

Chamberlain Association

... OF ...

AMERICA.



The President's Address.



BOSTON, SEPTEMBER, 1898.

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REMARKS

MADE AT THE DINNER OF THE CHAMBERLAIN
ASSOCIATION, BOSTON, ON SEPTEMBER 8, 1898,
BY GENERAL JOSHUA L. CHAMBERLAIN,
PRESIDENT OF THE ASSOCIATION.

Companions and Kindred:

We are glad to greet each other in such numbers and with such omens of good. Our date for this first reunion finds many of our associates held away from us in bodily presence by previous engagements, or by circumstances of the season. Their letters, however, give us the touch of hearts if not of hands from far and wide over the country. And from what we see around us, we are sure some covenant of inherited blessing is fulfilled in us by this high privilege.

This is a beginning. We look forward. Although judged by the spirit of zealous research so manifest, we seem to be concerned wholly with things that are long past, and to measure our importance by the distance to which we can dig up our roots in that direction, the real motive and reason of this association is the good we can do each other and

those who belong to us or with us, in the present and future time. We are slender and small in some aspects, but our sources reach back to mighty things; and we propose to increase, both largely and richly, both in content and intent, for mighty things to come.

Much is said now-a-days about the descent and ascent of man. Science would curb human pride by assuring us that we are all descended—or I believe the word ascended is permitted—from the simian tribe, whose previous best effort or efflorescence is the anthropoid ape. I should say of this introduction of new relations, as President Lincoln said to the book-agent, “For people who like that kind of a book, that is just the kind of a book they would like.” To those who are pleased with this proffer, we extend our entire consent, and yield them the ground. “*Similia similibus.*” But “*similia simiis,*”—we are not “in it.” The Chamberlain family claims descent, no doubt, from an upper story; but we do not look for our forebears in the trees. Our first parents made rather poor work of it under them. They doubtless looked up to these wonderful beings,—parodies or paradoxes of themselves,—without envy, as they reached down to them hanging in inverted order by extension of the inferior back-bone. That relation we recognize; we like back-bone; but we prefer ours

all to ourselves, and brain-end up! The new claimant to old priority has one set of locomotors the advantage of us. If he can overtake us, he is welcome on his arrival; but we will not run back after him. We will even help him to be the best possible type of his kind he can; just as we are doing for other remote fellow creepers or climbers, near and far, over the seas, or half-seas-over!

This talk about ascent and descent is very much a play upon words. Strictly speaking, there is no up and down. Things go straight forward on their own lines, unless some outward force or inward weakness bends them from it. Although we are now told that what we call straight lines are in reality curved lines, respondent to some other force than the impulsive, and that the motions of the whole universe are a returning to its goal; so for us, there is no ascent nor descent except as towards or away from the moral truth in our natures, as in the universe; all of which have their life and law in God. And the hope, the glory and joy of our career is to get back where we came from,—richer in content, indeed, counting work as worth, having gained other talents, and bringing our sheaves with us; having justified our powers and possibilities by keeping faith with them under whatever tests. And what are these ideals of the soul,—these visions and longings which draw us to something

seeming so deeply our own? Are they beckoning lights ahead? Or broken memories, or appointment and impulse given aforetime? How is it that this very "before" in place means behind in time? We march forward to get homeward. And the dream of returning is the song of the exiled soul.

That commanding reverence for ancestry in some races of the far East may seem to us like superstition. We are familiar with certain forms of it in the faiths of old Egypt and Greece and Rome. Something of it is seen in all races, and its strength is by no means in proportion to their dullness of spirit. This deep sentiment in the finer minds of China and Japan interests us because of its source in what we may call their metaphysics,—their peculiar Buddhistic conception of the nature of the soul, regarding it not as single, but as composite and complex—the necessary result of manifold thought and action of previous lives innumerable. This is something quite beyond and different from the doctrine of "transmigration of souls." This is a little better, I think, than to ascribe the soul to previous determinations in chemistry and molecular physics, as some modern masters in science insist.

But is there not, after all, something like this Oriental notion in our conception of the growth of character,—not confusing this with soul? Do we not see that character is largely the resultant of

almost infinite imperceptible vibrations from all worlds with which we are in relations, traversing our spirits and leaving their impress? Hence we are so careful about environment. We know, too, that we are complex. We live in each other. Our sorrows and our joys reach beyond our single selves. Personal sacrifices and triumphs do not find their full accounting in the individual subject, but are related to a continuity and oneness of life in which each is dimly conscious of the whole.

We reject the Oriental belief because it impairs moral identity and responsibility; but we recognize the fact that the soul is subject to some kind of relationship, and that there is a mysterious continuity through parentage. The ancient laws of peace and war recognized a certain mutual responsibility among members of one family; and I am not sure but we ourselves do so, on the small scale if not on the large. And the mystic enhancement of power in the mother's bible and the father's sword brings out a new law of values not known to political economy or to any physical law whatever. Hence we are careful, too, about heredity, and have reasons enough of our own to justify that reverence for ancestry which characterizes these meditative races of the East.

The law from Sinai recognizes the covenant of the generations. But it is grounded on far different

reasons from the metaphysical. The sanctions,—the motives, certainly,—presented to us rest almost entirely on physical conditions and practical consequences. This law enjoins filial reverence as a condition of length of days, and the peace and prosperity they betoken and make effective. This was given as a law for nations; regarding the honor of the family and the sanctity of home as the basis of human society. No doubt obedience to this commandment on the great scale has had more striking vindications than appear in the mere individual. And I wish our nation would take heed that the loss of reverence is the loss of integrity of soul, making way for inroads of alien and evil forces that would turn aside the true inheritance and cut off the natural course of blessing. It is a safeguard of life to have something to honor, to reverence, to hold sacred and keep unsullied.

We hold, therefore, that honorable lineage is a rightful presumption and guarantee of character. And the habitual cherishing of such a thought tends to make it an active power for good, as incentive and guide of conduct, in whatever sphere or service. Hence we study to learn more of our origin, with assured faith that we shall find something honorable in it, and something making for nobility before us as well as behind us. We associate ourselves by token of a name. But names stand for things.

They serve to mark, if not the essence or central idea, at least some striking peculiarity of objects, whether this be a feature, action, attribute, office or locality. A name is certainly something more than a number—a mere mark of separation; it is also mark of characteristic identity.

In our case the name betokens an office, and one of trust and responsibility. In our day and language it has some applications that confuse its significance. But its historical origin is clear, and of singular interest. Deep-colored threads of manifold history are woven into it. Its etymology makes manifest that it has come to us through the French, and also that it has taken on a German impress; while we recognize in the substance of the word the Latin, or perhaps older even than this, the Greek “kamera,” the word for chamber, the radical idea of which is a vaulted place. This Latin form remains in Spanish, Portuguese and Italian,—“camera” or “camara.” We also have the direct Latin word in English, with rather limited application.

But what kind of a lingo is this which makes the derivative “camarlingo” in Italian, “camarlengo” in Spanish, and “camerlengo” in Portuguese? How got in here that old High German *lenc*,—itself a curious compound, the *l* denoting frequency and the *enc* or *ing* marking some personal relation

to the thing signified by the main stock word,—as here, an attendant of the chamber; in what station, whether high or low, being determined not by the word but by its associations, in social and even political conditions? The overreaching Germans had taken this word camera from the conquered Southern peoples, and at a time when it already showed two marks of the popular transformation which since produced the languages of southern Europe known as the Romance, as is seen in the Pompeiian inscriptions in the first century of the Christian era. The short, unaccented vowel in the penult syllable disappeared, and a final unaccented vowel also disappeared, or was represented by a mute *e*, whatever the original vowel,—that poor little knock-about unaccented *e*, so easily dropped when you didn't like him, and so easily made to stand when you wanted something which wasn't much! This would give “camr”—a combination the German could not get over so easily as he could the Rhine, so took for a ferryman that easy-going *e*, and put in another *m* to make him stay there. This makes the German word “kammer,” and putting on to that the *lenc*, makes the old High German derivative, the feudal “kamerlenc,” later becoming “kämmerling.” This word the conquering Germans bore back to the Mediterranean shores, where we see it taken up by the Southern tongues

each in a fashion of its own. Early in the Provençal we find it quite German, "camarlenc," and soon "chamarlenc,"— prototype of our own "chamberlain."

This shows how the letter *l* with its final syllable got into the word. But how did the letter *b* get in—a letter nowhere appearing in the Southern or Northern forms of the word, but which in French strangely comes to take the place of the middle *e* in them? This gives us a look at the effect of local cross-currents on a passing language. The mighty outflowing of dissolving Rome flattened down with its own *débris* and spread to discharge itself by more mouths than the Tiber or the Po, the Rhone or the Rhine. First to the street Latin; then taking its way by forces of nature more than by military or political direction, or anything in the will of man. This "camera" was tossed about among the differing dialects of repopled old Gaul, some of which, as the Provençal in the South, and the Picard and speech of the Ile de France in the North, did not tolerate the junction of the *m* and *r* brought about by dropping the intermediate *e*, as we have seen, in such spoken word as "camra"; and by a physiological "law,"—in which physical geography and psychic race-tendency had no doubt their part,—required the facilitating flux of the letter *b* to help mix these liquids to suit them. So we find in these

dialects, for instance, “cambra” (Provençal), and “cambre” (Picard).

But what about this *ch* at the beginning, with a new sound, neither Latin nor Spanish,—unheard of before? We have remarked the occasional form “chamarlenc” in the old Provençal. This heralded what became a settled “law” in French. It is well known that in this language the initial *ca* of the Latin is replaced by *ch*,—usually attended by the softening of the *a* into *e*; as in the familiar instances, “cheval” from *caballus*, “chef” from *caput*, “cher” from *carus*, “chez” from *casa*,—“chez moi,”—house of me,—at my house. But observe that when this initial comes before two consonants, the *a* stands, not changed into *e*,—as in “charme” from *carmen*. And in the Isle of France, where was brewed the modern French language, this law of the *ch* prevailed.

And observe the reflex influence of this upon the German. For that great king of the Franks,—who in the fifth century gave the name to France,—this thoroughly German Emperor, with his capitals at Aachen and Ingelheim, this Karl Magnus, was to the Trouveres of France, “Charlemagne.” Reciprocally, in old High German of even earlier days, we find “chamerlinc” grafted from the French.

At length the law of language was reversed. Or rather, alien forces which could not affect the vital

law of birth came to determine what finished form should have most vitality and power. The election of Hugh Capet, Duke of France,—meaning then only the region tributary to the little island on which Paris stands,—to be king of all the turbulent provinces scarcely held together under Charlemagne himself, made all those provinces France, and Paris their capital; and this set in motion the causes which made the dialect of the little Ile de France prevail over those of Normandy and Picardy in the north, and Burgundy in the east, and in the course of events overcame the beautiful language of the south—the Languedoc, the Provençal of the Troubadours,—and made itself once for all the French Language.

So we have our name accounted for: the stuff of it from old Rome; fused in the reactions of race and circumstance; forged and welded beneath the thunder-blows of Goth and Frank and Hun; baptized and tempered in the fire-flooded fields and weird smithies of Northman and Saxon; emblem of trusted office in the appointments of feudal courts old and wide as the empire of Charlemagne; brought at last to England by the Normans mingled of so many bloods. Hence its place in the literatures of all races taking manly part in the evolution of modern history. The track runs red, with love or blood, through all the story.

I have tried your patience. You will smile to be informed that you have been spared much: hence you may pardon me one or two reflections.

It is not a pleasant suggestion that words—or rather, the users of them—show a tendency to descend from their nobler signification to the lower and less worthy. Is it that the nobler ideas decline with what we call the advance of civilization? But it is worthy of note that this name of ours has strangely held its dignity. In Rome, in early ages of the Church, the *camarlingo* was treasurer of the Pope, chief of his staff, and in his absence president of the Holy See. In Venice the *Camarlinghi* were treasurers of the Republic in the days of her ancient glory, as the beautiful palace near the Rialto testifies today. In Spain, up to the time of the kings of Arragon, the courtly name and office held high place together, and the name held it when the office had gone, “cased in cedar and wrapped in solemn gloom.” The German only among modern tongues, as if doubting the service of this “*lenc*,” has braced up its imperialism by the punctilious “*kammerherr*.”

The idea of trust and guardianship reaches naturally to highest associations. It was said of old, “*Seest thou a man faithful in business,*” that is, in affairs of trust, “*he shall stand before kings.*” The modern applications of the word in English return

to the original Roman office,—the quæstor, guardian of the public funds, who opened and closed the treasury, where too were kept the standards of the Legions. If the treasure-keeper does not hold his ancient honor with us, it is because we have made treasures of lower things.

It is surely an “augmentation of honor” that this name, rooted deep in Latin, and growing up and out with imperial Rome and empires succeeding and exceeding, should have held its integrity through all the vicissitudes of times and peoples and lands and tongues. Is it too much to infer that those who bore it bore it well? It may be that the associations of the name have a reflex influence on consciousness and character.

High-sounding, too, are these names in themselves,— a matter not to be passed over as trivial,— in all the tongues of that age of chivalry and state:

“Whose muse, full of high thought's invention,
Doth, like itself, heroically sound.”

Now for a few minor things to lighten our strain. We find the name in all spellings at a very early time,—among others, exactly as we have it, “chamberlain,” in the French writers of the times of the crusades, and in the “middle English” of that day the spelling “chaumberlein.” The present French

form, "chambellan," is the very same, only assimilating the liquids *l* and *r*, making *ll*,— the *l* sound drinking up the *r*.

Amusingly enough, or possibly to mortify our worldly pride, and keep us back from "presumptuous sins," the word "cambrelan" in modern colloquial French is applied to a lodger who lives in one chamber. The word, you will remark, is not a true French form. It has the letter-form of the provincial Picard; not that of the princely Ile de France. But whether it marks one who can afford to have a room to himself and not in common with others, or one who can afford only a single room and not a suite, we accept the issue. In the former case it distinguishes one who would preserve personal delicacy and self-respect; in the other, it suggests the honesty that refuses to live beyond its means,— the honor that scorns to live a lie.

Fair as has been the lineage of the name, I have not found the persons representing it unworthy. Some there doubtless have been who have fallen short of their mark; some who have failed to obtrude their merit or perhaps their rights; some who have calmly suffered injustice, more from proud reticence than from meekness; some punished for the misfortune of being found on the right side at the wrong time. Of such obsolete religion, doubtless, most of them, as to prefer others to them-

selves; but waiving this virtue when manhood is called to the field of arms. The crusader's cross and scallop-shell and palmer's branch on so many old armorial bearings prove that they were not unheard of in Holy Land.

No names of theirs are found on the list of the 72,000 "sturdy beggars" hung by Henry VIII, Head of the Church, as the lesson of political economy illustrating his reign, or yet among the lines of ennobled favorites, endowed by spoils of suppressed monasteries and schools; but finding other exaltation wherever right is to be maintained or wrong cast down, when their line is ended with the halter, the axe, or the faggot, strangely out-ranking the sword! It matters not much:

"Whether upon the scaffold high,
Or in the battle's van,
The noblest place for man to die
Is where he dies for man."

But it is not needful to die in order to be noble. It is well-doing that deserves the guerdon. And for this the opportunities were never more ample, nor more worthily met than now. Nor has our name lost prestige nor our blood lost color. In England, in America, in India, in Armenia, in Hawaii, and Japan, and the islands of all the seas, the name stands not indeed for ministers to kings,

but for ministers to man. And I am bound in truth to say that I have found the women of this blood singularly true and brave and strong of soul; needing no complement nor duplication to make them more than ministers,—representatives and examples of what is noblest in manhood. One need but look on this assembly,—on this list of membership,—to comprehend what royal office is in these days committed to man in the guarding of treasures and the fulfilling of trusts. And if we discern the signs of the times, we see what place there is yet for names to be written high on the rolls of the world's redeemers: where not by “deeds of bold emprise,” then, in whatever calling, by strenuous soul, outgoing love, outgiving worth,—steps and hands leading Godward!