

Closing Remarks¹

Of a sermon, at the funeral of Ebenezer Heath, at the Presbyterian Church, July 26, 1863, by Rev. N. G. Luke²

The deceased, Ebenezer Heath, resided in Ellery, in this County, and was in the thirty-first year of his age. About one year ago, when the call was made for volunteers to go into the service of our beloved country, he enlisted in Co. F. 154th Regiment of Volunteers, in which he remained until his death. Five years since Mr. Heath experienced religion in Panama, through the labors of Rev. J. Lytle. Immediately afterwards he connected himself with the M. E. Church—the church of his choice. Since that time he has served the Church in the responsible position of class leader which relation he held at the time of his enlistment. In an interview which I had with Rev. J. Allen, who was on Ellery charge when he left for the Army, and who knew him well, he said that “he wished to say to me that brother HEATH was an excellent man, and he had no doubt of his safe arrival home.

As a husband he was affectionate, devoted and true; as a neighbor, kind and obliging, as a citizen obedient and respected; as a soldier, brave and gallant, always ready to obey the word of command; and as a Christian he was loyal and true to the cause of Christ. When away from home amid dangers and privations and hardships, he always had time to pray, and read the precious Bible, so full of instruction and comfort to the lonely care-worn soldier. Whether amid the clash of arms, the dash of cavalry, the glittering of bayonet and sabers, the roar of artillery, the blood and groans of the dying; or walking the secret, silent nightly beat of the lonely sentinel, his mind was fixed intensely on the beautiful star of Bethlehem. He could exclaim in the language of the poet, in looking at the dangers which surrounded him, and the deliverance, temporal as well as spiritual, wrought out for him by the son of God:

“Now safely moored, my perils o’er
I’ll sing first in night’s diadem,
Forever, and forever more—
The Star! The star of Bethlehem.”

1. From the “Chautauqua Democrat”, August 12, 1863. Published 1853 to 1891; retyped from microfilm;
2. According to military records, Sgt. Heath died on July 27, 1863 of wounds suffered July 1, 1863 at Gettysburg, PA.

He passed through the celebrated battle of Chancellorville unhurt, while thousands groaned, and bled, and died around him. But in the famous and decisive battle of Gettysburg, Pa., on the 1st of July, the first day of the fight, he received a shot from the enemy's fire, which resulted in his death on the 27th inst. Of his soldierly bearing and deportment in the camp, in the hospital, on picket, and on the battlefield, we have the clear, honorable testimonials of his comrades and officers. But he is gone. He has fallen a martyr to the cause of liberty and humanity. His blood (though he wore no shining epaulets, the insignia of high official military position) forms a part of the redemption price of this nation, which will finally restore it to more than its former greatness and glory. Some have wondered that so many of the best men of the nation, loyal men, true men, brave men, faithful men, noble hearted men, devoted Christian men suffer and bleed, and die: baptizing the soil with their blood, while there are so many irresponsible, reckless, careless men spared. I answer the redemption of the nation requires the best, the purest blood of the nation, just as the redemption of the world required the blood of the spotless Lamb of God, the intrinsic value and purity of whom was seen from the nature of the Jewish offerings, all of which were typical of him, and the sacrifice which he made. Of the faithfulness of this our deceased soldier, friend and brother, the Rev. Mr. Smith, his Chaplain, in a letter addressed to his bereaved and affectionate widow says: "I visited Brother Ebenezer Heath while he lay in the 11th army Corps hospital, and rejoice to say, that during his suffering, the confidence which he had reposed in the Redeemer sustained and cheered him in his trials, and bore him in safety to his heavenly home."--- This is but an additional illustration of the truth that if a man lives right using the means of grace, he will die right, whenever and wherever he may fall.

To the friends of the deceased, I scarcely know what more to say that will comfort and console you. Are you not already comforted over the pleasing reflection that your dear husband and brother is no longer a soldier of his bleeding country, or of the cross, but a victorious conqueror, and citizen of heaven wearing a palm of victory, and a crown of glory? I need say no more. And now, I commend this afflicted widow, his affectionate wife, and his brothers and sisters together with all this circle of friends, whether intimately or more remotely related to the deceased, to the lover of God and the power of his grace. To the congregation I may say that I presume I am addressing few, if any on this interesting, though mournful occasion, whose friends, intimate or more remote have not fallen on some bloody battle field in the defense of our sacred rights: so that in an essential sense your blood, and the blood of the nation has been shed in defense of the noble heritage of our fathers, so sacredly committed to us, their children.

Then I appeal to you, shall we ever compromise with an armed rebellion? Shall we ever permit a disintegration of these states, so long united in holy wedlock? Shall this great American Republic be cut in two and each part bleed to death like the man that should be severed in twain through his vitals! And shall we wade through the tears and sweat and blood of our nation and death struggles: aye, and the very blood that coursed through our veins in obedience to the pulsations of the heart, to shake hands with rebels and traitors in arms: over the graves of the honored dead, and mangled bodies of our brothers, sons, husbands and fathers?

Shall we acknowledge to them an inferiority and allow them to dictate terms of peace?

Never with the consent of the loyal and patriotic millions of the United States. Never while the majestic Mississippi rolls its mighty torrents onward to the Gulf of Mexico.

Never! while the sun and moon and stars, and heaven's blue arch are above us.--- No! but while the Atlantic is on the East, and Pacific and Gulf of Mexico on the South and west, and the beautiful chain of lakes on our north, let this land, dedicated to the holy cause of freedom and equality, be one and inseperable, undivided and indissoluble. And let the old flag of our Union, the red, white and blue, the star spangled banner, the insignia of our of our civil and religious liberties wave in beauty, triumph and admiration, over every state and territory of American soil. But what if it shall cost the lives of thousands more of our noble citizens; let us make the noble sacrifice. --- Dedicate them to God and humanity, and swear by the Great Eternal that wherever they fall, (if this shall be their lot) north or south, east or west, our blood stained banner shall wave its beautiful folds triumphantly over their graves. I have friends in the army. A dear brother has been in the service almost ever since the fall of Sumpter. I dedicated him to the cause in which he enlisted; I gave him up; I placed him on the alter of my country; and yet there is none on earth I love more than he. --- Yet if he falls facing the enemy, as he did in the seven day's fight before Richmond, at Fredericksburg, at Antietam and at Gettysburg, in my own native state, and as I have confidence he will should he fall, I shall be reconciled, although the cup would be a bitter one, and I pray God it may pass from me. Only let me know that he died in hope of a glorious immortality, and that the noble flag under which he so bravely fought waves over him and those for whom he died, and I am content. I love my friends and home, and home associations and pleasures as well as any man, but I love my country and the cause of human freedom more. --- Next to the cross of Christ, the banner of the Gospel of peace, with its means of moral elevation. I prize the banner of my country with its constitutional liberty, and its sacred principals of equality. Then in view of what our noble heritage has cost us in money, toil, tears and in blood during the revolutionary struggle, the war of eighteen hundred and twelve and the present gigantic war with the South, let us resolve to be loyal without any mental reservation whatever. Loyal to God, loyal to his cause, loyal to our country, loyal to our children, and loyal to our departed dead, ever remembering that these scars and wounds and loss of limbs and arms in the service of our country are the truest badges of nobility, and worthy of all honor, and that the graves of our soldiers whose lives were given for our good, are the proudest moments of our land. And at last may we, with all this circle of mourners, and those who have passed through similar scenes, reach home, where war and bloodshed, sickness and death never come, where all are of one heart and mind, where "friends shall meet again who have loved" and where all tears shall be wiped from our eyes.