

**AN ADDRESS DELIVERED AT  
GETTYSBURG, AUGUST 27, 1883, AT  
THE DEDICATION OF THE 72D PA. VOLS.  
MONUMENT. ALSO, AN HISTORICAL  
SKETCH OF THE 72D REGIMENT**

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**ALEXANDER S. WEBB & CHARLES H. BANES**

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AN ADDRESS

DELIVERED AT

G E T T Y S B U R G,

August 27, 1883,

BY

GEN. ALEXANDER S. WEBB,

AT THE

DEDICATION OF THE 72<sup>d</sup> PA. VOLS. MONUMENT.

ALSO,

AN HISTORICAL SKETCH

OF THE

72<sup>d</sup> REGIMENT,

BY

CHARLES H. BANES,

ASSISTANT ADJUTANT-GENERAL AND BREVET LIEUT. COLONEL.

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PHILADELPHIA:  
PORTER & COATES.  
1883.

WITH COMPLIMENTS OF  
CHARLES H. BANES.

United States—preserved by the loving hands of those who cherish the saddest recollections of our late war—are the lasting monuments we have reared to testify to our assurance that it was God himself who preserved this Union; they are the pledges we have given that we will be its conservators.

We, therefore, approach in reverential respect and affectionate regret the graves of our comrades who have fallen, and, with tender recollection of our last companionship with them, we drop the tear of pride—yes, but of glorious pride—when we recall the time and the circumstance of their death—the time of our own salvation.

And why build monuments and pay loving respect and especial tribute to the memory of these men? Why claim for them a little more of these sad testimonials of our devotion than we give to others?

If from these few words of mine we may find left with us the conviction that these cold marbles are not yet sufficient to record, with anything like fidelity, the magnitude of the services rendered by the men who fought on this spot, we will have done no more than simple justice to their patriotism in this our act of veneration.

It is proper, therefore, that it should devolve upon one who was present with you in our glorious defence of “the main point of the Union line upon which General Lee ordered his columns to advance.” This is from Longstreet himself. It is proper, I repeat, to write that of which he can speak as an actor in the fray, with the certainty that no one will hereafter gainsay a clear statement of what we may all now testify to, and with the feeling that, in performing this labor of love, he does nothing more than pay a proper tribute to the memory of these who died a soldier’s death while rendering to their country a service for which no adequate recompense can be or will ever be made, either to their heirs or to their companions still living.

For thus it is, and thus it always must be, with Republics; so

that, expecting nothing and seeking nothing from our Government, we come to engrave on imperishable marble our tribute to the fallen in your old 72d Pennsylvania, knowing, as none others know, the time, the circumstance of their final devotion and gallantry, and death.

You will, therefore, gladly, no doubt, dwell with me for a few moments while I endeavor to place before you the facts and the circumstances which gave to the old clump of trees we so long defended, and which we never lost, the well-deserved name of "the turning point in the war."

And who were these men whose graves are now so signally honored, and whose death we crown with historical tribute?

Enlisted in Philadelphia in August, 1861, by Col. D. W. C. Baxter, they served under our old chief, McClellan, on the Peninsula, rendering signal service at Fair Oaks, where, under the War Horse Sumner and gallant Sedgwick, they came to the support of General Heintzelman, and with Sully and others checked the Rebel advance at a moment when all was confusion and much was panic. Thence to Peach Orchard and Savage Station, under their still honored and respected Gen. W. W. Burns, they passed to Glendale, displaying such staying qualities, and exhibiting such results of their discipline and drill, that they, together with their other regiments of the brigade, secured the promotion of their well-tried commander of the 69th, Joshua T. Owen, to a brigadier-generalship. Tried and exposed to shot and shell at Malvern Hill, they rested at Harrison's Landing—veterans—with a history of which they might well be proud. Surviving the disasters and mismanagements of the second Bull Run, they covered the retreat from Chantilly to the defences of Washington under Generals Sully and Sumner in person.

And now we ask your attention to their next service, since some writers have been misled, and these men, who, on this spot, fought with me, and made me known as their commander, have the right to demand for their reputation the services of my pen and voice.

Antietam was a scene of their success and of their bloody loss. It was not to them at any time a source of discomfort or of loss of reputation. Let Dunkers' Church, had it a voice, relate how they passed by it across the open field far, far into the wood, arrested only by the personal order of Sumner himself. Count the missing and the slain, and recall the promotion of Wistar, and then ask if all this can be, and this regiment and this brigade be charged with remaining in the rear or retiring without success.

At this time I cannot stop to dwell upon Fredericksburg, where their services are acknowledged and recorded. Time fails me, and I hasten on to this historic field.

The battle of Chancellorsville, May 2d to May 5, 1863, whereby Gen. Joseph Hooker lost much of his hard-earned reputation, was to the Northern patriot so severe a blow—and to the Southern Rebel so just a cause for pride and elation—that it is not a matter of wonder that Gen. R. E. Lee, taking into consideration the situation at Vicksburg, and almost certainty of the surrender of that city to Gen. Grant, determined to “counterbalance that impending disaster” by striking at once at the existence of the Army of the Potomac, and our possession of the Capitol at Washington by invading the North.

In matters international, it is generally customary, and probably wise, to dissemble in regard to our feelings towards all nations—but it will be better for us, if we study well the relations of the foreign powers to the United States during this portion of the year 1863—before we give way to any very strong feelings of reverence or esteem for their policies, their interest in, or their appreciation of our institutions. And, after such study, if we find that the neutrality of the government of England (save on the part of her Queen and Prince Consort), was shallow and pretentious; the position of France positively hostile; all other nations, except Russia, inclined to rejoice in our defeats, it may be well, on such occasions as these, to give way to that which is the honest expression of a reasonable distrust of all their pretensions, past, present, and future, and thus leave behind for the careful consideration of our posterity the soldier’s maxim:—

*“In peace prepare for war.”*

That dissembling policy strongly characterized the condition of affairs so far as regards our foreign relations from May 3d to July 4, 1863; but Vicksburg and Gettysburg made it necessary for all these powers to continue dissimulation indefinitely.

It may thus be understood that Lee did not lack good and sufficient reasons for, and moral support in beginning his invasion, and he seems to have felt confident, and reasonably so, that with a force of 75,000 men, placed north of Baltimore and Washington—cutting or menacing all their communications North, East, and West—he would be in a position to receive sufficient aid from the Northern Copperheads and the foreign neutrals, to warrant the claim from his Rebel “Government,” that England should throw aside her mask, and acknowledge “The (so-called) Confederacy of the South.”



What a day-dream! With English guns, English Shenandoahs, English moral support, and now English loans. What was to stand between Rebel hopes, and Rebel success?

Just one power, Omnipotent in council, irresistible in the field—

*“The will of God.”*

Why relate to you the incidents of the march from the Rappahannock to Gettysburg. You all took part in it, and remember it, and you care for little other than the remembrance of the facts as you now recall them. It is sufficient for us to repeat that, July first, we found the Rebels here, and that we knew that they had come to stay, if the right hand of the Government, the force in whom the people of the North had their sole dependence did not drive them out. The people knew the qualities of the Army of the Potomac. They relied upon it, and not in vain.

And now we near our subject, “the value of the sacrifice of these men—at this point of all others on this field—on the second and third days of the battle of Gettysburg.”

For nearly two months the disagreement between the War Department and General Hooker had been steadily approaching that point at which the resignation or relief of this General from the command of the Army was at last inevitable, and on the 29th of June, Major General George Gordon Meade was placed in command of the troops, who were destined under Divine Providence to drive Lee forever from Northern soil.

Bid not farewell to Joseph Hooker without expressing for his memory that meed of praise which should be his—by reason of his services from the Peninsula to Gettysburg. He was willing and anxious to fight at all times—was an able, impetuous commander in the presence of the enemy—was a warm friend of any one he considered a good soldier, and an able man in the field; but was most unwise in the selection of his surroundings.

His was a sad fate. Stripped of his unwise counsellors, and surrounded by good men and able staff officers, he would have ceased to have been his own worst enemy. He is dead. His faults lie buried with him. He was a courageous, ambitious, fearless commander—an organizer of men, a fast friend.

How can we of the Army of the Potomac speak in adequate terms of our last beloved commander, General Geo. G. Meade!

He who addresses you, as you well know, knew him as a soldier

as intimately as any one, serving with him night and day, in battle and in camp—how can he express to you one tithe of his love and respect for him!

The man, who was the first and only man who ever met Lee in his pride and strength in pitched battle, and defeated him, has, I know, been assailed for years by those whose military history will bear but little examination. And recently they have found a mouth-piece quite willing to repeat, without sufficient experience or any personal knowledge, the scandals to which these writers gave life, only after their final deposition from active commands or responsible duty in an army, to whose success, against Lee, they could have added, and did add nothing.

But George G. Meade was, and is known to have been the soul of honor, the Christian soldier and patriot, the modest, kind, scholarly friend, to all who approached him for counsel and support, the successful chief of the grandest army this continent ever has seen, or ever will see. How dare they tell us—on their hearsay—that such a man deliberately evaded telling the whole truth before the Committee of Congress, which was endeavoring to fasten upon him (by his own evidence), these malignant aspersions of those discharged, relieved, or retired officers—men who well knew that under such a commander as Meade, all the abuses practised during Gen. Hooker's rule, to which they owed their advancement, must cease. Gen. Meade then declared under oath, and called upon his God to witness to his then repeated declaration, that not one word of their charges against him was, or ever had been, true.

Strong indeed is the testimony of Sedgwick, Howard, Newton, Sykes, Williams, and Gibbon, and A. S. Williams, who were present at the Council of War, held July 2d, against Pleasonton and Doubleday, who were not present, and Slocum, who thought Gen. Meade said that, "Gettysburg was no place to fight a battle." Stronger yet, for the truth of history, is the evident inability of Gen. Birney to charge General Meade with any other fault than "seeming indisposed to fight, or hazard a battle on any except the most favorable terms." Strong indeed, on the side of Meade, is the testimony of Gens. Warren, Hunt, and Seth Williams, his trusted staff officers; and finally, and last of all, and most powerful against the influence of the authors of these charges, are the circumstances surrounding their separation from this army, and the natural result therefrom, that some, or all of them, have been finally permitted to sink into oblivion after

having failed utterly in their endeavors to detract from the well-earned reputation of Geo. G. Meade. Their punishment is well deserved.

This Christian soldier, on June 28th, took command of our dear old army, and, when he sent forth the following address to us, we well knew that he and we had come to succeed here or be sacrificed:—

“By direction of the President of the United States, I hereby assume command of the Army of the Potomac. As a soldier, in obeying this order—an order totally unexpected and unsolicited—I have no promises or pledges to make. The country looks to this army to relieve it from the devastation and disgrace of a hostile invasion. Whatever fatigues and sacrifices we may be called upon to undergo, let us have in view constantly the magnitude of the interests involved, and let each man determine to do his duty, leaving to an all-controlling Providence the decision of the contest.”

And believing in this all-controlling Providence, and relying on the skill, the soldierly ability, and the guidance of such a commander, the Army of the Potomac moved to this spot, ready to determine here in these open fields whether or not it was yet the will of God that the Union should be saved.

And now for a brief allusion to the battle and to the part these fallen heroes took in it. Pardon me if I relate something concerning the details of it, which you may know even better than myself. For the sake of the truth in history bear with me for a little while.

This three days' contest was a constant recurrence of scenes of self-sacrifice, and of exhibitions of wise prescience, on the part of Meade, Reynolds, and Howard on the first day; of Sykes, Warren, Weed, Hancock, and Geo. S. Greene, the man who saved our right flank, on the second; and on the part of all engaged on the third and last day. Lee was ever active and pushed us sorely.

The list of dead and wounded among our higher officers stands an ever present witness to the severity of these actions, and their loss was indeed to us, who had served with and had learned to respect and follow these men, most terrible.

The history of the battle has been told and retold until we are all familiar with the well-established particulars of it, as well as with most of the claims made by those who have not as yet been able to agree as to whether they were posted by themselves, by their commanders, or by individual skill and forethought, in localities calculated to repel Lee's and also any other army of the Rebel Confederacy.

In the presence of the graves of our dead let us repeat that which