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Original Literary Notices

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ORIGINAL LITERARY NOTICES.

For the Southern Literary Messenger.

AN ORATION on the Life and Character of Gilbert Motier de Lafayette, delivered at the request of both Houses of the Congress of the United States, before them, in the House of Representatives at Washington, on the 31st of December, 1834, by John Quincy Adams, a Member of the House. Washington: Gales and Seaton. 1835. pp. 94.

EULOGY on La Fayette, delivered in Faneuil Hall, at the request of the Young Men of Boston, September 6, 1834; by Edward Everett. Boston: Nathan Hall & Allen & Tichnor. 1834. pp. 96.

“An Oration in praise of Hercules!!! And who ever thought of blaming Hercules!”

THE limits of the old world bounded the labors of Hercules. There nature had planted imperishable landmarks; and on these the gratitude of nations had inscribed, in imperishable characters, the name of their benefactor. What could the breath of man add to his glory?

But the pillars of Hercules have been passed. Beyond this *ne plus ultra* of the ancient world, the genius of Columbus opened a way to new regions, and extended the sway of his imperial master around the circuit of the earth. A new hero was wanting, whose labors, commensurate with this enlarged theatre, might compass the globe, and convey to the new world the be-

nesses which his illustrious prototype had conferred on the old. Such a hero the bounty of Providence vouchsafed to man. But the spirit has returned to him who gave it; and it is in praise of his memory, that two distinguished orators have been required to task their acknowledged powers.

But "who ever thought of blaming La Fayette?" Who feels it necessary to utter his praise, even in this simple question? Who feels it necessary to answer it? Is not such silence the most expressive praise; the silence imposed by a common sentiment, which all are conscious is felt by all?

What can be expected from eulogy in such a case? What is there in the breath of praise; what is there in the pomp and circumstance of funeral pageantry, but a solemn mockery of the feelings that "bleed deep in the silent breast?" We find a natural though sad pleasure in telling the world of the unobtrusive merit of some good man, who in voluntary privacy had passed and closed a virtuous and useful life. We may have a purpose in erecting monuments to the *common great*, which, perishable as they are, may somewhat prolong the memory of those to whom they are dedicated. The undying strains of bards may rescue from oblivion names which might have perished. There were heroes before Agamemnon; but they had no Homer to record their deeds, and died without their fame. But what need had Hercules of Homer? What need has La Fayette that one should tell his fellow of him? Why proclaim to the world what all the world already knows? Why tell posterity what posterity can never forget, until man has lost the records of the history of man?

We talk of monuments to Washington. Why is none erected? Is it for want of reverence for his memory? For want of love? For want of gratitude? These questions are reproachfully asked, from time to time, by novices in politics, who, in striving to signalize their patriotism, their enthusiasm, or their *eloquence*, do but signalize their ignorance of the human heart. Such appeals are always answered by silence. It is the answer dictated by the unsophisticated feelings of our countrymen. Where would you place the monument? *In the capitol?* Is not the *capitol itself* too small? But the capitol may be considered symbolically as embodying the free institutions of the country which he made free. What then? Is not the *thing itself* worthier than the symbol? Is any monument to Washington so appropriate as that reared by his *genius, his toils and his virtues,—his country?* And what matters it under what part of that vast tablet, every where emblazoned with his glory, his bones repose? The silence of the people is the appropriate, the only *natural* expression of those sentiments which all can feel, though all know not how to speak them. The unsuccessful orator who, having uttered his premeditated declamation, goes his way, reproaching their apathy, does but expose himself to scorn, as one who would substitute *lip service* for the homage of the heart. But even that scorn, (such is the influence of the all-pervading reverence for the the mighty dead,) even that is repressed, and finds no voice.

These remarks are made because they illustrate the difficulty of the task imposed on Messrs. Adams and Everett. It is a difficulty which grows out of the nature of the subject. We are not sure that any man,

endued with all those qualities which enter into the composition of the perfect orator, would not instinctively shrink from such a task. Mr. Webster declined it; and it does not appear that it was sought by Mr. Clay, Mr. Leigh, or Mr. Preston.

Of one thing we are sure. Whoever attempted it must have failed. All such attempts must end in failure. The eulogies on Washington were all failures. Those on Adams and Jefferson were failures too, but from a different cause. When, on the 4th of July, 1826, the Declaration of Independence was celebrated in jubilee over the continent; while the political partisans of both those illustrious men, whose rivalry had so long divided the people, were hyming their praises, it pleased him whose instruments they had been, to touch them with his finger, and to show that they were dust. Never was any people so suddenly and so awfully reminded that it is *God alone* who doeth his will on earth and in the armies of heaven; and never did any people use so strenuous an effort to shake off a salutary impression. They refused to lay to heart the admonition of Providence. "The Lord of Hosts had called to weeping, and to mourning, and to baldness, and to girding with sackcloth; and behold joy and gladness; slaying oxen, and killing sheep; eating flesh, and drinking wine." The worship of the living was closed by the *apotheosis* of the dead: the best talents in the land were engaged in the solemn mockery: and the very ministers of the living God were seen officiating in the profane ceremonial. What could come of all this; what did come of it, but failure? We have no fear of offending any one of the distinguished men who tasked his powers for that occasion, by saying that his effort was a failure. Each one must have felt that it was so; and each one will readily accept the excuse furnished by the unfitness of the ceremony to the occasion. How many of those who witnessed it, went home with hearts oppressed by a consciousness of something wrong? And as the evils of man-worship have advanced, (*as they are now advancing*,) to their fatal consummation, how many, recalling the circumstances of that ceremonial, have heard a voice as that of Jehovah, whispering, "Surely this iniquity shall not be purged from you, until you die?"

We trust that the temper of these remarks will not be misapprehended. They cannot be made in the spirit of party, for the subjects of them were the very antipodes of conflicting parties. Whatever feelings such thoughts awaken in our minds, the thoughts themselves are suggested by considerations purely critical. We have but attempted to embody and apply two maxims that every master of the art of eloquence will own as true. First; that, *in cases calling for the highest reach of that art*, every attempt that falls short of it is felt to be a failure. Second; that under circumstances that offend the better feelings of the heart, the highest reach of eloquence is unattainable by human powers.

It may be readily believed that we have felt reluctant to sit in judgment on the works of men so renowned as Messrs. Adams and Everett. A decided condemnation would seem to many the height of presumption. Even to ourselves it has so much of this appearance, that we are desirous to have it in our power to charge the main defects of their performances rather on the occasion than on themselves.

Mr. Everett has certainly made the most of it. His delineation of the character of La Fayette is highly graphic; the incidents of his life are judiciously and tastefully selected, and told with spirit, simplicity and distinctness; and the comparative summary of his claims to the grateful admiration of the world, commands the acquiescence of the reader. The whole is interspersed with just thoughts and natural sentiments, which do honor to the head and heart of the speaker.

But a higher praise is due to Mr. Everett. The history of La Fayette is the history of man, in the most portentous and eventful era of his existence. Of the events of that era Mr. Everett so speaks as to show that he has understood and rightly applied the lesson which they teach to the world. He does not profess to see any thing "cheering and refreshing" in the progress or the results of the French revolution. How should he? How should a man of "untaught feelings, with a heart of flesh and blood beating in his bosom," find any thing cheering in theoretical good, purchased at such an expense of actual crime and suffering? How should a friend of liberty look, but with despondency, on the result of a series of horrors unutterable and inconceivable, only serving to confirm the sad truth "that men of intemperate minds cannot be free?" Those who could "hope against hope," shut their eyes as long as possible, and tried to forget that *rational liberty* is but another name for *self-government*. But they have been forced to see that *some appropriate training is necessary to qualify man for freedom*. In what that training is to consist, it is not easy to say. Its application depends on him who rules the world. When he shall please so to order events as to qualify men by the discipline of life, for *self-government*, they will then be capable of freedom, and not till then. A corollary from this important truth comes nearer home to ourselves. *When men, thus qualified for freedom and thus made free, become wiser than their teachers, and impatient to unlearn the lessons taught in this school of discipline, there is danger that they may imperceptibly lose those personal qualities on which their fitness for the function of self-government depends. The personal qualities of a limited monarch, who is but the minister of the actual sovereignty, may be of small consequence; but on the personal qualities of a free people, the efficient sovereign, de facto as well as de jure, every thing depends. If these be lost in experiments on the theory of government, all is lost.*

We should extend our remarks too far, if we indulged in all the reflections on this subject suggested by these two orations. By that of Mr. Adams they are provoked by repeated allusions to it, which give to his performance something of the character of a dissertation (not very philosophical) on the philosophy of government. He doubtless felt the difficulties of his situation, not the less sensibly, because he had obviously sought it. The whole proceeding seems to have been planned by himself, but he was probably not aware how hard a task he had undertaken, until he set about its performance. He seems throughout to have been at cross-purposes with himself; never decided whether to play the statesman, the philosopher, or the orator; and not always certain which of his two sets of political opinions had the ascendant for the day. His digression at page four, in which he wanders away into a statement of the titles of Louis XV and George II, is

certainly one of the strangest aberrations from the subject that we have ever seen. It is hard to imagine his motive for it, unless he was seeking an opportunity to record his testimony against *hereditary monarchy*. Why he should have felt this necessary, he best knows. But his observations on this point, after all, are superficial to very childishness; and we can hardly help questioning his sincerity when we see him affecting to be wholly unconscious of the true grounds on which the statesmen of the old world place their preference of the *hereditary* to the *elective* principle. Yet of these Mr. Adams could not have been ignorant, and had no right to suppose his hearers ignorant. What right had he then, to speak over their heads, to the uninitiated multitude, who have not yet learned that, in the judgment of the enlightened friends of liberty, it is not desirable *that the throne should be filled by a man of high personal endowments?* Such are the men to whom dangerous powers are conceded. Such are the men who seize prerogatives never claimed before, and transmit them to their successors. Even if the statesmen of England had been silent on the subject, could we have supposed them so unobservant of the history of their own country, as not to have remarked that *all concessions in favor of liberty* of which their annals bear record, have been obtained from *weak princes*, from those who held by *doubtful titles*, or from *minors?* Do they not know that the odious tyranny, the folly, the weakness, and the cowardice of John gave birth to *magna charta?* Had not this been extorted from him, could it have been wrung from the stern grasp of the first or third Edward? During the reign of this last, where slumbered that fierce spirit which broke out on the accession of the minor Richard II, and slunk away rebuked, the moment he showed that, though a boy in years, he was a man in spirit? Can we identify the abject slaves who crouched to the will of the bold and resolute Elizabeth, with the contumacious subjects of her silly and imbecile Scotch successor? Could the spirit which tumbled his son from the throne, have prepared itself for explosion during her vigilant and energetic reign? *If little was gained at the restoration, it was because little was asked. The people had lost a sense of the value of liberty, from experience of the abuses perpetrated in her name. They only asked to be freed from a sour and gloomy tyranny which invaded the privacy, and marred the comforts of the domestic circle. They ask for nothing but leave to enjoy life. Charles opposed irreligion to fanaticism, and they wished no more.*

The revolution found them in a different mood. Appetite was gorged, mirth had become stale, animal passion had spent its force, and men found themselves once more requiring something to engage the nobler faculties of the heart and mind.

Do we ask why, in this temper, they gained so little from William? Look at the character of the man, and you have your answer. Able, energetic, sagacious, firm and cold, he had power, even in the act of mounting the throne, to arrest the progress of reform in mid career.

The weak princes of the house of Brunswick enjoyed an advantage of a different sort, which supplied the place of talent to them. By contrast with the odious pretender of the house of Stuart they were popular;

and this counter-prop upheld the power of the crown until that race became virtually extinct. So sensible of this was the purest, the ablest, and the most resolved of the friends of liberty in the reign of George II, (we speak of Mr. Shippen)—so sensible was he of the advantage which freedom has in contending with a weak prince, and an unpopular name, that he had serious thoughts of bringing in the pretender with that view.

But the house of Stuart passed off the stage; the bugbear of a popish succession was removed; the cant of the "great and glorious revolution" went out of fashion; and people instead of looking back to that, took leave to look forward to something better. Our own revolution was the first fruit of this change in public sentiment. That which was preparing in England was arrested by the horrors of the premature explosion in France. But that interruption of its progress was but temporary, and it is now finding its consummation under the reign of one who, having passed from first to second childhood, without ever being a man, seems fitted by Providence for the place to which the order of succession called, and in which the order of events required him.

Have these things been lost on Mr. Adams himself? And has not his own experience taught him the advantage which a questionable title, or the folly of a ruler may give his subjects? Has he yet to learn that vanity and obvious weakness may provoke a clamor for reforms, which the man of spirit and address, who is brought in to effectuate them, may laugh at? Does he believe that the revolution so "cheering and refreshing" to his spirit, would have taken place, had Henri IV occupied the throne of Louis XVI? Does he think the reform now going on in England would have commenced under Elizabeth or her grandfather Henry VII? Does he believe that the people of the United States would, at this moment, address themselves to the reform of their representation, however unequal, however corrupt, if its corruption only produced subserviency to the will of Andrew Jackson? In short is he to learn, at this time of day, that the power which the exigencies of public affairs require to be lodged in the hands of the Executive of a great and ambitious nation, implies a *faculty of usurpation*? That such power, passing from generation to generation successively, into the hands of men of mature age, of bold spirits and commanding minds, will increase and multiply itself without end, is certain. That such power will be deemed necessary, so long as men give themselves up to dreams of glory and the lust of conquest, is equally sure.

Why did our fathers hope that the experiment of free government might succeed with us, though it had failed every where else? Was it not because our local situation removed us far from war, and the entanglements of foreign politics? Let any infatuation tempt us to throw away this advantage, and seek the evil that seeks not us, and it is not difficult to foresee the consequence. We shall soon find ourselves, like the friends of freedom in England, reduced to inquire, "what hope remains to us, but to regulate the succession on a principle which may afford the people a chance of wresting from a weak prince, the advantages gained by the ability and address of his predecessors?" The solution of this problem was found in the device of "blending together the principle of hereditary succes-

sion with that of reformed protestant christianity," at which Mr. Adams sneers so bitterly. Its inventors were the truest friends to freedom in the world. They were our masters in the science of government. Relieved from the necessity which drove them to this device, we imbodyed in our institutions the lessons we had learned from them. Should our folly throw away our peculiar advantages, and our vices render some contrivance of the sort necessary to us as to them, may we be equally fortunate in applying the maxims learned from them! If monarchy become necessary, (and they who most feel the necessity often most deeply lament it,) may we hit on some contrivance as well adapted to give the people the comfortable sense of security, while the ruler is made to feel that he holds his power only by their will. That in every stage of our political existence we may choose wisely, let us shut our ears to those who would disguise their well known predilections for strong government, by *ad captandum* sneers at any of its particular modes. What end can such sneers answer at this moment, but to confirm our people in the fatal error of supposing liberty secure because the forms of the constitution are preserved? because our monarch is elective, not hereditary; a man and not a child?

Of a piece with this is the declaration (at page forty-three) that, in the contemplation of the great results of the French revolution, Mr. Adams finds something "cheering and refreshing." It is well known that while the friends of freedom were animated with a hope, that the dark hour of its commencement was but the forerunner of a day of light and liberty and happiness, Mr. Adams belonged to a school which taught that this bright hope was but illusory; that all the horrors of the *reign of terror* were gratuitous; and that the French people would, in the end, return as near as might be, to the condition from which they were struggling to escape. These bodings have been fulfilled. The younger branch of the house of Capet has taken the place of the elder. The unteachable folly of those who could neither learn nor forget, has been superseded by the address, the subtlety, the energy and spirit of Louis Philippe. By these qualities, and by what is *instar omnium*, his private wealth, he has been able to stay the tempest of revolution in its wildest rage, and to establish himself firmly on the throne. The condemnation pronounced by Mr. Adams's school of politics, in the earlier stages of the revolution, has been justified by the event, and he finds something "quite refreshing" in the result!

We have perhaps extended these observations too far, and left ourselves but little room to remark on the style of these compositions. There is certainly much to praise in Mr. Everett's, and we would gladly adorn our pages with copious extracts from it; but it is in every body's hands, and will be read by thousands whom our humble pages will never reach.

It has been well said "that truth is sometimes more incredible than fiction." The history of La Fayette is a chapter in the romance of real life, more strange and interesting than any tale that imagination has ever suggested. The succinct sketch of that history, which forms the body of Mr. Everett's eulogy, must be read with great interest even by those already familiar with the facts. It is quite felicitously hit off.

We have already intimated the opinion, that the na-

ture of the occasion fixed the doom of failure on the attempts of both gentlemen, however executed. We wish we could say that no part of the fault attached to the execution itself. The circumstances justified the expectation that each oration should be perfect in its kind. Men selected from among millions for the occasion, and having months for preparation, were bound to furnish specimens of composition without blemish. We are sorry to point out faults which would merit censure in works of less pretension. In Mr. Everett's eulogy we mark a few.

Does he mean, at page six, to intimate that the "boldness of truth" was ONLY "not wholly uncongenial" to the character of La Fayette? We take this as a specimen of the faults into which men blunder, who adopt a sort of diluted style, in which affirmative propositions are stated by *disaffirming the negation of the affirmative*. This may be very polite and genteel. It betokens an amiable aversion to say any thing offensive; an eagerness to qualify and explain; and sometimes even a readiness to take back any thing that may displease. It may be called the *apologetic or bowing style*; for whenever we meet with it, we presently have before us the image of the speaker, ruffled, powdered and perfumed, and accompanying every sentence with the appropriate gesture of a deferential bow. This is Mr. Everett's besetting fault. But for this he might have been an orator.

At pages twelve and thirteen, we were inextricably puzzled (to say nothing of the ungraceful introduction of the *egomet ipse*,) by the following sentence.

"Yes, fellow-citizens, that I may repeat an exclamation, uttered ten years ago by him who has now the honor to address you, in the presence of an immense multitude, who welcomed 'the nation's guest' to the academic shades of Harvard, and by them received with acclamations of approval and tears of gratitude; when he was told by our commissioners, 'that they did not possess the means or the credit of procuring [credit of procuring!] a single vessel in all the ports of France, then, exclaimed the gallant and generous youth, 'I will provide my own.'"

The reader may unriddle this. We cannot. If the thing were possible, the most plausible guess would be, that the words "I will provide my own," were the words of Mr. Everett. It is the only exclamation we hear of.

We have not often had the pleasure of hearing Mr. Everett speak, and cannot pronounce whether he possesses that magic power of voice, and countenance, and attitude and gesture, which *should* have been displayed in the utterance of his closing paragraph. Without these, it is a school-boy declamation. We rather fear that Mr. Everett is not so endowed. Such was our impression on hearing him, and this is confirmed by the fact, that his power over the house of which he has long been a member, is no way commensurate to his acknowledged talents. We subjoin the paragraph, adding this advice—"that no man attempt to utter such a passage who is not very sure of his own powers." He who can do it as it should be done, may rival Cooke in Richard, or Cooper in the ghost-scene in Hamlet. This is the paragraph.

"You have now assembled within these renowned walls, to perform the last duties of respect and love, on

the birth-day of your benefactor, beneath that roof which has resounded of old with the master voices of American renown. The spirit of the departed is in *high communion* [does this mean *high mass*?] with the spirit of the place;—the temple worthy of the new name, which we now behold inscribed on its walls. Listen, Americans, to the lesson, which seems borne to us on the very air we breathe, while we perform these dutiful rites. Ye winds, that wafted the pilgrims to the land of promise, fan in their children's hearts, the love of freedom;—blood which our fathers shed, cry from the ground; *echoing* arches of this renowned hall, *whisper* back the voices of other days;—glorious Washington, break the long silence of that votive canvass;—speak, speak, marble lips, teach us THE LOVE OF LIBERTY PROTECTED BY LAW.*"

At pages six and seven, we have a passage, which besides savoring of transcendentalism, smacks of the school of Garrison and Tappan. We pass it by, because it is not with a mere occasional volunteer like Mr. Everett that we would discuss the subject there hinted at. Indeed we would touch him with a lenient hand, for his eulogy has great merit, and has deepened the kindly impression which his amiable character and classic talent had already made on us. The blemishes we have noted are but

"Stains upon a vestal's robe,
The worse for what they soil."

We recommend it to the perusal of all (if any there be) who have not read it.

We had noted for animadversion some of the most faulty passages of Mr. Adams's oration, but do not find them so much at variance with the general character of the work as to merit particular censure. When Secretary of State to a President, who, while minister to England, informed his government, in an official despatch, that he "had enjoyed very bad health," he acquired by contrast the reputation of a fine writer. He was the *cheval de bataille* of the administration. Afterwards, when the head of a dominant party, it pleased him to lay claim to the first place among the writers of the day, and his followers of course accorded it to him. A fatal claim, most fatally acknowledged! Had he known no more of writing than his successor, he might have been President now. As it was, he perilled the enjoyment of power, for the sake of vaunting it, in well turned sentences about "light-houses in the skies." His vanity tore away the veil under which federalism had lain securely hid for years. Had he, like his successor, unmasked a battery in doing so, he might have

* Subjoined to Mr. Everett's speech is an account of the circumstances of the ceremonial, much in detail. From this it appears that *by his side*, on the platform where he stood, was placed a bust of La Fayette, on a pedestal just high enough to bring the face on a level with the speaker's. The taste of this we do not propose to discuss with the committee of arrangement. It seems to have imposed on Mr. Everett a sort of necessity to have a word to say to the figure, and we do not know that he could have done it better than he has done. We incline to suspect that he would gladly have escaped from that part of his task. We are glad he got through it so well. We are glad too we were not there. The thought of Punch and the Devil knocking their noses together, might have made us laugh most unreasonably. Now that the thing is over, we venture to intreat that no man of genius and taste may be placed in a situation so perilous and so painful.

done it safely. This may explain some of our former remarks, when classing him among those whose weakness afforded the people an opportunity (fatally abused) of retrieving their rights.

Mr. Adams's style is any thing but felicitous. He has not the art of gliding gracefully on from topic to topic. His digressions are abrupt, untimely and rectangular; his allusions are generally of the ebony and topaz school; his blows are never inflicted with that dexterous sleight which engages our admiration too much to permit sympathy with the sufferer. They never take effect but when the victim is bound hand and foot, or on some imbecile wretch, like Jonathan Russel, who can neither parry nor elude them. His oratory reminds us of the *fa sol la* of a country singing school, differing as much from the easy flow of spontaneous eloquence, as the mellifluous stream of real music from that harsh jangling in which each note claims its separate syllable.

To those who may be startled at this account of Mr. Adams's style, we recommend the perusal of his oration as an exercise. We venture to predict that by the time the sixty thousand copies ordered by Congress have found as many readers, our judgment will be confirmed by at least fifty-nine thousand of them. But that will never be.

To Mr. Everett's address are appended a requiem and a hymn, of which we will say, but more emphatically, what we said of the orations. They should have great excellence and no fault. Each should be a gem of the first water, and without flaw. The first consists of six stanzas, of which two or three are very fine. But what shall we say to this :

“ One pulse is echoing there.”

An echoing pulse!

“ One pulse is echoing there !

The far voiced clarion and the trump are still,
And man's crushed spirit to the changeless will
Bows in rebuke and prayer !”

Whom or what does man rebuke ? If the writer meant “ *under rebuke,*” he should have said so. Again—

“ Gather about his pall,

And let the sacred memory of years
That he made glorious, call back your tears,
Or LIGHT them as they fall !”

If the writer had an idea connected with the last line it is incomprehensible to us.

The hymn of four short stanzas being destitute of any original thought, has not merit enough to be chargeable with any particular fault. There may be something new, though common-place, in the last stanza. Astronomers tell us that Venus and Mercury are morning and evening star by turns. Our poet, if we can understand his orrery, has a mind to make the name of La Fayette both morning and evening star at once.