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DISCOURSE

ON THE

Life of Honorable Henry Clay.

BY W. H. MACFARLAND, ESQ.

DELIVERED AT THE REQUEST OF THE COMMITTEE OF THE CITY OF RICHMOND.

[Published by request of the Committee.]

RICHMOND:
H. K. ELLYSON, PRINTER, MAIN STREET.
1852.

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CORRESPONDENCE.

RICHMOND, JULY 27, 1852.

DEAR SIR:—On behalf of the Committee, and in compliance with the general wish, I have the honor to request a copy of your beautiful oration on the death of Mr. Clay for publication.

Very truly, yours,

JAMES LYONS, *Chairman.*

To WM. H. MACFARLAND, Esq.

RICHMOND, JULY 29, 1852.

DEAR SIR:—I have the honor to place at your disposal, a copy of my remarks on Mr. Clay, made at the public request, for which you so obligingly apply.

The shortness of the interval allowed to prepare the address, and the little of that left by business at my disposal, will excuse some of its imperfections.

I am yours, very truly, &c.,

WM. H. MACFARLAND.

JAMES LYONS, Esq., &c., &c., &c.

DISCOURSE.

It needs no voice to interpret the contrast to its ordinary aspect, which our city this day presents. The solemn procession, the grave assembly, the touching indications of subdued emotion, which meet us on every side, proclaim with sympathetic power, above the reach of studied phrase, that a strong and cherished affection has been wounded, cast down and broken up. The emotion which, as by a single pulsation, has pervaded the heart of the entire nation, is witnessed here in the tokens and emblems in which a sincere and universal grief may vent its wailings. It is right that it is so. It would imply a fearful levity, ignorance of the true security and glory of a State, a low and depraved spirit, if the nation marked not by lamentation the death of a statesman, whose example and counsels had put her forward in the high career to permanent, solid, expansive success. It is an occasion to draw forth from the citizens of a free State, the plaintive vehemence of Israel's King—"O my Father, my Father! the chariot of Israel, and the horsemen thereof!" And if any one portion of the citizens more than another may thus express their lamentation, it is those who were allied to the revered dead by his birth, and by having furnished the theatre of his youthful training and of his earliest efforts.

HENRY CLAY is no more. "After life's fitful fever he sleeps well." The coming event had cast its melancholy shadow before it, and we were prepared in a measure for the sad announcement. But so long had he been prominent in the public mind, and to such an extent was he confided in and relied upon, that we do not realize the startling truth in all its affecting reality. And therein consists the magnitude of the nation's loss. Even now

did any great question arise, of national policy, or of constitutional law, we would find ourselves clinging to the delusion, that the great statesman was at his post. The fearful agitations of his time will and must return upon us, changed it may be in outward form, but fierce and turbulent as those with which he victoriously contended; and who then shall take his place, and emerge from the portentous excitement with a message of glad tidings! True, there survive him those who were his peers—statesman of mature wisdom and intrepid patriotism—to whom the country may look, as has been its wont, with pride and hope. And then, we may rely on the same Divine Providence which hitherto has so bountifully blessed our country, to provide for coming trials, by raising up men competent to meet them. Yet, so natural was it for the illustrious deceased to lead in great emergencies, and so cheerfully did others give place to him, that we of this generation cannot expect to look upon his like again.

HENRY CLAY is no more. The voice so often heard above the din of discord and faction, and which discord and faction was ever unable to resist or elude, is silenced. The stately form, the majestic mein, the composed and resolute air, in whose presence modest merit gathered confidence, and venal presumption was abashed, live only now in memory. "There has happened to him the great event, which finishes the honors and glory of life." It came, as with epic unity, to crown the cherished end and object of his being. His triumph over the grave was linked with the triumph of his unremitting labors in behalf of the Union, the master solicitude and object of his life. As was said on a similar occasion, if we had the power, we could not wish to reverse this dispensation of Providence.

It was his rare fortune to possess the homage alike of all classes and conditions; and to impress his opinions on every class with the same ready success. The lettered and the unlettered, the ambitious and the humble, were alike happy to repose on his authority. It was not so much his eloquence, high as was its order, which won upon the general admiration, and fixed him immoveably in the general confidence; but his unshrinking tenacity,

the sternness of his principles, and the ardor with which he asserted them,—too resolute under his convictions of duty, ever to consider what might happen to himself. Yes, his ascendancy over all classes, was a voluntary tribute to the elevation of his aims, and the open, earnest, onward manner in which he proceeded to accomplish them.

“Statesman, yet friend to truth! of soul sincere,
Of action faithful, and in honor clear,
Who broke no promise, serv'd no private end,
Who gained no title, and who lost no friend.”

The career of Mr. CLAY, consistent and in harmony with itself, as it was in its aims, and the motives which at all times controlled him, exhibited in its steady and upward growth, a reality as surprising and beautiful as ever warmed a poet's fancy. Here there was contrast,—novel, strong, yet majestic and inspiring contrast. There was nothing to identify the early with the matured man, save only the lineaments and endowments with which God had distinguished him. All things else,—his rank, fame, influence, were all his own, his by a heaven-descended title, being what his own steady and unaided purpose had achieved.—These nothing but a prophet's vision could have detected in the circumstances of his obscure and friendless youth. We have from his own lips the effect of the retrospect upon himself. “When,” said he, “I look back on my humble origin, left an orphan too young to have been conscious of a father's smiles and caresses, with a widowed mother surrounded by a numerous offspring, in the midst of pecuniary embarrassments, without fortune, without friends, without patrons, I have reason to be satisfied with my public career.”

It has been truly said, that he was a living tradition, connecting his own times with the great epoch of our history. Born the 12th of April, 1777, and reflecting faithfully the spirit of that heroic age, he seemed to connect us nearer with it. Though too young to appear in the memorable scenes, he was not too young to shape his aspirations by the illustrious examples before him. It was, indeed, an heroic age, above and beyond comparison,

heroic, for its actors, and the aims which inspired them. The very atmosphere in which men lived, was instinct with the elements of a high order of moral being. Superior to Grecian and Roman models, and beyond the *beau ideal* of poetry, were the chivalry, and wisdom, and virtue, that shone in the daily lives, as in the public acts, of the then living heroes and statesmen. There is something ennobling in the thought, that we are connected with such an age, by having among us those who were in contact with it, and lived whilst its heroes yet lived; and to lose one of them, and he one who had fully imbibed and ever retained its true spirit, is, as it were, to be driven from the spirit world. We feel, at least it becomes us to feel, that we enter on the future, deprived of a presence it was a privilege to repair to, when threatened with the national retributions, provoked by a heedless obduracy.

The unpropitious circumstances of his youth, was the occasion of bringing MR. CLAY to the notice of one, then of our city, and eminently distinguished in the eventful period to which I have just referred—that of the benignant, learned, and upright Chancellor Wythe. Admitted into the clerk's office of his court at the age of sixteen, he was soon engaged by the Chancellor as an amanuensis, and employed in transcribing Greek passages, without the least knowledge of the Greek alphabet. An humble occupation, as we might think, and inappropriate for the future orator and senator; yet, relieved by the fluent learning and courtesy of the profound and accomplished jurist, it served to supply the deficiencies of an imperfect education. In a recent letter sketching the Chancellor, he used this expressive language, “to no man was I more indebted, by his instructions, his advice, and his example, for the little improvement which I made, up to the period when, in my twenty-first year, I finally left the city of Richmond.” An acknowledgment which proved the depth of MR. CLAY'S gratitude, as it did the erudition and goodness of George Wythe.

This, with such additions as might be derived from his admission to the law office of Attorney General, Robert Brooke, was

the incipient training of the great statesman, whose fame afterwards filled the earth. In such men, the whole of life is a training for returning exertions, each greater and more surprising than any which have gone before. It is their privilege to find "tongues in trees, books in the running brooks, sermons in stones, and good in everything." Capable of gaining strength even from the stint and penury of adverse fortune, nought but the extinction of the divinity which stirs within, can stay the upward progress of original and capacious minds.

The removal of Mr. CLAY to Kentucky was, as we can now see, a fortunate, I should say a providential event. It brought him in connection with the infant State, and the great West, of which it was a fair portion, when everything was young, fresh, and yielding. Public opinion was unformed, civil institutions had not received their development, the spirit of a restless people waited to be directed, and those usages and creeds, which come without observation, but when established, are of overruling force, were without any sure or permanent ascendancy. It was an unoccupied theatre of mighty issues, soon to burst forth in giant powers, whether controlled by a superintending and competent guidance, or left to the direction of impetuous impulse. Nor was there a living man, so well as the youthful adventurer, fitted to shape and modify the coming results. His creative genius, the earnestness of his convictions, his enthusiasm, tempered with kindness, gained for him a reception at the outset, won by less brilliant endowments only after years of toil and observation. Of the statesmen of modern times, he resembled most the great Chatham. Original, lofty, conscious of his powers, and uniting with energy of diction, the most forcible method of reasoning. Like the great commoner, "the terror of his invective subdued those who were the most willing, and the best able to encounter him." Thus was he qualified to build up an infant State, training it to manly sentiment, sound opinion, to proud, but honest aims, which, more "than high rais'd battlement or labored mound," constitute a State.

Nor was Kentucky alone the object of his jealous care. His

patriotism, indeed, was co-extensive with the utmost bounds of his country. But the vast trans-mountain region, of which his adopted State was a type, in the freshness of its youthful being, excited more particularly his jealous solicitude. The boundless extent and magnitude of its resources, and the impediments to its progress, he saw; as he did, no less quickly, what was the system of policy to hasten and confirm its growth. It has been said of William, Prince of Orange, that he had never been young. Of our American statesman, it may be said, that he mastered the problems of political science, in their application to our country, at an age when ordinary men remit the labor of thought to their seniors. Forward and foremost in every movement for western interests and advancement, and often in advance of national opinion and enterprise, the order and course of events which before had prevailed, from the beginning of time, by him was reversed, and a bright orb, tracking the way to empire and renown, shone effulgently in the West.

But whatever was local and circumscribed in the aims and acts of Mr. CLAY, was swallowed up and hid in the colossal dignity and weight of his national labors. The fidelity with which he served his State, the energy of his exertions in behalf of western interests and rights, the unremitting devotion of his vast influence to elevate and adorn the social condition of that interesting region, were the genuine fruits of a love of country, too comprehensive and just to descend to questions of jealous rivalry between sections. It was the ambition of his life to make the Union the object of intelligent and unwavering attachment, by labouring to render the government the strong and beneficent agent, designed by its illustrious founders—An ambition, not only consistent with State partiality and pride, and in harmony with rightful State authority and privilege, but which operated to strengthen and establish them, by those clear exhibitions, in which he excelled, of the legitimate and benign ends of State and national authority. It was in the light of Senator, guiding and determining national deliberations, he was, above all others, honored in his life; and it is in this high character we must briefly contemplate him, now he is no more.

There is no loftier position among men, or one which demands higher faculties and powers, than that of *leader* in our national Congress. It is a place gained only by rare and splendid endowments, and retained alone by bringing them into constant and successful exercise. A judgment of higher authority, and more searching and stern than that of official connections, must be satisfied and propitiated—for the country, in all its plenitude, is witness and judge. There is no faculty, moral or intellectual, and no degree of training or maturity of either, which is not essential to an honorable and successful leadership. In the English Parliament, rank and powerful connections may confer the title, and the occupant of the perilous height may, for a time, trusting to adventitious aid, seem to satisfy its conditions. But even there, a leader is, in the main, what the name imports, one whom a people may trust, as well as follow. Here, it is a position taken without invitation, preceded by no canvass, attended by no ceremony of investiture. It is assumed in right of heaven's patent, by him who is able to allay the apprehensions of society, and to recover it from perplexing anxieties.

Thus defined, the leader of the deliberate assembly of a free State, rises in public confidence, and exerts an influence, proportioned to public uneasiness and alarm. The very circumstances which create a necessity for a leader, shut out from the position incompetency and inexperience. As, when the watery elements are in fierce commotion, and fear and trembling invite impending destruction, the valiant are distinguished from the timid, so, true and competent statesmanship is recognized and honored, when ordinary and familiar expedients are seen to be inadequate and unsafe.

The best deserved and highest eulogy of Mr. CLAY is, that he was such a leader! And that, not upon one occasion, nor for a short interval, but through a period nearly co-extensive with the span of human life, and upon every occasion of interest sufficient to enter into the history of his times. This is not the language of strained and mere eulogy. Again and again did he lead in the deliberations of Congress, and attract to himself the admira-

tion of his country, for his untiring and great ability. So to speak, he was *premier* longer than William Pitt, by a title better than royal favor, and not less a leader in opposition to an administration, than when acting with it. No grave question of international relations, of constitutional law, or of comprehensive policy, arose, during his connexion with Congress, which was not propounded by himself, or upon which he did not shed the light of his mature and concentrated wisdom.

Justice cannot be done to his memory, without selecting from among the great number of his noble efforts, some of those triumphs which, at the time, averted impending evils, and restored confidence and security to his perplexed and convulsed country. Few, now, retain a just conception of the angry Missouri controversy, and the fearful extent of its mischievous forebodings. In the nation, as in Congress, a spirit of fierce dogmatism and defiance prevailed, opposed to every conciliatory effort, and the country seemed verging to an awful convulsion. At this crisis, in the moment of its darkest gloom, when bold men, of greater experience, held back, overcome by its contagion, or in despair of a remedy, Mr. CLAY rose above the angry commotion, and carried the measure his fertile patriotism suggested. The gloom, which overspread the land, gave place to demonstrations of joy, and the incense of grateful hearts was lavished on him.

On two other occasions of intense excitement, one the result of formidable preparations by a State to resist the government, and the other the revival of the Missouri discord, his influence was as publicly acknowledged, as it was beneficently employed. In both instances, he so triumphed over the portentous agitation, as that, whilst South Carolina retained her loyalty, our institutions were preserved in their integrity, and the new domain, acquired by our arms, which, for a time, threatened disunion, became a pledge of more intimate fraternal relations.

Illustrious man! thy victories in defence of thy country's institutions, and thy contributions to her renown, shall shine as lights in our firmament, tracing the way to liberty's heights,

and cheering the discouraged patriot in his struggles to reach them.

His eloquence was original, marked, separate from every thing common and current. It was not the product of the schools, nor are the schools able to produce it. It was practical, direct, designed for an immediate end, and suited to the purpose, by an energy as commanding as may be claimed for the human voice. The outburst of intense convictions, robed in simple and emphatic language, his eloquence seemed as the visible form of a spirit, trusting alone for acceptance to its simple majesty and truth. And this explains his success and power as a speaker. Men cannot, if they would, escape the influence of a vigorous mind, inspired by deep and passionate emotion. Whether he would enforce the conclusions of a laborious and comprehensive induction, or insist upon some grave State duty, or expose an act of official delinquency, no matter what was the occasion, the style of his oratory was the reflex of a powerful intellect, proud in the purity of its aims, and intensely concerned for the cause of right and truth. He was not without taste for rhetorical embellishments; and when the argument might be thereby advanced, could and did abound in richness of allusion, amplification, and illustration. The power of sarcasm and invective, belonged to a nature as resolute and independent as his, and fell, when exerted, with terrific force upon the unhappy victim. Yet, the feature which gave to his eloquence its individuality, was its earnestness; that element of mysterious power, called *action*, by the father of orators.

The Athenian orator gave to his eloquence a harder polish. He had to deal with rhetoricians, and with a people whose delight was in the theatre, and who required in eloquence, as in the other arts, the severest perfection. But taking into the account the difference in the auditory, there is no oration of Demosthenes, for which a parallel might not be found in the speeches of Mr. CLAY.

The prominent features of his character belonged not more to his identity, than to the fashion of his public life. As the world

knew him, he was. Those manifestations of character, which attracted applause, were no farther the offspring of political station, than as it furnished the occasion for their display. His nature was too intense, his principles too much a part of his being, his self-respect too stern a monitor, his courage too near "an appetite for danger," to permit him to yield to other counsel than his sense of right. "I would rather be right than President," expressed in part only his invincible repugnance to every form of base and unworthy compliance. But stern as he was on points of duty, yet was he most attractive for his simplicity, the charms of his conversation, and his flowing and obliging humanity—

"In public life severe,
 To virtue still inexorably firm.
 But when, beneath his low, illustrious roof,
 Sweet peace and happy wisdom smooth'd his brow,
 Not friendship softer was, nor love more kind."

He did not escape the fortune which attends unflinching energies, uninterruptedly devoted to great objects. Never was it borne with more unsubdued confidence in the certainty of ultimate vindication. He had a giant's strength, and would, sometimes, use it as a giant. If his motives were not always understood, and his acts sometimes unsparingly criticised—if distrust and suspicion, breaking out at intervals in bitterness and scoffs, did not forbear to assail his life, he bore it, as one strong in his uprightness, disdaining to seek protection in unworthy compliances. Just ten years ago, when he retired from the Senate, he said of himself—"I have wished the good opinion of the world; but I defy the most malignant of my enemies to show, that I have attempted to gain it by any low or grovelling arts, by any mean or unworthy sacrifices, by a violation of any of the obligations of honor, or by a breach of any duties which I owed to my country."

The universal voice has set its seal to the undeviating and lofty propriety of the lamented dead. That justice to his memory, which will be paid by the sure judgment of posterity, we

hear already, in the irrepressible solicitude to do him reverence.

The memory of MR. CLAY, for itself, needed no eulogy. He was one of the few, even of great men, who stand so prominently out on the records of their time, that his fame must endure until they perish. His recorded and enduring acts are his best and only faithful memorial. But in grateful remembrance of his sacrifices and toils, and that our love of country may be quickened and purified, we do and will delight to dwell upon him. We feel that it is cause for grateful acknowledgment, that we have seen, and heard, and known him. As we meditate upon his illustrious life, our faith in the reality of public virtue, and in the certainty of Christian truth, grows stronger. Of the one, his life was a glorious example, and of the other, his death an impressive and sure witness. The statesman of honors and triumphs recoiled not at the humility of the Cross, but meekly sought his best and truest solace in Christian faith. The darkness, which envelops our nature, was dispelled by a light from beyond the grave, and the venerable statesman, as he descended to his rest, was sustained by visions of a blissful immortality.

The voice of the dead, even ⁿ more potent than the voice of the living, is even now crying unto us, "to fulfill our duties, according to our consciences, faithfully and to the last." His marble statue, from classic land, thanks to the patriotic enthusiasm of our ladies, is designed as an ornament for our city. May it enjoy that higher distinction, of cherishing his civil and religious virtues.



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