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MR. CHAPIN'S LECTURE ON MODERN CHIVALRY.— Corinthian Hall was thronged on Friday evening to hear the fourth lecture of the course before the Franklin Institute, which was delivered by the **REV. E. H. CHAPIN**, the distinguished pulpit orator. This lecture, upon the subject of "Modern Chivalry," has been delivered in many cities, in various portions of the Union. It has everywhere been received with unbounded applause. The *Rochester Democrat* in speaking of the delivery in that city says it was "eloquent, abounding in happy sentiments, pleasant satire and warm thoughts. The energetic delivery of the speaker set off the discourse with excellent effect."

He commenced his lecture by announcing that he proposed to speak of Modern Chivalry — the chivalry of our own age. He did not mean to show that this was an age of chivalry, but to point out and dwell upon such features of the chivalrous spirit as did present. In an investigation of this nature, exaggeration and disparagement were alike extremes to be avoided. "It is better to hope too much, than to disparage all, better to be too sanguine, than to discourage effort, or still worse, to turn back the hands on the dial. It is good to think well of our time and age, and is set over against its vices and defects, its possibilities and opportunities." He would premise that some excellence could be traced in all periods of man's history, and in the nature of this excellence all were essentially alike. There has been an age of chivalry, so called, an age of valor and brave deeds. It lies in the realm of romance, and extends along our horizon like a belt of clouds, kindling with poetic light, and suggestive of a realm of beauty, now far away; but if we carry closer the investigation, we find that there are in reality no abrupt distinctive features no common in our own or any other period. The nineteenth century has produced telegraphs, daguerreotypes, patent p---[?], &c.

In contemplating our own age, there are two prominent prevailing errors: the one the overweening pride in the 19th century, which vaults its progress and boasts its inventions and discoveries; while the other, its reaction and reverse, sees only the sad and bad of an age it deems empty of glory, merely advancing, not ascending. The age of chivalry is sorrowfully contrasted with ours, in which the sharp outlines of science and learning leave few recesses for the exercise of faith and imagination, and everywhere prevails the material

grossness of politics and peddling, and the horde of vulgar interests overpowering and over~~d~~owing [?] all else. Confessing this, still the essence of what was admirable then, crops out even now, with the same characteristics it then possessed. In the outset, we should take into account the exaggerations resulting from distance, which is history, as in the natural world, "lends enchantment." If **WE** are not what we should be, **THEY** may be less than they seem, and nearness, which to us shows the errors and defects of our own times, might disenchant chivalry of the charms to which its deformities may be softened by the lapse of centuries. They had many bad things, and the age of goodness was as far as ever. He would make no parallels by a balance of evils, but wished to show that the truly chivalrous was confined to no age or time.

Macaulay had said that as "civilization advances, poetry declines." Certainly in the age long gone, the passions, with their workings, lore, religion, and other objective themes, were sung in strains yet unsurpassed by the kings of song, from thrones where few may hope to sit beside them, and their works still tower like mountains, the culminations of poetry, few in number, like the mountains of the earth, yet sufficient perhaps to feed the poetic streams of all succeeding ages from their eternal springs. But the legitimate subjective themes of Poetry are not thinned out by science. Myth and fable may have vanished with the increase of light, but a small segment of our sky is yet fully illuminated, while, beyond, nature opens yet new and unexplored fields. With us, our country itself, its history, past and present, its future; our land, in its rivers, lakes and mountains, teeming cities, thronged settlements, and unbroken wilderness, are themes of true poetic inspiration which all may feel and acknowledge, though utterance may be given to few. It has been urged that the great epochs have been co-ordinate with mental darkness, that when literature advanced, glory faded. With the darkness of the earlier ages came chivalry—in our own time of advanced knowledge we have no faith, no imagination.—Many say that as the world knows more, it grows worse, whereas, in fact, knowledge tends to the increase of humility, wrong cannot stand cloaked before it, and selfishness is ashamed—It lights up the nooks and crannies of our nature, penetrates the crust of nationality, and discerns in the heart of every fellow man of whatever age or clime, the possession of common nerves and blood, passions and emotions. If it makes our own age appear worse, it is because the evil is made to appear in stronger and clearer light, and not because there is really more of it existing.

Among the knight errant of this day, he said, are the politicians who wander from party to party, and office to office, often bearing, like St. Dennis, their head under their arm, and like Micawber, "waiting for something to turn up." Then there are our "fast" young men, who run their tilts in the billiard room, and spend their lives in dissipation and sensuality. Some of them raise a moustache upon the upper lip, in order that they may go in mourning for their brains.

The spirit of the age is hasty—we ride in haste and our steamers go hissing to the sepulchre—our children are jerked through school, barely rubbing against the various studies, and retaining little if any of them—we have coats that look as if their skirts were left

behind in our haste, and bonnets that never are able to catch up with the heads that wear them.

Ours is an age of steam, and amid the fruits of the undue haste everywhere too manifest, we find commercial embarrassment and disaster, terrible casualties on land and sea, and the other teeming consequences entailed upon snatching the fancied immediate good, to the neglect of permanent future blessing. But aside from and superior to all its faults, our age retains all the nobleness of the past, when judged not by symbols, but by men and spirit. In any age, even the most corrupt, there have not been lacking men to protest against the prevailing evils, and when wanting for time in the decadence of an empire, they have sprung up in faraway lands, as the Goth swept in a resistless tide from the north, confronting and contrasting his chastity and valor with the enervated and decayed remnant of the Roman Empire. Chivalry is in the spirit and deed, and seats with no epoch. Many events and heroes of modern times command all the admiration we present upon the most daring feats of chivalry, so called. Sidney, Miller, Lawrence, were heroes, and such heroes are breaking out upon us every day.



Who shall say there is no chivalry in our day, with his eye on the helmsman of Lake Erie who directed his vessel to the shore though his arm cracked in the flame; or on the lad who stood firing the signal gun on the ill-fated *Arctio* till the waters closed over him; or on the soldiers on the *Birmingham*, who fixed their *f[e/o?]u de [fole?]* in the very face of death? They need no plumes nor parchments to make their deeds chivalrous. What nobler chivalry has any age ever seen than that exhibited by that noble expedition who for the sake of others have pierced the polar snow? The monster they encounter presents his icy jaws to destroy them. The traveler who for the sake of science penetrates the wilderness and the desert, is not excelled by the heroes of any age. Not in the 12th century nor in the 19th, not in the whole range of Bayards and Black Princes has there been found a nobler man than he who for the truth and righteousness, exerts his noblest powers.

The lecturer very humorously alluded to the fashions of the day. He produced much merriment in the course of his remarks.

Literature is winning even from the darkest lines of life a tribute to virtue and honor. Science, by its achievements, is knitting the whole world into a common humanity. This is not the age of discovery, as was that of Kepler, Newton and Columbus; but it is fruitful in the applications of advanced science to the benefit of man in all conditions of life. The lecturer then proceeded to show how a man may best employ the advantages furnished by our age. He would prefer a fanatic to the cold, hard critic, ever searching, scalpel in hand, for the morbid and distorted. The true man works on the faith and valor, constant with his own time, of necessity, because he cannot, if he would, turn to any other, willingly, since he finds it full of generous impulses and sympathies. We must look upon the sphere of history as a great workshop, where we are not to look for order and perfection. We should shun the impracticable. The traitor who runs away, is far less injurious to his party than he who

lingers only to cavil and find fault. Quite as bright a halo invests him who earnestly seeks and follows the available good, as ever beamed about knight errant or crusader. True, we have now, as there was in every age, **lumpish** [?] masses of humanity, that do but as any animals can, and tell as mere machines—but there are those, who may and do grow by contemplating and seeking out ideal goodness.—Any man may discharge his protest against the wrong, and lend his pulse-beat to the right, and all such, whether toiling at loom or anvil, or foremost in the field of public life, are truly deserving the cross of the Legion of Honor. It is truly an inspiring **light** [sight?], when a lofty valor is joined with advantageous gifts and splendid opportunities. When such an one unfurls his banner on the side of justice, he contains the spirit of all ages. Such an one is the true knight. This is a chivalrous spirit. He is a servant of God’s truth and a benefactor of his face, and will receive a rich reward for his philanthropy.

This is but a poor sketch of Mr. CHOPIN’S eloquent production. The lecture has undoubtedly cost the author much time and study. While all the previous lectures of the course have been excellent, we must pronounce this effort by Mr. C. the ablest thus far during the present season.

The next lecture will be delivered on Thursday evening of this week by Rev. THOMAS STAKE KING, of Boston.

Page 3: “Who shall say there is no chivalry in our day, with his eye on the helmsman of Lake Erie who directed his vessel to the shore **though his arm cracked in the flame**;...?”

“**The Helmsman of Lake Erie:**” “Crouching as far back as he could, he [=John Maynard] held the wheel firmly with his left hand, **till the flesh shriveled, and the muscles cracked in the flame**; and then he stretched forth his right, and bore the agony without a scream or a groan.”
- *Poughkeepsie Journal & Eagle*, July 19, 1845, p. 1, c. 6

Transcriber’s Note: Rev. Chopin’s lecture not only refers directly to the anonymous 1845 prose sketch but also assumes that it is not fiction but fact. Rev. Chapin’s lecture was presented only nine years after the first publication of the sketch. – Norman Barry

For an excellent photograph of Rev. E. H. Chopin, cf. Image ID# C754C049: <http://www.old-picture.com/mathew-brady-studio/Reverend-Chapin-H-E.htm>

Corinthian Hall in Boston: cf. <http://www.columbianlodge.org/about-us/tour/corinthian.html>