it for such a sacrifice as this, that she nursed and watched you in your infancy. I can not forget nor do I want to, the last words my poor Old Mother said to me just before I left my home. You will pardon me if I refer to my own personal experience of those days again. The influence of those words have followed me through my life, they are links in the chain that have held me. I know that they have kept me if I am kept at all. they gave hope and comfort when it was darkest, and that picture is the most highly prized & sacred to me of all the pictures that hangs on my memories walls. She took me off into a room by ourselves alone, and she said to me "They tell me you have got to go. it is tearing my heart out to give you up and if I could go in your place God knows I would do it, but I must not be selfish for I expect it is no worse for me then it is for other Mothers that love their Boys as I do mine but where ever you go, and what ever you do, do what you know to be right, and always remember that there is three times every day that on my knees, I shall ask God to keep you." Comrades you have all got memories of some such holy hours as this, which you would not part with for Gold.

This Nation of ours that is the pride and Boast of every true American owes more than we can compute to the inspirations and teachings of its Mothers. The greatest and purest of Statesmen teachers Leaders and Reformers that America has ever produced will tell you that their inspirations came through the influence and teachings of their mothers and that they made them what they are. The love of liberty goodness and purity was taught to you by that Mother. do our Wives and Daughters fully realise the opportunities and responsibilities that is in their Keeping, that on them rests the future Destinays of this Grand Country. into your hands is placed the Tablet upon which by your Examples and teaching is to be written by your own hands the happiness or misery, the upbuilding or taring down what God has given unto your keeping, and if I can do no good in any other direction to day, and if the young man of to day will listen to me in this one thing, I would say to him if he would live to be a grand and noble man, a life and Record that he would be proud of, so live that when he arrives at that time that must come to us all, and can then look back with no regrets for the past, and can have the proud satisfaction that life with him has been a success and not a failour, and that the world has been made better for his living, he will come the nearest to that result if he will listen attentively and always carefully carry out the teachings and advice of his mother and if he shall have

made her life bright and happy, by Love and Kindness extended to her, he will have no regrets. and comrades we have not done our duty if in decorating the graves of the dead if we have neglected to decorate the graves of our mothers. I wish I had time to mention a few of the many names of the noble patriotic Women of the war, who gave their time Health and lives to the Holy duties of caring for the sick and wounded in the Hospitals, and who by their heroic bravery and examples gave stimulus and power to our Army and there were many such in every department of the army--No duty to Hazardous No work too hard for them to perform. such Women were on every hand in every Hospital and Sanitary Station. Their names were always mentioned with the greatest respect. No words are adequate to describe the systematic persistent faithfulness of the Women who organized and led branches of the Sanitary Commissions Their Volunteer labor had all the regularity and enthusiasm of paid service hundreds of Women evinced talents there which in other spheres and in the other sex would have made them merchant princes or great administrators of public affairs. Storms nor Health could not keep them from their posts. they have won the thankful remembrance and respect of every Veteran of the War

What could not an Army accomplish, What Rebellion could they not subdue, when back of them was the Mothers Wives and Daughters, Fathers & Brothers that vied with each other in doing all that they could do to encourage and sustain the army at the Front, willing to deny themselves the Luxuries and even the plain necessities of life that the principals of Liberty and that the Union of the States should be upheld and maintained Speaking of what a Country we have and the spirit manifested brings to my mind an incident in the visit of General Joe Hooker to Chicago just after the Battle of Old Lookout. as he was standing on a Street Corner his attention was attracted by the unusual number of teams that he had noticed entering that city and passing down the streets, loaded with wood. finally he enquired of a man standing close by him what is the occasion of so much wood being drawn into the city. I do not understand it his Friend informed him that that day had been appointed for Volunteer Contributions of wood and provisions for Soldiers Wives & Widows. That Old soldier stood there quite a number of minutes unable to speak that grand big heart of his was full. His eyes filled with tears of thankfulness and as soon as he could command himself enough to speak he raised his hands and said "Oh my God, What a Country, who wouldnt fight for such a Country"

Comrades we to day have met to decorate the Graves of men who fought and died to protect and maintain just such a country.