

# MR. BRYAN'S ELKS MEMORIAL ADDRESS AT LINCOLN

At the Elks' Lodge of Sorrow, Lincoln, Neb., December 2, 1906, Mr. Bryan delivered this address:

On an occasion like this a number of themes suggest themselves. The word "fraternity" comes to us at such a time for we meet under the auspices of one of the greatest fraternities of this nation, and the hour might well be occupied in speaking of the great work that the fraternity is accomplishing throughout the world. Among the great forces that are at work drawing men closer together, teaching them to recognize the tie that binds each to every other, the fraternity occupies an important place. And the virtues upon which the fraternity rests—any of these would furnish an appropriate theme. The equality that is taught in the lodge room would in itself justify the existence of the fraternity, especially at this time when we need to learn over and over again that the worth of the individual depends not upon what he possesses, or upon distinguished lineage but upon the manner in which he performs the responsibilities that rest upon him; and our fraternity teaches this idea of equality. Hospitality is one of the virtues of our fraternity, and I think I can say without offending those who belong to other fraternities of which I am a member, that no fraternity in this land is more distinguished for hospitality. At home we can measure a man by what we know of him, and his position can rest upon his merits. But when a stranger comes among us we must assume the existence of virtues before we have an opportunity to test them; and throughout this land the homes that have been established by the Elks have the latch string ever out. And no order that exists among us extends a more cordial welcome to the visiting brother, or shows to him a more constant courtesy and care.

Charity is a virtue and this fraternity is conspicuous for what it does in the name of sweet charity. And it is a gracious thing in this fraternity that while it gives, gives willingly, and gives freely, it does not record the name of the one to whom it gives, that no humiliation shall ever come to one who has been the recipient of this fraternity's bounty. In charity no other order surpasses ours.

Brotherly love is another virtue upon which one might dwell today. For brotherly love lies back of equality and hospitality, and charity. It is the idea of brotherly love that the fraternity everywhere is attempting to teach, and it is this idea of brotherly love which growing, as I believe it is growing throughout the world, is cementing mankind more and more closely together. And it is this brotherly love which in my judgment is going to throw a light upon our pathway, and make it easier for us to distinguish the duties which we owe one to another.

But this afternoon the thought that is uppermost in my mind is the thought that brings us here. While we meet under the auspices of a fraternity and might contemplate the work of the fraternity and the virtues that are brought out in the lodge and among the members, it is death that calls us together; it is the fact that some who have been among us are among us no more; it is the fact that faces that were familiar in the lodge room are no longer seen there. We are here that we may pay a tribute of respect to the brothers who have gone hence, and dwell for a while with them in memory's halls. And assembling under these solemn circumstances we are brought to the contemplation of man's implacable foe. Those whose names have been read were not very long ago among us, as buoyant and as hopeful as we.

They are dead, and we meet year after year to hold brief communion with their spirits, and to utter a prayer for the peace of their souls. And it will not be long before other names will be added, not many years, in fact, until every one present here today will be recorded as they have been. And so it has ever been. This endless procession has been moving on towards one goal, from the time when man was placed upon this footstool to carry out a divine decree; and there is no turning back from this way. No one is rich enough to purchase immunity, and no one so poor as to escape notice. No one is strong enough to resist the grim reaper, and no one so weak as to excite his pity.

There is a time when death might seem a natural visitor; in extreme old age. When the joints become stiff and the flesh wastes away; when the eyes grow dim and the ears no longer drink in the music of the voice. Then it might seem that death were an appropriate thing. But how few reach advanced age. A large percentage

of the human race—a larger per cent than need be—die young. The summons comes to the very babe before its infinite possibilities begin to unfold; the summons comes when it has no coin with which to make payment for the care it secures, except the smile, and the smile remains when the face is gone. Sometimes the summons comes to the student just completing an education, prepared with trained mind and lofty purposes to take up the work of life—but the diploma is no answer to the summons. Again it comes to the mother; the child on her breast pleads for her, and the child at her knee clenches his chubby fist in defiance, but in vain; they must grow up without the knowledge of a mother's love. And now it is the man in the full strength of life, bearing a double burden and dividing his attention between the home and the state; he staggers and falls, and those who convey his remains to the cemetery try to comfort those whom he has left, and endeavor to divide among them the public task which he has left unfinished. Sometimes the cup comes to the lips of one whose whitened locks record the passing of many winters; his ripe experience has made him a treasure house from which wisdom can be drawn, and his spiritual wealth is a benediction to the home, and makes him a tower of strength to the church, but the chair by the fireside is vacated. Why is it that there must be this rude sundering of the ties that bind us to earth, and to each other? Why? A myriad of times this question has risen from broken hearts, and still no answer. I shall not attempt to answer it. But I can say in the language of the poet:

I do not see  
Why God should e'en permit some things to be,  
When He is love;  
But I can see,  
Though, often dimly, through the mystery,  
His hand above!

And that hand has inscribed some lessons upon the tomb so clear and plain that all may read them.

Death, by its very uncertainty teaches us to use the present hour. If we were assured of three score years and ten we might yield to the temptation to postpone everything to the later years. But the fact that we know not the day nor the hour when the call may come to us forces us to use today lest tomorrow may not arrive.

And, then, death reminds us of our weakness. Man was made in the image of his Creator, and given dominion over the earth, the air and sea—made but a little lower than the angels, and behold the work of man's hand! He has harnessed the forces of nature and compelled them to do his bidding. He has converted the waterfalls into motive power; he has condensed the steam and commanded it to draw the commerce of a nation over the iron highways; his ships plough all the oceans, and they follow their charts unerringly no matter how dark the night. He has imprisoned the lightning in a tiny wire and sent it around the globe as his messenger, and he has even flung his words through space and imprinted them on instruments hundreds of miles away. No wonder man is boastful, and yet just as he imagines himself almost omnipotent, just as he reaches out to seize the crown, death touches him, or one he loves, and then he realizes how helpless he is.

Death turns our thoughts toward immortality. Heaven never seems so real to us as when it becomes the abode of someone whom we have known and loved. When our treasures are there we can easily believe that no heart warmed to a glow by the fire of brotherly love will suffer an eternal chill, that no spiritual flame, that grows brighter with the years, will be extinguished never to shine again.

I have here a little grain of wheat; it grew more than 3,000 years ago on the banks of the Nile. Ten centuries before the Babe of Bethlehem was carried down into Egypt to escape the wrath of Herod, the stalk upon which this little grain matured was swaying in the breezes that fanned the brow of the Sphinx. All these years it has slumbered in an ancient tomb. Had it been planted, and all its progeny after it, the lineal descendants of that one grain would be numerous enough to feed the teeming world today. In every grain of wheat there is a germ of life—a germ of life that has within it the power to discard the body of today and construct from air and earth not a new body alone, but many new bodies—and into each one of the many it can put the power to continue the work of reproduction. If the vital spark in a grain of wheat can pass unchanged through countless deaths and resur-

rections, surely the spirit of man will be able to defy the grave. All nature proclaims that there is another life, and the belief in that other life lends comfort to us when, separated from a friend, we have the assurance that it is but for a time. The belief in immortality relieves the somber character of an occasion like this, for we are assured that the congenial spirits who meet and mingle here will hold communion in the world beyond. Belief in immortality not only gives consolation but it gives strength. We can better resist the temptation to do wrong to others when we expect to meet and associate with them in an endless world where our secret thoughts will be made known.

Death also prepares us for the change that is to come. To the young the thought of death affrights; but as we make progress along the path that leads from the cradle to the grave we all become accustomed to the word. Father dies, mother dies, a brother is taken, and then a sister. Children are called away, and friend after friend departs, and the ties that bind us to earth grow less and less in number, and the ties that bind us to the life beyond the grave increase. At last those who are joined together in holy wedlock are separated, and the survivor stands alone. Then death does not mean what it meant to us in youth. We no longer shudder at the thought; we may even come to wait for it with impatience. This is God's way; this is the way in which He weans us from the things that are and brings us into harmony with His plans. The great Irish poet has caught the sentiment, and expressed it in words the beauty of which will never be surpassed, when after scattering the leaves of the last rose of summer over the bed "where its mates of the garden lie scentless and dead," he exclaims:

So soon may I follow,  
When friendships decay,  
And from Love's shining circle  
The gems drop away.  
When true hearts lie wither'd  
And fond ones are flown,  
Oh! who would inhabit  
This bleak world alone?

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