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Dr. Sparks

with kind regards

Geo: Ticknor

24 Nov, '55

REMARKS ON THE CHARACTER

OF

EDWARD EVERETT.

BY GEORGE TICKNOR.

REMARKS ON THE CHARACTER

OF THE LATE

EDWARD EVERETT,

MADE AT A MEETING OF THE

Massachusetts Historical Society,

JANUARY 30, 1865,

BY GEORGE TICKNOR.

(FROM THE MEMORIAL OF EDWARD EVERETT.)



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WARD EVERETT.

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REMARKS
ON THE
CHARACTER OF EDWARD EVERETT.

MR. PRESIDENT: I ask your permission to say a few words concerning the eminent associate and cherished friend whom we have lost,—so sadly, so suddenly lost. It is but little that I can say becoming the occasion, so well was he known of all; for, in his early youth, he rose to a height, which has led us to watch and honor and understand, from the first, his long and brilliant career.

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erected with his own hand as he advanced; each seeming, at the time, to be sufficient for the reputation of one man. Few here are old enough to remember when the first of these graceful monuments rose before us; none of us I apprehend is so young, that he will survive the splendor of their long line. And, now that we have come to its end, and that it seems as if the whole air were filled with our sorrowful and proud recollections, as it is with the light at noonday, we feel with renewed force that we have known him as we have known very few men of our time. And this is true. How, then, can I say anything that shall be worthy of memory; still less anything that is fit for record?

When he was ten or eleven years of age and I was about three years older, his family came to live within a few doors of my father's house and subsequently removed to a contiguous estate. But, at this time, Mr. President, when the City of Boston, I suppose, was not one fifth as large as it is now, neighborhood implied kindly acquaintance. I soon knew his elder brother, Alexander, then the leader of his class at Cambridge, while I was a student in a class one year later, at Dartmouth College. I at once conceived a strong admiration for that remarkable scholar;—an admiration, let me add, which has never been diminished since. The younger brother, of whom I saw little, was then in that humble school in Short Street which he has made classical by his occasional allusions to it, and to the two Websters who were his teachers there. From the elder of these, who was frequently at my father's house, I used to hear much about

the extraordinary talents and progress of this younger Everett; praise which my admiration of his brother prevented me, I fear, from receiving, for a time, with so glad a welcome as I ought to have done. During the two or three subsequent years, while the younger brother was at Exeter or beginning his career at Cambridge, I knew little of him, though I was much with the elder and belonged to at least one pleasant club of which he was a member.

The first occasion on which the younger scholar's delightful character broke upon me, with its true attributes, is still fresh in my recollection. It was in the summer of 1809. Mr. Alexander Everett was then about to embark for St. Petersburg, as the private secretary of Mr. John Quincy Adams, and a few nights before he left us, he gave a supper—saddened, indeed, by the parting that was so soon to follow, but still a most agreeable supper—to eight or ten of his personal friends, one of whom (Dr. Bigelow) I now see before me;—the last, except myself, remaining of that well remembered symposium. The younger brother was there, so full of gayety—unassuming but irrepressible—so full of whatever is attractive in manner or in conversation, that I was perfectly carried captive by his light and graceful humor. And this, let me here say, has always been a true element of his character. He was never at any period of his life a saturnine man. In his youth he overflowed with animal spirits; and, although from the time of his entrance into political life, with the grave cares and duties that were imposed upon him, the lightheartedness of his nature was some-

what oppressed or obscured, it was always there. There was never a time I think — excepting in those days of trial and sorrow that come to all — in which, among the private friends with whom he was most intimate, he was not cheerful, nay charmingly amusing. It was so the very day before his death. He was suffering from an oppression on the lungs; and, as I sat with him, he could speak only in whispers; but, even then, his natural playfulness was not wanting.

But from the time of that delightful supper in 1809, my regard never failed to be fastened on him. At first, during his under-graduate's life, at Cambridge, I saw him seldom. But in that simpler stage of our society, when the interests of men were so different from what they have become since, all who concerned themselves about letters, were familiar with what was done and doing in Cambridge. Everett, youthful as he was, was eminently the first scholar there, and we all knew it. We all — or, at least, all of us who were young — read the "Harvard Lyceum," which he edited, and which, I may almost say, he filled with his scholarship and humor.

In 1811 he was graduated with the highest honors, and pronounced, with extraordinary grace of manner, a short oration, on — if I rightly remember — "The Difficulties attending a Life of Letters," which delighted a crowded audience, attracted more than was usual by the expectations that waited on what is called "The first part." But thus far, what was most known of his life was strictly academic, and was only more widely spread than an academic reputation is wont to be because he

was himself already so full of recognized promise and power. His time, in fact, was not yet come. But the next year it came. He was invited to deliver the customary poem at Commencement, before the "Phi Beta Kappa Society." It was not, perhaps, a period, when much success could have been anticipated for anybody, on a merely literary occasion. The war with England had been declared only a few weeks earlier and men felt gloomy and disheartened at the prospect before them. Still more recently Buckminster had died, only twenty-eight years old, but loved and admired, as few men ever have been in this community; — mourned, too, as a loss to the beginnings of true scholarship among us, which many a scholar then thought might hardly be repaired. But, as in all cases of a general stir in the popular feeling, there was an excitement abroad which permitted the minds of men to be turned and wielded in directions widely different from that of the prevailing current. The difficulty was to satisfy the demands in such a disturbed condition of things.

Mr. Everett was then just in that "opening manhood" which Homer, with his unerring truth, has called "the fairest term of life." And how handsome he was, Mr. President! We all know how remarkable was Milton's early beauty. An engraving of him — a fine one — by Vertue, from a portrait preserved in the Onslow family, and painted when the poet was about twenty, is well known. But, sir, so striking was the resemblance of this engraving to our young friend, that I remember often seeing a copy of it inscribed with his name in capital let-

ters, and am unable to say that the inscription was amiss. Radiant, then, with such personal attractions, he rose before an audience already disposed to receive him with extraordinary kindness.

His subject was, "American Poets," certainly not a very promising one. Of course his treatment of it was essentially didactic; but there was such a mixture of good-natured satire in it, so much more praise willingly accorded than was really deserved, such humorous and happy allusions to what was local, personal, and familiar to all, and such solemn and tender passages about the condition of our society, and its anxieties and losses,—that it was received with an applause which, in some respects, I have never known equalled. Graver and grander success I have often known to be achieved, on greater occasions, not only by others but by himself. But never did I witness such clear, unmingled delight. Everything was forgotten but the speaker and what he chose we should remember.

This success, it should be recollected, was gained when Mr. Everett was only a little more than eighteen years old. But, sir, in fact, it had been gained earlier. The poem had been read when he was only about seventeen, before a club of college friends in the latter part of his senior year, and had now been fitted by a few additions, for its final destination. Its publication was immediately demanded and urged. But on the whole it was determined not to give it fully to the world. Four copies, however, were privately struck off on large paper, one of which I received at the time from the author, and thirty-

six more in common octavo, which were at once distributed to other eager friends. But this was by no means enough. A little later, therefore, there were printed, with slight alterations, sixty copies more, of which he gave me two, in an extra form, marked with his fair autograph. I know not where three others are now to be found; though I trust, from the great contemporary interest in the poem itself, and from its real value, that many copies of it have been saved.

It is written in the versification consecrated by the success of Dryden and Pope; and if it contains lines marked by the characteristics of the early age at which it was produced, there is yet a power in it, a richness of thought, and a graceful finish, of which probably few men at thirty would have been found capable. At any rate, in the hundred and more years during which verse had then been printed in these Colonies and States, not two hundred pages, I think, can now be found, which can be read with equal interest and pleasure.

It was only a few weeks afterwards, as nearly as I recollect, that he began to preach. I heard his first two sermons, delivered to a small congregation in a neighboring town, and I heard him often afterwards. The effect was always the same. There was not only the attractive manner, which we had already witnessed and admired, but there was, besides, a devout tenderness, which had hardly been foreseen. The main result, however, had been anticipated. He was, in a few months, settled over the church in Brattle Street, with the assent and admiration of all.

But, in the midst of his success in the pulpit, he was turned aside to become a controversial theologian. Early in the autumn of 1813, Mr. George B. English published a small book, entitled, "The Grounds of Christianity Examined by Comparing the New Testament with the Old." It was, in fact, an attack on the truth of the Christian religion, in the sense of Judaism. Its author, whom I knew personally, was a young man of very pleasant intercourse, and a great lover of books, of which he had read many, but with little order or well-defined purpose. He would, I think, have been a man of letters, if such a path had been open to him. A profession, however, was needful. He studied law, but became dissatisfied with it. He studied divinity, but was never easy in his course. His mind was never well balanced, or well settled upon anything. He was always an adventurer—just as much so in the scholarlike period of his life, as he was afterwards, when he served under Ismail Pasha, in Egypt, and attempted to revive the ancient war-chariots armed with scythes.

His ill-constructed book received several answers, direct and indirect, from the pulpit and the press; but none of them was entirely satisfactory, because their authors had not frequented the strange by-paths of learning in which Mr. English had for some time been wandering with perverse preference. Mr. Everett, however, followed him everywhere with a careful scholarship and exact logic unknown to his presumptuous adversary. His "Defence of Christianity" was published in 1814, and I still possess one, out of half a dozen copies of it that were

printed for the author's friends, on extra paper, and are become curious as showing how ill understood, in those simpler days, were the dainty luxuries of bibliography. But the proper end of the book was quickly attained. Mr. English's imperfect and unsound learning was demolished at a blow; and, as has just been so happily said by Dr. Lothrop, the whole controversy, even Mr. Everett's part of it, is forgotten, because it has been impossible to keep up any considerable interest in a question which he had so absolutely settled. Mr. Everett's "Defence," however, will always remain a remarkable book. Some years after its publication, Professor Monk, of Cambridge, the biographer of Bentley, and himself afterwards Bishop of Gloucester, told me that he did not think any Episcopal library in England could be accounted complete which did not possess a copy of it.

In the winter following the publication of this book — that is, in the winter of 1814-15 — he was elected Professor of Greek Literature. I was then at the South, having made up my mind to pass some time at the University of Göttingen, and was endeavoring, chiefly among the Germans in the interior of Pennsylvania, to obtain information concerning the modes of teaching in Germany, about which there then prevailed in New England an absolute ignorance now hardly to be conceived. With equal surprise and delight, I received letters from my friend telling me of his appointment, and that, to qualify himself for the place offered him, he should endeavor to go with me upon what we both regarded as a sort of adventure, to Germany. Perhaps I should add that this

sudden change in his course of life excited no small comment at the time, and that, especially by a part of the parish whose brilliant anticipations he thus disappointed, it was not accepted in a kindly spirit. But of its wisdom and rightfulness there was soon no doubt in the mind of anybody.

We embarked in April, 1815, and passed a few weeks in London, during the exciting period of Bonaparte's last campaign, and just at the time of the battle of Waterloo. But we were in a hurry to be at work. We hastened, therefore, through Holland, stopping chiefly to buy books, and early in August were already in the chosen place of our destination. It was our purpose to remain there a year. But the facilities for study were such as we had never heard or dreamt of. My own residence was in consequence protracted to a year and nine months, and Mr. Everett's was protracted yet six months longer — both of us leaving the tempting school at last sorry and unsatisfied.

How well he employed his time there the great results shown in his whole subsequent life have enabled the world to judge. I witnessed the process from day to day. We were constantly together. Except for the first few months, when we could not make convenient arrangements for it, we lived in contiguous rooms in the same house — the house of Bouterwek, the literary historian, and a favorite teacher in the university. During the vacations — except one, when he went to the Hague, to see his brother Alexander, then our Secretary of Legation in Holland — we travelled together about Germany; and

every day in term time we went more or less to the same private teachers, and the same lecturers. But he struck in his studies much more widely than I did. To say nothing of his constant, indefatigable labor upon the Greek with Dissen, he occupied himself a good deal with Arabic under Eichhorn, he attended lectures upon modern history by Heeren, and upon the civil law by Hugo, and he followed besides the courses of other professors, whose teachings I did not frequent and whose names I no longer remember.

His power of labor was prodigious; unequalled in my experience. One instance of it — the more striking, perhaps, because disconnected from his regular studies — is, I think, worth especial notice. We had been in Göttingen, I believe, above a year, and he was desirous to send home something of what he had learnt about the modes of teaching, not only there but in our visits to the universities of Leipzig, Halle, Jena, and Berlin, and to the great preparatory schools of Meissen, and Pforte. He had, as nearly as I can recollect, just begun this task. But how so voluminous a matter was to be sent home was an important question. Regular packets there were none, even between New York and Liverpool. We depended, therefore, very much on accident — altogether on transient vessels. Opportunities from Hamburg were rare and greatly valued. Just at this time our kind mercantile correspondents at that port gave us sudden notice that a vessel for Boston would sail immediately. There was not a moment to be lost; Mr. Everett threw everything else aside, and worked for thirty-five consecutive

hours on his letter, despatching it as the mail was closing. But, though sadly exhausted by his labor, he was really uninjured, and in a day or two was fully refreshed and restored. I need not say that a man who did this was in earnest in what he undertook. But let me add, Mr. President, that, by the constant, daily exercise of dispositions and powers like these, he laid during those two or three years in Göttingen, the real foundations on which his great subsequent success, in so many widely different ways, safely rested. I feel as sure of this as I do of any fact of the sort within my knowledge.

When I left Göttingen, he and a young American friend (Stephen H. Perkins)—then under his charge, and who still survives—accompanied me on my first day's journey. At Hesse Cassel we separated, thinking to meet again in the south of Europe, and visit together Greece and Asia Minor, which, from the time of the appearance of "Childe Harold," four or five years earlier, had been much in our young thoughts and imaginations. But "Forth rushed the Lévant and the Ponent winds." A few months afterwards, at Paris, I received the appointment of Professor of French and Spanish Literature, at Cambridge; and, from that moment, it was as plain that my destination was Madrid, as it was that he was bound to go to Athens and Constantinople. We did not, therefore, meet again until his return home, in the autumn of 1819, where I had preceded him by a few months.

From this time Mr. Everett's life has been almost constantly a public one, and all have been able to judge him freely and fully. He began his lectures on Greek litera-

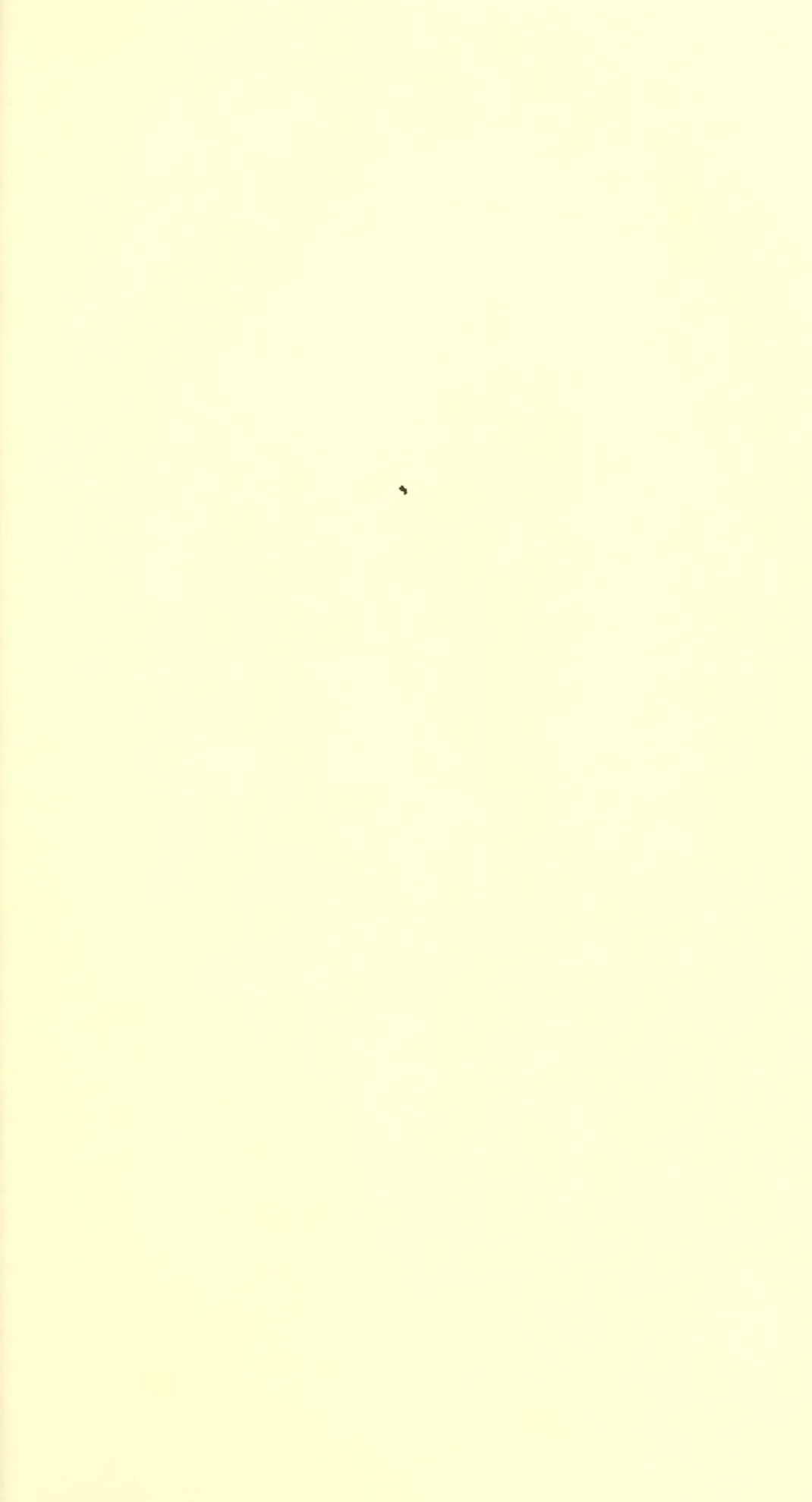
ture at Cambridge the next summer, and I went from Boston regularly to hear them, for the pleasure and instruction they gave me. The notes I then took of them, and which I still preserve, will bear witness to the merit just ascribed to them by the friend on my left, who heard the same course somewhat later.

But Mr. Everett was, in another sense, already a public man. From the natural concern he felt in the fate of a country he had so recently visited, he took a great interest, as early as 1821-23, in the Greek Revolution, and wrote and spoke on it, both as a philanthropic and as a political question. In 1824 he was elected to Congress. There and elsewhere, like other public men of eminence, he has had his political trials and his political opponents; sometimes generous, sometimes unworthy, but never touching the unspotted purity of his character and purposes. All such discussions, however, find no becoming place within these doors. We recognize here no such divisions of opinion respecting our lamented associate. We remember his great talents, and the gentleness that added to their power; his extraordinary scholarship, and the rich fruits it bore; his manifold public services, and the just honors that have followed them. All this we remember. In all of it we rejoice. We recollect, too, that for five-and-forty years, he has been our pride and ornament, as a member of this Society. But we recognize no external disturbing element in these our happy recollections. To us, he has always been the same. At any meeting that we have held since he became fully known to us and to the country, the beautiful, appropriate, and truthful reso-

lutions now on your table, might — if he had just been taken from us as he has been now — have been passed by us with as much earnestness and unanimity, as they will be amidst our sorrow to-night. They do but fitly complete our record of what has always been true. And let us feel thankful, as we adopt this record and make it our own, that — grand and gratifying as it is — neither the next generation nor any that may follow will desire to have a word of it obliterated or altered.









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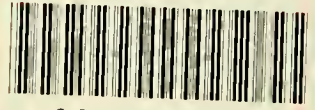


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