

A TRIBUTE TO McCLELLAN.

James B. Nicholson

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A TRIBUTE TO McCLELLAN.

A meeting of the citizens of Philadelphia was held in the Common Council Chamber, on Monday, February the 22d, 1886, upon the call of the Hon. William B. Smith, Mayor of the City of Philadelphia, "for the purpose of considering and perfecting such measures as will secure the procurement of the amount required to erect a suitable monument to commemorate the services of

MAJOR GENERAL GEORGE B. McCLELLAN."

After the meeting was organized, his Honor, the Mayor, called upon James B. Nicholson, who made the following remarks :

MR. MAYOR:—If I rightly appreciate the spirit of this occasion, it is that we are not called upon to do justice to the unselfish and unalloyed patriotism of George B. McClellan. He is gone, but his name will live forever in the annals of the country, that he loved so deeply and so well. He needs no eulogy at our weak hands. In fact, the time has not yet arrived to do him ample justice. When the God of Day emerges from his ocean bed, not only do golden rays and roseate hues betoken the coming light, but his level beams strike the mists upon the waters and the fogs upon the mountain side—they waver and struggle, but at length they disappear, and the mountain is bathed in sunlight from vale to summit, and stands revealed in all its majestic grandeur; so in the coming time will the light of truth so irradiate the mental horizon that the prejudices and passions of the hour will be dissipated, and the pure, stainless character of the Philadelphia boy, the patriot and the soldier, will stand revealed in all its excellence and beauty, and an admiring world with an universal acclaim will declare that he was a MAN, one of the highest, noblest, purest types of a true American citizen.

Not only in studied phrase upon historic page, but poet, painter, and writer will unite in telling the story of the Hero of Antietam; and behind and beyond all those agencies, there is

the Grand Army of the Potomac, the instrument that was fashioned by his brain, and that eventually conquered the enemies that raised their hands against the flag it carried. All honor to those gallant soldiers, they will be enshrined in a nation's memory. And how they loved McClellan! His very name was a charm, his presence an inspiration inciting to enthusiastic deeds of valor and devotion. His comrades have told, and "all that are left of them" are still telling their children of their beloved General; the children will tell their children's children the same old story, and thus in descending and ever-widening circles will his name be lispied in tones of love. Around the knees of the patriarch of the future, the little curly-headed urchins will gather, and the boldest, looking up, will say,—Grandfather, please tell us again the story that your grandfather told you, when you were a little boy, how the soldiers cheered and shouted when he rode with the good General McClellan down the line. Hatred may dim the reputation, kill the body, but love can transport the soul, and carry an honored name above and beyond the waters of oblivion.

Can we, upon this day, as we contemplate the unbending integrity, the high purpose, the pure character of him whom we delight to call the "Father of his Country," fail to do justice to the moral grandeur of his character? Yet in his lifetime he had enemies. Historians tell us that there was a Conway and his cabal. What do we care for such men now? We feel and know that there was but one Washington, and that his name will be honored and beloved as long as there is human speech to utter it, and human hearts to love.

The question that presents itself upon this occasion is,—Can we do justice to ourselves as men of the time? We stand for a moment amid the commingling generations of those who saw and knew McClellan, and those who knew him not. There are yet many living who passed through those days of trial, of sleepless anxiety, of patient sacrifice and of sundering ties, who can, at least faintly appreciate the labors and burdens that were laid upon the fertile brain, the measureless anxieties and pains of the throbbing heart of him who is now at rest. All such owe it to themselves, to their own memories, that they may be hallowed, to show by some visible, material—yet it may be—slight token, that they appreciate the life and character of General McClellan. Those born since the days of strife who have the slightest conception of the blessings of peace and of an united country, with a com-

mon destiny and one glorious flag as the symbol of its unity and power, cannot in justice to themselves, fail to respond, as a tribute to the worth of him who contributed so much to their advantage, and who rolled back the first tidal wave of invasion that broke upon the shores of the Northern States.

Let the appeal be made to all, and contributions received from all, however large or small. Do nothing to deter the poor man or woman from making a contribution. It may be much larger in proportion to their means than that of others who are able to give a larger sum. Let the Committee be not too large, but compact and well organized. Composed, if possible, of gentlemen who can command their time, and will devote a portion of it to this labor of love. And the co-operation of ladies should be secured in this good work. I believe that the ladies of Philadelphia have such respect for the public worth and private virtues of George B. McClellan, that they could build a monument to his memory, of which we would all feel justly proud.

Right here comes the sneering question: Of what use is a monument? What is it worth? Let me answer, my utilitarian friend, who believes that there is nothing valuable that has not the making of money as its result. In one respect it has but very little value; but in another aspect, it has a value beyond your ability to compute.

Historic monuments are means of education, incitements to grand and heroic deeds; they inspire love of country, and aid in the development and the moulding of a nation. We have very few monuments in Philadelphia, but they are priceless. Without referring to those of recent times and their lessons, permit me to refer to Carpenters' Hall, to Independence Hall, and the Old State House Bell. How much are they worth? Why, to the people of Philadelphia—to the American people—they are worth more than all the costly and magnificent structures that adorn the streets of the City of Brotherly Love.

McClellan, Meade, and Hancock, when boys, doubtless, often stood uncovered in Independence Hall, as thousands of Pennsylvania's other sons have also done, drinking in the inspiration of the surroundings of the men, who pledged their lives, their fortunes, and their sacred honor to vindicate the right of the Colonies to be free and independent States.

When Lee's army was marching towards Harrisburg, and the bridge at Columbia was burned, our utilitarian friends were

quietly packing up their valuables and thinking about starting for New York—a Pennsylvania boy struck the enemy, and fell with his face to the foe. His monument stands in front of the City Hall. When Reynolds fell, there was widespread dismay; but another Pennsylvania boy, Hancock, "the superb," rode to the brow of Cemetery Ridge, brought order out of confusion, and formed the lines which stayed the advancing hosts, whilst a Philadelphia boy, the Commander-in-Chief; our beloved Meade; hurried up the divisions that defended Philadelphia upon the slopes at Gettysburg. When Hancock, on the third day, rode from the right to the left of the Second Corps, passing in front of the Pennsylvania regiments with bands playing and colors flying, in sight of the advancing columns of Pickett's Division, of Longstreet's Corps, the enemy saw low stone walls, hardly knee high, and here and there slight intrenchments, and behind them the Union lines. But there was more there than they could see. Carpenters' Hall was there, Independence Hall was there, the Old State House Bell was there, Washington, Adams, Patrick Henry, Jefferson, John Hancock, Mad Anthony, were all there. The sacred memories of the past, the spirits of the mighty dead, were animating the hearts of living men, as they bared their breasts to the common foe. And when the loftiest crest of the Rebellion reared itself for the final dash, it was met, overtopped, and hurled back by the Philadelphia Brigade. The tide was turned, so that it set no more upon Pennsylvania's shores. Is it, then, saying too much, to declare that the patriotic memorials and mementoes of the past animated the hearts of Philadelphia boys, when they stood as men in the forefront of conflict, in the hour of their country's peril?

Let the people go on, and build monuments to the memory of the brave, the gallant, and the good, and among these should stand in the city of his birth, a monument to George B. McClellan.

His monument will command general respect, not only from our own people, but from visitors from every portion of the Union. The descendants of the misguided and erring men, against whom he fought, will stand with uncovered head and reverential air before his memorial, and be grateful for his services, and for a country saved from disruption. Meanwhile, his reputation and renown will increase in brightness, and will reflect glory upon the humblest memorial and upon the loving hands that reared it.



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