

HENRY ERICSSON

1861 - 1947

Rose Hill Chapel
February 24, 1947

Rev. Julius Lincoln:

Three sources of material are at hand as a guide in tracing the career of Henry Ericsson, in whose name we are today assembled in this memorial chapel for the final rites. Two of these sources are authentic volumes, one very, very old, the other a quite recent publication. In the former we read of a great Master seated on a Mount, addressing a vast multitude that was astonished at his teaching. Summarizing all that had been said, the speaker concluded as follows: "Therefore, whosoever heareth these sayings of mine and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock and the rain descended and the floods came and the winds blew and beat upon that house and it fell not for it was founded upon a rock."

The second book, dated 1942 is entitled "Sixty Years a Builder", an autobiography of Henry Ericsson, 377 pages of printed evidence of building upon the Rock of Integrity, a character exemplified by the work of his hands and commended by the City of Chicago, in which he

lived during his long productive career. The challenge issued by this builder of sixty years, as contained in the epilog of the book, still stands and so far is unanswered. It reads: "If there is a crack in a wall or a breach in a foundation of any of the many structures I have built, complaint of it has never come to me." Could we wish for a stronger testimonial of the man, truly a builder upon the solid Rock!

A third source of helpfulness in sketching the life of this friend are the so called intangibles, defined by lexicographers as "not corporeal", but none the less as real as the soft caresses of a zephyr or the beam of a distant star, fond memories of the ideal home-life of a happy family, the founding parents, the daughters and sons, and grandchildren, indeed a blissful unit.

In the book in which Henry Ericsson "being dead yet speaketh", the opening chapter is a wandering back in memory to the scenes of his boyhood and youth in Moheda, Sweden, where he was born August 3rd 1861. Tender references are made to his father and mother, and of his brothers and sisters he writes: "They added precious compensations to my life" - another evaluation of intangibles, among which Henry Ericsson also included the religious tone of the parish and the influence of the

outstanding spiritual leaders of that day. The words of the inscription on the chandelier in the parish church were memorized by the little lad: "I will go into Thy House with burnt offerings; I will pay Thee my vows, which my lips have uttered." Henry Ericsson was ever a man of his word.

The fundamental value of the atmosphere in the locality of his nativity and early training was never forgotten by Henry Ericsson and one of his happiest moments was in the summer of 1924, when with his wife and four daughters, he trod that familiar sod again, after an absence of 42 years.

Opportunities in his chosen trade of carpenter were offered to Henry Ericsson in his homeland, but America beckoned and together with brother Charles he embarked for the new world, arriving in Chicago March 31st 1882.

An interesting observation is made by Henry Ericsson on the landing in New York at Castle Garden. He recalled that thirty years earlier in that very building Jenny Lind had enraptured her first American audience. The twenty-one year old Swedish immigrant could not dream that 57 years later, His Royal Majesty the King of Sweden would bestow a highly prized decoration on Henry Ericsson, the Builder, for creating a shrine to

preserve the memory of the Swedish Nightingale in the American Swedish Historical Museum in Philadelphia, an Institution of which he was one of the founders and member of its Board until his death.

Henry Ericsson's first home in Chicago was with his Uncle Lind, who, on the young man's second day in the city (April 1-1882) asked him, "Henry, what would you like to see?" The instant reply was: "Big buildings!"

We now quote from the autobiography: "On Monroe Street, I beheld a miracle being wrought, the Montauk Building was rising up to its third story - seven more were to pierce the sky - the highest building so far undertaken. I spoke to no one. I wondered where I could take hold. I did not envision myself building structures that would outmode the Montauk before the decade ended. Nor did I dream that when my sons would join me, we should erect buildings, four times the height of the Montauk, into whose foyers the Montauk might have been placed as an exhibit of the first skyscraper in Chicago.

Returning to the Montauk, I repeated these lines:

"There's a Divinity that shapes our ends,
Rough hew them how we will."

Henry Ericsson had found himself. The list of

important buildings erected by the Henry Ericsson Company is impressive:

The Monon 1889, 14 stories, tallest in Chicago at that time.

The Manhattan 1890 (first 16-story building in Chicago):

The Continental Illinois Bank.

U. S. Naval Training Center - Great Lakes.

The Sheet Rolling Mill - La Grange for Aluminum Co. of America

U. S. Post Office & Court House - Columbus, Ohio.

St. Thomas Housing Project, Chicago.

The Pittsfield Building.

Chicago Motor Club.

Roosevelt Theater.

Erlanger Theater.

Hibbard Spencer Bartlett Building.

City Hall Square Building.

The Garland Building.

The Century Building.

The North Pier Terminal Warehouse.

This record from a young immigrant's vision and modest beginning, growing steadily into monumental dimensions, focused attention of officialdom and citizenry in Chicago on the man, whose name headed the

Henry Ericsson Company.

A stirring and general demand had arisen for revision of the building code, for condemnation of dilapidated buildings and for a cleansing of sordid conditions, which had given Chicago an unsavory reputation through the land by reports in newspapers and magazines. In that critical moment Mayor Carter Harrison appointed Henry Ericsson Commissioner of Buildings with authority to go ahead. The record of his accomplishments in that office reads like the story of a Holy Crusade.

Neither intimidations, threats nor overtures of compromise of any sort could swerve this builder on the Rock from his duty. He went straight ahead toward the goal he had set - A New Chicago! The stamp of official and popular approval was impressed upon the efficiency of Henry Ericsson as Commissioner of Buildings and as a most useful and worthy citizen.

Such has been the public career of the man now gone to rest. It was a life of stress and strain, physically and mentally, whether in the political arena, or in the highly competitive field of building, but the equanimity of this man held. Compensation in the terms of relaxation, peace and true happiness was found in an ideal home-life, which began when Henry Ericsson and his bride Lena Johnson were joined in marriage - a perfect

union that continued until Thanksgiving Day 1939 - 55 years - when the beloved wife and mother of their seven children, was taken away.

Those of us, who have had the opportunity of looking in on that family scene in the Surf Street home, saw in it the motif for a master's painting. In moving language it has been described by Henry Ericsson himself in these words: "I now come to the side in my life in which I have been a most fortunate and happy man - the realm of wife and children, of home and family. Houses are merely the scaffolding of our homes. It was the mother, whose sons and daughters rose up to call her blessed, who made home for us, her care for and guidance of our children, her joy in life, her faith in its possibilities and her unshakable trust in God, that constituted home for us."

The very last sentence in the 377 pages of Henry Ericsson's autobiography indicates the leaning of his true heart: "I trust I have been as good a father as I believe I have been a builder."

Seven children rise up to call their mother and father blessed - blessed and reunited forever - and now and forever enshrined in the affections of these sons and daughters:

Walter E., Florence Prather, Clarence E.,
Martha Leverone, Dewey, Hazel Theis and
Virginia Olson,

a circle that has been increased by sixteen grandchildren. Two sisters, Mrs. John Hall and Mrs. Hanna Keeler, and one brother, William, still remain of the family of Carl Ericsson, Moheda, Sweden.

The Henry Ericsson Company has been a unique Corporation, a perfect partnership of father and the three sons, a striking example of solidarity, a Company of mutual deference and understanding, of paternal and filial regard, and of vast accomplishment.

Henry Ericsson passed away peacefully at Miami, Florida, February 19th in his 85th year.

His epitaph has been chiseled by the steady hand of the Master, who described the wise builder:

"Well done thou good and faithful servant."

And now the benediction of God upon this assembly and hour!

The Lord bless thee and keep thee; The Lord make His face shine upon thee and be gracious unto thee, the Lord lift up his countenance upon thee and give thee peace.

Amen.

Holy Scripture read:

John 11:25

Psalm 23

Psalm 121

Isaiah 40: 28-31

The Prayer from "A Service Book"

Almighty God, who in the time of our shadow and darkness canst be our only true and lasting light, look upon us thy sad children with thy constant mercy, and give unto us the spirit of understanding promised by thy dear Son. When our eyes no longer behold what we have loved, and when we listen for the footsteps of those who have gone out of our sight, and hear them not, what can we do but turn to thee? And when our hearts fail us, and we sigh for that which cannot be, and no traveler comes back from that far country, and there are none to comfort us, make us to trust in thee. Then comfort our souls with the words of thy Son: "I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also." Give us this comfort of Christ through the Spirit of Truth, in whom grant us all to abide for evermore. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

From "A Book of Offices and Prayers"

We seem to give him back to thee, dear God, who gavest him to us. Yet as thou didst not lose him in giving so we have not lost him by his return. Not as the world giveth, givest thou, O lover of souls! What thou givest thou takest not away; for what is thine is ours always, if we are thine. And life is eternal; and love is immortal; and death is only a horizon; and a horizon is nothing save the limit of our sight.

Lift us up, therefore, strong Son of God, that we may see further; cleanse our eyes, that we may see more clearly; draw us closer to thyself that we may know ourselves nearer to our beloved who are with thee. And while thou dost prepare a place for us, prepare us for that happy place, that where they are, and thou art, we too may be. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

SINGING

At Chapel:

Hymn: "Abide with me" - Craftsmens' Quartet

Solo: "The Lord's Prayer" - John Clifton

Hymn: "End of a Perfect Day" -Quartet

At Grave: "Goodnight" - Quartet

Committal Service by Officiating Clergyman -
Rev. Julius Lincoln

"Cherishing memories that are forever sacred;
Sustained by a faith that is stronger than death;
And comforted by the hope of a life that shall endless be,
We commit to the ground all that is mortal of this our
friend.
Earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust."

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