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THE UNION LEAGUE CLUB

OF

NEW YORK.

PROCEEDINGS

IN REFERENCE TO THE DEATH

OF

HON. EDWIN M. STANTON,

DECEMBER 30TH, 1869.

CLUB HOUSE, MADISON AVENUE,

Cor. East Twenty-Sixth Street.

1870.

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stain has dared to hint a suspicion of his integrity. Oh, how great, how fortunate the lot which that noble patriot has enjoyed and supported! While mere military glory may decline or suffer deductions from the sober estimates of history, who does not know and feel that Mr. Stanton's fame has only begun to glow, and that those rays, beautiful and warm as they are, which, within one week, have been shining in concentrated splendor about his bier and on his hardly-closed grave, will gather in history into a sun that will fill distant ages and climes with the perfume and the glory of his deeds and his name? If, like another Elijah, he had ascended in a chariot of flame, it would have fitly symbolized his career, for he guided the burning axles of the national wrath, organized its fury, inspired its course, witnessed its victory, declined its rewards, and almost shrunk from its honors; and because we could not pay him for all this, God took him to his own keeping, and may be trusted to requite our hopeless debt. Of Mr. Lincoln and his great counsellor and close companion in the war that made the nation great in itself, and in their pure and precious characters, may we not say as Sir Walter Scott said of Fox and Pitt:

"Speak not for those a separate doom
Whom faith made brothers in the tomb,
But, search the land of living men,
Where wilt thou find their like again?"

ADDRESS OF REV. DR. THOMPSON.

MR. PRESIDENT AND GENTLEMEN,—When the one man who could have secured to France the benefits of her revolution while averting its excesses, thus conserving liberty with order—Count Mirabeau—had ceased to breathe, the intelligence was communicated to the Assembly in this brief and emphatic sentence: "*He is dead!*" And when the few journals of that day communicated to Paris and to France the great catastrophe, so momentous for the future destiny

of the nation, they opened the obituary with the same brief and pregnant words—" *Il est mort!*" No name was needed to interpret them. Everybody knew who was dead. The man who had said of himself, "In anarchy, a despot may even seem a savior;" the man of whom others had said he could not have a party, for his only party was his head; the man who, amid the stormy scenes of debate and the bloody tumults of the populace, had established order and unity by the magnetism of his presence, by the force of his will; that mighty ruling and taming spirit, whose very violence within itself commanded calmness in others, had ceased to be; he was dead. So when, last Friday, the telegraph flashed to all parts of this country the intelligence of the death of Mr. Stanton, everybody—man, woman, and child—knew who was dead. It was not that a party in the country had lost its leader, for he, too, could have no "party" whose only party was "his head". It was the nation that now felt the loss of one who, with all the virtues of Mirabeau and more, and with none of his vices, had dared to *seem* a despot that he might *be* a savior. The army of the North knew that he had gone, who, through all the war, had fed, clothed, equipped, housed, and organized them for victory. The scattered, broken army of the South knew that that mighty spirit had passed away, which, behind the array of artillery and the strategy of generals in the field, had moved on with unrelenting vigor, with steady, ever-growing pressure, until the rebellion was crushed, because he would hear no terms but absolute submission. The civilized world knew that that great Minister of War had passed away, who, from the peaceful industries of the people, had raised and equipped an army of 1,500,000 men, and when their work was done had remanded that army in two days to the quiet walks of industrious peace. The nation saw the patriot and statesman whom she was just beginning to appreciate, and to whom she had awarded such honor as office and eulogy could be-

stow, rising above the honors thus laid at his feet, to accept the crown of immortality. There is hardly another man in the nation whose death could create in every household, for various causes, so profound an impression ; and how few names are there among those that are gone that will stand, as the speaker before me has intimated, so great, so growing in the coming history of this country.

After your committee had tendered me the most unexpected compliment of an invitation to participate in these services, on re-entering my library, my eye fell upon a picture of those twin Colossi that stand in solitary grandeur upon the plain of Thebes, representing the monarch returned from successful wars—the whole country subdued to his dominion and peace established without—sitting down here in absolute rest, looking forth into unfathomable depths, as if commanding the empire of the world and of time. They stand as the sublimest impersonation of Majesty in repose. The Nile rolls the waves of its inundations around their pedestals ; all about them are the ruins of temples, and statues of forgotten men and gods, but there they stand immovable to-day as when erected more than three thousand years ago ! Not altogether mute, for one of them is the fabled Memnon that greets each morning sun with its note of welcome.

So it has seemed to me that a thousand years hence, the historian tracing the events of these times, and coming upon that flood of war that rolled over the land and threatened to merge all in ruin and desolation, will see rising above it two majestic forms, twin figures in virtue and in honor, twin saviors of their country, twin also in the enjoyment of the crown that History has conferred,—side by side, sitting with undisturbed repose, unwasted by all the changes of the ages since, unforgotten amid the dim memories of the past ; not silent either, but speaking wherever thought is honored, wherever virtue is revered, wherever patriotism is respected,

wherever history is known, speaking of the grandeur of devotion to country and to truth ; two unrivalled figures, LINCOLN and STANTON, side by side, in the foreground of a heroic past.

Mr. President and Gentlemen, the key-note of power in this world is Personality. Not thought alone, not eloquence, not position, not circumstances give influence, but a living personality, that can impress itself upon men and the times by the force of a human soul putting itself into the souls of others, into the spirit of the nation. This nation had need of such. Go back ten years, to the time when this great free people were still cowed and bullied by slavery, when this vast nation of intelligent men was ruled by imbecility ! What need we had to rouse our souls, to lead us on to the grand possibilities of the future, saving us from the impotency and destruction that threatened us !—what need of an example of self-sacrifice, of supreme devotion to country, of loyalty to truth and justice ! What need we had, within the walls of the Constitution our fathers had built, of such a zeal for the house as would drive out with the scourge the profaners of the temple, and overturn the tables of the money-changers ! And these examples were given. PERSONALITY, on the one side by the gentle magnetism of love, in Lincoln ; on the other by the force of indomitable will and courage, in Stanton. We needed the last as well as the first. It came to us in the rough, it remained in the rough ; the fires of the war tempered and annealed it, but never *enamelled* it. There it stood, a pillar unpolished, but strong and true, that the nation might lean upon it.

It is now nearly forty years since Mr. Stanton left a book store in Columbus, Ohio, where he had held a clerkship for a time—having been driven to his own support by the death of his father—to resume his studies, intending at that time to devote himself to the church. By the persuasion of friends he was induced to enter the profession of the law. A gentle-

man who is with us to night was at that time a companion of his, a clerk in an adjacent store ; they were together day by day, in conversation and in recreation, and his playfellow said to him as they parted, "You be a lawyer; you are made for that, and I shall see you one day Attorney-General of the United States." When Mr. Buchanan, in his vacillation—for I think we must do him the credit of exempting him from really treasonable designs—when Mr. Buchanan, in his vacillation, saw whither things were tending, and called Mr. Stanton to the post of Attorney-General, this old friend went to see him and congratulated him on the fulfilment of his prophecy.

Where did Stanton have his first hearing in his new office ? Where did he plead his first cause for the Constitution and the laws of his country ? Before its Executive Head, and in words which I will give you as they came from his own lips, and were taken down by this friend, who has put them into my hands. When the news came that Anderson had evacuated Fort Moultrie and occupied Sumter, Mr. Buchanan called his cabinet together in haste. When Stanton came in, the President sat trembling and pale, while the Southern members were loudly demanding an order from him compelling Anderson to return to Fort Moultrie. Stanton, hardly waiting to hear them through, said : " Mr. President, you *dare* not give this order ; *it is treason* ; it would be a repetition of the crime that Arnold committed, and for which André died ! " In the same conversation Mr. Stanton went on to say : " Mr. Buchanan didn't give the order to evacuate Sumter, and through all the weary time they were planting their guns around it I prayed that they might be mad enough to open their fire, for I knew the thunder of their cannon was needed to wake up the nation."

I differ slightly in my recollections—perhaps from coming in contact with a different circle of friends at the time—from Dr. Bellows, with regard to the position which Stanton had

already won in the confidence of the country when Mr. Lincoln came into office. It seems to me there was a wide-spread expectation that Mr. Lincoln would call him to his cabinet ; that he had shown such force of character, such capacity for administration, such loyalty to the country, such knowledge of executive affairs, as made him a man to be trusted. This, however, may be a recollection which has dawned upon me through the events of after years. Be that as it may, every one was gratified when he was fairly installed by Mr. Lincoln in the War Office; and he brought to the work ability, promptness, and energy of application, before unknown. He put his whole life and soul into his work. He was a man of "one idea" in the sense in which Paul, for instance, was a man of one idea. There is nothing disparaging in being a man of one idea, provided only the idea be great enough to possess the soul, and to fire it with devotion for man and God. Stanton went into the service with but one idea—to serve his country and to save it ; and here he exhibited that marvellous power of organization, that promptness in details, that energy of will, that at once brought the War Department up to the highest state of efficiency. A friend said to him, near the close of the war: "How was it that you succeeded in supplying this vast army throughout this great extent of country, whether in the camp or in the field, with all that they needed for comfort and support?" "Sir," said Stanton, "I will tell you how I managed in one instance, and you can infer the rest ; a day or two after I was installed in this office, a telegram came from Harper's Ferry urging that several large guns should be sent there that day. I at once sent an order to the Arsenal for the guns. Being busied in my office all day, I went after office hours to the Arsenal to see whether the order had been fulfilled. I found the Arsenal closed and nobody in attendance. Looking up a subordinate I learned that no guns had been sent. After having tried, in vain, to find the keys, I had the door broken

open ; helped drag the guns out, accompanied them to the railway, saw them put on the train, had an engine fired up, and those guns were off that night for the Ferry." The next morning the incumbent, not knowing of this action, came into the War Office and said : "It was not convenient, Mr. Secretary, to despatch those guns yesterday, but if you think it is at all urgent I will attend to it at once this morning." Said Stanton : "The guns are now at Harper's Ferry, and you, sir, are no longer in the service of the United States Government." I see you understand, gentlemen, the question is answered.

But let me tell you another instance. You will recollect, from having read the history afterwards, though the painful facts at the time were largely concealed from the public—you will remember what a stress of anxiety there was when our army was penned up at Chattanooga—its supplies cut off, and itself almost threatened with famine. Great fears were entertained at Washington of some catastrophe there. Stanton resolved that that army should be reinforced. He met the President and the Cabinet, and urged upon them his views. He took pains to ascertain from railway men how long a time would be required to transport an army corps from the Potomac to the Tennessee, and, with his facts all prepared, he forced his way through the objections of the Cabinet and the Generals, and succeeded in obtaining from the President the order that the thing should be done. Within twelve hours from the issuing of that order, an army corps was on its way to the Tennessee, detached from the Potomac army, where at that time it was not needed. Stanton himself was on his way, riding day and night, to meet General Grant, for conference. On the ninth day (he had promised within ten) that army relieved Chattanooga ; the enemy was held in check, and presently came that magnificent series of victories, in which the names of Hooker, of Thomas, of Sherman, have become immortal.

With this energy and determination in carrying out to the full all the responsibilities and details of his office, he had sometimes a boldness in taking the responsibility, that nothing but the extraordinary emergency could have justified, and that nothing but the marvellous patience, wisdom, and good-nature of Mr. Lincoln would have tolerated ; and yet Mr. Lincoln was led time and again to concede that, in such matters, the Secretary was wiser than he. For instance, when the good-nature of Mr. Lincoln was beset with entreaties to commission this man and that to this office and that in the army, he sent in at one time to the office of the Secretary of War a large batch of newly made commissions to be countersigned. When the messenger returned, the President inquired, "Is that business all done?" "With one exception," said the messenger. "What was that?" "It was the commission of a Major-General." "What did the Secretary say about that?" "He didn't say anything ; he tore it up and threw it into the waste basket." "Indeed," said Mr. Lincoln, "he must have had some very good reason." You all remember how the country was astounded just after the capitulation of Lee's army, by the announcement from the officer then in command at Richmond, that the Rebel Legislature would convene (to consider upon what terms the State would re-enter the Union) by authority of the President of the United States—Mr. Lincoln then being in Richmond. Mr. Lincoln returned to Washington a day or two after. His Secretary of War waited upon him, and handed him an order which he said he had issued during his absence, which was an order displacing the General in command, substituting another, and revoking his convocation of the Legislature. "Well," said the President, "What does this mean?" "I saw," said Mr. Stanton, "that he was throwing away all that we had fought for these four years." "But, did you not see that that was done by my authority?" "Yes, Mr.

President, I saw that it was by your authority, and I resolved to save the country while I could, and hand you my resignation." The President did not accept that resignation. The matter, as the story goes on good authority, was discussed in Cabinet, the Cabinet to a unit sustaining Mr. Stanton. That night the ball of the assassin verified his judgment.

Mr. Stanton had largely the element of hope. We are saved by hope ; and underneath that tone of sadness of which Dr. Bellows has spoken, was an unfaltering confidence in the success of the cause, an undying trust that the Union would be saved. He, perhaps, was the only man who never faltered or wavered ; for even Mr. Lincoln at times—his great heart so pained and grieved with the losses and disasters of the war, with the anguish of the nation that he bore upon himself, and made a part of himself—would verge toward despondency. Such an hour was that—and this I give as coming from the lips of Mr. Stanton himself to a friend, though he had no thought at the time that it would reach the public ear—such an hour was that when a series of disasters was crowned with the defeat of Chancellorsville. The Secretary of War, in such times, never left the office day or night ; did not sleep there, for he did not sleep at all, but stayed there on his couch, with his ear ever on the alert for any telegraphic despatch. On that night, Mr. Lincoln, who had been there through weary hours—through sleepless days and nights, was now in a perfect torture, bordering on despair ; and, as the news came in worse and worse, Mr. Lincoln arose from the couch on which he had been lying, and said : " Ah, Stanton, I can't bear this ! I should be happier to-night if I could walk into the Potomac, and sink ! " " No," said Stanton ; " you and I are set here by the country to see this thing through, and we can't sink. Come, we will go to the Potomac." In an hour after midnight he had a tug ready, and they two steamed off to the nearest

point of access to the army. The next day they saw the Generals, saw the army, rank and file ; saw that though this army was beaten, it was not annihilated—it had fight in it yet, and the President came back revived, full of new courage and hope.

Courage Stanton had, which, had he been called upon to exhibit it in the field, would there have made him renowned in deeds of valor. But he had that higher moral courage which faces obloquy and opposition, and dares to do right against even the misconstruction of friends. I think he manifested the highest type of courage in the closing act of his public life, when he who, as all now know, desired no office, but longed to have his hands free from all public responsibilities and return again to his profession and to the walks of private life, yet consented to submit to the misconstruction of being tenacious of office, and full of egotism, and all such like aspersions, because he saw that to go out of that office, though he knew the man in power behind him would gladly kick him out if he could, was to put in jeopardy the great interests of the country, not yet fully saved. Courage to do an unwelcome duty without explaining himself to friends, without defending himself from enemies; the grand self-sacrifice that led him there at the first, kept him there to the end.

And now, when we know, as an intimate friend of his who had knowledge of his accounts has told me this very day, that this man, who, when he accepted office, was in the receipt of perhaps twenty-five thousand dollars a year from his profession, just beginning to win its honors and emoluments, relinquished this for a salary of one-third that amount, a sum utterly inadequate for the support of his family, and came out of that office not only unsullied but having actually spent thirty-one thousand dollars of his limited private property, for the support of his family, we shall look, I fear, almost in vain for another such example in the history of our country.

There he stood through all that storm of war, a rock so high that no waves of rebellion or opposition could dash over it—a rock so firm that no tides of corruption could undermine it. You have heard more than I could tell from any personal knowledge, of another trait of his character that yet deserves to be distinctly recalled in connection with its rougher and grander elements—I mean the tenderness of his nature. Two instances will suffice to paint this upon the picture, just here. When he would spend whole nights for weeks together, in the War Office, feeling that that was the post of his duty, never living at home, he yet made it a point with the break of day to go out into the market and provide for his family, and was accustomed to say to his friends who wondered that he did not take those hours for rest: "This is the only green spot that I have in my life—to go and see in the market place a little of the freshness of nature, the fresh green products, the fresh, sweet-scented flowers, and to do this service for my family." Look at him again as he stands in that house opposite the theatre where the life of Abraham Lincoln is ebbing away! See how the tears course down his manly cheeks; see with what tenderness and reverence he recognizes the presence of God, and requests a clergyman to lead in prayer, setting the example of kneeling by the bedside; see how, with more than a brother's love, he watches over that dear form until there is life in it no more! then rises as if himself baptized with the blood of the martyr, again to summon the country to fidelity and to victory!

There is a moral sublimity worthy of such a life and history, in the manner of his dying. Just as he who had led us to the triumphant close of so great and terrible a war, was invited to sit on the tribunal of justice to administer the affairs of peace, he heard the voice of Him who is the Prince of Peace, saying, "To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me on my throne."