

PAYS TRIBUTE TO OLD AGE

Hon. B. F. Mulkey Delivered Eloquent Address to Pioneers at Their Reunion in Ashland.

The following is an extract from the address of Hon. B. F. Mulkey to the pioneers of Jackson county at their annual reunion:

It is painful to realize for the first time that one is growing old. All efforts to reconcile age have been futile, I believe. We do not wish to be told we are growing old. To be called "sixty" when we are fifty seldom pleases. To see the first wrinkle of the brow or the first gray hair sends us away from the mirror with alarm. We shrink from age because we wish to be part of the community life. We wish to be able to work if we wish to, notwithstanding our life's ambition has been to be independent of work.

And, too, we think of age as a period when the pleasures of life have lost edge. The clock ticks slow to the grandmother or grandfather left alone at the chimney corner while other household members are away for an evening at play.

But the real reason why the thought of growing old saddens is not that age brings decrepitude and wrinkles; nor that the hours are long and idle and lonely. Rather I think it is because old age is the beginning of the end. The staff and the arm chair mean the coffin next. It is right for us to wish to live, and just as long as we can. Thus it is because the yellowing of the leaf means the falling of the twig that we shrink from that period of life when we must fade like the leaf.

But even so, in thus instinctively shrinking from age and its encroachments we do show a will most "incorrect to nature and to heaven." As a matter of fact, age is the only period at which man attains his full value either to himself or to the world. Youth has no real worth except as a promise. Manhood is still an experiment. No correct estimate can be made until the plants are matured and the work done. But in age, we have a positive quantity, a sum total, a completed task. It is the story of the orchard. The spring covers the trees with bloom, but the apple crop is not assured. Frost, and the blight that kills may contravene. There is just enough in the conditions to awaken hope and anxiety.

In July the orchard trees are filled with young apples. Still there is no certainty of a harvest. The promise

of a crop is there and if there be no hail storm, and there is a proper admixture of moisture and sunshine, and if the transitory insects do not plant too many eggs in the valley of the passing flower, there will be a crop.

Then comes the autumn, and the story is told. If you find the apples are full grown and ruddy or golden and ripe for the picking, then, but not till then, can you correctly estimate the crop. Those blossoms of springtime were like youth. Those little green apples upon the boughs in summer were manhood. That ripened fruit deepening from the bending branches of the tree is old age. And age is as much more glorious than youth as the full grown apple is more valuable than the fragile blossom in which it had its origin.

The farmer will tell you that one apple sound and ripe is worth a thousand blossoms. Precisely a single matured and rounded life is worth more to the world than a thousand lives just begun.

The great Chinese wall is the wonder of the ages. Fifteen hundred miles long, crossing wildest chasms and scaling precipitous bluffs and mountains. A structure containing brick and stone enough to form a wall six feet high and two feet thick around the earth, oceans and all. This wall was all planned and completed within the reign of a single monarch. Imagine the feelings with which the intrepid ruler and his people placed the first stone of that giant undertaking. What emotions of hope and fear must have attended this first step in the mightiest material achievement a single generation ever wrought. But how does this step dwindle when it is compared with the last step, when that imperial hand placed the final stone in position, the vast undertaking no longer a project, but a solid, enduring reality. Age is as much grander than youth, as the completion of that great wall of China was more sublime than its beginning. In portance as is the laying of the cornerstone of a structure the supreme moment is when the capstone is fitted into position.

The earth is like the sea, and our lives are much like the ways of ships. Now the supreme moment in an ocean voyage is not the instant of starting. True, the hour with its adieu spoken, and the weighing anchor, stamps itself upon the memory. But the transcendent moment, the hour that sweeps every chord of the soul and sends the heart to the eyes, writing its events upon memory with a diamond's point is not the moment of setting sail, but the hour of making port. That hour you realize that the great sea, with its stormy waste is all behind you and land and home are at hand. Any bark can sail upon the sea, but only the staunch ship well manned can successfully complete the voyage. The children and youths are barks setting sail, but the aged ones among us are the ships

coming in. Just a few more miles, the rounding of another point, and their keels will have touched the dock.

There lies a boat out in the stream. It is beautiful in all its lines. It has swung from the pier and lies at anchor yonder, and men, as they cross the ferry stand and look at it and admire it. But it has never been out of port. It stands there green, new, untried. Still everybody thinks it is beautiful. That boat is just like lovely childhood. There comes up the bay and is making toward the navy yard another ship. It is an old man-of-war. It has been in both oceans and around the world. It has given and taken thunder blows under the flag of its country. It is the old "Constitution" herself. See how the people throng the cars and go out to get sight of her. See how sailors stand upon her deck and gaze upon her. Some of them have sailed in her and to them she is thrice handsomer than any new vessel. This old, war-battered ship that carries the memory of memorable battles lies there; and the crowds look at her breeched bow, her shattered rigging, her coarse and rude outlines, her dingy sides, and everyone thrills with the feeling "God bless you, old ship, God bless you." And that ship is honored and

virtuous old age. And yet we sigh for youth and pity age! We would rather be just entering the race than reaching the goal as winner!

Thus age, ripe, mellow, sweet, is a benediction to the home and to the community. These heads are white, not with the frost of years, but golden brown in the master's service are our irrefutable evidence that righteousness, the fear of God, and the love of man is not only possible to us all, but that it is the only thing which pays and endures.

These old men and women may not have all been Christian men and women, but their lives have been builded upon the principles mainly which the great Galilean gave to the world.

And now, good friends, if you are helped by these brief reflections upon your work as pioneers and upon your individual lives as you grow older, I am pleased. Life's twilight is the rest which the good man has earned after his day of toil. Just keep patient, faithful, sweet, and true, and although the face wrinkles and the locks whiten, and, one by one, you relinquish the cares and burdens of life. He will still be with you, and you shall find his beautiful promise true. "Thine age shall be clearer than the noonday, thou shalt shine forth, thou shalt be as the morning."

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