

A  
DISCOURSE

DELIVERED

IN ST. JOHN'S CHURCH, JAMAICA PLAIN, ROXBURY,

ON

SUNDAY, JULY 28, 1850,

ON

THE OCCASION OF THE DEATH

OF

General ZACHARY TAYLOR,

LATE

PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES.

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BY THE REV. EDMUND F. SLAFTER, RECTOR.

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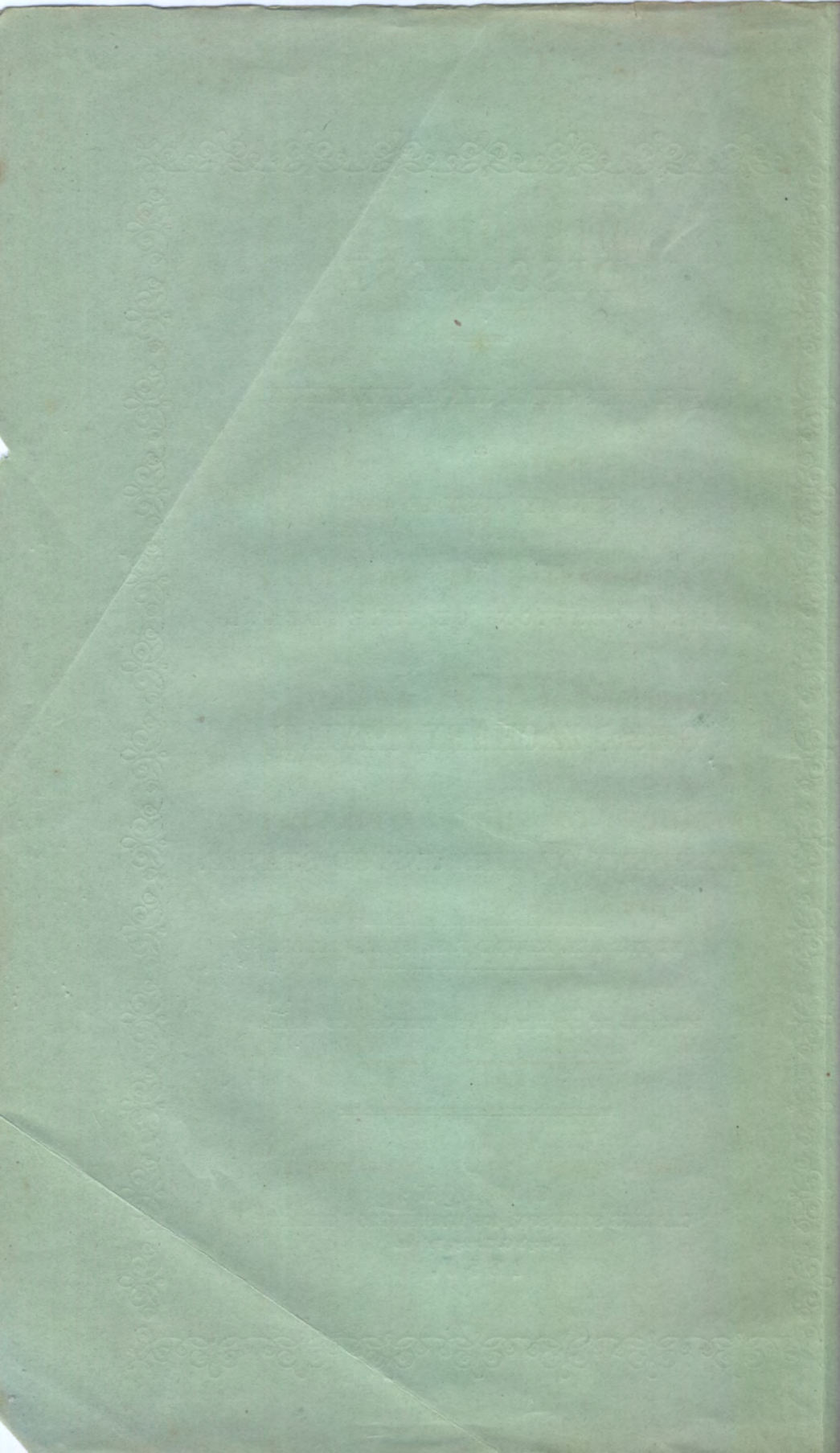
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“ THERE IS A TEAR FOR ALL THAT DIE,  
A MOURNER O’ER THE HUMBLEST GRAVE ;  
BUT NATIONS SWELL THEIR FUNERAL CRY,  
AND TRIUMPH WEEPS ABOVE THE BRAVE.

“ A TOMB IS THEIRS ON EVERY PAGE,  
AN EPITAPH ON EVERY TONGUE ;  
THE PRESENT HOURS, THE FUTURE AGE,  
FOR THEM BEWAIL, TO THEM BELONG.”



# DISCOURSE.

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II SAMUEL, III : 38.

KNOW YE NOT THAT THERE IS \* \* \* \* A GREAT MAN FALLEN.

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WHEN one eminent in the councils of the nation and affections of the people, is laid low by the stroke of death, the shock is felt in every part of the land. It is not a pungent grief, such as tears asunder and leaves bleeding the heart-strings of kindred, but it is a general sorrow, pervading all intelligent and thinking minds. It spreads itself over the entire nation, because an organ of national life has fallen from its place. The national energies are for a moment crippled ; the machinery of government becomes defective ; and its easy and natural movements are interrupted.

The blow which thus reaches the heart is felt in all its pulsations to the extremities of the country. A new tone of feeling comes over the public mind. Personal and party strife is merged in a common sympathy. Public and private animosities are soothed into the slumber of oblivion.

Tokens of mourning and sorrow are announced from towns and cities in every part of the land. The termination of a long and successful career of a public servant, holds out a just demand for these demon-

strations of grief. It is grateful to know that the American people are not insensible to their loss. It is delightful to feel that the event, which has bereft the nation of its Chief Magistrate, is universally esteemed as a great national misfortune; mourned as a common calamity. It is an omen of good, that the public mind is susceptible of real grief. It indicates a tone of feeling, which in the day of calamity, nerves the arm and the heart to noble deeds.

A just appreciation of her departed great men, is a nation's brightest virtue. It reveals the generous emotions of the national heart. It awakens qualities kindred to those she laments. By studying them in their thoughts and deeds, there is often imparted some of the elements of their superior natures. Great men are always the earnest of a nation's future glory. Distinguished intellectual power, cultivated taste, superior energy, and lofty principle, are the elements of national greatness. They are the only imperishable coin in the treasury of a sovereign people. Great intellect in whatever department of active life it be revealed, whether in letters, in oratory, in statesmanship, in the struggles of war, or in the more delicate labors of the artist, in poetry, painting, or sculpture, constitutes a nation's capital, honor and strength. It invests for her an invaluable treasure on the historic page; it gives her a position of dignity among the nations of the earth, and constructs imperishable bulwarks against the encroachments of physical power.

When one who has thus contributed to a nation's glory, in any of its departments, is suddenly with-



drawn from his labors by the hand of death, it were well for a people to pause, not only to shed the tear of sorrow upon his grave, but to estimate if they can, the greatness of their loss.

In the death of the late Chief Magistrate of the nation, we do not lament the departure of great learning, of genius or of what are commonly regarded the elegant refinements of life. But his character was made up of a rare combination of qualities; qualities which enabled him to bear the burdens, to accomplish successfully, heroically every task imposed upon him, during a period of more than forty years in the public service. All the qualities of his mind, demanded by the exigencies of his life, were of the highest order. In their conformation and developement so well proportioned, so perfectly balanced and so uniform, that his career must go upon the page of history, as successful and complete in all its parts.

The fame of most great men is tarnished by unworthy, if not by degrading deeds. Philip of Macedon was eloquent in the forum, and brave in the field of battle, but his private life was covered over with unnatural crimes. Alexander had power to conquer a world, but he had also the vileness to take the life of a friend at a feast, and the audacity to order himself to be worshipped as a god. History is redolent with greatness, genius and heroic valor. But few are found, who are great according to the standard of the world, the lustre of whose career is not clouded by public misdemeanor or personal vice.

As an exception to this general rule, President

Taylor will be referred to as an illustrious example, so long as the American name is known in the history of the world. His ambition never urged him for a moment beyond the faithful execution of the public trusts committed to his hands. To discharge his simple duty, thoughtless of personal advantage or fame, was the apparent aim of his whole life. And through this rugged pathway, which he so sternly trod, he advanced by slow gradations to the highest honors of the state.

His career was brilliant, tried by the severest tests. His honors were won by no concurrence of fortuitous events, nor by the successful experiments of a scheming and erratic genius. Every laurel which adorned his brow, was the purchase of his wise counsels and his noble deeds. He had no capital but his own: he accumulated for himself, independent of other men, the trophies of his fame.

If the test of greatness be the achievement of great deeds, the record of his history will accord to the late President of our Republic, the honor he has deserved.

President Taylor was born in Virginia in 1784. He was remotely connected with the Lees, the Barbors, the Madisons, and other distinguished families of the same State. His early years were spent in the forests of Kentucky, where he was trained to the severities and hardships of a border life. His education was confined to the rudiments of the English alone.

At the age of twenty-four he received his first military commission during the administration of



President Jefferson. From that period to the day of his death, his life and energies were devoted to the service of his country. From his first conflict with an enemy in his gallant defence of Fort Harrison,\* during the late war with England, in which in the language of a superior officer "he raised for himself a fabric of character not to be effaced by eulogy," to the last of his splendid achievements in the valley of the Rio Grande, in Mexico, General Taylor never suffered a defeat, nor was he ever guilty of an ungenerous or cruel deed. The prisoners who fell into his hands were treated not only with the courtesy of civilized warfare, but with a generosity and kindness as unexpected as it was often undeserved.† The wounded of the enemy were the objects of his generous care, while an honorable burial was often given to their dead.

It is grateful to see the hero of so many battles, his whole soul inwrought with the stern qualities of the warrior, in the camp, on the field of conflict and in his private relations, susceptible to the refined sympathies and emotions, which so much exalt and dignify the character of man. Humanity is a legitimate element in the soldier, as well as in the citizen of a retired and peaceful life. It was a gem of untarnished lustre in the character of our lamented Chief. It was exercised not only towards the

\* As a mark of approbation for the defence of this Fort with a force of only 10 or 15 efficient men against 400 Indians, President Madison bestowed upon Captain Taylor the title of Major by brevet—the first instance in the service of this species of promotion.

† As an instance of his generosity, when General Vega was sent to New Orleans as a prisoner of war, General Taylor gave him letters of introduction and of credit on his own banker, to secure for him respectful consideration and comfort on his arrival in the United States.

wretched victim of his conquering arms, but was a leading element in all the comprehensive plans of conquest, which he devised with profound wisdom and skill. When the outposts of a strongly fortified town had been taken in his last campaign, and victory was no longer a doubtful problem, it was more grateful to the generous Commander to accept a bloodless capitulation, securing all military objects, than to carry death and carnage into the home of thousands of his fellow men. And in answer to an implied censure by the authorities at the seat of government, the noble Chieftain frankly declared that "humanity was present to his mind, outweighing, in his judgment the doubtful advantages of another attack upon the town."\*

In his character, as a military Commander, were blended in beautiful harmony the qualities, which ennoble as well as adorn the profession of arms. Fear was foreign to his nature, and personal safety, when the honor of his country was at stake, was alien to his thoughts. Cool and deliberate in planning, firm and unyielding in execution, wise and liberal in his policy, he was always honorable and beneficent in the exercise of power. Broad and comprehensive in his views, his determinations were fixed by an authority and executed with an energy always tempered by moderation, justice, mildness and humanity.

With this singular combination of military virtues, when he came from the field of his glory, laden with

\* See letter of General Taylor, addressed to the Adjutant General, dated "Camp near Monterey, November 8th, 1846."



the honors of conquest, he drew from the most distinguished military Chieftain in the British nation, the merited declaration, laconic and pregnant with meaning, "General Taylor is a *General* indeed." And what gives force to this distinguished eulogium is the fact, that his martial honors were all achieved in the simple discharge of his duty. He never sought the field of conflict; he never occupied it, except in obedience to his country's commands. He had no natural ambition for a military life. Accident\* placed him in the service, and in the exercise of the noble virtues of his nature, and his superior talents, he honored it to the end.

When called upon to accept the highest office and honor in the gift of his country, the modesty, frankness and simplicity of his nature were strikingly revealed. He hesitated and wavered in his reply. He did not express his inability to discharge its functions, for had he doubted there, he never would have accepted the trust. But he distinctly declared, that there were other men far better qualified for the office than himself, and that it was his own personal desire, to return to the discharge of the professional duties and to the enjoyment of the domestic pursuits, for which he was best qualified by his education and tastes. Called only by the general voice of the people, without regard to their political differences, could he be induced to accept the high and responsible office of President of the United States.

\* A brother held a Lieutenant's Commission in the United States Army, who dying in the service, Zachary Taylor was appointed to the vacancy, May 3, 1808.

After this modest avowal, and on this truly republican principle, he was elevated by the majority of a great nation, to the highest office in its gift. A long life of industry in the acquirement of general knowledge, and in the study of the great questions of political economy, had qualified him in a singular manner, to discharge the duties of his trust. Having never in his life cast a vote in any political assembly, he was trammelled by no party prejudice, he was bound by no political creed. Coming to the discharge of his duties as no Executive of late has come, he was prepared, in an eminent degree, to be the Chief Magistrate of the whole nation. In the brief period of his civil power, no act of his has disappointed the nation's hope.

In the very opening of his civil career, at a time when the eye of the country was directed to him, to guide her destinies in a crisis of exciting and fearful danger, by a mysterious stroke of Providence, he has been withdrawn forever from the scenes of earthly duty. This event, sudden and unexpected, is a public calamity. It touches the sensibilities of every true American heart. And may this salutary lesson sink deep into the public mind, that no trust can be safely reposed in an arm of flesh: may Heaven forefend our threatened fate, and let a national good spring forth from an apparent evil.

In the contemplation of our public loss, it is grateful to know that all that belonged to the lamented hero, has not gone down to the silent tomb. The organized, material part slumbers indeed in the dust: the conscious spirit has gone to its rest: its



earthly career is terminated forever. But he has left a legacy behind him to the American people, as imperishable, as immortal as the American name itself. The fame of his character is the inheritance of his country. Wrought into nearly half a century of our national history, his memory will descend, fragrant with lofty virtues, to the latest period of time. And may the citizen of coming years, the student of future history, gather inspiration from his deeds, and strive to emulate the noble virtues of his life.

In this bereavement of our country, twenty millions of people have felt the severity of the shock. In the sanctuary and around the altar home, the tear of sorrow has been freely shed. How profound a grief did it awaken in those venerable men, who were bearing with him the burdens and honors of state. As they gazed upon his unconscious form, passing from their presence, as in the freshness of life, how frail and valueless must have seemed to them the honors and distinctions of earth.

But the most poignant sorrow is felt, where the glory that covers the dead, is unheeded and forgotten. In the retirement of private life, the heart of one is riven and left bleeding, who coveted not the honors of state for the companion of her youth, and who looked with prophetic forebodings upon his elevation to power. Her grief is solitary and pungent: no earthly solace can heal that lacerated heart. Desolation has entered into the precincts of a private family: a husband and father is gone, and the vacancy can never be filled.



In view of this event of Providence, carrying sorrow to so many hearts, shall not we, as private citizens, and as members of the great family of this nation, find in it a salutary lesson for our personal study and improvement? In the history of our late Chief Magistrate we have witnessed the example of a plain and obscure citizen, beginning early in life, and raising a fabric of character, brilliant with honor and renown, on the simple foundation of honesty, integrity and absolute self-consecration to duty. It was these and kindred virtues, that raised him to the highest pinnacle of American fame. Let us be reminded by this example, that the honest discharge of duty, and the practice of generous and noble virtues, however obscure our lot, will bring in some form, their merited reward. In the possession of such a character, sanctified by the holy influences of the Christian faith, when our career is finished, we may adopt the dying words of our venerated Executive :

“I HAVE ENDEAVORED TO DO MY DUTY,”

“I AM PREPARED TO DIE.”

How comforting this declaration, at such a moment, to the loved ones of earth, who linger behind! How cheering the sentiment to one, who is summoned into the presence of his God! May this consciousness of having endeavored to do our whole duty, and the assurance, that we are prepared for the great event of life, be to us, my brethren, the solace of our last hour, and the comfort of our mourning friends.







