

PATRIOTISM AND EMPIRE

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Patriotism and empire by John M. Robertson

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JOHN M. ROBERTSON

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AND EMPIRE**

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Patriotism and Empire

BY

JOHN M. ROBERTSON

AUTHOR OF

'THE SAXON AND THE CELT,' ETC.

London

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1899

To

MONCURE DANIEL CONWAY,

WHO HAS WROUGHT FOR PEACE, TRUTH, JUSTICE

AND INTERNATIONAL RIGHTEOUSNESS

IN BOTH HEMISPHERES

DURING TWO GENERATIONS,

THESE PAGES ARE DEDICATED

WITH AFFECTION AND ESTEEM.

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Patriotism and Empire

PART I

The Springs of Patriotism and Militarism

I

HISTORY and poetry, we may be sure, will not willingly let die the antique tale of the three hundred who at Thermopylæ held out for Sparta against the Persian host, knowing that there could be but one end, and facing it with a stern exaltation, combing their long hair for that, the last festival, and singing the while—

‘Singing of death and of honour that cannot die.’

It is true, there are offsets. There was no military wisdom in defending the pass after the Persians had got behind it; and if it was to be defended, it should have been, as before, from the narrows, not, as was finally done, by way of a sortie. Between the tactics of Leonidas

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below and those of the Phocians above, we are moved to say with Sir George Cox that 'the generalship, if the story be true, is little better than that of savages.' Nor are the three hundred entitled to all the honours of the fight, as fight, since there fought with them seven hundred Thespians as brave as they, and at least a thousand unconsidered helots, who did their part like men. Nay, the good Herodotus tells twice over that in all four thousand men were slain on the Greek side at Thermopylæ, a statement which Bishop Thirlwall gingerly accepts, and Mr. Grote somewhat perturbedly seeks to explain away. Then there were the Thebans, of whom many were spared, as the story goes, on their asking quarter. With four or five thousand men, to say nothing of the thousands he had sent home, Leonidas might have held the pass up to starvation-point. On the whole, we must suspect, with Sir George Cox, that the facts of the case have not come down to us intact. And when all is said, we know that in every age and stage of human things, from the nameless wars of savages to the most consummately controlled campaigns of so-called civilization, troops of men have died as hardily as those commanded by Leonidas. Yet withal it is a brave tale, and fit to typify an ideal.