

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

William Winter.

Presented
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To


Charles Henry Webb

With kind regards of

William Winter

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS





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GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

As he looked when I first saw him.—W. W.

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

A Eulogy

*DELIVERED BEFORE THE PEOPLE OF STATEN
ISLAND, AT THE CASTLETON, ST. GEORGE,
FEBRUARY 24, 1893*

BY

WILLIAM WINTER

“ Now is the stately column broke,
The beacon-light is quenched in smoke,
The trumpet's silver sound is still,
The warder silent on the hill.”

SIR WALTER SCOTT

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Second Edition.

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS.

This brilliant throng, this dazzling array of eager faces, this gentle, fervent welcome—they are not for me. They are for another. They proclaim your affectionate devotion to a gracious figure that has passed from this world; a voice that is silent; a face that here will shine on you no more. And, surely, if the souls of the departed are aware of anything upon this earth, if those ties of affection still subsist, without

which life—whether here or elsewhere—would be worthless, his sacred spirit descends upon this place, to-night, and sees into your hearts and rejoices in your love, and knows this hour and hallows it.

In the days of my youth I was often privileged to sit by the fireside of the poet Longfellow. He was exceedingly kind to me, and with his encouragement and under his guidance I entered upon that service of literature to which, humbly but earnestly, my life has been devoted. Longfellow possessed a great and peculiar fascination for youth. He was a man who nat-

urally attracted to himself all unsophisticated spirits; and—as I did not then know, but subsequently learned—he was a man who naturally attracted to himself all persons who were intrinsically noble. His gentleness was elemental. His tact was inerrant. His patience never failed. As I recall him I am conscious of a beautiful spirit; an altogether lovely life; a perfect image of continence, wisdom, dignity, sweetness, and grace. In Longfellow's home—the old Craigie mansion at Cambridge—on an autumn evening nearly forty years ago was assembled a brilliant company of gay ladies and

gallant gentlemen; and as I entered the large drawing-room, which now I believe is the library, one figure in particular attracted my gaze. It was a young man, lithe, slender, faultlessly apparelled, very handsome, who rose at my approach, turning upon me a countenance that beamed with kindness and a smile that was a welcome from the heart. His complexion was fair. His hair was brown, long, and waving. His features were regular and of exquisite refinement. His eyes were blue. His bearing was that of manly freedom and unconventional grace, and yet it was that of absolute dignity. He had the

manner of the natural aristocrat—a manner that is born, not made ; a manner that is never found except in persons who are self-centred without being selfish ; who are intrinsically noble, wholly simple and wholly true. I was introduced to him by Longfellow : and then and thus it was that I first beheld George William Curtis. From that hour until the day he died I was honored with his friendship—now become a hallowed memory. That meeting was more than once recalled between us ; and as I look back to it, across the varied landscape of intervening years, I see it as a precious and altogether excep-

tional experience. It was a hand dispensing nothing but blessings which bestowed that incomparable boon—the illustrious and venerated hand of the foremost poet of America. It was the splendid munificence of Longfellow that gave the benediction of Curtis.

It is not, however, only because he was a friend of mine that I have been asked to speak of him in this distinguished presence. It is because he was a friend of yours, whom you loved and honored living and whom you deplore in death. It is because he was a great person whose lot was cast in this community, and because this community is wish-

ful to listen to even the humblest voice that can be raised in his honor. Not indeed that his name requires eulogy. The career of Curtis is rounded and complete. The splendid structure of his character stands before the world like a monument of gold. It is not for his sake that our tribute is laid upon the shrine of memory; it is for our own. When the grave has closed over one whom we love, our hearts instinctively strive to find a little comfort in the assurance that while it was yet possible to manifest our affection we did not fail to do so. 'We were never unkind' (so the heart whispers),

‘we were never neglectful; we were always appreciative and sympathetic and true, and he was aware of our fidelity and found a pleasure in it.’ By thoughts like those the sharpness of grief is dulled and the sense of loss is made less bitter. With that motive this assemblage has convened,—in order that here, amid the scenes that he knew and loved; here, within a few paces of the home that was so beautiful and is now so lonely; here, in the hall from which the echoes of his melodious voice have scarcely died away, his neighbors and friends, bringing their garlands of gentle remembrance and

tender affection, may utter blessings on his name. It is the spirit of resignation for which we seek, and with it the satisfaction of our sense of duty. Not to express homage for a public benefactor would be to fail in self-respect. Not to reverence a noble and exemplary character is to forego a benefit that is individual as well as social. Nowhere else can so much strength be derived as from the contemplation of men and women who pass through the vicissitudes of human experience,—the ordeal of life and death,—not without action and not without feeling, but calmly

and bravely, without fever and without fear. There is nothing greater in this world, nor can there be anything greater in the world to come, than a perfectly pure and true and resolute soul. When the old Scotch Lord Balmerino was going to the block, on Tower Hill, — in expiation of his alleged treason to the House of Hanover,—he spoke a few great words, that ought to be forever remembered. “The man who is not fit to die,” he said, “is not fit to live.” That was the voice of a hero. An image of heroism like that is of inestimable value, and it abides in the human soul as a

perpetual benediction. In Shakespeare's tragedy, when the foes of Brutus are seeking to capture him on the field of battle, his friend Lucilius, whom they have already taken, denotes, in two consummate lines, the same inspiring ideal of superb stability:

“ When you do find him, or alive
 or dead, .

He will be found like Brutus, like
 himself.”

That might always have been said of Curtis. That was the man whom we admired and loved. That was the character we do ourselves the justice to

celebrate and reverence now. In every duty faithful; in every trial adequate; in every attribute of nobility perfect—

“He taught us how to live, and—oh,
 too high
The price for knowledge!—taught us
 how to die.”

And that announces to you the substance and the drift of my discourse. It is not the achievement of Curtis that now lingers most lovingly in the memory—it is the character. The authoritative and final word upon his works will be spoken by posterity. For us it is enough that we remind each

other of what we already know of the man. . . . "When a neighbor dies" (so Curtis himself wrote, in his wise and sympathetic sketch of the beloved and lamented Theodore Winthrop), "his form and quality appear clearly, as if he had been dead a thousand years. Then we see what we only felt before. Heroes in history seem to us poetic because they are there. But if we should tell the simple truth of some of our neighbors it would sound like poetry." . . . The simple truth about Curtis has that sound now, and more and more it will have that sound as time proceeds. It is the

story of a man of genius whose pure life and splendid powers were devoted to the ministry of beauty and to the self-sacrificing service of mankind. The superficial facts of that story, indeed, are familiar and usual. It was the inspiration of them that made them poetic—that profound, intuitive sense of the obligation of noble living which controlled and fashioned and directed his every thought and deed. The incidents customary in the life of a man of letters are scarcely more important than were the migrations of the Vicar of Wakefield from the brown bed to the blue and from

the blue bed back again to the brown. He moves from place to place; he has ill fortune and good fortune; he gains and loses; he rejoices and suffers; he writes books: and he is never justly appreciated until he is dead. Curtis was a man of letters, born sixty-nine years ago this day, in our American Venice, the New England city of Providence; born nearly two months before the death of Byron (so near, in literature, we always are to the great names of the past),—and a boy of eight in that dark year which ended the illustrious lives of Goethe and Sir Walter Scott. It has been usual

to ascribe the direction of his career to the influence of his juvenile experience at Brook Farm, in Roxbury, where he resided from 1840 to 1844; but it should be remembered that the Brook Farm ideal was in his mind before he went there—the ideal of a social existence regulated by absolute justice and adorned by absolute beauty. In that idyllic retreat—that earthly Eden, conceived and founded by the learned and gentle George Ripley as a home for all the beatitudes and all the arts—and later, at Concord, his young mind, no doubt, was stimulated by some of the most invigo-

rating forces that ever were liberated upon human thought: Theodore Parker, who was incarnate truth; the mystical spirit of Channing; the resolute, intrepid, humanitarian Dana; the sombre, imaginative Hawthorne; the audacious intellect and indomitable will of Margaret Fuller; and, greatest of all, the heaven-eyed thought of Emerson. But the preordination of that mind to the service of justice and beauty and humanity was germinal in itself. Curtis began wisely, because he followed the star of his own destiny. He was wise, in boyhood, when he went to Brook Farm. He was wiser

still in early manhood,—having formally adopted the vocation of literature,—when he sought the haunted lands of the Orient, and found inspiration and theme in subjects that were novel because their scene was both august and remote. On that expedition, consuming four precious years, he penetrated into the country of the Nile and he roamed in Arabia and Syria. He stood before the Sphinx and he knelt at the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem. It is a privilege to be able to add—since he was an American—that he did not endeavor to be comic. When, in later days,

my friend Artemus Ward went to the Tower of London he looked upon the Traitor's Gate, and he remarked that apparently as many as twenty traitors might go in abreast. It was funny—but to a reverent mind the note is a discordant note. Curtis was a humorist, but he was not the humorist who grins amid the sculptures of Westminster Abbey. He was a humorist as Addison was, whom he much resembled. He looked upon life with tranquil, pensive, kindly eyes. He exulted in all of goodness that it contains; he touched its foibles with bland, whimsical drollery; he would

have made all persons happy by making them all noble, serene, gentle, and patient. Such a mind could degrade nothing. Least of all could it degrade dignity with sport, or antiquity with ridicule. He looked at the statue of Memnon and he saw that "serene repose is the attitude and character of godlike grandeur." "Those forms," he said, "impress man with himself. In them we no longer succumb to the landscape, but sit, individual and imperial, under the sky, by the mountains and the river. Man is magnified in Memnon." He stood among the ruined temples of Erment and

he saw Cleopatra, glorious in beauty upon the throne of Rameses, and he uttered neither a scrap of morality nor a figment of jest. "Nothing Egyptian," he said, "is so cognate to our warm human sympathy as the rich romance of Cleopatra and her Roman lovers." . . . "The great persons and events," he added, "that notch time in passing do so because Nature gave them such an excessive and exaggerated impulse that wherever they touch they leave their mark; and that intense humanity secures human sympathy beyond the most beautiful balance, which, indeed, the angels love

and we are beginning to appreciate." That was the spirit in which he rambled and saw and wrote. "The highest value of travel," he urged, "is not the accumulation of facts, but the perception of their significance." In those true words he made his comment, not simply upon the immediate and local scene, but upon the whole wide stage of human activity and experience. He was wise, when he began to labor for the present, thus to fortify himself with the meaning of the past. Those early books of his, the "Nile Notes" and the "Howadji in Syria,"—which have been before the world for more than

forty years,—will always be a refreshment and a delight. They glow with the authentic vitality of nature,—her warmth, and color, and copious profusion, and exultant joy,—and they are buoyant with the ardor of an auspicious and yet unsaddened soul. But they are exceptionally precious now, for their guidance to the springs of his character. In the “Syria” there is a passage that, perhaps, furnishes the key to his whole career. He is speaking of successful persons, and he says this: . . . “Success is a delusion. It is an attainment—but who attains? It is the horizon, always bounding our path

and therefore never gained. The Pope, triple-crowned, and borne, with flabella, through St. Peter's, is not successful,—for he might be canonized into a saint. Pygmalion, before his perfect statue, is not successful,—for it might live. Raphael, finishing the Sistine Madonna, is not successful,—for her beauty has revealed to him a finer and an unattainable beauty." . . . In those words you perceive, at the outset, the spirit of comprehensive, sweet, and tolerant reason that was ever the conspicuous attribute of his mind. Those words denote, indeed, the inherent forces that governed him to the last—per-

ception and practical remembrance of what has already been accomplished, and the realization that human life is not final achievement but endless endeavor.

In early days Curtis wrote verse, as well as prose. As late as 1863 he delivered before the Sons of Rhode Island a poem of 418 lines, entitled "A Rhyme of Rhode Island and the Times." In that occurs his impassioned pæan for the Flag of the Republic :

"At last, at last, each glowing star
In that pure field of heavenly blue,
On every people shining far,
Burns, to its utmost promise
true. . . .

“And when the hour seems dark
with doom

Our sacred banner, lifted higher,
Shall flash away the gathering
gloom

With inextinguishable fire.

“Pure as its white the future see!
Bright as its red is now the sky!
Fixed as its stars the faith shall
be

That nerves our hands to do or
die!”

Those are but three of the eight stanzas. They show his patriotic ardor, and they also show the felicity of his diction in verse. That felicity is still further manifested in another

characteristic passage, denoting that in the eighteenth-century manner he also could have been expert, if he had cared to pursue it :

“ Admonished, by life’s fluctuating
 scene,
 Of all he is and all he might have
 been,
 Man, toiling upward on the dizzy
 track,
 Still looks regretful or remorseful
 back ;
 Paces old paths, remembering vows
 that rolled
 In burning words from hearts for-
 ever cold ;
 Bows his sad head where once he
 bowed the knee

And kissed the lips that no more
 kissed shall be.
So the sad traveller climbing from
 the plain
Turns from the hill and sees his
 home again,
And sighs to know that,—this sweet
 prospect o'er,—
The boundless world is but a foreign
 shore."

A certain frenzy is inseparable from the temperament of the poet. He must not yield his mind absolutely to its control, but he must be capable of it and he must guide and direct its course. He must not, with Savage and with Burns, abdicate the supremacy of the soul.

He must, with Shakespeare and with Goethe (to borrow the fine figure of Addison), "ride on the whirlwind and direct the storm." The conduct of his life must not be a delirium; but the capacity of delirium must, inevitably, be a part of his nature. Conventionality is bounded by four walls. Unless the heart of the poet be passionate he cannot move the hearts of others: and the poet who does not touch the heart is a poet of no importance. Curtis was a man of deep poetic sensibility. In that idyllic composition, "Prue and I," the poetic atmosphere is invariably sustained and it is invariably

beautiful. The use of poetic quotation, wherever it occurs, throughout his writings, is remarkably felicitous—as in his book that we know as “Lotus-Eating,” written in 1851—and it manifests the keenest appreciation of the poetic element. His analysis of the genius of Bryant, in his noble oration before the Century Club in 1878, is not less subtle than potential, and it leaves nothing to be said. His perception of the ideal—as when he wrote upon Hamlet, with the spiritual mind and prince-like figure of Edwin Booth in that character—was equally profound and compre-

hensive, and as fine and delicate as it was unerringly true. There can be little doubt that he was conscious, originally, of a strong impulse toward poetry, but that this was restricted and presently was diverted into other channels, partly by the stress of his philosophical temperament, and partly by the untoward force of iron circumstance. His nature was not without fervor; but it was the fervor of moral and spiritual enthusiasm, not of passion. His faculties and feelings were exquisitely poised, and I do not think there ever was a time in all his life when that perfect sanity was disturbed by any in-

ordinate waywardness or any blast of storm. The benign and potent but utterly dispassionate influence of Emerson touched his responsive spirit, at the beginning of his career, and beneath that mystic and wonderful spell of Oriental contemplation and bland and sweet composure his destiny was fulfilled. Like gravitates to like. Each individual sways by that power, whatsoever it be, to which in nature he is the most closely attuned. The poetic voice of Emerson was the voice, not of the human heart, but of the pantheistic spirit :

“ As sunbeams stream through liberal
 space,

And nothing jostle nor displace,
So waved the pine-tree through my
thought,
And fanned the dreams it never
brought."

In Curtis the poetic voice was less remote and more human ; but it was of the same elusive quality. It was not often heard. It sounded very sweetly in his tender lyric of other days :

" Sing the song that once you sung,
When we were together young,
When there were but you and I
Underneath the summer sky.

" Sing the song, and o'er and o'er—
But I know that nevermore
Will it be the song you sung
When we were together young."

There can be no higher mission than that of the poet, but there are many vocations that exact more direct practical effort and involve more immediate practical results. One of those vocations, meanwhile, had largely absorbed the mind of Curtis.

To people of the present day it would be difficult to impart an adequate idea of the state of political feeling that existed in New England forty years ago. The passage of the Fugitive Slave Act, which was regarded as the culmination of a long series of encroachments, had inspired a tremendous resentment, and the community there was seething

with bitterness and conflict. The novel of "Uncle Tom's Cabin" had blazoned the national crime of slavery, and had aroused and inflamed thousands of hearts against it, as a sin and a disgrace. Theodore Parker—that moral and intellectual giant—was preaching in the Boston Music Hall. The passionate soul of Thomas Starr King poured forth its melodious fervor in the old church in Hollis Street. Sumner, and Phillips, and Wilson, and Giddings, and Hale, and Burlingame, in Faneuil Hall and everywhere else, were pleading the cause of the slave and the purification of the flag. The return of Anthony Burns from Boston, in

June, 1854,—when the court-house was surrounded with chains and soldiers, and when State Street was commanded with cannon,—although perfectly legal, was felt by every freeman as an act of monstrous tyranny, and as the consummation of national shame. The murderous assault on Sumner, committed in the United States Senate chamber by Brooks of South Carolina, had aroused all that was best of manly pride and moral purpose in the North, and from the moment when that blow was struck every man who was not blinded by folly knew that the end of human slavery in the Republic must inevitably come.

There never had been seen in our political history so wild a tide of enthusiasm as that which swept through the New England States, bearing onward the standard of Frémont, in 1856. Statesmen, indeed, there were—foreseeing and dreading civil war—who steadily counselled moderation and compromise. Edward Everett was one of those pacificators, and Rufus Choate was another. Choate, in Faneuil Hall, delivered one of the most enchanting orations of his life, in solemn and passionate warning against those impetuous zealots of freedom who—as he beheld them—were striving to rend asunder the colossal crag of national unity, al-

ready smitten by the lightning and riven from summit to base. And it must be admitted—and it needs no apology—that the conviction of generous patriotism in those wild days of wrath and tempest was the conviction that a Union under which every citizen of every free State was, by the law, made a hunter of negro slaves for a Southern driver, was not only worthless but infamous. Conservatives, cynics, mercenary, scheming politicians, and timid friends of peace might hesitate, and palter with the occasion, and seek to evade the issue and postpone the struggle; but the general drift of New England sentiment was all the other way. Old

political lines disappeared. The everlasting bickerings of Protestant and Catholic were for a moment hushed. The Know-Nothings vanished. The thin ghosts of the old silver-gray Whig party, led by Bell and Everett, moaned feebly at parting and faded into air. Elsewhere in the nation the lines of party conflict were sharply drawn; but in New England one determination animated every bosom—the determination that human slavery should perish. The spirit that walked abroad was the spirit of Concord Bridge and Bunker Hill. The silent voices of Samuel Adams and James Otis were silent no more. “My ances-

tor fell at Lexington," said old Joel Parker—then over threescore years of age—"and I am ready to shed more of the same blood in the same cause." It was a tremendous epoch in New England history, and we who were youths in it felt our hearts aflame with holy ardor in a righteous cause. I was myself a follower of the Pathfinder and a speaker for him, in that stormy time,—assailing Choate and Caleb Cushing and other giants of the adverse faction, with the freedom and confidence that are possible only to unlimited moral enthusiasm. What a different world it was from the world of to-day! How sure we were that all we de-

sired to do was wise and right! How plainly we saw our duty, and how eager we were for the onset and the strife! If we could only have foreseen the beatific condition of the present, I wonder if that zeal would have cooled. Some of us have grown a little weary of rolling the Sisyphus stone of benevolence for the aggrandizement of a selfish multitude, careless of everything except its sensual enjoyment. But it was a glorious enthusiasm while it lasted; and, as poor Byron truly said,

“There’s not a joy the world can give
like that it takes away,
When the glow of early thought de-
clines in feeling’s dull decay.”

Into that conflict, of Right against Wrong, Curtis threw himself with all his soul. His reputation as a speaker had already been established. He had made his first public address in 1851 before the New York National Academy of Design—discussing “Contemporary Artists of Europe,”—and in 1853 he had formally adopted the Platform as a vocation; and it continued to be a part of his vocation for the next twenty years. He was everywhere popular in the lyceum, and he now brought into the more turbulent field of politics the dignity of the scholar, the refinement and grace of the gentleman, and all the varied equipments

of the zealous and accomplished advocate, the caustic satirist, and the impassioned champion of the rights of man. I first heard him speak on politics—making an appeal for Frémont—at a popular convention in the town of Fitchburg. It was on a summer day, under canvas, but almost in the open air. The assemblage was vast. Curtis followed Horace Greeley — with whose peculiar drawl and rustic aspect his princelike demeanor and lucid and sonorous rhetoric were in wonderful contrast. Neither of those men was wordly-wise; neither was versed in political duplicity. Greeley, no doubt, had then the

advantage in political wisdom ; but Curtis was the orator—and, while Curtis spoke, the hearts of that multitude were first lured and entranced by the golden tones of his delicious voice, and then were shaken, as with a whirlwind, by the righteous fervor of his magnificent enthusiasm. It was the diamond morning blaze of that perfect eloquence which some of you have known in its noonday splendor, and all of you have known in its sunset ray. He continued to speak for that cause—everywhere with great effect ; and down to the war-time, and during the war-time, the principles which are at the basis of

the American Republic had no champion more eloquent or more sincere. He abandoned the platform as a regular employment in 1873; but—as we all gratefully remember—he never altogether ceased the exercise of that matchless gift of oratory for which he was remarkable and by which he was enabled to accomplish so much good and diffuse so much happiness.

In this domain he came to his zenith. The art in which Curtis excelled all his contemporaries of the last thirty years was the art of oratory. Many other authors wrote better in verse, and some others wrote as well in prose.

Hawthorne, Motley, Lowell, Whipple, Giles, Mitchell, Warner, and Stedman were masters of style. But in the felicity of speech Curtis was supreme above all other men of his generation. My reference is to the period from 1860 to 1890. Oratory as it existed in America in the previous epoch has no living representative. Curtis was the last orator of the great school of Everett, Sumner, and Wendell Phillips. His model—in so far as he had a model—was Sumner, and the style of Sumner was based on Burke. But Curtis had heard more magical voices than those—for he had heard Daniel Webster and Rufus

Choate ; and although he was averse to their politics, he could profit by their example. Webster and Choate—each in a different way—were perfection. The eloquence of Webster had the affluent potentiality of the rising sun ; of the lonely mountain ; of the long, regular, successive surges of the resounding sea. His periods were as lucid as the light. His logic was irresistible. His facts came on in a solid phalanx of overwhelming power. His tones were crystal-clear. His magnificent person towered in dignity and seemed colossal in its imperial grandeur. His voice grew in volume, as he became more and

more aroused, and his language glowing with the fire of conviction, rose and swelled and broke, like the great ninth wave that shakes the solid crag. His speech, however, was addressed always to the reason, never to the imagination. The eloquence of Rufus Choate, on the other hand, was the passionate enchantment of the actor and the poet—an eloquence in which you felt the rush of the tempest, and heard the crash of breakers and the howling of frantic gales and the sobbing wail of homeless winds in bleak and haunted regions of perpetual night. He began calmly, often in a tone

that was hardly more than a whisper; but as he proceeded the whole man was gradually absorbed and transfigured, as into a fountain of fire, which then poured forth, in one tumultuous and overwhelming torrent of melody, the iridescent splendors of description, and appeal, and humor, and pathos, and invective, and sarcasm, and poetry, and beauty—till the listener lost all consciousness of self and was borne away as on a golden river flowing to a land of dreams. The vocabulary of that orator seemed literally to have no limit. His voice sounded every note, from a low, piercing whisper to

a shrill, sonorous scream. His remarkable appearance, furthermore, enhanced the magic of his speech. The tall, gaunt, vital figure, the symmetrical head, the clustered hair,—once black, now faintly touched with gray,—the emaciated, haggard countenance, the pallid olive complexion, the proud Arabian features, the mournful flaming brown eyes, the imperial demeanor and wild and lawless grace—all those attributes of a strange, poetic personality commingled with the boundless resources of his eloquence to rivet the spell of altogether exceptional character and genius. In singular contrast

with Choate was still another great orator whom Curtis heard, — and about whom he has written, — that consummate scholar and rhetorician Edward Everett. There is no statelier figure in American history. If Everett had been as puissant in character as he was ample in scholarship, and as rich in emotion as he was fine in intellect, he would have been the peerless wonder of the age. He was a person of singular beauty. His form was a little above the middle height and perfectly proportioned. His head was beautifully formed and exquisitely poised. His closely clustering hair was as

white as silver. His features were regular; his eyes were dark; his countenance was pale, refined, and cold. His aspect was formal and severe. He dressed habitually in black,—often wearing around his neck a thin gold chain, outside of his coat. His eloquence was the perfection of art. I heard him often, and in every one of his orations,—except the magnificent one that he gave in Faneuil Hall on the death of Rufus Choate, which was supreme and without blemish,—his art was distinctly obvious. He began in a level tone and with a formal manner. He spoke without a manuscript, and whether his

speech was long or short he never missed a word nor made an error. As he proceeded his countenance kindled and his figure began to move. With action he was profuse, and every one of his gestures had the beauty of a mathematical curve and the certainty of a mathematical demonstration. His movement suited his word, his pauses were exactly timed; his finely modulated voice rose and fell with rhythmic beat; and his polished periods flowed from his lips with limpid fluency and delicious cadence. A distinguishing attribute of his art was its elaborate complexity. In his noble oration on Washington,

when he came to contrast the honesty of that patriot with the mercenary greed of Marlborough, it was not with words alone that he pointed his moral, but with a graceful, energetic blow upon his pocket that mingled the jingle of coin with the accents of scorn. One speech of his I remember (as far back as 1852) contained a description of the visible planets and constellations in the midnight sky; and his verbal pageantry was so magnificent that almost, I thought, it might take its place among them.

Such was the school of oratory in which Curtis studied and in which his style was formed. It

no longer exists. The oratory of the present day is characterized by colloquialism, familiarity, and comic anecdote. Curtis maintained the dignity of the old order. You all remember the charm of his manner—how subtle it was, yet seemingly how simple; how completely it convinced and satisfied you; how it clarified your intelligence; how it ennobled your mood. One secret of it, no doubt, was its perfect sincerity. Noble himself, and speaking only for right, and truth, and beauty, he addressed nobility in others. That consideration would explain the moral and the genial authority of his

eloquence. The total effect of it, however, was attributable to his exquisite and inexplicable art. He could make an extemporaneous speech, but as a rule his speeches were carefully prepared. They had not always been written, but they had always been composed and considered. He possessed absolute self-control; a keen sense of symmetry and proportion; the faculty of logical thought and lucid statement; unbounded resources of felicitous illustration; passionate earnestness, surpassing sweetness of speech, and perfect grace of action. Like Everett,—whom he more closely resembled than he

did any other of the great masters of oratory,—he could trust his memory and he could trust his composure. He began with the natural deference of un-studied courtesy — serene, propitiatory, irresistibly winning. He captured the eye and the ear upon the instant, and before he had been speaking for many minutes he captured the heart. There was not much action in his delivery ; there never was any artifice. His gentle tones grew earnest. His fine face became illumined. His golden periods flowed with more and more of impetuous force, and the climax of their perfect music was always

exactly identical with the climax of their thought. There always was a certain culmination of fervent power at which he aimed, and after that a gradual subsidence to the previous level of gracious serenity. He created and sustained the absolute illusion of spontaneity. You never felt that you had been beguiled by art: you only felt that you had been entranced by nature. I never could explain it to myself. I cannot explain it to you. I can only say of him, as he himself said of Wendell Phillips: "The secret of the rose's sweetness, of the bird's ecstasy, of the sunset's

glory—that is the secret of genius and of eloquence.”

While, however, the secret of his eloquence was elusive, the purpose and effect of it were perfectly clear. It dignified the subject and it ennobled the hearer. He once told me of a conversation, about poetry and oratory, between himself and the late distinguished senator, Roscoe Conkling. That statesman, having declared that, in his judgment, the perfection of poetry was “Casabianca,” by Mrs. Hemans (“The boy stood on the burning deck”), and the perfection of oratory a passage in a Fourth-of-July oration by Charles

Sprague, desired Curtis to name a supreme specimen of eloquence. "I mentioned," said Curtis, "a passage in Emerson's Dartmouth College oration,—in which, however, Mr. Conkling could perceive no peculiar force." That passage Curtis proceeded to repeat to me. I wish that I could say it as it was said by him; but that is impossible. Yet the citation of it is appropriate, not only as showing his ideal but as explaining his self-devotion, not to art alone but to conscience.

"You will hear every day" (so runs that pearl of noble thought and feeling) "the maxims of a low prudence. You

will hear that the first duty is to get land and money, place and name. 'What is this Truth you seek? what is this Beauty?' men will ask, with derision. If, nevertheless, God have called any of you to explore truth and beauty, be bold, be firm, be true! When you shall say, 'As others do, so will I; I renounce, I am sorry for it, my early visions; I must eat the good of the land and let learning and romantic expectation go until a more convenient season;'—then dies the man in you; then once more perish the buds of art and poetry and science, as they have died already in a thousand, thou-

sand hearts. The hour of that choice is the crisis of your history: and see that you hold yourself fast by the intellect." . . . It was natural that Curtis should adopt that doctrine. He would have evolved it if he had not found it. That divine law was in his nature, and from that divine law he never swerved.

How should a man of genius use his gift? Setting aside the restrictive pressure of circumstance, two ways are open to him. He may cultivate himself standing aloof from the world, as Goethe did and as Tennyson did,—aiming to make his powers of expression perfect, and to

make his expression itself universal, potential, irresistible, such as will sift into the lives of the human race as sunshine sifts into the trees of the forest; or he may take an executive course and yoke himself to the plough and the harrow, aiming to exert an immediate influence upon his environment. The former way is not at once comprehended by the world: the latter is more obvious.

In his poem of Retaliation, Goldsmith has designated Edmund Burke as a man who,

“ Born for the universe, narrowed his
mind,

And to party gave up what was meant for mankind.”

It has always seemed to me that Curtis made one sacrifice when he went into business, and another when he went into politics. He manifested, indeed, sterling character and splendid ability in both ; yet he did not, in a practical sense, succeed in either. The end of his experiment in business was a heavy burden of debt, which he was compelled to bear through a long period of anxious and strenuous toil. His experience was not the terrible experience of Sir Walter Scott—that heroic gentleman, that supreme and in-

comparable magician of romance! —but it was an experience of the same kind. He released himself from his burden, justly and honorably, at last; but the strain upon his mind was an injury to him, and I believe that the literature of his country is poorer because of the sacrifice that he was obliged to make. That “Life of Mehemet Ali,” the great Pasha of Egypt, which he designed to write, was never written. On a day in 1860 I met him in Broadway, and he said to me, very earnestly, “Take advantage of the moment: don’t delay too long that fine poem, that great novel, that you in-

tend to write." It was the wise philosophy that takes heed of the enormous values of youth and freedom. It pleases some philosophers, indeed, to believe that a man of letters will accomplish his best expression when goaded by what Shakespeare calls "the thorny point of bare distress." That practice of glorifying hardship is sometimes soothing to human vanity. Men have thought themselves heroes because they rise early. It may possibly be true of the poets that they learn in suffering what they teach in song; but the suffering must not be sordid. Literature was never yet en-

riched through the pressure of want. The author may write more, because of his need, but he will not write better. The best literatures of the world, the literatures of Greece and England, were created in the gentlest and most propitious climates of the world. The best individual works in those literatures—with little exception—were produced by writers whose physical circumstances were those of comfort and peace. Chaucer, Shakespeare, Milton, Herrick, Addison, Pope, Byron, Wordsworth, Shelley, Scott, Moore, Lamb, Thackeray, Tennyson—neither of them lacked

the means of reputable subsistence. Burns, fine as he was, would have been finer still, in a softer and sweeter environment of worldly circumstance. Curtis was a man of extraordinary patience, concentration, and poise. He accepted the conditions in which he found himself, and he made the best of them. His incessant industry and his composure, to the last, were prodigious. He never, indeed, was acquainted with want. The shackle that business imposed on him was the shackle of drudgery. He was compelled to write profusely and without pause. His pen was never at rest. Once—in 1873—he broke

down completely, and for several months he could not work at all. During more than forty years, however, he worked all the time. Curtis, at his best, had the grace of Addison, the kindness of Steele, the simplicity of Goldsmith, and the nervous force of the incomparable Sterne. Writing under such conditions, however, no man can always be at his best. The wonder is that his average was so fine. He attained to a high and orderly level of wise and kindly thought, of gentle fancy, and of winning ease, and he steadily maintained it. He had an exceptional faculty for choosing diversified themes, and his treatment of them was al-

ways felicitous. He wrought in many moods, but always genially and without flurry, and he gave the continuous impression of spontaneity and pleasure. A fetter, however, is not the less a fetter because it is lightly borne, and whatever is easy to read was hard to write. It may be, of course, that the troublesome business experience in the life of Curtis was only an insignificant incident. It may be that he fulfilled himself as an author—leaving nothing undone that he had the power to do. But that is not my reading of the artistic mind, and it is not my reading of him. For me the mist was drawn too early across those

luminous and tender pictures of the Orient, those haunting shapes and old historic splendors of the Nile. For me the rich, tranquil note of tender music that breathes in "Prue and I" was too soon hushed and changed. Genius is the petrel, and like the petrel it loves the freedom of the winds and waves.

"My thoughts like swallows skim the
 main,
 And bear my spirit back again,
 Over the earth and through the air—
 A wild bird and a wanderer."

All thinkers repudiate the narrow philosophy that would regulate one man's life by the stand-

ard of another. "Be yourself!" is the precept of the highest wisdom. Shakespeare has written his Plays. Milton has written his Epic. Those things cannot be done again and should not be expected. The new genius must mount upon its own wings, and hold its own flight, and seek the eyrie that best it loves. I recognize, and feel, and honor the nobility of Curtis as a citizen; but I cannot cast aside the regret that he did not dedicate himself exclusively to Literature. Everything is relative. To such a nature as that of Curtis the pursuits of business and politics are foreign

and inappropriate. He was undoubtedly equal to all their responsibilities and duties; but he was equal to much more—to things different and higher—and the practical service essential to business and politics did not need him. The State, indeed, needs the virtue that he possessed—but needs it in the form, not of the poet but the gladiator, who, when he goes rejoicing to battle, has no harp to leave in silence and no garlands to cast unheeded in the dust. I would send Saint Peter, with his sword, to the primary meeting; I would not send the apostle John. The organist should not be required to blow

the bellows. Curtis was, by nature, a man of letters. His faculty in that direction was prodigious. So good a judge as Thackeray, looking at him as a young man, declared him to be the most auspicious of all our authors. It is a great vocation, and because its force, like that of nature, is deep, slow, silent, and elemental, it is the most tremendous force concerned in human affairs. Shall I try to say what it is? The mission of the man of letters is to touch the heart; to kindle the imagination; to ennoble the mind. He is the interpreter between the spirit of beauty that is in nature and the

general intelligence and sensibility of mankind. He sets to music the pageantry and the pathos of human life, and he keeps alive in the soul the holy enthusiasm of devotion to the ideal. He honors and perpetuates heroic conduct, and he teaches, by many devices of art—by story, and poem, and parable, and essay, and drama—purity of life, integrity to man, and faith in God. He is continually reminding you of the goodness and loveliness to which you may attain ; continually causing you to see what opportunities of nobility your life affords ; continually delighting you with high thoughts and beautiful pictures.

He does not preach to you. He does not attempt to regulate your specific actions. He does not assail you with the hysterical scream of the reformer. He does not carp, and vex, and meddle. He whispers to you, in your silent hours, of love and heroism and holiness and immortality, and you are refreshed and strong, and come forth into the world smiling at fortune and bearing blessings in your hands. On these bleak February nights, with the breakers clashing on our icy coasts and the trumpets of the wind resounding in our chimneys, how sweet it has been, sitting by the evening lamp, to turn the pages of "The Tem-

pest," or "The Antiquary," or "Old Mortality," or "Henry Esmond," or "The Idylls of the King," while the treasured faces of Shakespeare and Scott and Thackeray and Tennyson looked down from the library walls! How sweet to read those tender, romantic, imaginative pages of "Prue and I," in which the pansies and the rosemary bloom forever, and to think of him who wrote them!

"His presence haunts this room to-night,—

A form of mingled mist and light
From that far coast!

Welcome beneath this roof of mine!
Welcome! this vacant chair is thine,
Dear guest and ghost."

But whether the choice that Curtis made was a sacrifice or not, we know he made it and we know why he made it. Pre-figured in his character and his writings, at the outset, and illustrated in all his conduct, was the supreme law of his being—practical consideration for others. The trouble of the world was his trouble. The disciple of Andrew Marvel could not rest at ease in the summer-land of Keats. His heart was there; but his duty, as he saw it, steadily called him away.

“Some life of men unblest
He knew, which made him droop,
and fill'd his head.

He went; his piping took a troubled
sound,
Of storms that rage outside our
happy ground;
He could not wait their passing; he
is dead."

He would have rejoiced in writing more books like "Prue and I;" but the virtuous glory of the commonwealth and the honor and happiness of the people were forever present to him, as the first and the most solemn responsibility. When his prototype, Sir Philip Sidney, on that fatal September morning, three hundred and seven years ago, set forth for the field of battle at Zutphen, he met a fellow-

soldier riding in light armor, and thereupon he cast away a portion of his own mail—and in so doing, as the event proved, he cast away his life—in order that he might be no better protected than his friend. In like manner Curtis would have no advantage for himself, nor even the semblance of advantage, that was not shared by others. He could not—with his superlative moral fervor—dedicate himself exclusively to letters, while there was so much wrong in the world that clamored for him to do his part in setting it right. He believed that his direct, practical labor was essential and

would avail, and he was eager to bestow it. Men of strong imagination begin life with illimitable ideals, with vast illusions, with ardent and generous faith. They are invariably disappointed, and they are usually embittered. Curtis was controlled less by his imagination than by his moral sense. He had ideals, but they were based on reason. However much he may have loved to muse and dream, he saw the world as a fact and not as a fancy. He was often saddened by the spectacle of human littleness, but, broadly and generally, he was not disappointed in mankind,

and he never became embittered. The belief in human nature with which he began remained his belief when he ended. Nothing could shake his conviction that man is inherently and intrinsically good. He believed in the people. He believed in earthly salvation for the poor, the weak, and the oppressed. He believed in chivalry toward woman. He believed in refinement, gentleness, and grace. He believed that the world is growing better and not worse. He believed in the inevitable, final triumph of truth and right over falsehood and wrong. He believed in freedom, charity, justice, hope, and

love. The last line that fell from the dying pen of Longfellow might have been the last word that fell from the dying lips of Curtis: "'Tis daylight everywhere!"

Upon the spirit in which he served the state no words can make so clear a comment as his own. "There is no nobler ambition," he said, "than to fill a great office greatly." His estimate of Bryant culminates in the thought that "no man, no American, living or dead, has more truly and amply illustrated the scope and fidelity of republican citizenship." . . . "The great argument for popular gov-

ernment," he declared, in his fine eulogy on Wendell Phillips, "is not the essential righteousness of a majority, but the celestial law which subordinates the brute force of numbers to intellectual and moral ascendancy." And his stately tribute to the character of Washington reached a climax in his impassioned homage to its lofty serenity, its moral grandeur, and its majestic repose. The quality of every man may be divined from the objects of his genuine devotion. There could be no doubt of the patriotism of Curtis: and I will make bold to say that, in the conditions which

now confront the American Republic,—conditions more perilous than ever yet existed in its experience (vicious immigration, the dangerous Indian, the still more dangerous negro, racial antagonism, discontented labor, socialism, communism, anarchy, a licentious press, a tottering church, ambitious Roman Catholicism, the Irish vote, boss rule, ring rule, corruption in office, levity, profanity, and a generally low state of public morals),—it was no slight thing that such a man as Curtis should have testified, to the last, his confidence in the future of the American people, and to the last

should have devoted his splendid powers more largely to their practical service than to anything else. Fortunate is the man who can close the awfully true book of "Ecclesiastes" and forget its terrible lessons! Fortunate is the people that has the example, the sympathy, the support, and the guidance of such a man! If the altogether high and noble principles that Curtis advocated could prevail, then indeed the Republic that Washington conceived would be a glorious reality. When a wise and final check is placed upon the influence of mere numbers—then, and not till then, will

the ideal of Washington be fulfilled; then, and not till then, will the Republic be safe. There is no belief more delusive and pernicious than the belief that virtue and wisdom are resident in the will of the multitude.

If, therefore, Curtis made a sacrifice in turning from the Muse to labor for the commonwealth, at least it was not made in vain. Nor must it be forgotten that—despite his preoccupation as a publicist and as the incumbent of many unpaid and most exacting offices—his contributions to literature, especially in the domain of the Essay, were extraordinary and brilliant. When, in 1846, he

began his literary career, a young man of twenty-two, American literature had begun to assume the proportions of a substantial and impressive fabric. Paulding, Irving, Dana, Bryant, Cooper, and Percival were in the zenith. Longfellow and Whittier were ascending. Hawthorne was slowly becoming an auspicious figure. Halleck and George Fenno Hoffman were reigning poets. Poe had nearly finished, in penniless obscurity, his desolate strife. Holmes, aged 37, was but little beyond the threshold: and the fine genius of Stoddard was yet unknown. Griswold still held the sceptre, which Willis was presently to inherit. Allston and Paul-

ding were 67 years old ; Irving was 63 ; R. H. Dana was 59 ; Sprague 54 ; Bryant 51 ; Drake, Halleck, and Percival 50. Emerson was only 42. Into that company Curtis entered, as a boy among graybeards. Authors were more numerous than they had been thirty years earlier, but they were less numerous than they are now, and, perhaps, less distinctive. It was easier to acquire literary reputation then than it is at present ; but genuine literary reputation was never easily obtained. Curtis made a new mark. In his oriental travels the observation was large ; the fancy delicate ; the feeling deep ; the touch light. Then came, in *Put-*

nam's Magazine, between 1852 and 1854, the satirical "Potiphar Papers" and the romantic "Prue and I"—the most imaginative and the loveliest of his books. After that the limitations of circumstance began to constrain him. He assumed the Easy Chair of *Harper's Magazine* in 1854,—receiving it from that Horatian classic of American letters Donald G. Mitchell, by whom it had just been started,—and he occupied it till the last. In *Harper's Weekly*, in 1859-60, he wrote the novel of "Trumps"—a work which will transmit to a distant future that typical American politician, prosperous and potential yesterday, to-day, and forever, General

Arcularius Belch. In *Harper's Bazar* he wrote a series of papers, extending over a period of four years, called "Manners on the Road"—the Road being life, and Manners being the conduct of people in their use of it. In those papers and in the Easy Chair the Addisonian drift of his mind was fully displayed. Those Essays do not excel *The Spectator* in thought, or learning, or humor, or invention, or in the thousand felicities of a courtly, leisurely, lace-ruffle style; yet they are level with *The Spectator* in dignity of character and beauty of form; they surpass it in vitality; and they surpass it in fertility of theme, sustained af-

fluence of feeling, and diversity of literary grace. *The Spectator* contains 635 papers, and it was written by several hands, though mostly by the hand of Addison, between March 1710 and December 1714,—a period of four years and nine months. The *Easy Chair* contains over 2500 articles, and it was written by Curtis alone and was prolonged, with but one short intermission, for 38 years.

It was Wesley, the Methodist preacher, who objected to the custom of letting the devil have all the good music. Curtis was a moralist who objected to the custom of letting the rakes have all the graces. Good men are some

times so insipid that they make virtue tedious. In Curtis, notwithstanding his invincible composure and perfect decorum, there was a strain of the gypsy. He had "heard the chimes at midnight" and he had not forgotten their music. He had been a wandering minstrel in his youth, and he had twanged the light guitar beneath the silver moon. As you turn the leaves of Lester Wallack's "Memories of Fifty Years," you find Curtis to be one of them; you come upon him very pleasantly in the society of that brilliant actor, and you hear their youthful voices blended — the robust yet gentle genius of

Thackeray being a listener—in the golden cadence of Ben Jonson's lovely Grecian lyric :

“ Drink to me only with thine eyes,
 And I will pledge with mine ;
Or leave a kiss but in the cup,
 And I'll not look for wine.”

Throughout his life Curtis never lost the capacity for sentiment ; the love of music ; the worship of art and beauty ; the morning glow of chivalrous emotion. He never became ascetic. He was a Puritan but he was not a bigot. He made the jest sparkle. He mingled in the dance. Without excess, but sweetly and genially,

he filled a place at the festival. From his hand, in the remote days of the Castle Garden Opera, the glorious Jenny Lind received her first bouquet in America; and from his lips, in the last year of his life, her illustrious memory received its sweetest tribute. When he heard the distant note of the street-organ his spirit floated away in a dream of "the mellow richness of Italy:" yet he was a man who could have ridden with Cromwell's troopers at Naseby, and given his life for freedom. There was no plainness of living to which he was not suited, and equally there was no opulence of culture and art that

he could not wear with grace. The extremes of his character explain its power. There was no severity and no sacrifice of which he was not capable, in his scorn and detestation of evil and wrong; but for human frailty he had more than the tenderness of woman. He knelt with a disciple's reverence at the austere shrine of Washington: yet his eloquence blazed like morning sunlight upon a wilderness of roses when he touched the rugged, mournful, humorous, pathetic story of Robert Burns.

In this evanescent and vanishing world one thing, and only one thing, endures,—the spiritual

influence of good. Out of nature, out of literature, out of art, out of character, that alone, transmuted into conduct, survives ensphered when all the rest has perished. We are accustomed, unconsciously, to speak of our possessions and our deprivations as if we ourselves were permanent; not remembering that, in a very little while, our places also will be empty. Our friend is dead—our champion, our benefactor, our guide! Life will be lonelier without his presence. The streets in which he used to walk seem vacant. The very air of our silent and slumberous island, musing at the

mysterious gateways of the sea, seems more brooding and more solitary. Yet, being dead, he far more truly lives than we do, and in far more exceeding glory, because in that potential influence which can never die. Still in our rambles he will meet us, with the old familiar look that always seemed to say, 'You also are a prince, an emperor, a man; you also possess this wonderful heritage of beauty, and honor, and immortal life.' Still in the homes of the poor will dwell the memory of his inexhaustible goodness. Still in the abodes of the rich will live the sweetness and the power of his benignant

example : and still, when we have passed away and have been forgotten, a distant posterity, remembering the illustrious orator, the wise and gentle philosopher, the serene and delicate literary artist, the incorruptible patriot, the supreme gentleman, will cherish the writings, will revere the character, and will exult in the splendid tradition of George William Curtis.

I shall close this address with the Monody that I wrote not long after his death:

I.

ALL the flowers were in their pride
On the day when Rupert died.

Dreamily, through dozing trees
Sighed the idle summer breeze.

Wild birds, glancing through the air,
Spilled their music everywhere.

Not one sign of mortal ill
Told that his great heart was still.

Now the grass he loved to tread
Murmurs softly o'er his head :

Now the great green branches wave
High above his lonely grave :

While in grief's perpetual speech
Roll the breakers on the beach.

O my comrade, O my friend,
Must this parting be the end?

II.

Weave the shroud and spread the
pall!

Night and silence cover all.

Howsoever we deplore,
They who go return no more.

Never from that unknown track
Floats one answering whisper back.

Nature, vacant, will not heed
Lips that grieve or hearts that bleed.

Wherefore now should mourning word
Or the tearful dirge be heard?

How shall words our grief abate?—
Call him noble; call him great;

Say that faith, now gaunt and grim,
Once was fair because of him;

Say that goodness, round his way,
Made one everlasting day;

Say that beauty's heavenly flame
Bourgeoned wheresoe'er he came;

Say that all life's common ways
Were made glorious in his gaze;

Say he gave us, hour by hour,
Hope and patience, grace and power ;

Say his spirit was so true
That it made us noble too ;—

What is this, but to declare
Life's bereavement, Love's despair ?

What is this, but just to say
All we loved is torn away ?

Weave the shroud and spread the
pall !

Night and silence cover all.

III.

O my comrade, O my friend,
Must this parting be the end ?

Heart and hope are growing old :
Dark the night comes down, and
cold :

Few the souls that answer mine,
 And no voice so sweet as thine.

Desert wastes of care remain—
 Yet thy lips speak not again!

Gray eternities of space—
 Yet nowhere thy living face!

Only now the lonesome blight,
 Heavy day and haunted night.

All the light and music reft—
 Only thought and memory left!

Peace, fond mourner! This thy
 boon,—

Thou thyself must follow soon.

Peace,—and let repining go!
 Peace,—for Fate will have it so.

Vainly now his praise is said;
 Vain the garland for his head:

Yet is comfort's shadow cast
From the kindness of the past.

All my love could do to cheer
Warmed his heart when he was here.

Honor's plaudit, friendship's vow
Did not coldly wait till now.

O my comrade, O my friend,
If this parting be the end,

Yet I hold my life divine
To have known a soul like thine:

And I hush the low lament,
In submission, penitent.

Still the sun is in the skies:
He sets—but I have seen him rise!

APPENDIX.

The following tribute to the memory of Curtis was written by me, in the *New York Tribune* of September 1, 1892,—the morning after his death.—W. W.

“AMONG American men of letters no man of this generation has so completely filled as Curtis did the ideal of clear intellect, pure taste, moral purpose, chivalry of feeling, and personal refinement and grace. From the moment of his entrance into public life, as a speaker,—now nearly forty years ago,—he has entirely satisfied,

especially for the mind of sensitive and generous youth, the highest conception of purity, dignity, and sweetness. His noble presence and serious demeanor, the repose and sweep and sway of his eloquence, and the crystal clearness of his literary style were all felt to be naturally and spontaneously representative of an exalted personality. Upon all public occasions the tremulous sensibility of his feelings and the inflexible reticence of his mind were not less remarkable than the absolute propriety and perfect symmetry of his language. In the element of felicity few orators have

equalled him and no orator has surpassed him. He was, of course, an artist; but the soul of his art was the virtuous and wise sincerity of a noble nature. The work was fine, but the man was finer than the work; and of all the charms that he exerted none was so great as that of his pure and gentle spirit. His manners, indeed, were so undemonstrative and so polished as to seem cold; but all who knew him, all who ever listened to his speech, felt and owned in him the spell of inherent, genuine nobility.

There is, indeed, a conception of character and conduct which

assumes that when a man is not effusive and familiar he is aristocratic. Curtis was reticent: yet no one ever more profoundly and practically believed than he did in the brotherhood of humanity. He was republican, through and through. His voice and his pen, his personal influence and his private means, were always enlisted in the cause of the helpless, the oppressed, and the weak. Perhaps the best oration he ever delivered was that upon Robert Burns—in which every word thrills with the pulsation of human kindness, and of which the spirit is love for every virtue and pity for every weakness of the human race. But his

theory of equality was not degradation. He desired, and he labored, to equalize the race, not by dragging people down, but by raising them up. If he was fastidious and reticent, he did not deny to others the right to be fastidious and reticent also. In this he was of the kindred of Bryant, and Washington Irving, and Longfellow, and Emerson,—with whom he had much in common, and the spotless standard of whose art and life he loyally and brilliantly sustained and has transmitted in light and beauty to all the younger men of letters who succeed him. In all that the word implies he was a

gentleman; and there is no worthier or more expressive tribute that can be brought to any man's coffin than the tear that will not be repressed for life-long devotion to duty, for goodness that never faltered and kindness that never failed.

In the presence of death and under the instant sense of bereavement it is not easily possible to speak with cold judgment of his achievements as a writer. He was the master of a style as pure as that of Addison and as flexible as that of Lamb. In its characteristic quality, however, it does not resemble either of these models. The influences that

were most intimately concerned in forming his mind were Emerson and Thackeray. He had the broad vision and the fresh, brave, aspiring spirit of the one, and he combined with those the satirical playfulness, the cordial detestation of shams, and the subtle commingling of raillery and tender sentiment that are characteristic of the other. His habitual mood was pensive, not passionate, and he was essentially more a contemplative philosopher than either an advocate, a partisan, a reformer, or a politician—all of which parts he sometimes was constrained to assume. He was born for the

vocation of letters and his best success was gained in the literary art. His literature will survive in the affectionate admiration of his countrymen long after his political papers are forgotten. 'Prue and I' is one of the most delicate, dreamlike books in our language, and the spirit that it discloses is full of romance, tenderness and beauty. The affectionate heart, the lively fancy, and the subtle literary instinct of Goldsmith could not have made it finer. As an orator he had all the grace and more than the emotion of Everett, whose tradition he has perpetuated. His rhetoric was not merely a sheen

of words, but it burned and shimmered with the vital splendor of a sincere heart. He was in earnest in all that he said and did. He has had a long and good life, and his name is noble forever.

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