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Loyal Legion Vignettes



AN INSIGHT INTO PROFESSOR CHAMBERLAIN'S PHILOSOPHY AND ITS APPLICATION TO CURRENT THREATS FACING THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA AND THE WORLD

By Rutherford B. Johnson
RuddBaron@aol.com
(May 2003)

General, you have the soul of the lion and the heart of a woman, said General Sickel to General Chamberlain in 1865. This statement sums up the character of Professor Joshua Lawrence Chamberlain, one of the most respected officers on either side of the Civil War, before and after. This bilateral respect makes him a particularly worthy character for study regarding present-day threats.

His courage, sense of knightly honor, and portrayal of human struggle as the affirmation of ideals is made even more poignant by the fact that he was not a professional soldier. In fact, he spent most of his long life as an educator. Chamberlain, a native of Maine, was teaching rhetoric at Bowdoin College when the turmoil that was to result in the War Between the States was beginning to brew. A man of tremendous ideals, honor, and conviction, Chamberlain traveled to Augusta to offer his services to the Governor of Maine. Maine was raising regiments for the war and recruited officers from the best families of the State. Chamberlain was appointed Lieutenant Colonel of the newly-formed 20th Maine Regiment of Volunteers under Colonel Adelbert Ames, a West Pointer. Chamberlain proved himself to be a quick study and, under the tutelage of Colonel Ames, became as adept at soldiering as he was at rhetoric. Later given command of the 20th Maine, he was awarded the Medal of Honor for his unit's gallant defense of Little Round Top at the Battle of Gettysburg.

He was promoted to Major General and given the singular honor of commanding the Union contingent to receive the arms of the Confederate Army after the surrender of General Robert E. Lee. It was at this event that Chamberlain resolved to end the war with a sense of brotherly respect, just as he had fought throughout the entire war, and put the nation on a course towards reconciliation. As the Stonewall Brigade, led by General Gordon, passed by, Chamberlain gave an order to salute to Confederates in honor of their bravery during the war and in hopes for reunion. In Chamberlain's own words,

When General Gordon came opposite me I had the bugle blown and the entire line came to attention [preparing to execute the salute to each regiment]. The General was riding in advance of his troops, his chin drooped to his breast, downhearted and dejected... At the sound of that

*machine-like snap of arms, however, General Gordon started, caught in a moment its significance, and instantly assumed the finest attitude of a soldier. He wheeled his horse facing me, touching him gently with the spur, so that the animal slightly reared, and as he wheeled, horse and rider made one motion, the horse's head swung down with a graceful bow and General Gordon dropped his sword point to his toe in salutation.*¹

This event, vastly important in the history of our nation, gives valuable insight into the spirit of Chamberlain. How, then, can the nature of this spirit be applied to our present threats? Professor Chamberlain's philosophy can easily be summed in his own words, viz.,

*The inspiration of a noble cause involving human interest wide and far, enables men to do things they did not dream themselves capable of before, and which they were not capable of alone. The consciousness of belonging, vitally, to something beyond individuality, of being part of a personality that reaches we know not where, in space and time, greatens the heart to the limits of the soul's ideal.*²

Such characteristics of subordinating one's own selfish ends to the furtherance of a noble, important, and often life and death cause are sorely lacking in today's mainstream society. It is not that they do not exist, but rather that those feeling likewise are fewer today than in certain previous times, and often those feelings are greatly suppressed by popular culture. Yet, in this struggle for the preservation of freedom and indeed our very existence, such characteristics are most essential. Chief among these is moral courage and an inclination to carry out actions, when called, which, no matter how unpleasant or self-endangering, are essential to achieving victory.

Chamberlain's life was filled with many failures, despite his academic and military achievements, because he did what was morally and ethically right regardless of the consequences or what people said. Chamberlain could easily have remained a Professor throughout the war, and his colleagues preferred this. However, he chose service of his country and a greater cause (It is not intended to promote one side of the Civil War over the other in this discourse). In today's struggle, not all involved in its winning will be those in uniform on the battlefield. Though the parallels to conflicts of bygone eras are vast, this conflict is possessing of many somewhat different qualities.

Regrettably, our enemy does not possess the qualities of honor and virtue borne by both sides of the war in which Chamberlain fought and in several wars before and after. This struggle will involve the military, civilian government agencies, and indeed every citizen of the country.

It must be noted first that Chamberlain's philosophies of military strife are dissimilar to the relatively straightforward principles of other Generals, such as our own colorful, fighting General George Patton. Chamberlain's principles are far more esoteric and are an outgrowth of his own poetic sense of idealism. They, for this reason, require far more contemplation to comprehend.

To commence with the treatment of conduct by the civilian population, the foremost act must be to have the courage to continue with their lives. The terrorist factions and tyrants of the world who seek our destruction wish to accomplish this end in part by disrupting our daily lives. They envy the freedom that we hold so dear, and thus wish to rob us of it by any means they can. Doing as our President requested and living our lives is a true form of American defiance against tyranny. Participating in one a many groups, private or government, that allow one to apply one's skills to the service of one's country, be a part of this noble cause, and be prepared to serve with stout-hearted enthusiasm in the event of national emergency. We know not where the front line of combat shall be in this conflict.

Also essential to the duty of a citizen is the support of our troops overseas. Stalwart soldiers place their lives on the line for the defense of freedom of all Americans, yet often receive far less praise, support, and thanks as is due to them. As Chamberlain stated, it is a *...strange law of human*

*economics - the greater given for the least.*³ Far too often our finest men travel to far-flung reaches of the earth or the hard-won soil of our own land to shed their blood in battle for freedom, while those not remotely willing to participate in such a struggle reap the benefits. Such must not be the case. Citizens called to serve must do their duty in glad and cheerful fashion. All others must be prepared to serve if and when they are called, maintain the homeland, and participate in whatever work, either professional or volunteer, that they can in support of the war effort.

Now to discuss those who serve in uniform. Our nation's military has been weakened by political correctness, politics, and weak leadership over the past decade. Many corrections have since been made. The military, however, must never become a social experiment, a place for fairness of occupation, or a means to obtain selfish gains with no intention to provide commensurate service. Far too often citizens have joined the military to obtain money for college with no desire or intention of serving their country and keeping their word in the defense of the same, should they be so called to do. Such persons must not be allowed to cheat the taxpayer and must be made to serve. Indeed, such persons cheat themselves and every soldier in the military who, with stiffened sinews, rises to the challenges of warfare and bloodshed. However, such persons must be expunged from the service before they even begin. Only the finest and most honorable citizens with stoutest of heart must be allowed to remain.

As for the actual conduct of warfare, it must be remembered at all times that we are not dealing with ethical and noble soldiers with which and against which Chamberlain fought. Our enemy does not fight openly and with gallantry. They fight in cowardly fashion and have long since divested themselves of that divine spark with which mankind is blessed. This is not, however, a license for our troops to behave like a rabble, pillaging at will. We must not permit ourselves to be lowered to their ignoble level and must at all times conduct ourselves with that sense of honor and nobility of spirit that bore our ancestors to the glorious victories that have ensured our continued freedom and, at times, done little less than save the entire world.

Chamberlain's defense of Little Round Top, probably the most strategically important piece of land on the field at Gettysburg, is his most famous military victory and highly relevant to our situation today. He brought the 20th Maine to the top with moments to spare. After repelling several charges and running out of ammunition, Chamberlain ordered a bayonet charge down the hill and carried the day. His men summoned courage they likely did not know they possessed, rallying under their fearless commander, and defeated a brave, veteran enemy of superior numbers. We, all citizens, whether in uniform or not, whether overseas or on the homefront, must be prepared to summon all courage if we are called to participate in whatever manner in a struggle that is indeed a matter of our very existence.

As with Little Round Top, upon the battle we fight now against evil men and tyrannical dictators rests the fate of our free way of life that we so dearly cherish. Let us all, like Chamberlain, rise to the occasion, do honor to our forebears, and win the inevitable victory.

NOTES:

1. *Bayonet! Forward.* 1994. Joshua Lawrence Chamberlain. Stan Clark Military Books, Gettysburg, Pennsylvania p.236.
2. *To the Limits of the Soul's Ideal.* Patricia Finnegan, Editor.
3. *Bayonet! Forward.* 1994. Joshua Lawrence Chamberlain. Stan Clark Military Books, Gettysburg, Pennsylvania p.45.