

ADDRESS TO GRATIOT COUNTY G. A. R. ASSOCIATION.

By Rev. Geo. F. Hunting, D. D.

SUBJECT:—"Uncle Sam's preferred creditors and the rest of us."

COMRADES OF GRATIOT COUNTY: LADIES AND GENTLEMEN:— It is a common custom among men, in the event of business failures, to classify those to whom they are indebted, and among the classes is one known as preferred creditors.

These are paid first, or in full, by reason of some relationship or special claim, while others, whose demands are perhaps equally just, but of a different character, are left unpaid, or paid only in part.

It has occurred to me, and in some cases with emphasis, that in the arrangement for the payment of our national debt, we have followed this business custom, to the neglect of some claims which ought to have had attention.

Don't be frightened at those words, National Debt, nor fancy that I am about to bore you with an array of figures and statistics, for I assure you I have no idea of doing so. In the first place I never had any taste for arithmetic myself, and I have learned by observation that other people are as little entertained as I am with long columns of figures, except, indeed, they represent dollars, and are on the credit side of their own ledger.

But there is another, beside the financial side of the national debt, and I want to call your attention to that other side, a little while, and to what I conceive to be an injustice to certain classes, to whom we, as a nation are greatly indebted, in connection with the war of '61 to '65. I refer to the matter of personal effort and sacrifice for our country which has never been recognized, and cannot be, as it deserves, for there is a kind of service which dollars do not pay for, and for which an occasional newspaper notice, is a very meagre return. In the payment of that national debt which gold and greenbacks can reach, we have done grandly, and have, in the main, I suppose, done equal justice to all to whom we were indebted, but in this other branch of obligation, which I have said, dollars cannot pay, we have, perhaps unconsciously, done only partial justice.

We have, without wrong intention I suspect, selected a few preferred creditors, and lavished upon them our words of praise, and our political and social honors, to the utter neglect of whole legions of equally deserving men, who according to their ability, and in their sphere, helped to win the fight for freedom. I have no disposition to pluck one leaf from the laurels of those whom we have honored, not one, they deserve them all, but while these preferred creditors have shared in the rich assets of our hearty thanks, and the material tokens of our regard, and I say amen to it all, I want to speak for a little to-day, as the attorney of that great body of creditors, whose names and claims have largely been forgotten. That I may, at the outset, disabuse your minds of any thought that I am an interested party in this case, let me say, just here, I held, during the war, the position of a lieutenant of artillery, and so am not counted at all among those to whom I refer.

Let me first speak of those who did duty in the ranks and before the mast, in that four year's fight. The men who wore the shoulder straps, and those who walked the quarter deck, were, in the main, as noble a set of men as ever officered an army or a navy. We most gladly, and most heartily doff our hats to Grant and Farragut, Sherman and Porter, Sheridan and Foote, and to all their subordinates who did their duty like men, and we grudge them nothing which they have received at the hands of our people, but we only ask, that while they are preferred creditors, in the distribution of the honors and the gratitude, there be, also, a just remembrance of the rank and file, through whose pluck and blood and muscle, these leaders by land and sea, were lifted into their prominence, and supported there.

For such of those brave men as have been properly pensioned, and provided for, by government, of course their friends can ask nothing more of pecuniary sort, but let me

suggest that there is due to these who suffered for us, if they conduct themselves like men, a respect which no loyal citizen can, or will ignore.

Our children are looking on, and they are learning from our treatment of these veterans, what estimate their fathers place upon that service by which our country was preserved. If we would have a true patriotism take root and grow in the hearts of our young men, let them see that we honor those, who bore for us, and for them the perils of the fight, the long exposure to the death bearing atmosphere of Southern swamps, the horrors of the prison pens, and who are still bearing wounds, diseases and pains untold, consequent upon the hardships of those four years.

When we who are gray-haired were boys, we were taught to respect the aged and the infirm, and to lend a helping hand to the feeble and sick and destitute, but I am afraid the lads of our time have, not been very carefully instructed in this direction, at least the rudeness and impudence too often seen among them, do not indicate very faithful home training. In this matter, we fathers and mothers are blame-worthy, and if we do not suffer for our folly, it will be very strange. When our boys are disrespectful to us, let us remember, we are reaping just what we have sown, and I do plead with you younger men, whose children are yet within your control, let your management of your households be better than ours has been. Teach your children to respect those who are older, and wiser, and especially do I urge upon you, teach your children to honor the gray-haired, broken old men who once bled for them, and while they enjoy the fruits of that long struggle, teach them gratitude to those by whose labor and blood and treasure were purchased, the good things they enjoy.

Boys! Don't ignore, nor despise the old soldier. To be sure, he can take care of himself now, but in a little time he will be dependent. Be patient with his garrulous old age, let him tell his stories over, and when he "shoulders his crutch and shows how fields were won" don't laugh at him, but recall the fact, he left that leg at Gettysburgh, that arm was shot away at Corinth, and he was maimed and crippled for you, that you, boys, might enjoy the liberties of this fair land. Will some of you say: The old soldiers don't ask nor need any such plea as this, for they are yet vigorous and abundantly able to keep up with the column of life. True, and I am glad so many of them are hale and hearty, but our young folks are being educated, and I would have them begin in season, to honor those to whom honor is due. Don't get the idea, young folks, that the men who wore the shoulder straps did all the fighting, nor that all the heroes were commissioned. There is an unwritten history of that four years' war, which, could it be written, would bring to the front many a name which never found its way into the newspapers, and was never mentioned in orders among those who were distinguished for gallantry. The best and bravest were not always brevetted, and if the true story of that long agony could be told, "many" that are now "first would be last and the last first."

Let me read just here from a slip cut from an old newspaper. It is only a straw, but it shows just a little, which way the wind blows.

At the last meeting of the post the following resolutions, which are self explanatory, were adopted:

WHEREAS, More than 20 years have elapsed since the war of the rebellion, and

WHEREAS, The suffering and deeds of the soldiers of the Union seem to be rapidly fading from the memory of the people of this nation.

Resolved, That we express our profound respect and gratitude to the ladies of the W. C. T. U., who voluntarily visited our post on Memorial day and so kindly expressed their love and sympathy, for the cause in which we suffered, and sacrificed so much.

Resolved, That the beautiful flowers they so generously donated to strew upon the graves of our departed comrades, we accept as an emblem of the givers' patriotism and, further, that we all say "God bless the ladies."

Resolved, That a copy of the foregoing be presented to the W. C. T. U.

Now my fellow citizens, there ought never to exist a state of feeling in any community of the United States which could at all justify the second paragraph of that preamble.

Just think of it! Whereas, "The suffering and deeds of the soldiers of the Union seem to be rapidly fading from the memory

of the people of this nation." Is it possible that there is truth in this? Is 20 years the limit of America's remembrance of the heroes who bled and died in her defense? I cannot, nay I will not believe it. Our people are so busy in commercial affairs, so busy in pushing the railroad, the telegraph and the telephone, so busy in trying to calm the troubled sea where the opposing currents of capital and labor meet, that they have for a little forgotten their duty, and their privilege, and they only need a bit of a reminder, and we shall see them doing again as they have done, and responding once more to what I am sure is the prompting of the American heart.

In the meantime I too, thank the W. C. T. U. that they remembered our soldier dead at least one year.

But let me turn to another fact which we all too often forget. Among those who are especially deserving of recognition for honorable service during our last war, are a great multitude who were noncombatants. In the old days when King David issued his army regulations, this was one of the articles. In case of a victory, the political doctrine of our time seems to have obtained. "To the victors belong the spoils," but with the farther provision that all should share alike, whether they were in front or rear, in action or in reserve. This is the way it reads:

"As his part is that goeth down to the battle, so shall his part be that tarrieth by the staff; they shall part alike."

No preferred creditors under that regulation. The guard of the baggage train, you see, was deemed equally worthy of honor, with those who fought at the front.

And this is just what I am pleading for. Give every man his due. You know, and I know, that the chief quartermaster of such a body of men as the army of the Potomac had no sinecure, if help in his duty, and so of the chief commissary and their subordinate officers in each.

No other set of men in the whole army were harder worked than these men, and yet who ever heard of a quartermaster or a commissary being pushed to the front in any place where men do honor to the old soldiers? Hurry up the clothing and the hardtack, the tents and the haversacks, the beans and the bacon, and then curse him if he didn't get there, that was the sort of honor and thanks the poor fellows received.

You fellows who marched through Virginia mud, think you had a tough time of it, but what about the boys who had to get your rations, and your forage to you, wherever you were, through that same mud? To be sure they had teams, yes indeed, and I do just here and now put in a special claim for the efficient members of that corps who bore the euphonious M. D. which translated into the vernacular meant mule driver, for if ever a poor fellow on earth deserved a pension of the first class, it was the chap who pushed a six mule team through the mud of the Chickahominy.

Some of the grandest successes of the war, came about through the agency of those teamsters. Tired out and disheartened, the boys lay down at night on their arms, too thoroughly used up, even to get out their blankets and dog tents, if they had any, and yet it was of great importance that they be forty miles farther on, at daybreak. But the boys were hungry and no rations at hand. But hark! Just as they began to grumble, the familiar He-haw! of a distant mule breaks on the ear, and the dinner bell at Delmonico's was never one-half so welcome, as it invited men to turtle soup and champagne, as was that He-haw! which told of coffee and hardtack.

Old Sancho Panza cried out "God bless the man who first invented sleep," and while the old soldiers would all heartily second that, I suspect they would be ready to add with emphasis, God bless the man who first invented coffee. It is, I believe, above all others, the drink for an army.

Let us put the two together, as they are coupled in our affections. "Tired nature's sweet restorer, balmy sleep," and "tired nature's chief restorer, fragrant coffee."

And here they come tumbling into park with a thousand more discordant He-haws, and a thousand more discordant yells, with words a deal more forcible than elegant, and out come the camp-kettles, and tin cups, and down they sit by the hastily kindled camp-fires, and when the staff was piping hot, they drank their pint, with such a relish as Jupi-

ter never dreamed of, when he and Juno took nectar and ambrosia in the hands of Hebe, or Gonymode in the back parlors of Elysium. Boys it was good, wasn't it? Let's never drink anything stronger. There are no headaches, nor dreams of monkeys and snakes, in a tin cup full of coffee, but there's lots of "git and pluck," and so when the bugler blew "fall in," the rested army sprang to its feet and by a forced march of forty miles, met the enemy at daybreak, and won a fight, which helped to break the shackles off four million slaves and make our land "the land of the free," and all this because those mule drivers "got there" with the coffee.

Oh yes, when I get into congress you may let I'll vote to pension the mule drivers.

And just here, while we are talking about quartermasters, did you ever know old "Rucker" chief quartermaster of the army of the Potomac, the roughest old chap in America, but a better quartermaster never issued a canteen. Well the Department sent into his office a little statement of differences one day, to the effect, that his accounts showed a trifling shortage of a million and a half or such a matter. The old man looked at the sum total a half a minute, and then with an explosive expletive, dashed off an indorsement across the paper:

"Please stop it against my pay. Yours &c., RUCKER."

And now, I fancy I hear the sick call, and that suggests two or three classes more, who are deserving of honorable mention.

There were cowards and shirks among the soldiers, and here and there an officer who showed the white feather, or who was a petty tyrant with his men, and a poltroon before the enemy. None of them were without fault, and so I suppose the doctors were not all just what they should have been. Some who dealt out quinine down there, ought to have been hoeing corn, and here and there a chap was cutting off legs and arms, with the title of Surgeon, who ought to have been shaking a back-saw. But on the whole our medical corps was an efficient one, and to most of us our memories of the Doctor are grateful memories. He helped some of us through more than one tight place, and not a day of the boys are on earth to-day, through the will and kindness of some faithful surgeon. They had to cut and slash sometimes without much time to consider whether they couldn't save a leg or an arm, for so many poor fellows lay bleeding and moaning, waiting for their turn, that there wasn't time for deliberate consultation. Hurry was the order of the day, whether on the field or in the hospital. But even so, with all the inconveniences and discomforts and amid all the rush, many a veteran has occasion to thank some kind old surgeon that he is spared to his right hands among those chaplains which could bring a rebel's body down at twenty paces, and then point his soul to Heaven, so faithfully that the lad in gray, blessed in his heart, the Yankee preacher, who could sing and shoot with equal will, who could help his country's foe out of this world with a bullet, and into the next with a prayer, with equal fervor and hearty good will.

And now boys, once more. There are frauds and humbugs and hypocrites everywhere, but I suspect, on the whole, you and I never met a nobler, kinder set of men, than our chaplains, and some of them could ride in a charge and handle a six-shooter with the best of you. That Smith & Weston didn't lose anything by being carried in the same pocket with a Bible, and there were good right hands among those chaplains which could bring a rebel's body down at twenty paces, and then point his soul to Heaven, so faithfully that the lad in gray, blessed in his heart, the Yankee preacher, who could sing and shoot with equal will, who could help his country's foe out of this world with a bullet, and into the next with a prayer, with equal fervor and hearty good will.

I recall old Chaplain Woodward, an old man when I was a boy, and living yet, God bless him, among the green hills of Vermont. The boys of the First Vermont Cavalry tell of their first experience under fire. They were crossing Chain Bridge in Washington, and their colonel somehow didn't seem anxious to lead the regiment. It was a critical moment, but see! just at the pinch old Parson Woodward spurred his big black to the front, and half way across the bridge before the boys could gather themselves, hear him, "Come on, boys," and they came on, and the rebels had an errand farther down toward Richmond. I can fancy the rebels talking over the skirmish that night, and asking one another, "I say, Jim did you see that old chaplain on the big black horse? I stayed there 'till I saw the fire in his eye and then I made up my mind that my mother wanted me, and I lit out, right smart, for home." And then the good old man, when the fight he had helped to win, was over, would be around among the wounded, before the stretchers got there, and with a cheering word and a drink from his canteen, he fixed the boys up, and got them off to the rear, and there he tended them as though they were his own children. Body and soul, every man in the regiment was dear to him, and one day the old man grew more tender and braver than ever before, and report said his son was shot dead on the field, his only son. I remember John Woodward well, a schoolmate of mine, and for pluck and gallantry, a chip off the old block. The old chaplain's eyes were dim for a little, and his voice a trifle husky, but he didn't resign, nor leave his post, and when I tell you, the boys loved old Chaplain Woodward, as they loved their mothers, you won't doubt my word, nor their manliness. A few years ago I preached for the old man, and thinking he might have some choice as to the theme I should present to his people, I said to him Sunday

morning, what shall I preach to your people, Father Woodward? "Preach the Gospel," replied the old veteran, and I shan't forget that lesson while I live. And now I reckon, comrades, all things considered, you'll say with me, God bless the chaplain.

And just here, somehow, my mind and my heart recall a few of the forerunners, the John the Baptists of our war, and I must just mention a few of them, for I am persuaded they are not all among Uncle Sam's preferred creditors. The people of these states, and especially our colored people will not altogether forget Wm. Lloyd Garrison and Gerrit Smith and John Brown, and yet I am sadly confident that they are not remembered as they ought to be. The prosperity of our country, and especially of the South, is what it is to-day, very largely because of the abolition movement, inaugurated by Garrison, and by that intrepid leader put upon the path to success. His radical measures startled the world, and men hated him for his fanaticism, but the years have ripened our thought, and our calm retrospect whispers softly, the grand old man was right after all.

Of his co-worker and helper, Gerrit Smith, let me read you what I wrote when the old man died in 1874.

The man who dared to do the right, The man who dared be true; Who led the van in freedom's fight, When freedom's friends were few.

The man who dared befriend the slave, At his own proper cost; And grew more confident and brave, When others whispered "lost."

The man who never yielded ground To any vaunting foe; And who, to save another's wound, Himself received the blow.

The man who lent a list'ning ear To every human moan; He held the stricken doubly dear, And made their cause his own.

This is the man who died to-day, And died, a crown to win; Wide open swung the gates of Day, To let the hero in.

"But he had faults," go, cynic, go To him who can atone; And who is sinless here below, Be first to cast a stone.

Upward, along the shining street To where the angels wait, His noble spirit tried to greet Saint Peter, at the gate.

But scarce delaying there his way, E'en to receive a crown; The old man whispers, "tell me, pray, Where I may find John Brown."

And this carries us back to Harper's Ferry and 1859, to find another who was not a preferred creditor. Do you remember how our hearts burned within us in those years? and how, under the fiery eloquence of Wendell Phillips and Charles Sumner and Joshua Giddings and a score of others among the Boanerges of that time, our blood leaped through our veins. The mad excitement of the time must find vent in the sacrifice of some victim, and John Brown came to the front. He said of himself, "I am worth more to hang than anything else," and they hung him on that 2nd of December, 1859, and from that day slavery was doomed. John Brown was not without faults but he will ever be counted among the stars of first magnitude, in the constellation of American heroes. I can say no more of him just now but some day, perhaps in the near future, I shall be glad to say of John Brown, in your presence, what I think and feel. You may not agree with me. You may call him by some other name than hero, but we won't quarrel about that to-day.

And now, comrades, I suppose you have some preferred creditors in Gratiot county, and perhaps a few, who are not among that favored class. If there be any among you here to-day who have shared largely in the favors dispensed by our government, let me say, no one rejoices more in your good fortune than your fellow citizens who have not been so fortunate.

We old soldiers are one, and if one among us be honored we are all sharers in that honor, and on the other hand, if one be neglected, we all share in the regret and disappointment. We must stand by each other, not with the mistaken zeal of those who led by unwise counsels, are blocking the wheels of business, and bringing unhappiness and want to their own homes and the homes of others, not as a political organization, for such an organization could only defeat its own wishes and hopes, but we can and must stand together, as a loyal band of brothers, whose first care is for our common country, and second to this is our care one for another.

We believe our government intends to do for her old soldiers, all that is right and just. We love our country, and down deep in our hearts we feel, that in the end upon the annals of fame, justice will be done to all classes, who, ought for the common good of our common country, in the final adjustments of history, we shall stand alike approved by man, and we trust approved also of God. Yes, we believe the time is coming when among all who served our country in whatever capacity, there will be no favoritism, except that to which all will gladly yield assent, and that touching the indebtedness of our people, to those who fought for them by land, or sea, there will be nothing offensive, in the suggestion of preferred creditors.