

An address given by Colonel Samuel Frazer Gray on the occasion of a reunion of the 49th Ohio Volunteer Regiment, Grand Army of the Republic, at Bucyrus, Ohio, in 1903.

The Gray family lived at Bucyrus in 1850 when Colonel Gray was fourteen years of age.

This speech is outstanding in that it gives us an intimate picture of the political affairs of our country at that time. His descendants feel that it is a true personal record and a heritage to us all.

49th
Ohio
Volunteer
Regiment
x 7

ADDRESS by COLONEL SAMUEL FRAZER GRAY

I am glad to meet the regiment in reunion at Bucyrus, for the reason that more than a half a century ago, I was a citizen of the village. A callow youth, a school boy, and then an apprentice to a mechanical trade. After so long a time, I recognize but few of the landmarks, and am almost an entire stranger to today's population of the City of Bucyrus.

I had the usual boyish experiences, pleasurable and otherwise. By otherwise, I mean that I had some disappointments, and I think I must tell you one. I fell in love with a very sweet, pretty girl, and I thought I had a pretty full grip upon her affections. In other words, I thought I "stood in" favorably. Alas for human calculations! When I was obliged to leave the town and go elsewhere, an attractive and dashing young fellow stole my girl, or cut me out as it were. This same young man afterwards became a cavalry officer, which of course is indicative of dash in his youth. I, however, recovered from the shock, but have always remembered this young lady as very sweet and fascinating, and for a long time I was grieved that I had been displaced.

Nine or ten years later, the scene had shifted. The evolution from inexperienced youth, to the time when I entered upon the serious affairs of life had been rapid, caused by the stirring events of the day, the great political questions that agitated the two sections of the country north and south, from 1850 to the culmination of the war. Every one of us, I think, officers and men, can well remember the dark days of that time.

At the risk of becoming somewhat tiresome, I think I must relate to you my own personal feelings, and the impressions made upon me at that time.

Soon after Mr. Lincoln's first inauguration, I went to Washington on some business, and while there was a close observer of the situation as it existed at the Capital of this great Nation. I visited the White House, on the occasion of a reception given by the President, and saw in his face, traces of ineffable sadness. The great man seemed weighted down with responsibilities, the like of which had never fallen to the lot of any other executive.

Strange as it may seem, I could find very little traces of loyalty to the Government. I visited my boyhood friend, Henry Rouse of Bacyrus, who was employed in one of the Departments, and he told me that all of the Departments were filled with employees who were at heart disloyal to the Government. The spirit of secession was everywhere rampant. I went with my friend Rouse to the theatre, and when the orchestra struck up the Star Spangled Banner, there was scarcely a response, but later on when they played Dixie, the secession element nearly tore the house down.

I witnessed a remnant of the regular army coming into Washington, pitifully small. Going down Pennsylvania Avenue, I encountered a military company from Mt. Vernon, who came up to pay their respects to their former Captain, who I think was connected with the staff of General Scott, Commander in Chief of the Army. I followed them around the corner to the Captain's home. He came out on the balcony on crutches, and I listened to his fraternal greeting to his men. He said he had hoped to be able to present them to General Scott, but on account

but on account of the General having a previous engagement, he would be unable to do so. In the course of his remarks, he stated that dark clouds were hanging over the national horizon, and that doubt and distrust prevailed everywhere, but he hoped that whatever happened, that his old company would be found loyal to their Country's flag. His appeal struck me as pathetic.

I had been a close observer of the political affairs of the country, and I was tired and disgusted with the dominating spirit of the slave holders of the south. I knew well enough that they charged that the northern people were low in the social scale, that they were the mud sills of society, and without physical courage.

Every effort of Statesmen and Politicians in the north, seemed to be directed towards the pacification of the sections, and the avoidance of a conflict. There were anxious faces and guarded speech. The Senate of the United States was in executive session, and I visited it one day listening to the speech of Stephen A. Douglass. I remember that Clingman of North Carolina, a secessionist at heart, was sitting behind Mr. Douglass, and frequently coached him. In that speech Mr. Douglass' argument was, that under the Constitution of the United States, the Government had no power to coerce a sister state, and his speech was loudly applauded by the Southern side of the house.

I left Washington with my youthful heart oppressed with solicitude for the salvation of my Country. I was fired with indignation, and I then and there determined that if the conflict came, I would not only be on the side of my Country's flag, but I would make any sacrifice, and give what there was of my young manhood in its defense.

Soon after this came the firing on Fort Sumter, and the call by Abraham Lincoln for 75,000 men for three month's service, showing that neither Mr. Lincoln, nor Congress had any adequate idea of the magnitude of the struggle upon which the Country was entering. Having a business to settle up, and provisions to make for my family, I did not find an opportunity to enter the three month's service, but my prophetic soul saw that it would not be long until a second call would be made for more men and a longer term. It is not my intention to trace the history of the country during this period, but more than anything else, to indicate to you my individual feelings, which I am sure must have been the feelings of every intelligent man at that time.

It came soon enough as you all know. On the day after the first battle of Bull Run, I commenced, in connection with other members of old Company A, to organize a company, in anticipation of the call that soon followed. Upon the completion of our company to its minimum, and after the election of Officers, Colonel Gibson, having had authority to recruit a regiment, visited us at Findlay, and invited us to become the nucleus of his regiment. Having confidence in him, we gladly enlisted ourselves under the banner, and became the right wing of this afterwards great regiment.

Courage and patriotism in that day and hour was not confined to the soldier element. I have often thought that it required more courage for fathers and mothers and wives to see their loved ones march away to the cruel war, and with heroic effort give them their blessing and godspeed, than for us to face the cannon's mouth. While I had the courage to face the responsibilities and dangers of the struggle, I have often wondered whether I would have been equal to sending my

but that it was done - is a matter to me almost marvelous. My own experience in this line is the experience of most others. My father was a faithful pioneer was assured that the company would go into active service, my mother made some

itself in the following language:

"I have not advised my son to go, nor have I said to him to stay, but have made the subject a matter of prayer, and I determined to leave the issue in the hands of God, and now that his determination is taken. I commend him for it, and give him my blessing, and would add, if I were young as he is young, I would go myself."

Dennison, under the orders of the Government, the train stopped enroute at Carey, Ohio, where many of the parents and friends of the boys had assembled to bid them goodbye. I remember the mother of William Gibbs, then a sergeant, afterwards a Lieutenant, whom I saw fall pierced through the heart by a ball. He was shot in an endeavor to rescue a fellow soldier. It was that we all remember, the 27th of May, 1864. The mother embraced the dead feet to the foe". Who can measure the depths of a mother's love, and who can

in this case, as in many others never to return. Some may have enlisted as the result of the contagious patriotic outburst, but young as we were, I think the great majority weighed carefully and well the dangers and responsibilities of our undertaking, and thus boys almost instantly became men, determining to undertake men's work. I think we realized it was no holiday job.

I am glad to be in reunion at Bucyrus for another reason. This city and vicinity gave to the 49th Ohio, one of its most gallant companies, commanded by Captain Keller - courageous Captain Keller! He and Lieutenant Keller, his brother gave up their lives on the bloody field of Stones River. They were both quiet Christian heroes. Their unflinching patriotism, and their splendid courage and will, stamped them as men who had in their veins, the spirit of martyrs. I visited Lieutenant Keller after the battle, in the field hospital. One of his legs was badly shattered, and the surgeons had recommended amputation, as the one hope of saving the Lieutenant's life. Lieutenant Keller refused to allow it to be done, stating he would rather die than to have his limb taken off. I visited him when it was apparent that he could not live. His cheeks were feverish, but his eyes were bright, and his heart was full of hope and trust in God. All hail to the memory of the gallant deeds of Captain and Lieutenant Keller! And you, Mrs. Gibson, we greet with fraternal love and affection. May the great Spirit have you ever in his keeping. May you live and have the strength to attend many more of these reunions, and when the supreme moment comes, your soul will be cheered and soothed in its passage across the dark river, by the thought of a reunion with your beloved in the land of spirit, where love is the ruling passion for ever more.

47 The list of our heroic dead is a long one, and the grass over their graves is kept green, and watered by the tears of their loved ones.

There can be no question my comrades that we are getting old, and each language of the day, that we are becoming back numbers. I do not like the phrase, because it is hardly true. While other and younger men are now, and will take our places, yet there is still devolved upon us the duties of citizenship. Having arrived at what you might call the philosophical age, we may be as effective for good as ever. We can never be soldiers again, that is sure. We have lost much of that youthful impulse, I might say audacity of youth, that God ordained principle, which bears the individual forward to his destiny, sometimes recklessly, but ever forward to the end. To compensate for this loss, there has come to us a riper judgment, a more conservative way of thinking, less impulse, more reason, and a keener sense of justice. We should congratulate ourselves that our lives were cast in this period of our country's history. That we had a part in the preservation of this great Republic, and can go down to our graves, leaving a united and happy people, a glorious heritage to our children and succeeding generations. Indeed I have the greatest satisfaction in the feeling that this great country is my debtor, and that I shall die with the debt uncanceled. I hold it as a jewel inalienable, not transferable, not negotiable.

Nothing is sadder in life to contemplate than senility, the passing of active vigorous life to the feebleness of old age. It is not a beautiful sight, nor a

pleasing contemplation, and one must be a philosopher to bear it serenely.

There seems to me nothing left for us to do, but seize upon such opportunities as are at hand. Do what we can find to do in the way of inculcating patriotic ideas, encouraging philanthropic undertaking, and the doing of all these things that are helpful and upbuilding to our brother man, keeping up our courage, and keeping our hearts warm and fresh. It seems to me that this kind of a life is the most suitable and logical winding-up of our former credible careers.

Nations like individuals have their youthful impulses. They grow, develop and expand, and it is the will of God that it should be so. There comes a time I believe, when nations, like the individual, reach the zenith of their glory, and then decline into final ruin and decay. It is hard for me to realize that this great nation must ever go down to decay. The lesson of history is I believe, that the rise and fall of Empires and Republics, has been due to official corruption, luxury overruling ambition, and the suppression of liberty and the rights of the people.

Lord McCauley speaking of this great Republic, predicted that the republican form of government is unsuited to large populations because of the lack of strong central government. It will be admitted by all that the country has not as yet passed the experimental age, and demonstrated that McCauley's statement is untrue. It is my hope that this bountiful country founded by Washington, and our other Revolutionary heroes, and later purified and redeemed from the fearful curse of slavery by the immortal Lincoln - our Father Abraham - who called us from the shops, the farms, the stores, and from the peaceful avocations of life

... in a cause as glorious as ever nerved the arm, and moved the heart of man to great endeavor, will never fall. Nearly 1,500,000 of the youth of the land were suddenly transformed from citizens to soldiers. I ~~remember would be~~ practically ruined for the best citizenship. What was the result? When the war closed, and we were mustered out, this great aggregation of men dropped quietly back into the peaceful walks of life. Many youths who left college in the defense of their country returned to school, and today we find them following the various vocations; lawyers, preachers, doctors, and a few statesmen. I recently had occasion to talk to a clerical friend of mine who visited my house, and who was deploring the Spanish-American war. He was a dutiful disciple of the meek and lowly Jesus, and believed that love and reason should rule, and that war and strife should pass away, the result of our advanced civilisation. I stated to him that war was a civilizer, at which he seemed to be somewhat shocked, and I explained to him that when this regiment was organized, from that part of Ohio that was blessed with free schools, it did not seem that there would be much illiteracy, but we found that when our first payrolls were ~~to be signed,~~ more than ten percent were unable to sign them. This occurred, I think, but once. Men found time while in camp to learn to write. They were in contact with other better educated, and being naturally bright and receptive, ~~received~~ education. They became intelligent men, and returned to their homes, I think, broader and better than when they entered the service.

It was said by an eminent man, that a country that remained at peace for the period of a generation, lost its necessary war-like spirit, and became a sordid money-making trading people. It will be remembered that our friends across the waters spoke of us as a great jelly fish, soft and unable to defend ourselves, and that the Almighty dollar was our ruling passion and that we were a nation of traders. The influence of our flag throughout the world needed the support of a navy on the seas, and an army on land to give it the influence to which a nation of seventy millions of people is entitled. Whether we had sufficient cause to go to war with Spain was disputed by many good men, but whether such was the case or not, we all know the result and the brilliant achievements of our navy and the soldierly qualities of our regular army demonstrated the falsity of their charges. What is the result? Our navy is respected on high seas throughout the world and it is fully conceded that the American soldier is the equal of the soldiers of any nation on the earth. I think it will be conceded that since the ending of the war, continually up to the present hour, the old soldiers of the war of the Rebellion have been the right arm and the dominating power and influence that has guided our nation forward to its present high estate. Our soldiers fill the Legislative Halls, fill the Presidential office, keep alive the fires of patriotism, and teach loyalty and devotion to the dear old flag.

Shall we continue to uphold the honor of the nation? Are you willing to entrust the honor of our country to Comrade McKinley, a wise man, a patriot, and a soldier? There is no politics in this, and no old soldier should take offense at this, whatever be his politics, for in this sentiment there is no politics. It does not seem to be a political question. A number of both political parties, calling

themselves Anti-Imperialists, Anti-superannuated old fools have placed themselves in the pathway, I think, of progress and national honor and they must be swept

you will most all remember that took place at our camp on Nolin Creek in Kentucky a few months after we had entered the field, while in camp at this place, the good ladies of Tiffin made us a beautiful flag, and sent it to the regiment by the hands of General Mitchell, of Ohio, and one beautiful Sabbath day, after our morning church service, the flag was presented to the Regiment and after a stirring oration, he called upon the regiment to march around under its folds, touch them and they will be as good as dead. I remember very well my feelings, which only represented the feelings of all, that impression of that scene I would have gone under the very cannon's mouth, into the jaws of death, into the hell of strife. The lesson was never forgotten. The promise was kept and was sealed with the heart's blood of many a gallant boy.

Now my comrades and citizens, our duty is not yet done; we must continue to uphold the flag and go forward to its destiny as ordained by the God that over-rules the universe.

I do not believe that the people are to be robbed of their liberties and I believe that justice and righteousness will prevail and I see no reason why our great schools and our great charities in our broad and enlightened country should not maintain and satisfy this great people so that our nation may endure and live forever: