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A MEMORIAL ADDRESS

By Edwin Anderson Alderman, LL. D.,
President of the Tulane University, of New Orleans, La., delivered at Richmond, Virginia, April 26, 1903, under the auspices of

The Conference for Education in the South.

It is altogether proper and beautiful that this great Conference, after a session of singular interest and meaning, should come together, in its closing hours, to do honor to the memory of a man who helped to form and direct its history, and who stood for its highest ideals; and likewise to gain from a study of his purposeful life, fresh strength and will for the work that lies before us, and will lie before those who are to come after us. Jabez Lamar Monroe Curry, who passed out of this life on February 12, 1903, lived a long, full, varied life of service, of devotion, of struggle and achievement. We mourn, therefore, no young Lycidas, dead ere his prime, but we come, rather, to take to heart the lesson of the life of a splendid Ulysses, who had never known rest from travel and work, who had drunk honorable life to its lees, and whose spirit at the last

still yearned in desire "to strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield." J. L. M. Curry had been a soldier in two wars, a maker of laws in a state and nation, a preacher, a writer of useful books, twice the representative of his government at the court of Spain, and a statesman of that truest sort whose faith in the perfectibility of men was unfailing and whose ambition was to give to all men a chance to inherit the beauty, the richness and power of life.

Dr. Curry was born in Lincoln County, Georgia, on June 5, 1825. During his early childhood, his father, a wealthy planter, emigrated from Georgia to Alabama, and settled about six miles from Talladega in that State. His academic training was received at the University of Georgia and his legal education at Harvard College, from which he was graduated in 1846 at the age of twenty-one. In 1847, he was elected to the Legislature of Alabama from Talladega County and began his great career as a public servant. For twenty years he served the State of Alabama with singular ability and distinction, as legislator, congressman, soldier and teacher, and though his later life was passed elsewhere, and his services belonged to the nation, his heart and mind constantly reverted with tender loyalty to that great state, as the land of his young manhood and his home.

The intense, rich life of our leader and friend covered an equally intense and rich period of his

country's history. His thoughtful boyhood looked out upon a crude, healthy, boastful nation, drunk with a kind of democratic passion, and getting used, in rough ways, to the shrewd air of popular government, and yet clinging to the concept of orderly nationality. His young manhood was passed in the isolated lower South, amid the storm of a great argument, as to the nature of this Union, made necessary by the silence and indecision of the Constitution. To our minds, cleared of the hot temper of the time, that age seems an unhappy, contentious, groping age; but I believe that it was a good age in which to be born, for men were in earnest about deep, vital things. It was indeed an age of passion, but of passion based on principles, and enthusiasms, and deep loyalties. The cynic, the political idler, the self-seeker, fled before these fiery-eyed men who were probing into metaphysical, governmental theories and constitutional interpretations, and who counted their ideas as of more value than their lives. The time had its obvious faults, and was doomed to fall before the avatar of progress; but there lived in it beauty and force and a great central note of exaltation of personality above social progress. To this was due the romantic beauty of many of the personalities of this period and section, and also the industrial inefficiency of the total mass. Around the fireside, in that frontier world of his, the talk did not fall so much upon the kind of man who

forms the syndicate or corners the stock market or who wages the warfare of trade around the world, but rather upon simple, old questions which might have been asked in the Homeric age: Is he free from sordidness or stain? Has he borne himself bravely in battle? Has he suffered somewhere with courage and dignity? Has he kept faith with ideals?

The best and most lasting bequest of the time to the whole nation was the conception of politics as a lofty profession, to be entered upon by the best men for unselfish purposes. The old South sent her greatest, truest men to represent her in national councils. The new South has sent unpurchasable men at least. I believe that the whole nation has been taught a lesson by this custom which will prove an unceasing good in this great democratic experiment of ours. Dr. Curry had reached his prime when the great drama, fate determined and fate driven, passed from argument into war, and he, himself, caught in the grip of that same fate, with all his gentleness and tenderness, became of those whose "faith and truth on war's red touchstone rang true metal." In the strength of middle life and in the serene wisdom of old age, this fortunate man found himself living in another world, and with sufficient strength of heart, which is courage, to live in it and of it and for it with a spirit unspoiled by hate or bitter memories, with a heart unfretted by regrets and with a purpose unshaken

by any doubt. A great soul is needed to pass from one era to another in such fashion as this. The strand of every revolutionary epoch is lined with the wrecks of pure and lovable men who had not the faith and courage to will to live and serve another time. Dr. Curry possessed this quality of courage in high degree. Indeed, for the first time he had sight of the possibility of an undivided country, rid of sectionalism and provincialism and hindering custom and tradition, conscious of its destiny, assured of its nationality, striving to fit itself for the work of a great nation in civilization. He had sight, too, of his own section, idealized, to him, by fortitude and woe, adjusting itself in dignity and suffering and power to the spirit of the modern world. What is there for a strong man to do?—we may fancy himself asking himself in the silence of his soul. There could be no bickerings for such men as he, no using of his great powers to find place for himself by nursing the feeling of hatred and revenge in the breasts of proud and passionate races. There could be no crude, racial scorn, no theatrical pettiness, no vain, fatuous blindness, or puerile obstinacy. "Not painlessly had God remoulded and cast anew the nation." The pain had indeed smitten his soul, but his eyes were clear enough to see God's great hand in the movements of society and to realize the glory of new-birth out of pain, and his desire was aflame to be about the work that re-creates and

sets in order. Like all sincere, unselfish men to whom life means helpfulness, he saw his task lying before him—like a sunlit road stretching straight before the traveler's feet. He was to walk in that path for all his remaining days. The quality of his mind, the sum of his gifts and graces, the ideals of contemporary civilization suggested political preferment, but no consideration of self or fortune could swerve him from his course. There dwelt in him a leonine quality of combat and struggle, a delight of contest, a rising of all his powers to opposition that had only one master in his soul, and that master was the Christian instinct for service. I once heard him declare to an audience that it was the proudest duty of the South to accomplish the education of every child in its borders—high or low, bond or free, black or white. The only response to his appeal was silence. He shouted, "I will make you applaud that sentiment." With strident voice and shaking of the head, after the manner of the oratory of the olden time, he plead for human freedom. He pictured to his audience the ruin that may be wrought by hate, and the beauty of justice and sympathy until he awakened in them the god of justice and gentleness that lies sleeping in the human heart, and the applause rolled up to him in a storm.

Over at Lexington, by the quiet flowing river, and the simple hills, Robert E. Lee saw the same vision, because there dwelt in him, too, the same

simplicity, sincerity and unselfishness. The philosophic student of our national story will one day appraise and relate how much it meant to that story that the vision of Lee was not disturbed nor distorted by dreams or fancies that in all ages have beset the brain of the hero of the people. This quiet man at Lexington had led mighty armies to victory, and had looked defeat and ruin in the face with epic fortitude. He had stood the supreme figure amid the fierce joys and shoutings of a mighty war. His name rang around the world foremost in the fellowship of the heroes of the English race; but the vision that appeared to Lee, the conqueror and warrior, was the same that appeared to Curry, the scholar, and student and orator. It was a vision of many millions of childhood standing impoverished and untaught amid new duties, new occasions, new needs, new worlds of endeavor, appealing with outstretched hands to the grown-up strength of their generation, to know why they should not have a country to love, an age to serve, a work to do, and a training for that work. Alien to this new generation were the subtleties of divided sovereignty, or the responsibility for the presence of the African in our life, and strange to their eyes and ears the fading fires and retreating noises of battle and of war. The vision was life—unconquered, tumultuous, beautiful, wholesome, regenerative young life—asking a chance of its elders to live worthily in its world and time. The elders had

had their day, and had had acquaintance with achievement and sadness and defeat, but here stood undefeated youth, coming on as comes on a fresh wave of the sea, with sunlight in its crest, to take the place of its fellow just dashed against the shore. "Life is greater than any theory! We ask the right to live!" said this vision. And it touches my heart when I recall that I was of that appealing company.

The Good Master once set a little child in the midst of His warring disciples and declared to them that that pathetic little figure prefigured to men forever the kingdom of heaven. Again and again in the long, dark story of the struggle of the race, that figure has appeared, and real greatness of soul has never failed to catch the meaning of the radiant presence. We may be sure that it was present to William the Silent, and that the German has seen it in his dark hours, and the Frenchman and the Englishman, and the Greek and all the great races which have brought things to pass. Lee and Curry saw it, and thousands of like souls followed their leading and found their work and were happy as we are to-day with our work lying before us and our hearts asking no other blessedness. Let all Americans be grateful to the God of nations that He had us enough in His care to choose for us such leaders as these, "whose strength was as the strength of ten, because their hearts were pure." Lee gave his great example and a few years of noble

service to the nation, and passed, like Arthur, "while the new sun arose upon a new day." A happier fortune befell Dr. Curry. There was left to him over two decades of time in which to strive for the realization of his dreams and the fulfillment of his plans.

Our democracy, with its amazing record of achievement in the subduing of the continent, has nothing finer to show than the example of these two men in a time of great passion and headiness, save perhaps the example of another American. Away off in Massachusetts — that great commonwealth from which the nation has learned so much of order and moral persistence —a private citizen—George Peabody—was bethinking himself of his country, bleeding from the red stripes of civil war, and wondering what he could do to heal its wounds. I hail him as the pioneer of that splendid army of "volunteer statesmen" who do not hesitate to undertake any work for their country's good. It did not matter to him that the states of the South had stood to him for four years as the enemy's country. His patriotism was not the patriotism of the Cossack, but the patriotism of the Christ. What he saw was youth which the nation needed for its health springing up untrained and sorely burdened—the sons of brave men, men who knew how to die for an idea, and who did not know how to compromise. What he did was to rise clearly above all small passions and to pour his great

fortune into those stricken states for the benefit alike of the former master and of him who had been a slave. Lee, Peabody, Curry! We will do well never to tire of mentioning their names! An industrial democracy threatened constantly with vulgarity and coarse strength will have increasing need of the example of their noble calmness and patient idealism.

The General Agency of the Peabody Board and later of the Slater Board, two of the noblest creative forces which have ever been set to work upon the life of the Republic, came to him as the opportunity of his life, and his last years were to be years of unfailing youth wherein he was able, in the service of these boards, to think clearly, to will resolutely, to work joyfully toward high, national ends. The task that confronted him, in its larger lines, was to democratize the point of view of an aristocratic society, to renationalize its impulses and aspirations, to preach the gospel of national unity to both sections, to stimulate the habit of community effort for public ends, to enrich the concept of civic virtue, to exemplify the ideal of social service to young men, and to set the public school, in its proper correlation to all other educational agencies, in the front of the public mind, as the chief concern of constructive statesmanship. His task, in its more technical aspects, was to reveal the public school as it should be, actually at work in a democratic society, with all of its necessities—trained and cul-

tured teachers, varied curricula appealing to hand and eye and mind, industrial training, beautiful surroundings, nourished by public pride and strengthened by public confidence. The first ten years of his work were years of battle for the development of public opinion, and it was to be a great struggle, for many heresies were afield. He was told by those who sat in high places that public schools were godless, and that the state had no right to tax one man to educate another man's child; that it was dangerous to educate the masses, and that the educated negro or poor white meant a spoiled laborer, and many other musty things dear to the heart of the conscientious doctrinaire. His reply to all this was: "Ignorance is no remedy for anything. If the state has a right to live at all, it has a right to educate. Education is a great national investment."

And so, that solemn, majestic thing, called public opinion, got born, and a few men as earnest as death became somehow what we call a movement, and the movement, led by this splendid figure, wherein was blended the grace and charm of the old time with the vigor and freedom of the new, became a crusade, and young scholars had their imaginations touched by it and their creative instincts awakened by it, and the preachers saw their way clear to push it along, and the politicians, ever sensitive to the lightest wind of popular desire, felt its stirrings in the air. Above

it all, and energizing it all, stood this strong, gifted, earnest man—I had thought to say old man, but there never was any suggestion of age about Dr. Curry. Like the president of this Conference, he met youth on its own ground and asked no odds—impulse for impulse, strength for strength and heart for heart. I thank God that, as the things of sense faded from his sight, he saw that supremest good of life—an honest bit of creative work well done and bearing fruit. At the moment of the establishment of the Peabody Fund, it should be remembered that not a single Southern State had a system of free public schools. The angry gusts of war had blown out all the lights burning in their ancient seats of learning, save in the University of Virginia, Washington and Lee and a few other struggling colleges, which burned steadily on, giving light and heat to the darkness and coldness of the still land. The splendid system of private academies was being slowly re-established. Only in a few cities were to be found the semblance of a public school system. There were no normal or industrial schools. The Peabody Fund came into the field of helpfulness, and during a period of thirty years, under the wise administration of great American citizens, and directed by the energy and insight of Barnas Sears and J. L. M. Curry, expended, in stimulating ways, the sum of $2,478,527.13. No more impressive evidence of the influence of this fund and of the monu-

mental work of Curry and Sears can be found than in a plain recital of these facts:

In every one of the Southern States to-day there is a public system of schools more or less complete. To bring this to pass a war-stricken region has expended one hundred and sixty-five millions of dollars. Normal and industrial schools for both races, sustained by general and local taxation, exist in every state. Thirty great institutions of higher learning have been revived and established. Five thousand Southern boys are studying technological subjects where ten studied them in 1873. Practically all cities or towns of three thousand population maintain a school system from which boys and girls may pass into college. The percentage of illiteracy for the white race in the twelve Southern States has been reduced from 25 per cent. to 12.5 per cent., and the colored race from 87 per cent. to 47.5 per cent. And greater than all this, a generous and triumphant public sentiment has been aroused that will make these performances seem feeble in another decade. Can it be claimed that ever before in the history of the Republic so much good was accomplished as has been accomplished by the expenditure of this $2,478,-527.13 plus the heart and brain of men like Curry and Sears and their colleagues and followers? I do not claim, of course, that all this wonderful achievement was due solely to these boards and to their agents. That would be ab-

surd. The efforts of these boards would have been farcical if they had not been projected upon the spirit of a self-reliant and unconquerable people. It was simply the meeting of a great idea with a great people and there followed a great result.

The most impressive thing about Dr. Curry was his intense Americanism. One could not think of him as an Alabamian or a Virginian, but always as an American. He had believed in his youth in the theoretical ethics, at least, of Secession. He did not change that belief in his old age. Calhoun was second only to Aristotle in this regard, and yet he was the most ardent American I have ever personally known. The flag stirred his highest eloquence, and our great unrended nation, with its dreams, its needs, its perils, its ideals appealed to him like nothing else on earth. In the summer of 1898, on July 4th, he was making the annual address before the University of Chicago. At the same moment, in the waters about Santiago, American warships were thundering out the knell of Spanish rule on this continent. His subject on that occasion was the "Life and Character of John C. Calhoun." He was defending the constitutional orthodoxy of that great exponent of the compact theory of our government, with all the power and passion of his mind and heart. Every now and then a messenger boy would arrive with a telegram, and the proceedings would be interrupted to read the

announcement of the destruction of another Spanish ship and to hear the outbursts of frantic, patriotic applause. Whereupon, Curry would turn to the American flag, draping the platform, and make it the basis of an appeal for unity and nationality, and then when the applause would die away, back again to Calhoun without a lost note. And so, the morning passed with Calhoun, Santiago and the American flag vividly entwined before the face of a Chicago audience. The incident was something more than amusing or dramatic, else I should not pause to relate it. An essential characteristic of the man stood revealed. His real genius and passion were for adaptability to environment, for sympathy with his time, for service on the side of its better forces. He had the grand manner and the social instincts of the aristocrat, but at bottom he was an individualist in the structure of his mind. Thomas Jefferson—that great spiritual force which the Lord God sent to this democracy that it might have fair trial, to teach it patience with common men and faith in their unfailing rectitude—claimed his deepest heart.

His was the first voice to declare that there was no place for a Helot in our system and that the negro must be trained properly for life in this nation. He was among the first to urge common sense as against sentimentality in the education of the negro. He denounced vehemently the proposition to divide taxes for educational pur-

poses, on the basis of race, as un-American, undemocratic, un-Christian, unwise. He it was who first pointed out that the strategic point of the whole educational battle was the untaught white man and his child. He was the first to thunder out to colleges and universities that education was one whole thing, and that the colleges and universities must come out of their isolation, and, under the operation of the principle of *noblesse oblige*, lead the fight for the education of all the people. He sent home to our people their share of responsibility, and he also made the world know something of the courage and patience and self-reliance of the Southern struggle for self-realization, and he made the world believe that there was strength and purpose enough in this people to solve their own problems with justice and wisdom. In the discharge of all of these duties of the pioneer and the propagandist, no man in America, since Horace Mann, has shown such energy and enthusiasm as J. L. M. Curry. He had the genius for giving himself out, and the equipment of intellect and temperament necessary for his many-sided duties. Before the legislatures of every state, from the Potomac to the Gulf, from college platforms, in great national gatherings, by country cross-roads, and in little villages wherein some impulse stirred a community to better its life, his voice was heard for twenty years.

I saw him for the first time in 1883. A thriv-

ing North Carolina town was proposing to tax itself for adequate school facilities. This was not then an every day occurrence in North Carolina. Curry stood before them and plead with passion and power for the children of the community. I remember how he seized a little child impulsively, and with dramatic instinct placed his hand upon his curly head, and pictured to the touched and silent throng the meaning of a little child to human society. It was the first time I had ever heard a man of such power spend himself so passionately in such a cause. I had seen and heard men speak in that way about personal religion and heaven and hell, and struggles and wrongs long past, but never before about childhood. It seemed to me, and to all young men who heard him, that here was a vital thing to work for, here indeed a cause to which a man might nobly attach himself, feeling sure that, though he himself might fail, the cause would go marching grandly on.

And now what is the lesson of this sincere inspiring life, for we are not here to mourn Dr. Curry or to recount in formal fashion the details of his life or to enumerate his specific achievements, to catalogue the honors of his long life. I know of no happier life than Dr. Curry's. There is not an earnest man here who does not thrill at the thought of living such a life of work, and of making such an end of triumph. We do, indeed, sorrow in our deepest hearts, with her to

whom his daily presence meant strength and joy, and who was to him all this and more. We sorrow, too, with his son and his kindred. We do, indeed, miss him here and everywhere—we miss the tonic of his unconquerable youth, his noble mien and presence, the vibrant tone of his voice, the old-fashioned eloquence out of the heart, the garnered wisdom and experience, the sympathy, the vitality, the holiness of the man. My own heart has a sense of loneliness for the loss of him, for I loved him as men love one another, as the younger man sometimes loves the elder who has reached out to him warm, strong hands of sympathy, helping him thus to live loyally with his higher self, and who has stood to his sight an embodied ideal. "But we wage not any feud with death." It is the commonplace of life. It is taught everywhere in nature and in literature, by the bright-winged ephemera that flutter about in the golden sunshine after the spring rains, and by the solemn imagery running through human writing wherein life is likened to the flying cloud, the stuff of dreams, the fleeing shadows and the vapor that vanisheth away. The strongest of us all shall shortly, as time runs, be otherwhere, even as our dead friend and leader, and the children playing in the fields shall stand in our places, doing the world's work. Matthew Arnold in "Dover Beach" calls his love to the window and bids her hear the grating roar of the pebbles on the shore, bringing to his

mind, as to Sophocles long ago on the Ægean, the eternal ebb and flow of human misery. They must love each other, he says pitifully, for the bright-seeming world lying before them has really neither light, nor hope, nor love, nor certitude, nor peace, nor help from pain. Such a life as Dr. Curry's, with its eager zest, its joyous desire to be at work, its perception of human dignity and worth, puts such pessimism out of thought and soul, and teaches that the high analogies and impulses of life come not from the moaning sea, but from the glad, renewing earth, and from undismayed, advancing life.

The chief work then of this noble life was to develop an irresistible public opinion in a democracy for the accomplishment of permanent public ends. In short, through such work as his in one generation of grim purpose and intellectual audacity, the South has lost its economic distinctness and has become a part of American life and American destiny, and the North has learned to love, I trust, its brothers whom it did not know and, therefore, could not understand. Men may forget the oratory, the diplomacy, the intellectual vigor, the gracious, compelling charm of Curry the man, but they will not forget the zeal, the self-surrender of Curry the social reformer and civic patriot; and when the final roll shall be called of the great sons of the South, and of the nation, who served society well when service was most needed, I believe that no answer will ring

out clearer and higher and sweeter in that larger air than the *Adsum* of J. L. M. Curry. I trust that the State of Alabama, whose citizenship he adorned, may have wisdom enough to reserve one of its niches in the national capitol for a statue of this man, not only in recognition of his great services, but to emphasize the fact that a man may be a statesman or a hero, as well by service to childhood and ideals of training, as by subtlety in constitutional argument or bold courage in war. His work has been accomplished, and has been handed on to the living, and he has gone. His fame is secure, for it is the persistent fame of the teacher and reformer.

Marcus Aurelius in his tent on the Danube tells how he learned discipline from Rusticus, and kindness from Sextus, and patience from Alexander, mentioning one by one his old teachers, and their names glow there forever beside their pupil's—the pure pagan—shining like stars in that heathen night. In such ways does the teacher live on through generations, teaching in death as in life. Is it not the task of the living to take this public opinion, now ductile and shapable, and fashion it into scientific, active forces, and realize it in ever greater and more enduring institutions and agencies for the betterment of man? Is it not our task, gaining strength from the example of this dead leader of ours, to press forward with patience and quiet resolve, not to be deterred, not to be made afraid, not to despair,

not to listen to any voices save those voices within us, which tell us that such work cannot die? Surely this work we are in is the nation's work, and this nation is a great spiritual and moral adventure worth living for and working for, as well as dying for.

Earnest, simple men, like him of whom we have spoken, have hallowed its past by upright living and patriotic purpose. Strong, stout souls hear the call to battle for the integrity of its present life, and hints and prophecies of its wide and liberal future sing in the hearts of the long, bright line of invincible youth to whose freedom we stand pledged, even as there stood pledged to us, the high-statured men of the olden time.