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### Howard, Oliver Otis; Memorial Sermon, delivered by E.G. Guthrie

O.O. Howard Collection

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BEING UNABLE TO REPLY PERSONALLY  
TO THE MANY MESSAGES RECEIVED,

MRS. O. O. HOWARD

ASKS YOU TO ACCEPT THIS EXPRESSION  
OF HER GRATEFUL APPRECIATION OF  
YOUR KIND SYMPATHY.

Major-General Oliver Otis Howard

1830---1909

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BORN AT  
LEEDS, MAINE, NOVEMBER 8, 1830.

DIED AT  
BURLINGTON, VERMONT, OCTOBER 26, 1909.

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# Memorial Sermon

Delivered at

The First Church, Burlington, Vermont,  
October 29, 1909,

BY

Rev. Ernest Graham Guthrie, M.A., B.D.,  
Minister.

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*“I have ought the good fight, I have finished the course. I have kept the faith: Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give to me at that day.”—2 Tim. 4: 7, 8.*

This was the record of the greatest soldier of the Cross in his own day; and such is the record of this other great soldier of the Cross whose life and death we commemorate today. It is fitting that we, in whose midst he lived the last years of his life, should celebrate his going from us, and that we should do it in such a way as to break through the small community vision of his life by which our eyes are too much bound, into a comprehensive insight into its national significance for the republic as a whole and its meaning for the Church universal. For, apart from the personal feelings of great loss which we all feel, there is, in the closing of this life, the breaking of a link between those momentous hours of our history, when the great military leaders, of which he is the last, led the armies of the people into battle, and these, our own days, when we are being marshalled by the spirit of God for the yet



greater victories of peace. It is not for me to rehearse that gallant life in all its mighty detail of deeds—for these things we all know; nor is this the place for turgid eloquence but for quiet and strong remembrance. My work as the minister of the Church, is only to point out those great principles of his life, that large vision into which he lived and for which he fought and worked, that we may make them our own, and enter into the succession which he has left.

I. *I have fought a good fight.*

Surely this was true of him. In those dark days of the Civil War, when army ties were being broken, and those who had been comrades in the social life of the military school and of the barracks were driven apart to reappear as public enemies, the one to the other, on opposite sides of the fray, his course became clear to him and his heart responded, as it always did, to that voice of duty which was the watchword of all his life, and he appeared in the armies of the North. "He was prepared to fight for the integrity of the American Union and the religion of his soul supported the decision of his intellect." That beautiful consideration for his men which is, at once, one of the noblest elements of his character, and, at the same time, one of the surest marks of a true military officer, immediately appeared. Colonel Osborne, who was on his staff, says that he never saw another officer, so intensely solicitous for the care and welfare of his men at all times as Colonel

Howard was, that they be clothed, fed, well encamped, and not over fatigued.

Because of his ceaseless devotion of his duty in the drilling and disciplining of his men, he was summoned by General McDowell to lead a brigade, in which was one of our own Vermont regiments, into the first large and disastrous battle of the great war at Bull Run on July 21, 1861. Sick and dizzy with the burning sun, he and his men waited for their orders, and when the call came with a silent prayer "O God help me and enable me to do my duty!" he led his men forward to the relief of Heintzelmann. As they came nearer the bomb shells bursting over their heads caused some to show signs of fear; and Colonel Howard, to encourage them, halted at the head of his column and had his entire brigade pass by him as if in review. The men looked up into his face and reading the confidence and resolution expressed there gave him an answering smile as they passed on to their places in the battle line, followed by his prayers. And so on through the successes, and reverses of the great war that brave life went, in what spirit is shown by the prayer of his heart on the field after Williamsburg that God would hasten the end of this horrible war, but with what personal bravery is recorded by Headley in his description of the battle at Fair Oaks where he says "Howard exposed himself like the commonest soldier until at last he was struck by a ball which shattered his arm. Instantly waving the mutilated member aloft as a pennon, he cheer-

ed on his men to the charge, and was then borne from the field." You and I have often seen that empty sleeve waving with the vigor of the great soul within stirred for some great cause of the Kingdom of God and peace. Did you ever think of the tale it told?

It tells of a battle field of gore  
Of the sabre's clash, of the cannon's roar,  
Of the deadly charge, of the bugle's note,  
Of the gurgling sound in a foeman's throat,  
Of the whizzing grape, of the fiery shell,  
Of a scene which mimics the scenes of hell,  
Till this very hour w'd you e'er believe  
What a tell-tale thing is an empty sleeve,  
What a weird, queer thing is an empty sleeve?

Tho it points to a myriad wounds and scars,  
Yet it tells that a flag with stripes and stars,  
In God's own chosen time will take  
Each place of the rag with the rattle-snake,  
And it points to the time when that flag shall wave  
O'er the land where there breathes no cowering slave,  
To the top of the skies let us all then heave  
One proud huzza for the empty sleeve,  
For the one-armed man with the empty sleeve.

We might follow him as he fought the good fight for the nation, as he mounted, step by step, in his military career, passing through the dark hour at Chancellorsville, (according to his own words) the weakest link in his military record, but where his position was commended for its strength by officers high in rank, on to the immortal field of Gettysburg, where he chose and held the field for the battle that "repulsed defeated and drove back, broken and dispirited the veteran army of the



rebellion;" for which he was associated with General Meade in receiving the thanks of Congress. On the death of the gallant McPherson, Generals Thomas and Sherman recommended General Howard for the command of the army of the Tennessee. With that self-renunciation which was part of his character, Howard urged the claims of Hooker, his senior in commission, but at the word of the President the assignment was made to General Howard. Throughout the march to the sea he nobly performed his part. His men became strong and hardy and able to endure, and not one of his seven grand divisions was ever known to be fifteen minutes behind time. He was the disciplinarian of the right wing. His orders were of the sternest character, and to his eternal honor be it said that, after Lee's surrender, no depredations were permitted in his army.

And then, when the great fight was over, came one of the greatest hours in this hero's life. On the 6th day of May he was summoned to Washington to be offered the post of Freedmen's Commissioner according to the desire of the dead president. If he accepted it, it meant that he would not be in the Grand Review in command of the army with which he had fought so many battles. He consulted Sherman, and he advised him to accept the trust. But he is no man to whom glory is not dear. He hesitated, and then Sherman said, "Howard, you are a Christian; what do you care for a day's display? It will be everything to Logan to have the command; why not let

him have it?" Then came a great reply from the man whose body today is dust. "If you put it on that ground General, I yield at once." He had fought the good fight, the fight for country and for flag—yes. But a greater fight he had fought and won, that mighty universal fight in which the great Captain of the World has led the way, the fight with self, and for that one act alone we surely may raise his name to the greater glory and the grander fame of him who following his Master said these words: "I have fought the good fight," now that

✓ "The long self-sacrifice is o'er  
The great republic's victor will be seen  
no more."

## II. *I have finished the course.*

Yes he finished his course. The great war was but the beginning of his task. He was like Chinese Gordon, the great hero of the Soudan, in this that his victories in peace were no less great than his victories in war. To be Chief of the Freedmen's Bureau with his headquarters at Washington was the legacy of trust that Abraham Lincoln had left him. An empire of four and a half millions of emancipated slaves he had upon his hands, with power to feed, and educate and train them to labor and citizenship, without, at first, a dollar of appropriation from the Treasury. It was, as Sherman called it, a Hercules' task. This, to me, is the great heroic work of his life, and it was enough to test the greatest powers. As he carried on the beneficent work of feeding the starving thousands, the people began to cry out that "General Howard was feeding

niggers in idleness." As soon as the dangers of starvation were overcome, his department undertook the harder task of transporting the freedmen to where their services were wanted, where they could secure compensation for employment; finally, he entered upon the great educational enterprise whereby schools were opened and universities endowed all over the South land, and the negro was given his first chance to rise. A dollar from the government funds for every dollar given for the work by any church or society, was the plan; and, together, they built the first great educational institutions of the south. But not without calumny, abuse and misrepresentations that finally had to be met by an investigation, called for by General Howard himself, in which he was completely and victoriously vindicated and commended to Congress and the Nation. One of the elements of greatness in the policy of his administration throughout these years is undoubtedly this, that was pointed out to me this week that, trained though he was in the military school, and preeminently a soldier, he conceived and organized his educational work on the most liberal educational lines. And despite some criticisms, Superintendent Douglass, in this church last week, in a masterly exhibition of the situation, showed that he, at this late hour, is completely in sympathy with the scheme that puts the complete course of common school, high school and university within the range of the negro, which was the ideal of General Howard's great work in the South. "Howard," his critics again



said, "never would see that niggers are not white men." But in that glorious blindness he had for company not only the great leaders in the South today but also the Saviour of the world who knew not Jew or Gentile, Greek or Barbarian, bond or free, when He was estimating the powers of men. It was at Atlanta that that incident so prophetic of the final greatness of his work, that Whittier has immortalized, occurred. He was listening one day to the little negro children reading the words of Jesus and singing the songs of David in a school room in the South.

There was the human chattel  
Its manhood taking  
There in each dark, brown statue,  
A soul was waking!  
The man of many battles  
With tears his eyelids pressing,  
Stretched over those dusky foreheads  
His one-armed blessing.

And he said: Who hears can never  
Fear for or doubt you;  
What shall I tell the children  
Up North about you?  
Then ran round a whisper, a murmur,  
Some answer devising,  
And a little boy stood up: "Massa,  
Tell 'em we're rising."

Oh! black boy of Atlanta,  
But half was spoken;  
The slave's chain and the master's  
Alike are broken.  
The one curse of the races  
Held both in fetter;  
They are rising—all are rising,  
The black and white together.



Do you wonder then that, when he had to carry to the negroes of the Sea Islands the decision of the President that the lands abandoned by the Southerners were to be re-claimed from the negroes and returned to their former owners, the first great storm of bitter disappointment and opposition yielded to his leadership, and all over the building in which they were assembled the voices of the people were heard answering to his appeal "We'll trust you; we'll trust you?"

But the course of this noble life was not yet complete. First, as peace commissioner to the Apache Indians, and then, later, at the head of the Department of Columbia, by capturing Chief Joseph, he brought peace between us and the Indians, as his last act of official service to his country. Well then he might have retired to rest the remainder of his days. But the end was not yet. Gladstone, in describing the transformation that had taken place in the function of the kingship in England, said that it was in substance "a beneficial substitution of influence for power" and that the range of that influence was determined by the character, capacity, experience in affairs, and the close presence of the sovereign in the nation's life. This, I believe, indicates the nature and almost the extent of General Howard's work since he laid down his official duties. He said, when he ventured, unarmed, into the power of the Apache Indians, "This is the work given me. He that saveth his life shall lose it and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it. I have laid mine on the altar." And this

seemed literally true of all his life and work in these last days. He was pouring it out unto death; and unto death he came; but not till he had become throughout the nation known, honored and revered as a mighty influence for all that is highest and best in the nation's life and for all that his Master loved and sought to bring to the world through his Church and through such great Christian heroes such as he, who, after a life of national service, count it their highest privilege to be a witness of Him to whom he was a witness, not only in inward thought and outward deed, but with the word which he gloried to proclaim.

Ever on his mission he went up and down the land, founding, with the last days of life, that university for the mountaineers that was a memorial of love for them and a discharged trust from his departed chieftain. Ever restless, never content, his course unfinished, running still when death caught him the other day. Oh my brothers what a life to have lived, what a course to have run! Where are you, where am I in this great course which now for him, on earth at least, is complete. He would have me ask you that, I know. Are you in the middle, at the beginning, at the end? Wherever you are, will you not begin, from this day where his course is ended, to run in the same way, the way of the Master, with wide and willing service unto the Father's feet.

III. For this last testimony of the apostle was also, surely, supremely his. "*I have kept the faith.*" Oh what a glorious lesson is in this life for us young men, from that noble stand, when, at Fort Brooke, hearing several scoffers making fun of a small deformed woman who went forward to the altar in response to the appeal, the young lieutenant, as much to rebuke them as for any other reason, rose, and buttoning his military coat about him walked behind her to the front, on to those last words, that linger in our souls, spoken in the early morning in this church the other day, "Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors." Lord Melville once declared in Parliament that bad men make the best soldiers. Vicars, who was General Howard's ideal as a young man, said: "Were I ever, as leader of a forlorn hope, allowed to select my men, it would be most certainly from the soldiers of Christ; for who should fight so fearlessly and bravely as those to whom death presents no after terrors?" To this belief General Howard committed his life. He laboured unceasingly at West Point, in the campaigns of the war, and until the end as a witness and ambassador for Christ. On the hillside at Bull Run, 4000 men uncovered at his command and listened to his words, and to the Chaplain's prayer. And from the battle line he sent back word to his little son at home, "Oh, my son, do love God and serve Him! \* \* \* May God bless and keep you all for Christ's sake." At Bald Hill, as he sat motionless on his horse, while the enemy's guns were discharging, a soldier re-

Verano (1857)



marked on his attitude, "He don't seem to hear the thunder," one said motioning towards the commander, "Oh, he's praying," was the quick reply. "Wait till he's through, and then he'll go in." And in a moment he was galloping to the summit of the hill where his soldiers welcomed him with shout. To him war had no triumphs. "Only a stern, impelling sense of duty joined with great ability and discipline, made him a soldier and kept him to his profession." But all through life he kept the faith, simple, but mighty and invincible to the last, for "he had given his heart to the Purifier and his will to the Will that governs the universe." I am sure had he been asked what was the greatest boon life had given him, he would have echoed those words in which the grand old man of Edinburgh, and discoverer of chloroform, in reviewing the great gifts of God in the century gone, gave his last testimony to the university world. "I thank God most of all that while the dews of youth were still upon my life I became a friend of the peerless Son of God."

And, my brothers, you men and women of my own generation, who now must bear the arms that he has so gallantly borne and now laid down, who go forth into the thick of another fight, shall we not, in the presence of this life so nobly lived and so victoriously ended, make friends too with the peerless Son of God. I know he would say, "God speed you, young brother," if he knew, if he knows where he is in the great crowd of heavenly witnesses, that



here before God's altar in the presence of his people, I am using his life to make one more plea with you for the cause of God, and for surrender to him who is the Lord and Master of us all. I covet for you a life like this that, at the end, you also may be able to say, "I have fought the good fight. I have finished the course, I have kept the faith."

*Henceforth there is laid up for him the crown of righteousness*, which the Lord the righteous judge shall give to him at that day. Oh, if only one, two, three more lives should be added to the Kingdom of God and of his Christ because of his life and this commemoration of his death this day, surely that crown of righteousness would be lighted with brighter stars, and God, who is our judge and his, will tell him of new victories won by his name, where he is gone beyond the bound of the waste, in triumph, into the Valhalla of the heroes and, as we believe, into the city of God.