Original Literary Notices

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Repository Citation
Tucker, N. Beverley, "Original Literary Notices" (1835). Faculty Publications. 1289.
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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. 93.

EULOGY on Lafayette, delivered in Faneuil Hall, at the request of the Young Men of Boston, September 6, 1834; by Edward Everett. Boston: Nathan Hill & Allen & Ticknor. 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 meridian 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-
What is there in the breath of praise; what is there in so long divided the people, were hymning their praises, the pomp and circumstance of funereal magnificence, but the 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 studying strains of birds may resound 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? Is it for want of love? Is it 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 unphilosophical feelings of our countrymen. Where would you place the monument? Is the capital itself too small? But the capital 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 canvass? And what matters it under what part of that vast table, every where embellazoned 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 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, endowed 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 rivalship had so long divided the people, were hymning 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 entirely reminded that it is God alone who doth his will on earth and in the armies of heaven; and never did any people use so strenuous an effort to shake off a servile impression. They refused to lay to heart the admonition of Providence. The Lord of Hosts had called to mourning, and to mourning, and to baldness, and to girding with sackcloth; and behold joy and glad memory of those to whom they are dedicated. The undying strains of bards may resound from oblivion names which might have perished. We have but attempted to imbody and apply two maxims suggested by considerations purely critical. We have but attempted to imbody 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 unsatisfactory 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, combined with the support 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 men, in the most potent 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 exalting" in the progress or the results of the French revolution. How should he? How should a man of "untought 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 intermittent minds cannot be free?" Those who could "hope against hope," shun 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 men 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 unlock 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 soveereign, de facto as well as de jure, every thing depends. If these he lost in experiments on the theory of government, all is lost.

Our remarks too far carried, will have been 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 very forcibly made away into a statement of the title 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 France 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 to favor of liberty which their annals bear record, have been obtained from weak princes, from those who held by doubtful titles, or from ruins? 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, whom chambered that fierce spirit which broke out so soon after the extinction 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 object slaves who clung to the will of the bold and resolute Elizabeth, with the contemplative subjects of her silly and incoercible 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 nothing but leave to enjoy life. Charles opposed irritation to tranquility, and they wished no more.

The revolution found them in a different mood. Appetite was gorged, and had become stale, national passion had spent its force, and men found themselves more requiring something to engage the noblest 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 force to them. By consent with the foolish 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 oldest, and the most revered 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 hue and cry of a popish succession was removed; the cost 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.

1 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 claim for reform, which the man of spirit and address, who is brought in at the last moment, 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 that the reform now going on in England would have commenced under Elizabeth or her grandson 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 subversiveness 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 suspension? 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 everywhere else? Was it not because our local situation removed us far from war, and the entanglements of foreign politics? Let any information 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 success

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tute 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 could 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 oratory we mark a flaw.

Does he mean, at page six, to intimate that the "boldness of truth" was only "not wholly concealed" to the character of La Fayette? We take this as a specimen of the faults into which mere blunder, who adopt a sort of diluted style, in which affirmative propositions are stated by disconfirming the negation of the affirmative. This may be very polite and genteel. It betokens an umbilical 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 orator, 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 to the subject, which the head of Mr. Everett, who has been President now, as well as others who have followed him, 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 explanation we have of it.

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 he should be done, may rival Cooke in Richard III. The house of which we have not the honor of being a member, has not the pleasure of hearing him on its Willis. 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 resumed of old with the master voices of American renown. The spirit of the departed is in high communion [does this man high massa?] 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, thatunted 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 reverend hall, solemnize the voices of other days;—glorious Washington, break the long silence of that votive chorus;—speak, speak, marble lips, teach us the love of liberty protected by law."

At pages six and seven, we have a passage, which besides savouring of transcendentalism, smacks of the school of Garrison and Tappan. We pass it by, because it is not by a true man, and because we should wish to know that Mr. Everett that we would discuss the subject there hinted at. Indeed we would touch him with a lenient hand, for his oratory has great merit, and has deepened the kindly impression which his amiable character and classic talent had already made on us. The blunders we have noted are but

"Status upon a venerable rook, The woes for which they toil."

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 dispatch, that he "had enjoyed very bad health," he acquired by contrast the reputation of a fine writer. He was the chef-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 faintly 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 sate of vanishing 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

1 Subjected to Mr. Everett's speech is an account of the circumstances of the eventful, novel 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 issue of this we do not propose to discuss with the committee of arrangement. It seems to have impressed on Mr. Everett a sort of necessity to have a word or two to the figure, and we do not know what could have done it better than he has done. We holistically 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 Pouch and the Devil knocking their gums together, might have made us laugh most merrily. Now that the thing is over, we venture to tatter 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 anything but felicitous. He has not the art of gliding gracefully on from topic to topic. His digressions are abrupt, untimely and rectangular; his allusions 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 inebriate wretch, like Jonathan Russell, who can neither parry nor elude them. His oratory reminds us of the fa sol fa 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—

"Other about his fall,

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 oratory, has a mind to make the name of La Fayette both morning and evening star at once.