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Anniversary Sermon

Delivered by

MATTOON MONROE CURTIS, M. A., PH. D.



at the Annual Ceremonial of the
TROOPING OF THE COLORS

of

WESTERN RESERVE SOCIETY
SONS OF THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION

AT TRINITY CATHEDRAL, CLEVELAND
DECEMBER—1915

Commemorating Washington Crossing the Delaware
December 25, 1776

THE FOUNDATIONS OF PATRIOTISM

by

Mattoon Monroe Curtis

1. The Christmas of 1776 looked very dark to the struggling American colonists who had published to the world their Declaration of Independence. It appeared as if England, with her plundering hirelings from Hesse-Cassel, which Frederick the Great taxed as cattle for export, had already crushed the hopes of aspiring humanity. In despair Voltaire cried: "Alas! reason and liberty are ill-received in this world;" and the great Immanuel Kant bemoaned the outlook for freedom and justice among men. In England, in France, in Germany, it was thought that the revolution would be speedily ended. In New York, Howe was squandering the money of the colonists on wine and women, and Cornwallis,—as fighting was over,—sent his baggage on board a packet for England. They did not take adequate account of the spirit and resourcefulness of Washington. In spite of the gloomy outlook America was to have a Merry Christmas. I will not recount to you how Washington formulated his campaign, looking to the crossing of the Delaware and the capture of Trenton with its fifteen hundred Hessians; how on that bitter Christmas Eve, in the face of blinding snow and floating ice, he threw his ill-clad army across the river; how, half frozen, slipping and struggling through the storm, his gallant and tattered ranks made their way toward Trenton; how the brave Sullivan sent word to Washington that the arms of his troops were wet, and received the reply: "Then give the enemy the bayonet;" how Washington captured Trenton and so maneuvered his troops that he kept

Cornwallis in America, aroused the dissolute Howe, and placed himself among the great generals of all time.

It is nearly one hundred and forty years since these stirring and critical events which presaged ultimate victory to the colonists, and independence for America. American liberty was not born in England, nor in Holland, nor in Geneva, nor at the headwaters of the Elbe; American liberty was born in America, cradled in America, and lives in America only because she has always had men like Washington and Hamilton, soldiers and statesmen, to whom the Declaration of Independence is not mere sentiment but a living reality. It was for this that the men of Lexington "fired the shot heard round the world;" that Washington crossed the Delaware; and that our fathers, with bleeding feet, tramped the snows of Valley Forge.

2. America has once again fallen upon a time that tests her soul, her ideals, her principles, her patriotism. O, you say, America is not at war! Well, that is true in a sense; we do not hear the roar of cannon, the crash of the serried ranks; we do not see the bursting shells, the fields strewn with the dead and dying, the wide-circling navies of the sea and of the air, the glow of furnaces burning the dead lest the pestilence of disease be added to the pestilence of slaughter, and the solemn, tear-stained faces of mourning millions. It is only by accident that we are not in this welter of blood. Distance, and the great surrounding oceans, and a partial exemption from entangling alliances, enable us to witness our brothers' woes and to

contemplate the greatest tragedy of all time. But in another sense we *are* at war. America stands facing herself as in a looking-glass. She stands revealed in her weakness and in her might. Bunyan, seeing a poor drunken wretch shambling along the street, exclaimed: "But for the grace of God there goes John Bunyan!" So we, looking at the nations clashing in Europe may say: "But for the grace of God there goes America!" She *is* in the fight in the sense that the ideas and principles which are ruling in Europe, and of which this war is an expression, are the ideas and principles that are ruling in America. If there is a breakdown of so-called civilization in Europe, it is a warning to America that she too may be on the wrong track and must mend her ways or pay the penalty of her blindness. Macaulay once said: "Nine-tenths of the calamities which have befallen the human race had no other origin than the union of high intelligence with low desires." No one can question the high intelligence of these nations; must we admit their low desires? The ruling ideas in national life during the last sixty years, and in some nations during the last one hundred years, have been commercialism, imperialism, and militarism, or if you please, wealth, expansion, and power. Our own America has grown intensely commercialistic and imperialistic, while our isolation alone has modified our militarism. The great upheaval in Europe is the explosion of these dominating ideas in the rivalry of the principal nationalities. The *different* nations are not fighting for *different* principles, moral, political, or religious, but are fighting for commercial and imperial power. The mere fact that England is linked with Russia and Japan, and that Ger-

many is linked with Turkey and Bulgaria, should be sufficient to refute any theory that this is a war of *different* types of civilization, or of *different* races, or of *different* moral principles, or of *different* religious convictions, or of *different* political policies. The most serious fact about this war is its immoral, unpolitical, irreligious, and irrational foundation. It is the result of a vicious philosophy of nationalism in which the moral and spiritual interests of humanity are sacrificed to the economic and the material.

3. I have no intention of discussing this war. Guns are undoubtedly important but far more important are the ideas and principles of the men behind the guns. In the light of what is going on in the world I wish to call attention to a few things looking to the foundation of a true and effective loyalty. Patriotism is a spiritual asset and is to the state what religion is to the church. It is the duty of every nation to conserve its spiritual assets. Unless it does so it debases its own soul and invites extinction. A nation really lives by the loyalty of all its citizens to the fundamental ideas and principles which it represents, and these to be *real* must be truths of the spirit. America is in a position where she must make some serious choices as to what she is going to think and feel and do; as to what ideals she is going to set before her youth if she is to be internally and externally powerful among the nations of the earth. Among other things we must choose whether we are going to give this world in which we live a materialistic or an idealistic interpretation. It makes a mighty difference what attitude underlies our educational system; whether we regard

nature as "our arch enemy," as "red in tooth and claw," as "a merciless machine," or as a realm of suggestion and inspiration in our search for truth, beauty, and goodness. Nothing bulks bigger in America today than the word Science; but science contains within its ranks two very distinct and opposing attitudes toward the world. There is a science that kills the soul of things and a science that keeps it alive. To one class the world is nothing but a machine governed by rigid mechanical laws—soulless, Godless, meaningless. The thesis of this view is that the world is composed of atoms; these atoms attract and repel each other, and the laws of their attraction and repulsion constitute all the laws of nature, including man. There is nothing but matter and motion; there is no freedom; all is necessity. Everything is stated in terms of mechanics. This so-called science declares the unreality of all values and ideals, plunders all the healthy, aesthetical and ethical sentiments of life, and reduces the intellect to the *slavery* of a false metaphysics. Over against this paralyzing view is the conviction that the world is our dwelling-place, a living thing full of truth, of beauty, of goodness; of symbolism, which inspires poetry, music, painting, and all the fine arts; an invitation to wrestle with her for her secrets, to build up our sciences and philosophies, and to expand our interests in a thousand different ways; even permitting us to believe that "the heavens declare the glory of God and the firmament showeth His handiwork," or to say with the Master: "Behold, the lilies of the field! they toil not, neither do they spin, yet I say unto you that Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these." The love of nature lies close to religion and still closer to patriot-

ism. America must choose between these two conceptions of nature in our national education. The one destroys the spiritual life; the other enriches it. I am glad to notice that the Nestor of American science, Professor Edmund B. Wilson, rejects the materialistic view "as the great Myth" of the laboratories, and holds with the great thinkers of the world that true science is a realm of the constructive imagination, free, moving, and akin to poetry. This makes science not the enemy but the friend of humanity. The love of country has at least one of its sources in the love of our "rocks and rills," our "woods and templed hills."

4. A choice of even greater importance is presented to us in regard to the nature of man. It makes a vast difference to this nation whether we spiritualize human nature, giving to it eternal values as did our fathers, or materialize and commercialize it as is the tendency today. These two views have been competing with each other all through human history. The one is the humanistic view that looks upon man as the noblest work of God, the crown of the creative process, and containing within him the elements of divinity itself, the potentialities of ever becoming nobler. It is the view that naturally presents itself when we consider man's marvelous conquest of nature. It is the view of Aristotle that man is a social and political animal by nature, capable of developing all the virtues which blossom in an organized society where liberty and law are properly adjusted. It is the view of Jesus who committed his gospel to his disciples with the command to preach it to all the world out of their own hearts and understandings; who gave them the simple

rule of equity—to do unto others as they would that others should do unto them; or expressed philosophically in the words of Kant—“so act that you can will the principle of *your* action to be universal law.” It was the view of our fathers who regarded all men as born free and equal before the law, and as children of God to be treated not as means but always as an end. Over against this conception is the old theological view that man is by nature totally depraved and capable of no good thing; the view of Hobbes that “man is to man a wolf,” that the natural state of man is “war of all against all,” that the only government man is capable of is absolute monarchy, in which might is right and which prescribes all morals, law, and religion. It is the materialistic conception so common in our day that man is wholly incapable of considering any values that are not economic or material; that by the inevitable decrees of his own nature he is bound to the worship of physical wealth, power, and pleasure; that a mechanical struggle for existence resulting in natural selection or in the survival of the fittest is the rule in all humanity. The fact that views like these have gained some currency in America shows how far some have wandered from truth and given themselves to a psychology and a philosophy *without a soul*. This view is as great a travesty upon primitive man as upon civilized man, tending to make sympathy, benevolence, and justice, artificial or conventional accretions, instead of radical elements in the groundwork of human nature. America must choose between these views. The one contains within it the promise of everlasting war; the other has in it the potentialities of enduring peace. Plato said reason is given to man to control his desires

and to constitute his will *good*, and Kant added, there is nothing under heaven or among men that can be unqualifiedly called good but a *good will*. This good will, I verily believe, is the inner core of the American philosophy of life.

5. America must choose between two rival conceptions of *law* which, for twenty-five hundred years at least, have struggled against each other in the world conflict between liberty and despotism. One conception is that law is an expression of force, is arbitrary, conventional, *de facto*; has nothing to do with moral right or wrong, good or evil; and has for its end the preservation of the state or dynasty or rulers. This has always been the theory of *absolutism*. The other view is that law is the expression of human nature, rational, moral; that law, government, and the state itself, exist as means to human welfare as an end; that the foundation and the sanction of law lie in evident principles of justice which may be argued up to God as their Author. This was the view of the old Stoics and of the Roman Jurists, and of Christ who declared, "the sabbath was made for man and not man for the sabbath." This view is the foundation of every step in the progress of human liberty against the despotism of the absolute theory as held by the Stuarts, the Bourbons, and the Hapsburgs. From the time that Antigone defied Creon and Peter defied the Sanhedrin, down to the last effort for liberty under law, this view has led to victory. This was the view that dominated the spirit of the English revolution of 1688 and of the American revolution of 1776, and again in 1861 when union and slavery were the issues. Its philosophy is

set forth by that incomparable statesman Alexander Hamilton, who says; "The supreme Intelligence who rules the world has constituted an eternal law which is obligatory upon mankind prior to any human institution whatever. He gave existence to man together with the means of preserving and beautifying that existence, and invested him with an inviolable right to pursue liberty and personal safety. *Natural* liberty is the gift of the Creator to the whole human race. *Civil* liberty is only natural liberty modified and secured by the sanction of civil society. It is not dependent upon human caprice, but it is conformable to the constitution of man as well as necessary to the well-being of society. The sacred rights of mankind are not to be rummaged for among old parchments or musty records. They are written as with a sunbeam in the whole volume of human nature by the hand of divinity itself, and can never be erased or obscured by human power. This is what is called the law of nature which being coeval with mankind and dictated by God himself is of course superior in obligation to any other. No human laws are of any validity if contrary to this. It is binding over all the globe, in all countries, and at all times." I am sorry to see America retreating from this impregnable, idealistic, conception of law; for law which has not a *moral, social, religious, and patriotic* content has lost its soul, and its power to guide and guarantee liberty. With our case law system supplanting the study of jurisprudence and our increasing passion for legislation, we fail to see the woods on account of the trees, and in the place of a profession learned and enlightened in the principles of justice and equity, of natural and common law, the tendency is toward a clever

profession wandering in the midst of multitudinous statutes and conflicting decisions. This condition makes *legislation* erratic and invites such devices as recall, initiative, referendum, and the extension of primaries; while it renders *judicial* procedure slow, expensive, uncertain, technical and even arbitrary. When law and morality pursue divergent lines we have encroachments upon liberty and permanent possibilities of revolution. In 1776 we were *legally* wrong but *morally* right; in 1861 the North was *legally* wrong, but *morally* right. When will legality learn to yield to morality, and not force people into war? When will legality learn that it is the servant, and not the master, in human affairs? Our fifty years of peace and unexampled material prosperity have made us thoughtless and reckless and even skeptical as to the fundamental principles expressed in our federal and state bills of rights. My revered teacher, Theodore Dwight, used to tell us that our fundamental law should be the educator of the people in directing public opinion, and that its spirit should be our spirit of patriotism. In our democracy I do not see how any other view is defensible. When Choate referred to the Declaration of Independence as a group of glittering generalities, Emerson replied: "Yes, they do glitter, and like gold they have a right to glitter, and they will keep on glittering through the ages." Emerson was right, and I believe that in the dark days, when the clouds gather and the storm is upon us the old faith of the fathers of American liberty will warm our hearts and receive the full confirmation of our lives. Still I believe there is a tremendous obligation resting upon the legal profession today, to place American law and procedure upon a higher

plane. A like obligation rests upon our educational and religious institutions to bring more unity and devotion into American life. America is a giant, untrained and uninspired.

6. All extraordinary events are sources of revelation. So the great issues of the present in Europe have revealed America to herself. Most thinking Americans are not surprised at our present situation, but all had hoped that it would not stand out in such glaring colors. We face a situation in which the tenderest sympathy and the crassest greed run side by side. The same ship that carries from our ports arms and ammunition for the carnage in Europe also carries money and goods and medicines and devoted souls for the restoration of its victims. Perhaps the same persons who are reaping material profits from selling instruments of slaughter contribute to the ameliorating services. There is a moral split in our American life between our theory and our practice, that leaves us oscillating between the principle that *might* makes right and the principle that *right* makes might. We are too apt to confound moral temptations with economic opportunities and to regard international usage as a standard of right and wrong when it is entitled to no such distinction.

There is another line of cleavage that is even more serious and should be entirely foreign to us in view of our declared neutrality and the persistent advices of our Chief Executive. It is the rash expression of the spirit of partisanship in regard to the nations at war, even to the apparent neglect of our most obvious duties as American citizens. Most of this is superficial and

would disappear in the time of deepest strain. I know the call of the blood, of the race, and of traditions, in our heterogeneous millions; and I know the power of prejudice and self-interest, but we must deplore the apparent fact that when America needs all our loyalty, patriotism, and patient service, so much of our energy and interest is devoted to foreign partisanship in word and in act. A year ago our President might have spoken of American citizens "who have poured the poison of disloyalty into the very arteries of our national life," and none too soon has he declared "such creatures of passion, dishonor, and disloyalty must be crushed out." This is strong language, but our President knows the temper of America. That protest is an assertion that unconditional loyalty is and must be the core of American citizenship. America today is no place for divided loyalties and interests. America demands all our labors and devotions if she is going to rise spiritually triumphant out of this terrible ordeal that has been thrust upon the world, and the still more crucial test that will succeed this conflict. From the standpoint of *nationalism* America has not a friend in the world today, nor so far as we can see will she have when this European carnage is ended. If this tremendous strain does not *consolidate* us, we shall miss its whole significance for America as a nation. The issues are too sharp and wide-sweeping for us to be anything but Americans. Of course, the overflow of sympathy will run in various directions, but the full measure of loyalty must be for America. The Stars and the Stripes must be the Flag of our hearts.

7. There is still another vital problem before the American people, just because we owe something to

humanity. We must choose between stopping at a purely nationalistic morale and going on to a cosmopolitan or universal morale. You recall the famous toast of Decatur: "My country, may she ever be in the right, but right or wrong!—My Country!" So far as we agree with this sentiment of Decatur's, we stand for a purely national morale, and this is precisely one of the most serious features in the growth of modern nationalism. Each nation piously wishes that it may be in the right, yet belligerently adds—"but right or wrong, my country!" This means that the morale of a nation follows its flag and that the flag follows its dominant interests which in our day are commercial and imperial. This places the prospect of international morality in a perilous position and ensures the regime of ruthless competition and of war. I am confident that this development in recent times is the main and sufficient reason why the world today is so morally and religiously helpless; and international law and treaties little better than scraps of paper. Humanity has been sacrificed by nationalism just as Socrates was, just as Christ was. Once admit that necessity knows no law and all law is at an end, for it fails at the point needed and for which it was made. If laws are pushed aside whenever some one pleads necessity, we might as well spare ourselves the trouble of having laws. We may talk about international courts of this, that and the other description, but unless national ethics bows to universal or human ethics, we are wasting our time and breath. The nations must train themselves in justice and reciprocity to the point of observing the equities of the smallest and weakest people on the face of the earth. Those who point the finger of scorn at England for her

recent conduct in South Africa, in Egypt, and in Persia, should remember that we have our Philippines, our Hawaii, our Panama Canal Zone, and Mexico, and that we failed to protest the violation of Belgium's neutrality. I see no hope for humanity on the Decatur basis. I see no hope for peace as long as the great and powerful nations trample with impunity upon the rights and equities of the smaller and the weaker. Unless the leading nations put their international ethics on a cosmopolitan basis and abandon narrow and selfish nationalism, this whole conflict will have been in vain, and before long another weltering mess will disgrace humanity. The real significance of this war will be the modifications wrought in ideas and ideals which are to dominate the future. Today America is the only great nation which is in a position to set a great example by shifting its emphasis from material to spiritual goods, from an economic to an ethical interpretation of human life. Have we the *spirit*, have we the *courage*, have we the *wisdom* to do this service for the future of humanity? Should America do this, it would be the first great victory ever secured by peace. If American patriotism or that of any great nation is to be a beneficent influence on earth, it must *dare* to transcend mere national boundaries, and assert the eternal and universal principles of righteousness, just as our fathers of the Revolution *dared* in the face of a despotic world to set up the first free government under heaven. This is the kind of patriotism that has its roots in eternal justice, makes the nation strong in its own integrity, while it blossoms and fructifies for the benefit of all the world.