



MEMORIAL DISCOURSE

ON THE DEATH OF

HON. THOMAS C. FULKERSON,

MEMBER OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES OF THE THIRTY-SIXTH GENERAL
ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF MISSOURI,

By W. M. PROTTSMAN, CHAPLAIN,

FEBRUARY 21, 1892.

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES.

FEBRUARY 26, 1892.

Mr. SANDERS offered the following resolution:

Resolved, That the Chief Clerk be and he is hereby directed to place upon the journal of this House the memorial address delivered by the Chaplain, Dr. W. M. PROTSMAN, on the death of the late Hon. THOS. C. FULKERSON, Representative from Newton county.

Which was read and adopted.

After an appropriate prayer by Rev. J. T. M. JOHNSTON, Chaplain of the Senate, and Scripture lesson and song-service conducted by Rev. W. T. McCLURE,

The Chaplain spoke as follows:

Something over 3,000 years ago, burdened with the weight of mortality, Job asked the question,

“If a man die, shall he live again?”

The man dies, but his memory lives. Thus he lives in the recollection of those with whom he was connected in social relations.

Memorial services and honors—always creditable to humanity—have their origin in the early lights of civilization and the warmth of affectionate memory.

The millions of monuments sacred to the memory of the sleeping dust beneath them have their origin in the same honorable source.

That great draw-string of humanity—brotherly love—prompted the ancient soldier to cast a stone upon the grave of his dead chieftain before he left the battle-field. Gradually the heap became a monument, not only towering over the plain around that grave, but a sea-mark looked upon by the voyager out upon the distant waters.

The calendar history of all men is very simple. But upon this plain outline all men work out the chief end of their existence—human character. Reputation may be as evanescent as the shifting scenes of a dream, but character is the man forever and ever.

There is really but little interest in the duties and official titles of men, but the deeds achieved, the virtues matured, and the character developed, are the chief points of observation.

The dead lie before the living in observation of more charitable view than when living. “In the presence of death, the good man judges as he would be judged. He knows that men at best are only fragments of the great whole of the human family; that the greatest walk in shadows, and that faults and failures mingle with the lives of all.”

HON. THOMAS C. FULKERSON.

Esteemed by a worthy and intelligent constituency, took his seat in the Thirty-sixth General Assembly of the State of Missouri, filling the responsible office of Representative of Newton county.

He was in the very vigor of robust manhood, of most excellent health, and in the forty-ninth year of his age.

Born in Sullivan county, Tennessee, he came with his parents to Missouri when in infancy. The facilities for acquiring education at Newtonia, the scene of his youth, though ordinarily good, were not equal to his genius and capacity for learning; and like the average American boy and future law-maker, he was self-sufficient because self-reliant.

He came up under the pressure of adversity, and rose by the American science of gaining by losses and rising by depressions.

Around the rude and rural school-house in those early days the mighty force of genius, with great thought in the very core of its soul, turned its very enemies into its allies, its assailants into its assistants, and its foes into its fortune.

What of knowledge Thomas Fulkerson knew, he learned; and what of wealth he possessed, he earned; and what of true character crowned his life, came from obedience to wise and affectionate parental instruction, and to moral and religious associations in social life.

Whilst civilization and high mental culture have their uses, they are not without their abuses.

Influences which smooth the pathway of youthhood only tend to soften the muscle and weaken the manly powers of resistance.

Thomas Fulkerson was no trellis-trained vine, lacking self-sustaining power.

He took hold of life with both hands, as a duty and a privilege, to labor for the best interests of all within the circle of his influence.

It has ever been fortunate for the future of the commonwealth of America that its destinies have been wielded by men who are conscious of their responsibilities and have the courage of their convictions. His convictions, being religious, governed his life, making the right and the just thing the square and compass of his life.

These convictions made his life no uncertain record in the great conflict between the principles of good and evil which seem to be the heritage of humanity.

Guided by sound principles of morality and true Christian faith, to know him was to know his relation to this great conflict. And none, whether in high or low estate, can do better than he who puts his best thought, his highest and most mature convictions of right, into his life work.

Perfection is for God alone; and he deserves best of his fellow-men who follows with unfaltering courage where his most enlightened judgment leads. The religion of Thos. C. Fulkerson was that of the Redeemer and Savior of mankind—the man without a sin!

The most perfect character which has ever adorned the world, the embodiment of the most profound truths ever offered to the study of man, the purest precepts ever given for the government of the actions of mankind, the loftiest life and the sublimest death in all the history of the world—a religion fitly expressed by a union of mortal

feelings with immortal hopes—a religion uniting all hearts into one in all doctrines essential to salvation, giving entire liberty of thought and action in all non-essentials; but in all things, charity.

The Christian religion is truly mirrored in your immortal Declaration and great Constitution of the Federal Union.

With its Bible, its Sabbath, its churches and its agencies for pagandism, it has taken a strong hold upon the popular faith of this country. It exists not simply as a religion in books and libraries, and known only to scholars and students, but as a living, acting and great social power among the people. It has made a deposit of itself alike in their heads and hearts, and is built into the very rising walls of the Great Republic.

It is in this respect that it is like the Constitution of the United States and the principles of Republican government, which, though written and formulated in definite statements, enactments, chapters, articles and sections, really exist in the convictions of the people, embosomed and imbedded in the very core of their hearts.

Clothed with the uplifting power of this faith, Thomas C. Fulkerson, the citizen of Missouri and Representative of Newton county, took his seat in this Hall of the Voice of the State.

Unassuming in possibilities, gentle, refined and courteous in manner, his desk seemed more humble than formidable.

But the great truth of the Divine Master spoke forth from his religion; the humble alone unbosoms the lofty, and greatness is greatest when it stoops the lowest.

He sat down in your presence as a citizen of the Commonwealth, against whom no breath of reproach had ever been breathed.

With a character for moral honesty so high that slander could not reach it; a merit so modest that envy never assailed it; a public spirit so uniform that suspicion of self-interest never impugned it; a Christian consistency so unassuming that it escaped the sneers of the scoffer; a neighbor and factor in society whose moderation and wisdom, unmoved by partisan or sectional purposes, were doing much to heal the wounds and close the rents of estrangement between the two great sections of this indissoluble Union.

Of all the positions of public trust in a republic, that of a Representative is the most responsible. Its rank is above ordinary office, and is really a vocation, because the voice of the people. A legislative representative is the creator of light; an executive officer uses it. Executive work is simply the operating of the constitutional machinery which more skillful hands have constructed.

The construction of constitutions is to stand abreast of the greatest problem of the ages, and to take up the work of human government where the hand Almighty laid it down.

Human society is not only the component of antagonistic forces within, but also of adverse influences constantly exerted from without.

Government, although intended to protect and preserve society, has itself a strong tendency to abuse its powers, as all experience and almost every page of history testify.

The powers which it is necessary for government to possess in order to repress violence and preserve order cannot execute themselves. They must be administered by men in whom, like others, the individual are stronger than the social feelings. And hence the powers vested in them to prevent injustice and oppression on the part of

others will, if left unguarded, be by them converted into instruments to oppress the rest of the community.

Government being ordained of God, there is no difficulty in its formation.

It is not even a matter of choice in social society whether there shall be one. Like breathing, it is not even dependent upon our volition.

To form a constitution which will completely counteract the tendency of government to oppression and abuse, and hold it strictly to the great ends for which it was ordained, has thus far exceeded human wisdom.

Who knows but that constitutional government is like the throne of the eternal One—something we may ever approach, but never reach.

This is the problem which the legislator has to confront, and this under the solemn conviction that justice is the key-note of the moral government of God, and all else is out of tune.

We should not be surprised that it has become far more important to know how to cast a ballot than a spear—how to fire a truth than a columbiad.

Even the very nature of law is a most profound study. It is useful only when it is stable, and to be perfect must be inflexible. If it yield to one, why not to another? Thus it would become as weak as the very human nature which it is designed to protect.

Just laws are no restraint upon the freedom of the good citizen; for the just man desires nothing with which the law will interfere.

The legislator should never forget that the glorious uncertainty of law has as much, if not more interest to its profession than its justice. There are millions in it!

The home and the nursery are our future law-makers. Hence the great philosopher said, "Give me the nursery and I will make the laws of the State."

From such a home as this, Thomas C. Fulkerson came on the voice of the people to this legislative hall to deliberate with, and with you to act and enact for the best interests of the State. Discharging his duty faithfully here, esteemed by his associates, he returned to his family—loving wife and affectionate children—to die!

This was the joyful return of the loving husband and fond father, soon to be followed by the sadness of grief. The common lot of mankind; for since the world began it has been the fate of the high and the humble, the gifted and the gay, the brave and the beautiful, the loved and the lovely, to wither, fade, and die!

He died at his home in the town of Harmony, Newton county, on the 2d day of last April, at the age of forty-nine years—save one day. He enjoyed the blessing of the beautiful Oriental benediction—"May you die in your home!"

Such was his character in that home—the sweetness of his temper, the warmth of his heart, the glow of his fatherly presence, and the religious influence of his daily walk and conversation—that death put the light and warmth out of the sunshine there.

Here we must cease to speak and leave him to home, widow, and memory; for

"Recollection is the only friend
Which grief can call her own."

Consolation from the world's sympathy may ease an aching heart, but it cannot heal its wounds. Only from God and His angel Time can come the healing balm. And there are sorrows in the vale of tears

that Time itself has no power to soothe—griefs that, like running streams, are forever deepening their channels.

We have walked with our brother to his sunset of life, and in the grave he has disappeared from mortal sight.

Is his life at an end now? Is it dispersed throughout the great universal All? Is this your destiny? "If a man die, shall he live again?" Let this question be answered by Christ himself. His dictates constitute the rudiments of sacred science, and they are to be acquiesced in as the reasons of duty and laws of faith. The resurrection of the body being the very keystone of christianity, Christ may be said to have labored out the proof of it till he brought it to a demonstration. In the science of theology the sayings of Christ are ultimate truths. "The hour is coming," said he, "and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God, and they that hear shall live."

Throughout the kingdom of nature, wherever an organ is found to exist, an assurance is given that, by and by, it will develop into the perfection of its kind. Nor is this prophecy ever falsified. If we look into the great volume of nature, we find it to contain one vast and compacted argument for the divine perfections. But deny to man a future state of existence, and the argument is flawed, and the character of God is impeached.

The most perfect human being is but an unfinished sketch of humanity—an organism of unknown and untold possibilities.

Unless then the divine hand-writing impressed upon man's nature be a forgery, we are warranted in the belief of his immortality.

"It must be so—Plato, thou reasonest well—
Ere whence this pleasing hope, this fond desire,
This longing after immortality?
Or whence this secret dread and inward horror
Of falling into naught? Why shrinks the soul
Back on herself and startles at destruction?
'Tis the divinity that stirs within us;
'Tis Heaven itself that points out a hereafter,
And intimates eternity to man."

I feel my immortality oversweeping all pains, all tears, all time, all fears, and peal like the eternal thunders of the deep into my ears this truth, thou shalt live forever.

Is death the round-up of all life? If so, then man's works are greater than man himself. Then this capitol building is grander than its builder, and your laws more imperishable than the mind which enacted them.

Then are the liberty-inspiring words of the Declaration of American Independence greater, grander and sublimer than the author—Thomas Jefferson; and the Constitution of the Federal Union is more enduring than James Madison; the farewell address of Washington is but the last sound of a worn-out machine before it crumbles down to dust; and the honor which you this day, in the name of the great State of Missouri, pay to the memory of the Honorable Thomas C. Fulkerson, is but a childish error, for it is absurd to honor that which has no existence.

As to the application of the universal question—If a man die, shall he live again?—to Thomas C. Fulkerson, we answer, he shall!

There is a voice which sorrow hears,
When heav'lest weighs life's galling chain;
'Tis Heaven that whispers, "Dry thy tears,
The pure in heart shall meet again."