302
6
H2 B98
opy 1

*Reprinted from the*

EDUCATIONAL REVIEW

APRIL, 1913

Copyright, 1913, by EDUCATIONAL REVIEW PUBLISHING CO., New York

# ALEXANDER HAMILTON

*Stenographic report of an address delivered at the Hamilton Club of Brooklyn, N. Y., January 11, 1913. Printed by the courtesy of the Brooklyn Eagle.*

BY

NICHOLAS MURRAY BUTLER

E 302
.6
.H2 B98

# ALEXANDER HAMILTON[1]

Mr. Chairman and gentlemen: You have summoned me to a grateful and an honorable task. To a lover of Hamilton nothing could be more pleasing than to be asked to speak of him on the anniversary of his birth, to a company of gentlemen assembled in a club which bears his name, in the borough on whose soil he received his baptism of fire in the War of Independence, and now part of a city so devoted to his personality and his political opinions that it was called by his enemies Hamiltonopolis. But it is not possible for me to say anything new about Alexander Hamilton. Every American who knows his country's history, every American who has penetrated beneath the surface of our political life to an understanding of its making and its fundamental principles, knows full well that Alexander Hamilton has joined the company of the immortals.

You need not expect from me a severely critical estimate of the man, of his service to our American life, or of his place in history. I love him too well. I am too much under the spell of his personality, of his eloquence, and too profound and convinced a believer in the doctrines of liberty and of government that he taught and made to live in institutions on this soil, to speak of him in words of cautious and hesitant criticism. You will have to accept from me the reflections of a convinced believer in Hamilton as the one supremely great intellect yet produced in the western world; as the only man whose writings on political theory and political science bear comparison with the classic work on politics by the philosopher Aristotle. I am prepared to defend the thesis that the two great epoch-making works in the whole literature of political science are, for the an-

[1] Stenographic report of an address delivered at the Hamilton Club of Brooklyn, N. Y., January 11, 1913. Printed by the courtesy of the *Brooklyn Eagle*.

cient world, the *Politics* of Aristotle, and, for the modern world, those contributions known as *The Federalist* and the various letters and speeches which taken together represent Hamilton's exposition of the American Constitution and the American form of government.

There is nothing that I can say about Hamilton which will be novel to members of a club that bears his name. Yet after the passage of all these years, what a splendid memory that personality suggests, what a romance that life was, what a revelation of human power and of human service his contributions to mankind and to the progress of civilization!

I like to think of the strands that entered into the making of that personality and that character. There was the high-purposed, rugged determination of the Scot, together with the almost fanatical devotion and enthusiasm of the Huguenot; these strands not meeting and intertwining under ordinary circumstances or under a gray and unfriendly sky, but under the bright sun of the West Indies on a little point of rich volcanic land, representing, perhaps, the ambition of mother earth to thrust herself up thru the blue waters of the tropical ocean in order to make a fit birthplace for a political genius. I like to think of the youthful beginnings of his boyish life, of the admiration of his mother for her brilliant child, who, in infancy, had the maturity of an experienced philosopher; a boy who, at nine, was writing letters worthy of a sage, and at thirteen was managing an important business for a distant client in the province of New York. I like to remember that when that dying mother felt the hand of death upon her at the early age of thirty-two, she summoned the little boy to her bedside and said to him: 'My son, never aim at the second best. It is not worthy of you. Your powers are in harmony with the everlasting principles of the universe.' Was ever a child, an orphan child, sent out from an island home to seek his fortune in a new and strange and troubled land with higher prophecy or with more beneficent benediction?

Gift
Author
(Person)
FEB 10 1914

And then the boy crosses the sea to the province of New York. He casts about for an opportunity of obtaining an education. He is thirsting for information. He had read a few great books, books far beyond the capacity of an ordinary boy of his age. He was seeking direction, instruction, opportunity, and he presented himself to President Witherspoon of Princeton College. He said that he wanted to become a student there; that he had no time to devote four years to the very moderate course of instruction of that day, but that if he were allowed to pursue the course in less time and to complete it earlier he would be glad to enter his name. The president told him—after the fashion of college presidents—that there were rules that could not be broken and that his proposal was impossible. Did the boy enter himself at Princeton for four years? Not in the least. He moved on to New York and appeared before Myles Cooper, the scholarly Tory who was president of King's College, and made the same proposal to him. Myles Cooper, trained at Oxford and more a man of the world, said that it could be arranged; and it was. So Alexander Hamilton became a pupil in King's College over yonder, on the King's farm, just beyond where Trinity Church now stands and not far from the churchyard where his ashes lie.

It was well that he did so, because within a year the angry mob of New York rebels, stirred to anger by the actions of the British Government and by reports from across the sea, as well as by the Tory president's pamphlets in defense of British policy, appeared at the college doors and demanded the punishment of President Myles Cooper. This stripling of eighteen stood on the college steps and held them at bay with his eloquence while the president of the college escaped by the rear gate, and was taken off by a boat to a British ship lying in the Hudson. If Alexander Hamilton had gone to Princeton, Myles Cooper would have been lynched.

And then I like to think of him at that early age, a boy, a mere child, putting down in the notebooks which have been preserved for us, the list of things he was interested in and the books that he read. In them you come upon this

item: 'Read particularly Aristotle's *Politics*, chapter 9, Definition of Money.' You begin to see the shadow of the first Secretary of the Treasury, of the author of the Report on Manufactures, of the author of the Report of the National Bank, and of the man of whom it was truly said afterward by Webster that he struck a blow on the rock of the national resources and revenue gushed forth for the people of the United States. At seventeen, then, Hamilton was reading the greatest work of antiquity on the science and art of government among men.

I like to think of him strolling on the Common yonder, at the head of what we now call Bowling Green, with the youth of his time, eager and enthusiastic; then writing pamphlets in defense of the rebel position, that attracted the attention of the whole country in answer to the Westchester Farmer, one of the learned men in the Colonies, the boy concealing his own identity. In two short years after coming from his West Indian home, so completely had he entered into the feelings and aspirations and hopes of the Colonists, so thoroly had he mastered the problems before them, that even before they knew his name or his age, they were hailing the writer of those pamphlets as their deliverer from the oppression of Great Britain. I submit that in the whole history of government there is nothing to be found like this. We have seen great and precocious genius in literature, as, for example, in Chatterton; we have seen great and precocious genius in music, as, for example, in Mozart; but where in the affairs of men, where in those large matters that have to do with the organization of liberty, the establishment of government, and the perpetuation of everlasting standards of right among human beings—where from the dawn of history have we before seen a youth of 19 leading the thought of a people and laying the foundations of a nation?

Then I like to think of his part in the army during the War of Independence, of his close association with Washington and of his admiration for him, and of Washington's dependence upon the younger man. I like to think of his eager and

exultant defense, by voice and by pen, of every act of the new people, and of his part in shaping the slowly-forming government that the thirteen colonies were feeling their way, tentatively, toward building into a visible and permanent form. I like to think that at no single step in the process did Hamilton fail to take a most conspicuous part. At no time did he fail to strike the heaviest blow. Never was he found anywhere but among the leaders, the real leaders, of political opinion in the American Colonies. Whether it was in New York, in Massachusetts, in Virginia, or in South Carolina the American people of that day doffed their hats to Alexander Hamilton as the one supreme genius in intellectual leadership and in exposition that they had among them.

As soon as the war was over he found his place at the bar and in the Congress of the Confederation. He warmly defended the treaty with Great Britain. He insisted that it must be lived up to even tho unpopular; that even a young nation could not afford to be false to its pledged word. He insisted that our people never would be free and never would be safe until they had formed a real government with real powers, and had made themselves, not a loose federation of independent units, but an integral, independent, self-respecting, self-supporting, self-defending nation. That was Hamilton's task. He had to compete with men otherwise minded, to overcome prejudices and to answer reasonable as well as unreasonable objections. He had to meet all these; and then he had to combat the selfish and the self-seeking as well. He was tireless, this stripling only then in the twenties and early thirties; tireless with voice and with pen in making men understand what the United States might be and what America ought to be.

Finally, almost by a subterfuge, he got a constitutional convention. In those days you could not easily persuade the several colonies to come together in conference for any purpose, lest they might, in some way, as a result of conferring, sacrifice a measure of their independence and their sturdy separateness. He persuaded some of them, how-

ever, to convene at Annapolis to settle questions relating to the navigation and use of Chesapeake Bay. Having brought them into conference he persuaded them to call a constitutional convention. He did not quite call it by that name—had he done so it might never have been held—but he persuaded them to call another conference to devise a more adequate plan of government. He went back to Albany and got himself elected as one of the three delegates from New York; the other two, being convinced opponents of the whole undertaking, outvoted him in the convention, so long as they remained in it. At the psychological moment Alexander Hamilton took the floor in the convention. Was he in doubt about the making of a constitution? Not in the least. He had a constitution all ready; he proposed it. For five hours, as Madison tells in his journal, he held spell bound this convention of the ablest men ever gathered together in one room for a like purpose, while he explained the principles on which the nation's government should be organized. The major portion of that plan of government is contained in the Constitution of the United States in this year of grace 1913. Other plans were proposed; long debates ensued, but that genius, that patience, that persistence, that skill of exposition never failed. His two colleagues from New York left the convention in disgust when they saw that the Constitution was going to be made; but he remained and signed it as the sole representative of what is now the Empire State. Had it not been for Alexander Hamilton the name of the State of New York would not have been included among the members of the Constitutional Convention who accepted and recommended for adoption the great instrument and the form of government that were the result of their deliberations.

Then came the heaviest task of all; how to get this Constitution ratified by the people of the several States? It was provided, as you know, in the instrument itself that it should become operative when ratified by nine States, but no one knew better than Alexander Hamilton that nine States would not do. He knew that that provision was a

mere device, and that every State must ratify if the Constitution was to become effective and the supreme law of the land.

There followed what I venture to think is, perhaps, the greatest forensic triumph of modern times. The Convention of the State of New York met at Poughkeepsie. There were sixty-five delegates from the various counties of the State. Nineteen of them, including Hamilton and the other delegates from New York, Kings and Westchester, were committed to the Constitution. The remainder were followers and friends of George Clinton, who bitterly opposed it. Chancellor Kent has told us what happened. Long after, nearly half a century after, Chancellor Kent wrote his recollection of what took place. He went to Poughkeepsie and sat in the gallery of the convention and listened to every word of the debates for six weeks. He has told us what Hamilton said, what Jay and Livingston said, what was said in reply, and how obdurate and stubborn and insistent was the opposition to the ratification of the Constitution. Hamilton sent a runner out to the east so that he might report at the earliest moment the news whether or not New Hampshire had ratified. He sent a runner out to the south to report at the earliest possible moment the news from Madison as to whether Virginia had ratified. Finally, by sheer force of intellect, by the display of political genius of the first and most enduring order, Hamilton wore away all opposition and the Poughkeepsie Convention ratified the Constitution on behalf of the State of New York by a majority of three. That, Mr. Chairman, was before the days of bosses; it was a time when men had to be won over from one side of a proposition to the other by force of argument and by intellect; and Hamilton wore down the powerful and determined opposition by no other instruments than those.

The Constitution was made. What was the government? Where were its resources, and what scheme of taxation was it to employ? How was it to differentiate its scheme of taxation from that which supported the several

colonies, now States? How was this new national unity to develop? How was it to make itself real? Obviously, the center point of the fighting line was the Department of the Treasury; and to that department Alexander Hamilton went at George Washington's call. There he sat for the six most fateful years of the history of the government of the United States. One great report after another was poured in upon the Congress. It consisted of clever and intelligent men, but they were almost stupefied by the wealth of information, the rush of argument, the appeals that were made to them to formulate a system of taxation, to charter a bank, to raise revenue, to organize a treasury system and to call the latent forces of a nation into action for purposes of national support and for national administration. No one doubts—no one can—that Hamilton did every atom of work in connection with all this. The Congress had hardly anything before it of great magnitude but his proposals. It had nothing to do but to accept, to amend or to reject them; you may read the history of those Congresses for yourselves. They accepted in principle, and almost in detail, every great fundamental recommendation that he made; and that is how the government of the United States was built. There was no use in making a government that was a framework of bones and skin alone; these bones must be covered with flesh; these arteries and veins must be filled with blood; there must be food to assimilate, power to gain nourishment, ability to act. Hamilton saw to it that all this was done. Read the history of the first three Congresses. Read the communications made to them; read their debates, their votes; read the history of Washington's administration, and tell me whether Alexander Hamilton did not make the government of the United States in body and in spirit, just as truly as he had planned and constructed it in form.

Hamilton withdrew from the service of the Government at thirty-eight. At thirty-eight this great epoch-making work was done. At an age when most men, even those of talent, of power, of training, are just ready for the active

and constructive work of life, Alexander Hamilton was thru as the builder of the greatest government of any people that the world has ever seen. He withdrew to the practise of the law. He lived over across the river in Wall Street at No. 58, in a little house almost opposite the great building which was formerly the Custom House, wellknown to all of us. It was in passing that house that no less a person than Talleyrand, on his visit to New York said, when he saw the light burning in Hamilton's study window at midnight: 'I have seen the eighth wonder of the world. I have seen a man laboring at midnight for the support of his family who has made the fortune of a nation.'

Hamilton's career at the bar was without an equal. As an advocate and in exposition, particularly in defense of fundamental principles of justice and equity and human liberty, the testimony is that he was a marvel of lucidity and of power. Long afterward—in 1832, I think it was—Chancellor Kent wrote a striking letter to Mrs. Hamilton. Hamilton had then been dead twenty-eight years and Mrs. Hamilton was an old lady. She wrote to Chancellor Kent and asked him whether he would not put on record some of his reminiscences of her husband; whether he would not tell her, what he, Kent, thought about Hamilton's relations to the making of the Constitution; what he, Kent, thought about his work at Poughkeepsie where Kent had watched him, and what he, Kent, thought about his work at the American bar. Kent wrote in reply one of the most beautiful and charming analytical eulogies that one human being could write of another. Remember that Kent was, with Marshall, the greatest of American jurists; remember that Hamilton had been dead and gone for twenty-eight years; remember that the shadow of the great contest as to slavery was already projecting itself over the land; remember that new men and new issues were in the places of prominence, and that there was nothing due to Hamilton but the dispassionate, fair and honorable judgment of history. Kent rendered this judgment in one of the most memorable documents of our American literature. I can-

not now recall its striking passages and its phrases, but I commend it to every student of American politics. It tells us what James Kent, that maker and interpreter of American law, thought about Alexander Hamilton as the guide, philosopher and friend of the Government, the bench and the bar of his day.

I have wondered sometimes whether Kent must not have overheard one of Hamilton's most charming sayings, many years before, when they were on circuit together—as I remember it, in Orange County in this State—Kent as judge, Hamilton as barrister. They found themselves spending the night in an uncomfortable and ill-furnished tavern in a country town. Hamilton awakened in the night, shivering because of the insufficiency of his covering; he got up from his bed and with his covering in his arms carried it into the room where Kent was sleeping, and quietly and softly spread it over him, saying, 'Sleep well, sleep warm, little judge; we cannot afford to have harm come to you.' I have often wondered whether Kent in his sleep did not hear these affectionate words, and whether he did not fifty years afterward reflect, in his judgment to the stricken widow, something of the feeling of affection and regard which the great barrister, the great constructive statesman, felt for him.

Then came Hamilton's end; that tragic, fateful end, to be ascribed, as we look back on it now, to the false sense of honor that prevailed a century ago, which made men think that it was necessary for them to kill each other in order to avenge a fancied or a real insult. In this connection, too, I recall now another interesting story of Kent. Kent had been a friend of Aaron Burr, but the devoted admirer of Hamilton. He never saw Burr for years after this terrible calamity until one day when Kent was walking up Nassau Street, in New York, he saw Burr coming down on the other side. The little Chancellor crost the pavement and went over to Burr and said, 'Mr. Burr, you are a damned scoundrel. Sir, you are a damned scoundrel!' Burr looked steadily at him, took off his hat, and replied with

mock politeness, 'Mr. Chancellor, your judgments are always entitled to be received with respect.'

It is not possible for us—even for those of us who remember the taking off of Lincoln, the killing of Garfield or the murder of McKinley—to picture the feeling of this country—then a mere strip on the seaboard to be sure, without telegraphs, without telephones or rapid post—when it was learned that Hamilton was dead. It did not seem possible to the people of the United States of that day that this very symbol of power and vitality, this center of the constructive force of the nation, who seemed able by his charm and persuasiveness and potency to ride down every obstacle, to conquer enemies and to bring the great mass of the population to the support of his specific projects—it did not seem possible that at 47 Alexander Hamilton had past from earth. And yet he had.

Before venturing to speak to you on this subject, I have been reading over again the records of that time, in order to get back into the atmosphere of the period, to catch something of its feeling, and to refresh my memory as to some of the men and events of those years. In doing so I came upon the funeral oration delivered two weeks after Hamilton's death by the Henry Ward Beecher of that day, by Dr. Mason, senior minister of the Collegiate Dutch Church in New York, who was the favorite pulpit orator of this part of the United States. He had been selected to deliver the funeral oration on Hamilton before the Society of the Cincinnati at a great meeting called in New York. I wrote down a few paragraphs from that oration, and I ask the privilege of reading them in order to take you back with me into the atmosphere of July, 1804, when it was known that Hamilton was really dead.

After describing Hamilton's career, what was then so fresh, so new, so full of suggestion, and after tracing the whole history of the making of the Constitution, Dr. Mason concluded his oration with these words:

"The result is in your hands. It is in your national existence. Not such, indeed, as Hamilton wished, but such as he could obtain, and as the States would ratify, is the Federal Constitution. His ideas of a government which

should elevate the character, preserve the unity, and perpetuate the liberties of America, went beyond the provisions of that instrument. Accustomed to view men as they are, and to judge of what they will be, from what they ever have been, he distrusted any political order which admits the baneful charity of supposing them to be what they ought to be. He knew how averse they are from even wholesome restraint; how obsequious to flattery; how easily deceived by misrepresentation; how partial, how vehement, how capricious. He knew that vanity, the love of distinction, is inseparable from man; that if it be not turned into a channel useful to the Government, it will force a channel for itself, and if cut off from other egress, will issue in the most corrupt of all aristocracies—the aristocracy of money. He knew, that an extensive territory, a progressive population, an expanding commerce, diversified climate, and soil and manners, and interest, must generate faction; must interfere with foreign views, and present emergencies requiring, in the general organization, much tone and promptitude. A strong government, therefore; that is, a government stable and vigorous, adequate to all the forms of national exigency, and furnished with the principles of self-preservation, was undoubtedly his preference, and he preferred it because he conscientiously believed it to be necessary. A system which he would have entirely approved would probably keep in their places those little men who aspire to be great; would withdraw much fuel from the passions of the multitude; would diminish the materials which the worthless employ for their own aggrandizement; would crown peace at home with respectability abroad; but would never infringe the liberty of an honest man. From his profound acquaintance with mankind, and his devotion to all that good society holds dear, sprang his apprehensions for the existing Constitution. Convinced that the natural tendency of things is to an encroachment by the States on the Union; that their encroachments will be formidable as they augment their wealth and population; and, consequently, that the vigor of the general Government will be impaired in a very near proportion with the increase of its difficulties; he anticipated the day when it should perish in the conflict of local interest and of local pride. The divine mercy grant that his prediction may not be verified!

"He was born to be great. Whoever was second, Hamilton must be first. To his stupendous and versatile mind no investigation was difficult—no subject presented which he did not illuminate. Superiority, in some particular, belongs to thousands. Pre-eminence, in whatever he chose to undertake, was the prerogative of Hamilton. No fixed criterion could be applied to his talents. Often has their display been supposed to have reached the limit of human effort, and the judgment stood firm till set aside by himself. When a cause of new magnitude required new exertion, he rose, he towered, he soared; surpassing himself, as he surpassed others. Then was nature tributary to his eloquence! Then was felt his despotism over the heart! Touching, at his pleasure, every string of pity or terror, of indignation or grief; he melted, he soothed, he roused, he agitated; alternately gentle as the dews, and awful as the thunder. Yet, great as he was in the eyes of the world, he was greater in the eyes of those with whom he was most conversant. The greatness of most men, like objects seen through a mist, diminishes with the distance; but Hamilton, like a tower seen afar off under a clear sky, rose in grandeur and sublimity with every step of approach. Familiarity with him was the parent

of veneration. Over these matchless talents Probity threw her brightest luster. Frankness, suavity, tenderness, benevolence, breathed thru their exercise. And to his family—but he is gone. That noble heart beats no more; that eye of fire is dimmed; and sealed are those oracular lips. Americans, the serenest beam of your glory is extinguished in the tomb!"

That, Mr. Chairman, is the contemporary judgment; spoken, to be sure, under stress of great feeling and deep sorrow, the contemporary judgment of one of the greatest orators of his day, voicing the opinion of men of intelligence, high spirit and good will everywhere as to the man who was killed by Burr's bullet on the shelf of the Palisades.

I said to you a few moments ago that I could tell you nothing new about Hamilton. This is all a twice-told tale. This is part of the warp and woof of our American history; this is part of the very fabric out of which we are made and of the institutions under which we live. And yet, Mr. Chairman, who would have supposed that after the lapse of a hundred short years the work of Alexander Hamilton must be done all over again? That, sir, is the condition which confronts the American people in these opening years of the twentieth century. What Alexander Hamilton taught of civil liberty, of freedom and of order; what he taught of effective, responsible government, of its purpose, its organs, its instruments, has become so familiar, so built into our daily life and into the fabric of our business, that we have forgotten, many of us, that it is essential to our welfare and to the perpetuity of our Government. Yet today, from one voice and another, meeting a fair measure of approval all over the land, come attacks upon these very fundamental principles of our Government, until many of us cry aloud for the spirit of Hamilton to come back to us and lead this great empire of ours still farther forward in the fight for the permanent upbuilding of civil liberty!

When the Constitution of these United States was framed, our fathers staked out clearly two great fields of activity and conduct. On the one hand, they formulated a plan of government. They constituted it of an executive, a legislative and a judicial branch, and they ascribed to these their several functions. Then they marked out just

as clearly the field of civil liberty. They forbade the Government to invade it, and they erected great courts of justice to see to it that it was not invaded. Never before in the history of mankind, and never since, has that been done. In no ancient state, in no medieval state, in no modern state but ours, is civil liberty a part of the fundamental law of the land. The nearest approach to it is in the Constitution of the German Empire; that Constitution written after the war with France, in 1871, under the guidance of Bismarck. Neither the Constitution of France nor the unwritten Constitution of Great Britain—none of these modern constitutions of which you read, not one of them—defines and protects the field of civil liberty as our fathers did 125 years ago. Today it is proposed to us as an advance, as a step forward, that we should unite to throw away the only thing which distinguishes us from the other nations of the world; to put civil liberty into the melting-pot; to make it subject to any majority, however temporary, however fickle, whether at the polls or in the Legislature, and to make it possible to strip a man of his property, his liberty and freedom; and that, if you please, by any mere rush of tumultuous passion!

Never has a more preposterous, never has a more ignorant, proposal been made by anybody. In absolute defiance of history, in utter ignorance of the history of Europe, in ignorance even of the history of the United States, without any appreciation of what we have been doing these 125 years, we are now asked to strip ourselves of the one great fundamental protection which the fathers won for us, and to which the enlightened peoples of the world have been looking for a century and a quarter as the greatest evidence of political progress that mankind has ever seen!

I submit, Mr. Chairman, that it requires not only a large measure of ignorance, but a total lack of the sense of humor, to propose such a program in the name of advance. This new program may be a wise one, but then put upon it the name that belongs to it—reaction! Say frankly that

we have gone ahead too fast; that we have staked out territory that man is still incompetent to occupy; that we are not ready for liberty; that we should go back to the days of Francis I and Henry IV and Henry VIII, and, substituting the many for the one, turn over our civil liberty to the tender mercies of a tyrant. That is what is seriously proposed to the American people today.

This is not a party question; it rises far above faction or names or personalities, or political parties. I beg you to believe that I should not speak of this matter in this presence, on an occasion such as this, did I not believe that it goes to the very roots of our American life, and that those things with which the great names of Hamilton and Jefferson and Washington and Madison and Marshall and Webster and Lincoln are associated, are at stake. They are all at stake in the issues that are being debated before the American people today.

You may, if you choose, solace yourselves with the optimistic thought that everything will come out well. Hamilton never did. He saw to it that it came out well. He addrest himself to the Constitutional Convention lest error be made. He later addrest himself to the New York Convention at Poughkeepsie lest the Constitution be rejected. He addrest himself to the Congress of the United States lest we have no adequate financial system, no national income and no properly ordered system of taxation. He was never content to let matters drift. He saw to it—trusting as he did, and as every American must, in the good faith, the honor and the intelligence of the American people—he saw to it that the facts were laid before them with such clearness, the arguments adduced with such cogency, the objections answered with such overwhelming force, that they were led to walk in the straight and narrow path of national safety.

The building of this nation has been a long, a solemn and a sacred task. It is the work of four generations of men who have conceived lofty ideals, and who, without regard to party, religious faith or section, whether up in

the pine forests of Maine or over across the continent in the orange fields of California, or down on the plantations of the sunny South, have wrought for freedom, for liberty, for stability, for justice. The American people have, in a singular sense, regarded themselves as the instruments of Providence in the working-out of a great government and a mighty civilization. Almost alone among the governments of the world, they have been in the habit, from the beginning, of invoking the Divine blessing upon the deliberations of their legislative bodies, and they have seen to it that religion has been represented on every great occasion of national festivity or rejoicing. They have felt that here in this Western World, with an endowment by Nature the like of which history has never recorded, the opportunity has been given to try on a huge scale, opening their arms to all who would come, the fateful experiment of self-government. Many men of all types and kinds, soldiers and sailors, jurists and teachers, legislators and executives, philosophers and popular leaders, have contributed to that great end. But out of them all I name six men who stand forever in the American Pantheon as supremely important among all those who have builded the nation's government. I do not speak now of those who have made other and important contributions; I have not in mind those who have led great parties, who have accomplished important acts or have set in motion great and fine and lasting currents of thought; but I speak of six men who, one after another, have struck the blows that were necessary to the construction of our great American ship of state—the nation's builders.

The first is George Washington. Without his calm and even temper, without his serene and unruffled mind, which was as influential because of what he refrained from doing as because of what he did, the existence of this American nation is unthinkable. His is, beyond all comparison, the great self-sacrificing character in political history. Washington, thru his personality, drew the people of these colonies together, made them feel loyalty to a single

person, and thru that person, to the idea which he represented; and then he deftly withdrew his personality and left them to worship the new and beautiful ideal that he had given them.

By his side and with him was Hamilton, the supreme constructive genius in political philosophy and in statesmanship. He showed what to do and how to do it; how the executive and the legislature could be adjusted to each other; how the nation's business could be carried on; and how the various departments of government should be organized. He taught the great mass of the American people what the fundamental principles were which underlay this new and fateful project.

Next comes John Marshall, who, from his great place as Chief Justice of the United States, gave to the new Constitution that interpretation—at a time when two interpretations were possible—which welded the nation together in unity and gave to it supreme power and legal control over its several parts. But Marshall's work was challenged. Thomas Jefferson petulantly put obstacles in his way, and no less a man than Andrew Jackson said: 'John Marshall has made the decision, now let him execute it.' The people of the United States had to be taught that when the nation spoke—whether by voice of the President, the Congress or the Supreme Court, when a constitutional interpretation was made, it was to be obeyed, even if it took the whole of the nation's power to compel obedience.

That great act of public education was preformed by this same rugged Andrew Jackson of Tennessee in his great proclamation to the nullifiers of South Carolina. When the distinguished gentlemen of South Carolina said they would not enforce the tariff act, that they did not approve of it, that they would not accept it for their State, Andrew Jackson—speaking perhaps by the pen of the great jurist, Edward Livingston of Louisiana—made a famous proclamation to the nullifiers in which was conveyed the substance of his reported personal message to John C. Calhoun, one of the greatest of all American statesmen and political

philosophers. This was that if one drop of blood was shed in defiance of the laws of the United States, he, Andrew Jackson, would hang the first nullifier he could lay his hands on to the first tree he could find. And so the laws of the United States were not nullified in South Carolina. The decisions of the Supreme Court were undisputed thereafter, and this nation took a long step forward toward real nationality.

Then came the eloquent voice of Daniel Webster, who, for thirty years at the bar, on the platform and in the Senate of the United States, educated public opinion to a point where resistance to the secession movement that had to come, was both natural and necessary. We need not blink the fact that without Daniel Webster the Civil War could not have been fought to a successful conclusion. It was not possible to rest our national contention in that war upon a purely legal basis, even upon legal propositions so clear and firm; for they were cold and rational only. Daniel Webster had for thirty years made them live. He burned into the hearts of the American people the idea of nationality. Whether you take one great speech at Plymouth, another at Boston, another in New York, or the great and conclusive reply to Hayne in the Senate, it makes no difference; they are all part of one great going to school by the people of the United States to Daniel Webster. He taught them not alone in terms of constitutional law and of legal definitions, but in terms of everyday thought and feeling and action that this nation was one. It was he who prepared the way for what followed.

Daniel Webster made it possible for Abraham Lincoln—that sad, patient, long-suffering man—to carry this nation thru the final crisis of its birth throes; because he had put under him and behind him the great body of opinion which believed that this nation was one, was to be kept one, was to live as one and was to live a free people.

These six men, Mr. Chairman, are both the symbols and the moving forces of the constructive nation-building of the American people. They are drawn from all parts

of the United States, from different classes of society, with varying political views, touching the people with different interests and at different points. These six men are the most prominent in the galaxy of our nation-building heroes. Each one of them would be affrighted could he know from his place in high heaven that at this late day it is seriously proposed in the name of greater justice, of more effective advance, to undermine and to break down the very foundations on which this government and the civilization of this people rest.

And so, Mr. Chairman, as we mark this anniversary of Hamilton's birth and pay to him the highest tribute, we can give him his most just and well-earned recognition only if we remember not alone what he was, not alone what he did, but what bearing all that has upon the America of today; what lessons his career and his teachings have in relation to the great problems of politics, of economics and of the development of civil liberty that are to be solved in the future. There is no safe guide for the future but the experience of the past. When we know what has happened under certain conditions we may with some assurance predict what will happen when those conditions are repeated. When we see out of what a morass of medievalism, out of what a morass of injustice and ignorance and squalor, the people of the United States and their ancestors, have come; to what heights they have mounted under their Constitution and their laws, their civil institutions, their liberty and their freedom, it is to me inconceivable that as these people come to know what the issue of the moment really is, they will turn their backs on Washington and Hamilton and Marshall and Jackson and Webster and Lincoln, and tear their governmental structure down just to see what will happen.

Nicholas Murray Butler

Columbia University

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS
0 011 836 896 4