

REV. OWENS' FLAG DAY ADDRESS IS PATRIOTIC TALK

Delivered at the Congregational Church on Sunday, June 22nd To G. A. R.

On Sunday, June 22nd the Rev. Thomas J. Owens, pastor of the Congregational Church gave a flag day address at the morning service. Naper Post, G. A. R., were invited to the service.

After giving the account of the rise of the American flag as set forth in the Boy Scouts Handbook, Mr. Owens spoke as follows:

"Such then, briefly, is the history of the development of that flag, dear above all others to you and me, and now, since the last five years, more than ever the emblem of liberty and justice to all the world.

"Now let us consider a little more at length what our flag is really significant of—what it really stands for.

"First of all, our flag represents the ideal America. The America of honest hearts, the America of Star-ved idealism, the America of kindly hearted brotherhood, the America of freedom and equality and democracy; the land of opportunity for all who are willing to devote themselves to earnest effort for things worth while. It is true, we have a number, all too many, unworthy and undeserving citizens—some for instance, who during the war were profiteers—the most degraded and despicable of all traitors—those and other parasites have been with us and are still following their ways of slimy selfishness now in these days of peace as they did in the days of war. But our flag is not their flag, it does not represent them—and neither, thank God, can they sully it with the stain of their shame. But it is well to recognize that our citizenry is not perfect; it is wise to face fairly and squarely our national faults and weaknesses. Nothing is gained by a blind, widespread boastfulness that claims for ourselves all the virtues and none of the faults and failures of others. It is only right to recognize that our country, like the world as a whole, has evil within its gates, in order that we may take such measures as are necessary to rid ourselves of it. Too often we do not adequately face these unpleasant facts. A few days ago there came into my hands a College Paper in which I found a summary of an address of the President of the College. He submitted these three propositions:

"Goodness is stronger than evil. Love is stronger than hate. Truth is stronger than falsehood."

All of which is absolutely true. But often our teachers and professors give us the impression that good and love and truth are so much stronger than evil and hate and falsehood that the conquest of these evil things is comparatively an easy matter. I think that is the impression that most College graduates have upon leaving college. But a great disillusionment comes before long when they find the forces of evil and ignorance and indifference and callousness and stupidity and laziness still so strong and so deeply entrenched, still fighting with such hellish skill and cunning. I think that in order to present a balanced statement of the truth, that College president should have added another trio to his three propositions, something like this:

"Weeds grow faster than flowers. Thistles may choke out the wheat. Quack grass may crowd out corn."

So that in remembering the truth of the first three propositions, the students might be adequately warned of the fierceness and the difficulty of the struggle of good against evil, and not make the mistake of thinking that the devil is on his death bed as yet. "Now some people in other countries they have been calling us hard names; they have called us a race of profiteers, a nation of dollar chasers. And as I have said, we have had some citizens of that stripe, who are with us still. But at the same time, the facts, that of all the nations engaged in the Great War, ours was most free from that class of undesirable; and if you wish to uncover the most shocking and revolting cases of profiteering you will have to go to France and England and Austria and Russia and Germany to find them. Those who would call us dollar chasers—who would fling that stone at our country, are living in very glassy glass houses themselves. Thanks be, with all our short comings, Katherine Lee Bates comes nearer the truth when she says:

"Life is a trifle; Honor is all; Shoulder the rifle, Answer the call. A nation of traders! We'll show what we are, Freedom's crusaders"

Who war against war.

"Battle is tragic; Battle shall cease; Ours is the magic Mission of peace. Gladly we barter Gold of our youth For liberty's charter Blood sealed in truth.

"A nation of traders! We'll show what we are, Freedom's crusaders Who war against war."

And that indicates in part at least, what our flag represents and what it stands for.

"But while we may assure ourselves that in the testing time that we have just passed through, the manhood and womanhood of this nation has proven itself worthy of the heritage and traditions of the past, what about the immediate present and the distant future? Peace is ours again, and it may be that we are at the dawn of universal peace—may God grant that it be so. But if so, what then? What shall our flag stand for in the future, and what kind of a country will it represent? We have hurried down the foe that thought to enslave us, and our defenders will soon all be busy again in the humdrum activities of civil life. But are all our dangers past, has all our conflict ended? Surely we would be greatly mistaken if we thought so. Has it not been said that peace hath her victories no less than war? And if so, then peace hath her conflicts and her defeats no less than war. And the call comes to us now to gird ourselves and acquit ourselves like men in the struggle and battles of peace. Peace may weaken, peace may enervate, peace may engender moral and spiritual disease unless we are constantly on our guard. Long ago Walt Whitman wrote:

"Long, too long, America. Travelling roads, all even and peaceful, you learned from joys and prosperity only. But now, ah now, learn from crises of anguish, raffancing, grappling with direst fate and receding not. Now to conceive and show to the world what your children really are."

"Is it too much to hope that now America has learned the lessons of war so that she will never need to learn them again, and that now she will be able to understand and overthrow the insidious powers that work under cover of peace? I think we may hope so. But sad indeed would it be if this hope is a vain one, and if America falls before these powers, great shall be her fall!

"This is thy destiny; the choice is thine To lead all nations and outshine them all; But if thou failest, deeper shame is thine. And none shall spare to mock thee in thy fall."

Better, far better to go through Belgium's agony and be able to face the future as Belgium is facing it, than to be like Babylon and Rome, mistresses of all the world, only to be slain by the ulcerous and loathsome plagues of their own self-indulgence and degeneracy, leaving nothing behind but the memory of misused power and a shameful memory.

"But away with such foreboding. What then may we hope for America's future? What shall our beloved flag mean to the generations yet unborn? What are the tasks that must be accomplished, the battles that must be won, if our flag is still to remain the proud banner of freedom and democracy?"

"The answer to this question is a challenge to the idealism and altruism of our land as great or greater than any challenge that the past has ever brought. Would that a prophet, a messenger of God might be sent among us who with inspired vision and tongue of fire should point out to us the ways in which God would have us go; who would throw such a light upon our disease spots and sores that we could not fail to see them and with bitter repentance seek their cure. And on the other hand, would open our eyes to the splendor and the beauty that shall be if we hold fast the faith that has been delivered to us. And if such a one would come, and denounce our national sins would he not repeat the arraignment of the ancient prophets against Israel?"

"Woe unto you," I can hear him say, "Woe unto you who join house unto house And who add field to field, While the cry of the orphan and the oppressed come unto me and thou hidest thy face from them, whose land increaseth in prosperity, while my little ones perish because there is no milk for them, and they perish like flies in thy dark tenements. Woe unto you rich and intelligent and good people who in thine own ease and prosperity will not stir yourselves to awake and direct public opinion against those evils and abuses which thrive and poison my people because public opinion regard-

eth it not. Woe unto you because you chain my little ones to the cotton mills and in the deep and dark mines for thine own gain. Woe unto you, because those who would lead this people mislead them, and those whom they ought to have led are destroyed. And for all this His anger is not turned back, but His hand is stretched out still."

"Woe unto those that give mischievous verdicts. Elaborate scrolls that bring sorrow. By robbing the weak of their rights And by plundering the poor of their due So that widows become their spoil, And orphans fall a prey. But what will ye do in the Day of Assize Which will come like a crash from afar? To whom will ye flee for help, And whom will ye leave your abundance. That ye crouch not among the prisoners Or fall among the slain? Yet for all this His anger is not turned back. But His hand is stretched out still."

"But there was another side to the message to those ancient men of God. And no human records contain such glorious, and magnificent, and thrilling, and awe inspiring visions of what a redeemed world and a redeemed humanity may be. And if that modern prophet would tell us of the cleansed and purified and redeemed America that is to be when our battles of peace have been won, could he do better than repeat Isaiah's exalted strain:

"Arise, shine, for thy light is come, and the glory of Jehovah is risen upon thee. Nations shall come to thy light, and kings to the brightness of thy dawning. Then shalt thou see and be radiant, and thy heart shall thrill and be enlarged. For brass I will bring gold, and for iron I will bring silver, and for wood brass, and for stones iron. I will also make thine officers peace, and thine exactors righteousness. Violence shall no more be heard in thy land, desolation nor destruction within thy borders; but thou shalt call thy walls Salvation and thy gates Praise. I Jehovah will hasten it in its time. I will also make thee a light to the nations, that thou mayest bear my salvation unto the ends of the earth. For the mountains may depart, and the hills be removed; but my loving kindness shall not depart from thee, neither shall my covenant of peace be removed, saith Jehovah that hath mercy on thee."

"And does not such a vision thrill us and fill us with an eagerness to be up and pressing toward it? But let us not forget how hard the task of its realization will be. Many will shrink from it who ought to help us, many will be indifferent because its accomplishment will not be spectacular, many will pass it by because they will not even see it. Out of one hundred men that will willingly go 'over the top' in the face of shrapnel and machine gun bullets, barely two or three will be willing to live say for fifty years a life of persistent, patient, often monotonous devotion to those common every day things which must be done day in and day out if our national house is to be kept in order, and kept clean and healthy. This is a far more difficult task, it is a far less attractive task, it is a far more monotonous task, out such are the tasks of peace. We could do it with the rifle and bayonet if we could do it with the flare of trumpets or the roll of drums—but these works cannot be done so, these demons cannot be cast out but by such devotion and patience and sacrifice and suffering as are known but rarely even in the camp and the trench. For these things are things of the spirit, not of the flesh, and their burden brings anguish of the soul and spirit—far more piercing as we know than mere physical pain.

"Then where are we to get the strength and courage that we need to carry this burden and accomplish this work, and carry on this spiritual warfare? Surely there is but one answer—from our God and our Father whom we know in that fullest revelation of Himself which we have in Jesus Christ. Jesus, the world's one and only hope who alone is the Captain of our salvation. Have you ever fully realized the connection between Christianity and civil liberty? There is a reason why we find the completest development of democracy wherever we find the completest incarnation of Christianity. Which are the nations today that enjoy the greatest measure of liberty? Those in which the leaders and people are most loyal to the life and teachings of Jesus. Paul says well when he speaks of the liberty which is in Christ Jesus, and that it was for liberty that Christ set us free. My friends, in this spiritual warfare, no Camp Grant will adequately train us, no abundance of armament and high explosives and munitions and big guns will adequately equip us—the one thing we must have to know Him who is the Way the Truth and the Life. We must have within us the spirit

that was in Christ Jesus, who came to serve, and not to be served. We must hate evil as he hated it; we must fight injustice and corruption and pride and selfishness as He fought them—with a clean heart, and pure hands, and stainless motives, and above all with a consuming zeal for the Kingdom of God wherein dwelleth righteousness and Love.

"Then would we learn to love our country, and our country's flag as we ought to love them? We must first learn to know and to follow Jesus Christ. For only He can make us the best of patriots, endowed with all the virtues by which we can serve our country best. There are many false teachers who traduce and misrepresent Him, and it is a pity that these mislead so many, yet He himself warned His followers of this very thing—but you and I can meet with Him and know Him truly if we truly desire it. If we will carefully, reverently study that wonderful Life, and seek further light that comes from putting Him and His teachings to the test in our own actual lives, we shall have our reward, and He and we shall abide together, and He will lead us into all the Truth and the Truth shall make us free—and only those who are themselves free can lead others into freedom. This is the foundation of democracy.

"Those have been splendid calls to which the manhood of this land has responded whenever it has leaped to the colors to defend this nation against the aggressor and the spoiler—and more than once manhood, has gone on a crusade as holy and as glorious as any ever undertaken in the days when knighthood was in flower. But let me say to those here assembled, to the youths and the maidens, to the mature men and women, there is a far more glorious crusade yet to be undertaken, there are far more glorious achievements yet to be realized, there is a greater service yet to be rendered to our country. And to these let our lives be given—to the better care and protection and instruction of our children and youth; to a higher exaltation of the place and responsibilities of womanhood; to the expulsion of economic wrong and political corruption and commercial greed; to the strengthening of the bonds of truth and virtue and loyalty in our relations to one another; to a united and brotherly cooperation among all men for the conquest of the material world for spiritual ends—all of which can be summed up as consisting in the life that is in Christ Jesus and the upbuilding of the Kingdom of God. Trumpeter, sound for the splendor of God!

Sound the music whose name is law. Whose service is perfect freedom still. The order august that rules the stars! Bid the anarchy of night withdraw. Too long the destroyers have worked their will, Sound for the last, the last of the wars! Sound for the heights that our fathers trod, When truth was truth and love was love. A hell beneath and a heaven above. Trumpeter, rally us, rally us, rally us. On to the city of God."

"The Hebrew prophets constantly held before their people the great responsibility that was theirs because God had chosen them to be His instrument in bringing salvation and the

knowledge of the true God to all nations. And in a very true sense we may look upon America in the same way. God has manifested in the way He has dealt with us, and the position in which He has placed us, that it is His will that America shall be the world's great teacher and leader in liberty and democracy. God keep us from failure. God bring it to pass that our flag where ever it may wave, in the days that are to come, may be the symbol of a people whose God is Jehovah, whose walls are Salvation, whose gates are Praise, and whose works are the works of healing and blessing to all humanity."

"O beautiful for spacious skies, For amber waves of grain, For purple mountain majesties Above the fruitful plain! America! America! God send His grace on thee And crown thy good with brotherhood From sea to shining sea!

O beautiful for pilgrim feet, Whose stern, impassioned stress A thoroughfare for freedom beat Across the wilderness! America! America!

God mend thine every flaw Confirm thy soul in self-control, Thy liberty in law!

"O beautiful for heroes proved In liberating strife, Who more than self their country loved, And mercy more than life. America! America! May God thy gold refine, Till all success be nobleness, And every gain divine!

"O beautiful for patriot dream That sees beyond the years Thine alabaster cities gleam Undimmed by human tears! America! America! God shed His grace on thee And crown thy good with brotherhood From sea to shining sea!

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