



MODERN
ELOQUENCE

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VOL. III

AFTER-DINNER
SPEECHES

P-Z

JOHN D. MORRIS AND COMPANY
PHILADELPHIA

W. A. COWIE 1901

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THOMAS DEWITT TALMAGE

BEHOLD THE AMERICAN!

[Speech of Rev. Dr. T. DeWitt Talmage at the eighty-first annual dinner of the New England Society in the City of New York, December 22, 1886. The President of the Society, Judge Horace Russell, introduced Dr. Talmage to speak to the toast, "Forefathers' Day."]

MR. PRESIDENT, AND ALL YOU GOOD NEW ENGLANDERS: If we leave to the evolutionists to guess where we came from and to the theologians to prophesy where we are going to, we still have left for consideration the fact that we are here; and we are here at an interesting time. Of all the centuries this is the best century, and of all the decades of the century this is the best decade, and of all the years of the decade this is the best year, and of all the months of the year this is the best month, and of all the nights of the month this is the best night. [Applause and laughter.] Many of these advantages we trace straight back to Forefathers' Day, about which I am to speak.

But I must not introduce a new habit into these New England dinners and confine myself to the one theme. For eighty-one years your speakers have been accustomed to make the toast announced the point from which they start, but to which they never return. [Laughter.] So I shall not stick to my text, but only be particular to have all I say my own, and not make the mistake of a minister whose sermon was a patchwork from a variety of authors, to whom he gave no credit. There was an intoxicated wag in the audience who had read about everything, and he announced the authors as the minister went on. The clergyman gave an extract without any credit to the author, and the man in

the audience cried out: "That's Jeremy Taylor." The speaker went on and gave an extract from another author without credit for it, and the man in the audience said: "That is John Wesley." The minister gave an extract from another author without credit for it, and the man in the audience said: "That is George Whitefield." When the minister lost his patience and cried out, "Shut up, you old fool!" the man in the audience replied: "That is your own." [Laughter.]

Well, what about this Forefathers' Day? In Brooklyn they say the Landing of the Pilgrims was December the 21st; in New York you say it was December the 22d. You are both right. Not through the specious and artful reasoning you have sometimes indulged in, but by a little historical incident that seems to have escaped your attention. You see, the Forefathers landed in the morning of December the 21st, but about noon that day a pack of hungry wolves swept down the bleak American beach looking for a New England dinner [laughter], and a band of savages out for a tomahawk picnic hove in sight, and the Pilgrim Fathers thought it best for safety and warmth to go on board the Mayflower and pass the night. [Renewed laughter.] And during the night there came up a strong wind blowing off shore that swept the Mayflower from its moorings clear out to sea, and there was a prospect that our Forefathers, having escaped oppression in foreign lands, would yet go down under an oceanic tempest. But the next day they fortunately got control of their ship and steered her in, and the second time the Forefathers stepped ashore.

Brooklyn celebrated the first landing; New York the second landing. So I say Hail! Hail! to both celebrations, for one day, anyhow, could not do justice to such a subject; and I only wish I could have kissed the blarney stone of America, which is Plymouth Rock, so that I might have done justice to this subject. [Laughter and applause.] Ah, gentlemen, that Mayflower was the ark that floated the deluge of oppression, and Plymouth Rock was the Ararat on which it landed.

But let me say that these Forefathers were of no more importance than the Foremothers. [Applause.] As I understand it, there were eight of them—that is, four fathers

and four mothers—from whom all these illustrious New Englanders descended. Now I was not born in New England, though far back my ancestors lived in Connecticut, and then crossed over to Long Island and there joined the Dutch, and that mixture of Yankee and Dutch makes royal blood. [Applause.] Neither is perfect without the other, the Yankee in a man's nature saying "Go ahead!" the Dutch in his blood saying, "Be prudent while you do go ahead!" Some people do not understand why Long Island was stretched along parallel with all of the Connecticut coast. I have no doubt that it was so placed that the Dutch might watch the Yankees. [Laughter.]

But though not born in New England, in my boyhood I had a New England schoolmaster, whom I shall never forget. He taught us our A, B, C's. "What is that?" "I don't know, sir." "That's A" [with a slap]. "What is that?" "I don't know, sir." [With a slap]—"That is B." [Laughter.] I tell you, a boy that learned his letters in that way never forgot them; and if the boy was particularly dull, then this New England schoolmaster would take him over the knee, and then the boy got his information from both directions. [Renewed laughter.]

But all these things aside, no one sitting at these tables has higher admiration for the Pilgrim Fathers than I have—the men who believed in two great doctrines, which are the foundation of every religion that is worth anything: namely, the fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of Man—these men of backbone and endowed with that great and magnificent attribute of stick-to-it-iveness. Macaulay said that no one ever sneered at the Puritans who had met them in halls of debate or crossed swords with them on the field of battle. [Applause.] They are sometimes defamed for their rigorous Sabbaths, but our danger is in the opposite direction of no Sabbaths at all. It is said that they destroyed witches. I wish that they had cleared them all out, for the world is full of witches yet, and if at all these tables there is a man who has not sometimes been bewitched, let him hold up his glass of ice-water. [Laughter.] It is said that these Forefathers carried religion into everything, and before a man kissed his wife he asked a blessing, and afterward said: "Having received another favor from the Lord,

let us return thanks." [Laughter.] But our great need now is more religion in every-day life.

I think their plain diet had much to do with their ruggedness of nature. They had not as many good things to eat as we have, and they had better digestion. Now, all the evening some of our best men sit with an awful bad feeling at the pit of their stomach, and the food taken fails to assimilate, and in the agitated digestive organs the lamb and the cow lie down together and get up just as they have a mind to. [Laughter.] After dinner I sat down with my friend to talk. He had for many years been troubled with indigestion. I felt guilty when I insisted on his taking that last piece of lemon pie. I knew that pastry always made him crusty. I said to him: "I never felt better in all my life; how do you feel?" And putting one hand over one piece of lemon pie and the other hand over the other piece of lemon pie, he said: "I feel miserable." Smaller varieties of food had the old Fathers, but it did them more good.

Still, take it all in all, I think the descendants of the Pilgrim Fathers are as good as their ancestors, and in many ways better. Children are apt to be an echo of their ancestors. We are apt to put a halo around the Forefathers, but I expect that at our age they were very much like ourselves. People are not wise when they long for the good old days. They say: "Just think of the pride of people at this day! Just look at the ladies' hats!" [Laughter.] Why, there is nothing in the ladies' hats of to-day equal to the coal-scuttle hats a hundred years ago. They say: "Just look at the way people dress their hair!" Why, the extremest style of to-day will not equal the top-knots which our great-grandmothers wore, put up with high combs that we would have thought would have made our great-grandfathers die with laughter. The hair was lifted into a pyramid a foot high. On the top of that tower lay a white rose. Shoes of bespangled white kid, and heels two or three inches high. Grandfather went out to meet her on the floor with a coat of sky-blue silk and vest of white satin embroidered with gold lace, lace ruffles around his wrist and his hair flung in a queue. The great George Washington had his horse's hoofs blackened when about to appear on a parade, and writes to Europe ordering sent for the use of himself and

family, one silver-lace hat, one pair of silver shoe-buckles, a coat made of fashionable silk, one pair of gold sleeve-buttons, six pairs of kid gloves, one dozen most fashionable cambric pocket-handkerchiefs, besides ruffles and tucker. That was George. [Laughter.]

Talk about dissipations, ye who have ever seen the old-fashioned sideboard! Did I not have an old relative who always, when visitors came, used to go upstairs and take a drink through economical habits, not offering anything to his visitors? [Laughter.] On the old-fashioned training days the most sober men were apt to take a day to themselves. Many of the familiar drinks of to-day were unknown to them, but their hard cider, mint julep, metheglin, hot toddy, and lemonade in which the lemon was not at all prominent, sometimes made lively work for the broad-brimmed hats and silver knee-buckles. Talk of dissipating parties of to-day and keeping of late hours! Why, did they not have their "bees" and sausage-stuffings and tea-parties and dances, that for heartiness and uproar utterly eclipsed all the waltzes, lancers, redowas, and breakdowns of the nineteenth century, and they never went home till morning. And as to the old-time courtships, oh, my! Washington Irving describes them. [Laughter.]

But though your Forefathers may not have been much, if any, better than yourselves, let us extol them for the fact that they started this country in the right direction. They laid the foundation for American manhood. The foundation must be more solid and firm and unyielding than any other part of the structure. On that Puritanic foundation we can safely build all nationalities. [Applause.] Let us remember that the coming American is to be an admixture of all foreign bloods. In about twenty-five or fifty years the model American will step forth. He will have the strong brain of the German, the polished manners of the French, the artistic taste of the Italian, the stanch heart of the English, the steadfast piety of the Scotch, the lightning wit of the Irish, and when he steps forth, bone, muscle, nerve, brain entwined with the fibres of all nationalities, the nations will break out in the cry: "Behold the American!" [Applause.]

Columbus discovered only the shell of this country.

Agassiz came and discovered fossiliferous America. Silliman came and discovered geological America. Audubon came and discovered bird America. Longfellow came and discovered poetic America; and there are a half-dozen other Americas yet to be discovered.

I never realized what this country was and is as on the day when I first saw some of these gentlemen of the Army and Navy. It was when at the close of the War our armies came back and marched in review before the President's stand at Washington. I do not care whether a man was a Republican or a Democrat, a Northern man or a Southern man, if he had any emotion of nature, he could not look upon it without weeping. God knew that the day was stupendous, and He cleared the heaven of cloud and mist and chill, and sprung the blue sky as the triumphal arch for the returning warriors to pass under. From Arlington Heights the spring foliage shook out its welcome, as the hosts came over the hills, and the sparkling waters of the Potomac tossed their gold to the feet of the battalions as they came to the Long Bridge and in almost interminable line passed over. The Capitol never seemed so majestic as that morning: snowy white, looking down upon the tides of men that came surging down, billow after billow. Passing in silence, yet I heard in every step the thunder of conflicts through which they had waded, and seemed to see dripping from their smoke-blackened flags the blood of our country's martyrs. For the best part of two days we stood and watched the filing on of what seemed endless battalions, brigade after brigade, division after division, host after host, rank beyond rank; ever moving, ever passing; marching, marching; tramp, tramp, tramp—thousands after thousands, battery front, arms shouldered, columns solid, shoulder to shoulder, wheel to wheel, charger to charger, nostril to nostril.

Commanders on horses with their manes entwined with roses, and necks enchained with garlands, fractious at the shouts that ran along the line, increasing from the clapping of children clothed in white, standing on the steps of the Capitol, to the tumultuous vociferation of hundreds of thousands of enraptured multitudes, crying "Huzza! Huzza!" Gleaming muskets, thundering parks of artillery, rumbling pontoon wagons, ambulances from whose wheels seemed to

sound out the groans of the crushed and the dying that they had carried. These men came from balmy Minnesota, those from Illinois prairies. These were often hummed to sleep by the pines of Oregon, those were New England lumbermen. Those came out of the coal-shafts of Pennsylvania. Side by side in one great cause, consecrated through fire and storm and darkness, brothers in peril, on their way home from Chancellorsville and Kenesaw Mountain and Fredericksburg, in lines that seemed infinite they passed on.

We gazed and wept and wondered, lifting up our heads to see if the end had come, but no! Looking from one end of that long avenue to the other, we saw them yet in solid column, battery front, host beyond host, wheel to wheel, charger to charger, nostril to nostril, coming as it were from under the Capitol. Forward! Forward! Their bayonets, caught in the sun, glimmered and flashed and blazed, till they seemed like one long river of silver, ever and anon changed into a river of fire. No end to the procession, no rest for the eyes. We turned our heads from the scene, unable longer to look. We felt disposed to stop our ears, but still we heard it, marching, marching; tramp, tramp, tramp. But hush,—uncover every head! Here they pass, the remnant of ten men of a full regiment. Silence! Widowhood and orphanage look on and wring their hands. But wheel into line, all ye people! North, South, East, West—all decades, all centuries, all millenniums! Forward, the whole line! Huzza! Huzza! [Great applause.]

WHAT I KNOW ABOUT THE DUTCH

[Speech of Rev. Dr. T. DeWitt Talmage at the seventh annual dinner of the Holland Society of New York, January 14, 1892. The President of the Society, George M. Van Hoesen, said: "The next regular toast is: 'What I Know about the Dutch,' which will be responded to by a gentleman who needs no introduction—the Rev. Dr. T. DeWitt Talmage."]

Oh, Judge Van Hoesen, this is not the first time we have been side by side, for we were college boys together; and I remember that there was this difference between us—you seemed to know about everything, and it would take a very large library, a library larger than the Vatican, to tell all that