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A

DISCOURSE

COMMEMORATIVE OF THE

CHARACTER AND CAREER

OF

HON. JOHN PARKER HALE.

DELIVERED IN THE

First Parish Church, Dover, N. H.

ON THANKSGIVING DAY, NOV. 27, 1873.

BY REV. GEORGE B. ^{Spalding} SPALDING.



CONCORD, N. H. :

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1874.

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CORRESPONDENCE.

DOVER, N. H., December 19, 1873.

REV. GEORGE B. SPALDING :

Dear Sir—Having listened with great interest on last Thanksgiving Day to your discourse commemorative of the late HON. JOHN P. HALE, we are of opinion that its publication would be of great service in helping mankind to form a true estimate of Mr. Hale's character and achievements. We would therefore respectfully request you to place the discourse at our disposal, for publication in pamphlet form.

Very truly, your obedient servants,

- | | |
|--------------------|-------------------|
| E. H. ROLLINS. | OLIVER WYATT. |
| Z. S. WALLINGFORD. | JOHN BRACEWELL. |
| DANIEL HALL. | E. J. LANE. |
| GEORGE W. BENN. | T. J. W. PRAY. |
| JOHN R. VARNEY. | JOSEPH W. WELCH. |
| A. H. YOUNG. | LEVI G. HILL. |
| EDWARD P. HODSDON. | JAMES H. WHEELER. |
| WELLS WALDRON. | |

DOVER, N. H., December 23, 1873.

TO HON. E. H. ROLLINS, Z. S. WALLINGFORD, ESQ., HON. DANIEL HALL, AND OTHERS :

Gentlemen—If the publication of my discourse will serve to deepen in men a sense of their obligation to Mr. HALE for his distinguished public services, and add a single leaf to the laurels with which, I feel sure, a grateful posterity will wreath his name, I shall be equally happy with you in having submitted the manuscript to your hands.

Most sincerely yours,

GEORGE B. SPALDING.



DISCOURSE.

ROMANS 13:7.

RENDER THEREFORE TO ALL THEIR DUES: TRIBUTE TO WHOM TRIBUTE IS DUE; CUSTOM TO WHOM CUSTOM; FEAR TO WHOM FEAR; HONOR TO WHOM HONOR.

Great men are the choicest gifts which God bestows upon a people. In this respect he hath not forgotten to be gracious to us.

“Great men have liv’d among us. Heads that planned
And tongues that uttered wisdom,—better, none.

* * * * *
Even so doth Heaven protect us!”

To feel this truth, to be profoundly grateful for it,—I know of no thanksgiving worthier than this, none more acceptable to God than this.

It has been the crime of men in all ages, that they have turned against their greatest ones; have scorned them while living, and belittled them when dead. The Israelites murmured and rebelled against Moses. The Athenians ostracized Aristides, and gave the hemlock to Socrates. The men at Rome proscribed Cicero, and, when they had put him to death, nailed his hands to

the Rostra, to moulder there in mockery of the triumphs of his eloquence. The Florentines racked, strangled, and burnt Savonarola. England derided and cursed the mighty Cromwell while he lived, and, when dead, dug up his bones and hung them on a gallows. Are republics less ungrateful and wicked? or, do we of this age and country show ourselves to be true children of these who killed the prophets?

It must be confessed that, in our past history, we have been guilty of traducing the characters of even our greatest and best. Washington, Hamilton, Jefferson, and others of as distinguished merit who have lived in our own day, were assailed with reproaches and calumnies during their careers. Their memories have been handed down to us blackened by many an accusation begotten of party bigotry and hatred.

I love to think that an advancing Christianity is making us wiser and better,—more charitable and more reverent toward our great men; that, despite all partisan prejudice and personal opposition, we are coming to regard them as the best bestowment of God upon us, as charged with some divine mission or message to us and our generation. I find a ground for so great faith in the spectacle which has been presented, as a distinguished man and great public actor has been summoned from the scene of his toils and triumphs,—this universal testimonial from men of opposing views and principles to the excellence of his character and the greatness of his work. I think that, to-day, how-

ever much we may differ among ourselves, and from him who has gone from us, in regard to those public measures which engaged his splendid powers, we weep together over his grave in mingled respect and affection for him, and on this thanksgiving occasion can thank God for what he achieved for truth and liberty; for the wisdom that saw the right, and the firmness that maintained it; for his rare abilities in thought and speech, and for the rich legacy he has bequeathed us of patriotism and devotion, of loyalty to God and to man.

Let us, as best we may, bring back before us the character and career of our illustrious townsman,—the brilliant lawyer, the fearless, indomitable public leader, the untarnished senator, the true brother and champion of his entire race, JOHN PARKER HALE.

The first glimpse which I catch of him is full of pathos, and is most significant. In his early boyhood he lost his father, a parent tenderly loved and revered. It is said, by neighbors who sympathized with the boy in his early sorrow, that for a long time he was wont to go forth at early morning hour, or in the solemn evening twilight, and kneel down by the father's grave to pray. The figure of that kneeling boy, in that rude graveyard, is the most fixed and prominent recollection which some have of him whom we honor to-day.

If I know anything of New England character and of the power of New England training, I know that

both have from the first been so distinctly religious, that most of our great men have had their natures permeated with great religious sentiments and principles. I think of John Adams, taught in his infancy to repeat the prayer which he never after forgot to utter to the close of his magnificent career, "Now I lay me down to sleep;" I think of Webster, who, according to his own words, was taught to lisp, at his mother's feet and on his father's knee, texts from the Scripture; I think of this young boy, easing his breaking heart in prayers to God over his father's grave; and I see how it was that one and all of them, in all after life, despite all their mistakes, despite, it may be, the absence of an open and professed piety, manifested the presence and power in them of a profoundly religious nature. In this I find the key to their characters. In this I see an explanation of that deep moral earnestness, that solemnity and grandeur, which came out in all their great speech and action.

Mr. Hale graduated at Bowdoin college at an early age, distinguishing himself more by his brightness and versatility than by his accurate scholarship. He studied law here in Dover in the office of Hon. Daniel M. Christie, and was admitted to the bar of this county in 1830. His character as a lawyer was manifested in its entire fulness in the first trial which he conducted. It comes from one who was present on the occasion, and is eminently able to gauge the merits of men in his profession, that this effort of Mr. Hale's, though

often repeated, was never surpassed. He sprang full-armed into the arena, and, at the very beginning of his career, struck his blows with the same consummate skill and force with which he dealt them at the very last.

Mr. Hale was preëminently an advocate. His real place was before a jury. He understood law,—but its great principles rather than its technicalities. And these first he had mastered, not by close, severe study, but by a kind of intuitive insight, coupled with a quick, retentive memory, which treasured up for his ready use decisions and arguments to which he had once listened, or of which he had once cursorily read. As he stood up before the jury, not drilled to his task by painstaking care, but inspired by the occasion, by the very faces which confronted him, with his large, generous form, his free, open gestures, all lighted with a soul that was earnest with conviction, with words singularly facile but terse and full of force, holding his flashing lance straight and steadily to the one point in the case, and driving it home with his splendid bursts of feeling, he was well-nigh irresistible. He was full of imagination, but his imagery never blunted the edge of his blade, nor impeded the vigor of his blow. His speech was like an Eastern scimitar, bright and dazzling, and yet keen in edge, cutting to the marrow.

Let me give you an instance. It was during one of those famous trials growing out of the rescue of the

slave Shadrach at Boston. Mr. Hale had read from the reports numerous decisions to the effect that slavery is against the law of God, the law of nature, and the laws of England and Massachusetts. He also read from the laws of Virginia and other Southern states to show that a person of Shadrach's color (not a negro) is even there presumed to be free, and cannot be proved a slave except by evidence of descent from an African slave-mother, and that possession and holding of a slave did not afford a presumption of slavery. He then said,—“Now, gentlemen, it appears that there is no slavery by the law of England, by the law of Massachusetts, by the law of nature; and *these* old Judges say,—mind, Your Excellency, *I* do not say this; it would be treason; so unequivocal a recognition of the higher law would be treason in me,—but *these old Judges say* that it is against the law of God! Against all these laws, against all this evidence, against all these presumptions, comes one John DeBree from Norfolk, Virginia, and says that he *owns him!* This is all the evidence. The mere breath of the slave-catcher's mouth turns a man into another man's chattel! Suppose John DeBree had said that he owned the moon, or the stars, or had an exclusive right to the sunshine, would you find it so by your verdict? But, gentlemen, the stars shall fade and fall from heaven; the moon shall grow old and decay; the heavens themselves shall pass away as a scroll,—but the soul of the despised and hunted Shadrach shall live on with the

life of God himself! I wonder if John DeBree will say that he owns him *then!*"

It is said that neither court nor marshals could check the long and tumultuous applause which followed. Here is finest wit and genuine humor, and vivid, bold imagination, and most felicitous language; but under all, like an ocean's peal, we hear the solemn movement of a profoundly earnest soul.

I think that, as we follow the man on in his great career, and note those passages which have been and always will be treasured up as specimens of masterly power and eloquence, we shall find that they, one and all, were spoken when his moral nature was most deeply stirred; when his soul quivered with a sense of God and his eternal and immutable truths.

During the first fourteen years after Mr. Hale was admitted to the bar, he was a prominent and active member of the democratic party, and, as such, was honored with various offices. In 1832 he represented this party in the state legislature, where he at once became conspicuous as an ever-ready and most effective debater. In 1843 he was elected to congress. At this time both of the great political organizations in the state and nation were entirely neutral in respect to the matter of slavery. Neither party carried its policy into the domain of morals. They stood apart upon mere questions of finance and internal economy. A little handful of folk, despised alike by whig and democrat, were for pushing politics into the realm of

conscience. One of their number, a former pastor of this church, Rev. David Root, had made a memorable speech at the meeting of the pioneer anti-slavery society, in the hall of the Massachusetts house of representatives, in which he declared "The great *moral* war is but just begun." And yet we find Mr. Hale, in the first session of congress in which he sat, so true to his moral instincts, that when an attempt was made to suppress the right of petition in respect to the matter of slavery, he opposed the movement, expressing, in eloquent language, his determination to defend to the last the position that any party or class has the right to petition for the redress of grievances. I think that it was Mr. Hale's speech on this subject which drew to him, by his peculiar eloquence, the attention of the house,—members leaving their seats and thronging around him,—and won for him the sobriquet of the "White Mountain Cataract."

At the closing session of the twenty-eighth congress, a resolution was introduced, under the stimulus of President Tyler's message, for the annexation of Texas as a slave state. It was not a measure of the democratic party: it was, rather, a personal scheme of the president's. It was denounced by prominent democratic congressmen: and I think that the testimony of the party in this state was, for a time at least, straight against it. Mr. Hale put himself on record, by speech, resolution, and ballot, as opposed to the measure. He was not long in discovering that

his position was not approved at home ; and, further on, he came to see that his continued opposition to the annexation scheme would prove his political death-warrant. He was at this time the nominee of his party for reëlection ; but he knew that his votes and action on this measure would result in his being finally repudiated by his political friends. Still he wavered not. Rather, he went forward and forestalled his doom by writing a letter addressed to his constituents, in which he declared that the reasons given by the advocates of the annexation scheme “were eminently worthy to provoke the scorn of earth and the judgment of Heaven.” In the convention of his party, which immediately followed, Mr. Hale’s name was struck from the ticket by an unanimous vote. Mr. Hale then began to make those appeals to the people, in which the powers of his peculiar and versatile eloquence had full play. He spoke before crowded audiences in great halls, or to the few who gathered in school-houses or in the open air, to listen to his impassioned vindications. The meeting in the old North church, at Concord, will never be forgotten. Mr. Hale went there an object of bitter hatred to his old friends,—not accepted by the other great party,—alone. In that speech in the church, in the presence of an excited, crowded audience, his voice attuned to the promptings of his deepest convictions, rang out those ever-memorable words,—“I expected to be called ambitious, to have

my name cast out as evil, to be traduced and misrepresented. I have not been disappointed. But if things have come to this condition, that conscience and a sacred regard for truth and duty are to be publicly held up to ridicule and scouted at without rebuke, as has just been done here, it matters little whether we are annexed to Texas, or Texas is annexed to us. I may be permitted to say that the measure of my ambition will be full, if, when my earthly career shall be finished, and my bones are laid beneath the soil of New Hampshire, and my wife and children shall repair to my grave to drop the tear of affection to my memory, they may read on my tombstone,—‘He who lies beneath, surrendered office and place and power, rather than bow down and worship slavery.’” I think that the bitterest political opponent who to-day survives Mr. Hale, must admire his lofty, intrepid spirit, as thus manifested, concede his perfect honesty, and confess that, now, as he sleeps beneath New Hampshire soil, after nearly thirty years of fearless and persistent opposition to a great wrong, he may fairly claim the proud epitaph which he once craved.

More than a quarter of a century has passed away since this man began to bear so great testimony to the truth that was in him. What effects followed his noble words, as he spoke here and there in his little district meetings, he knew not to the full. Now, when so many years are fled, and he at last has gone from earth, one and another comes forth to acknowledge

the sovereign power of his words in molding their opinions and characters. During the present week I received a letter from a distinguished scholar and great public benefactor. It reads thus: "I noticed the death of Mr. John P. Hale, in the morning papers, as I was riding in the cars a few days since, and, turning to a friend, expressed my personal obligations for the services he had rendered me years ago, one afternoon, under the shadow of the old academy, in Keene, N. H. He had come home from congress, cast off by the democratic party for his opposition to its pro-slavery designs upon Texas and the territories of the United States. He stood up before a little company of twenty or thirty men and boys,—some of them old, liberty-loving men, and a few old-line whigs and democrats,—drawn by curiosity to hear what he might say for an act they regarded as political suicide. There was one man there, an 'old-line democrat' as his father was before him, who listened with profound attention, and was persuaded of the thorough moral earnestness and honesty of the speaker, and then of the correctness of his views, and from that hour became first an independent democrat, then a free-soiler, and last a republican, in which he still abides, grateful for the words and influence of John P. Hale; and to-day signs himself cordially yours,

—————."

In 1846 Mr. Hale was chosen a member of the state legislature,—was made speaker, and subse-

quently elected to the United States senate, the first anti-slavery senator ever in that body.

Froude, in his brilliant history, in speaking of the rise of the English drama, says,—“We allow ourselves to think of Shakspeare, or of Raphael, or of Phidias, as having accomplished their work by the power of their own individual genius; but greatness like theirs is never more than the highest degree of an excellence which prevailed widely around it, and forms the environment in which it grows.” The principle is doubtless correct. Great men are but the embodiment of the ideas of their age. Applying this principle to such a character and career as that of Mr. Hale’s, we may say that he was the great, consummate leader that he was, because he so fully represented the feelings, the conscience, the moral instincts of the people among whom he moved. And yet this detracts nothing from the excellency of the man, nor the grandeur of his work. The true virtue was doubtless in the people. The love of liberty, hatred of wrong and oppression, without a doubt, were in the tinder; but it was the spark from his great, generous, truthful heart that struck the sluggish mass to kindle it into flame. Regarding Mr. Hale from the time when he first broke with his party and appealed to the people, onward through all his senatorial career, we say of him that he was intended of Heaven to be a public leader, rather than a statesman; to interpret to the people their conscience and moral feeling and purest politi-

cal aspirations, rather than to organize them into a compact and disciplined party, and gather up their sentiments and principles into some legislative code or some administrative policy. Into every revolutionary period God sends some such man to do the great needed work. It is the people's heart that must be stirred; its holy passions that must be aroused; its patriotism, devotion, self-sacrifice, all high and daring qualities, that must be kindled into heat, before those movements can take place which break down the strong barriers of custom and precedent, tear asunder hoary institutions of wrong, topple into the dust the thrones of kings, and, if need be, overturn the whole social order, that truth and liberty may not die from off the face of the earth. To thus touch the people's heart, and evoke its passion and life, a prophet is needed,—one who can speak in the inspiration of his own burning thoughts and feelings. It was so in our fathers' day. James Otis and Patrick Henry were the evangels of our American liberty. Theirs were the voices which were heard ringing in the wilderness. They did a work as mighty as that of Washington and Adams, whose genius it was to organize the forces which these others had called into life; to put them into serried columns on the field of battle, and construct them into the union of states and the constitution of a great nation. Mr. Hale was the Patrick Henry of our revolutionary age. His clarion voice, wherever heard,—in the congressional hall, or from the

platform,—electrified the people, and challenged them, for twenty long years, to a deeper and deeper indignation against the great wrong of the nation. His speeches in the senate chamber were meant for other ears than grave and reverend senators. They were not carefully prepared orations. They were not for the elucidation of some perplexing subject of finance. They were not in exposition of constitutional law. They were brief, witty, scathing replies, or magnificent bursts of feeling and righteous wrath, or jocose allusions and illustrations, under the fun and laughter of which the keen blade glittered, or solemn, prophetic warning and appeal,—all these, from first to last, bearing upon the one great evil, and all addressed to that vast, to him ever-visible audience, which, in all the cities and villages, and in every hamlet of the North and West, were listening, some in rage, and some in fervid sympathy, but all listening with profound interest, to the words which leaped from his lips.

And how skilfully Heaven fitted its chosen instrument for this great, perilous work! It was wonderful! Other congressmen spoke in opposition to slavery, and then became silent through fear. Others only evoked an answering wrath, which took from their arguments half their power. But here was one who stood, through the battle of twenty years, the most conspicuous knight of them all, striking with the heavy and lightning stroke of a *Cœur de Lion*, but with such good heartiness, such imperturbable temper, such rollicking fun,

in the wild medley of the great fight, that his enemies fell back to pay homage to his magnanimity, his courage, his genuine feeling, his irresistible, large fellowship and good nature. I remember, when in 1858 I was acting as a reporter in a Southern commercial convention in Savannah, where Yancey and Rhett, and Barnwell and DeBow, and other fiery sons of the South, poured out in red hot invective and abuse their hatred of Northern men,—I remember of hearing them speak of “Jack Hale,” as they and you loved to call him, as a “prince of good fellows.” In an after sojourn of a year in the South, mingling with the great Southern leaders, just on the eve of those great events which broke upon us, when men’s minds were infuriated with hatred of the North, I do not recall that I ever heard from any of these men any word which indicated a bitter feeling against Mr. Hale.

Now, such a man, one who could hold his place and yet all the time be true to it, faithful and yet courteous, speaking the severest truth with such an inimitable grace of soul that his foes must needs join in admiration of it,—such a man, my friends, is not born in centuries. It was our happiest fortune that Heaven sent him into our age, and into the awful crisis of our affairs. One less courageous than he would have failed us. One less amiable and good-hearted would have been useless.

Mr. Hale’s work was practically over, when the great events which called and used him were over. He

bore into the later years and services of his life an undiminished patriotism, a severe honesty, an unabated zeal for the honor of the nation and the welfare of man. But he was like a war-frigate which lies in port in peaceful times, its mighty armament and its scarred bulwarks only suggestive of stormy days when its ports were up and its great guns dealt havoc upon the foe. Our tears before Heaven are, that he did not live in the rest and play of his magnificent powers, and, as the reward of his fidelity, rejoice with us in the work of his hands.

Of his private life, of the charms of his personal character, you are all familiar. His sweetest and most attractive trait was his love of nature. He loved the great hill-tops, where he could see village and hamlet, plain and forest, and the horizon stretching away into its infinitude. He loved the ocean, and would sit for hours entranced by its ever-varying sights and sounds. He loved especially the hillside where he now lies, and from it he was wont many and many times to gaze in mute rapture upon the sun sinking into the western heavens. He loved old ways and old places. He was full of the simplicities of nature,—childlike, sportive, notional, hearty, always natural. And for it all you loved him with a rare fondness and pride. No party prejudice kept your hearts from him. When he came back from his foreign mission, his old political opponents vied with his strong party-friends to bid him warmest welcome. In his sickness and sad in-

firmities, your pities and prayers mingled. And when at last God had called him, and you went forth to bear him to his loved and longed-for resting-place, without thought of party differences, you, with tears and tenderness, laid him with his mother Earth.

He must have been a rare man to have thus won your hearts,—rare in the qualities of his social nature and the sweetness of his character, as well as in his splendid intellectual capacities, his keen, broad mind, his intuitive insight, his fervid imagination, and eloquent speech. Already we yearn to honor him with the full meed of his honor. But that cannot be. The smoke and dust of a tremendous conflict still cover the field. We, and he who moved so grandly in it, are not to be seen in due clearness and proportion. But the day is coming when the mist shall have cleared away, and all will stand forth in the revealing light of history in their true place and stature. When that day comes, among the greatest who wrought with equal skill and force to lift man into higher dignity and knit the race into closer brotherhood, and who taught succeeding generations the solemn, inspiring lesson of loyalty to God and right, will be seen, in all the loftiness of his full stature, him whom to-day we honor,—JOHN PARKER HALE.



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