


CASSIUS M. CLAY

ASSIUS MARCELLUS CLAY, American orator and politician, abolitionist, diplomat, and soldier, was born in Madison Co., Ky., Oct. 19, 1810. He was educated at Centre College, Kentucky, the University of Pennsylvania, and Yale College, and after graduating at Yale in 1832 he declared himself an emancipationist, and, influenced by a speech of W. L. Garrison, freed his own slaves. He was admitted to the Bar, but has rarely practiced. Entering the Kentucky legislature in 1835 he there advocated, among other measures, gradual slave emancipation, the owners of slaves to be reimbursed for their losses. His anti-slavery views caused his defeat in his endeavor to enter the legislature in the following year, but he was successful in 1837, though again defeated, and for a like reason, in 1841. He opposed the admission of Texas, and when Henry Clay was the Whig candidate for the Presidency he canvassed the State in behalf of the great Kentuckian. In 1845, he established an anti-slavery journal, "The True American," in Lexington, Ky., and when his office was mobbed he continued to issue the paper in Cincinnati and to distribute it in his own State. Always a fighter for his opinions, he figured in several personal encounters as well as in one or two fatal duels. He served in the American army during the Mexican War, and on his return to his native State was received with public honors. In 1850, he was unsuccessful as the anti-slavery candidate for governor, and in the elections of 1856 and 1860 supported Fremont and Lincoln. He was Minister to Russia from 1861 to 1869, save for an interval of a year, when he served as major-general in the Federal army during the Civil War, and he subsequently espoused the Cuban cause and was president of the Cuban Aid Society. In 1872, and the two succeeding presidential campaigns, he supported the Democratic candidates for the Presidency, but in 1884 gave his allegiance to the Republican candidate, Blaine. Since then he has lived in retirement at White Hall, Kentucky, though in 1896 he declared himself a Gold Democrat.

ADDRESS AT YALE COLLEGE

DELIVERED ON THE CENTENNIAL BIRTHDAY OF WASHINGTON,
FEBRUARY 22, 1832

GENTLEMEN OF YALE COLLEGE,—Were a stranger to visit this land, in this time of peace and plenty, this mildness and tranquillity of nature, and hear, at a distance, the loud peals of cannon, and the murmurs of assembled multitudes, behold crowds of both
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sexes and every age moving in anxiety to the churches and places of public convocation, in amazement he would exclaim, "What means this hurried array! this mighty tumult! What threatened invasion; what great political commotion; what impending convulsion of nature, draws together thirteen millions of human beings?"

Illustrious, departed shade! whom we this day call to memory, this could not be. For from what land shall he come who knows not thy great and virtuous deeds? What language shall he speak who has not heard the name of Washington?

We are assembled to-day, a great and intelligent nation, to offer up our thanks to the Author of our being for the many and signal favors bestowed upon us as a people. To give to departed worth our highest approbation, the voluntary tribute of grateful remembrance. To manifest to mankind and our posterity the regard which we entertain for the blessings of religious and political freedom which our gallant ancestors have bequeathed us. To make ourselves better men and better citizens. It is enough for one man that thirteen millions of intelligent beings have assembled in his name. Any efforts which I might make to color his fame by indulging in panegyric would be trifling with the feelings of this assembly; for, from the throbbing bosom and brightening eye, I perceive that you have outstripped the slow pace of language and already given way to the grateful emotions of the soul. I shall therefore briefly touch upon a few incidents of his life, and proceed to some other considerations, which may be not inappropriate to the occasion. It was the good fortune of Washington to unite in one personage the far distant and almost incompatible talents of the politician and soldier. It would not, I presume, be considered disre-

spectful to say that this circumstance is the only one which made a material distinction between him and some others of his noble compatriots. Other men may have conceived as high designs and entertained as exalted patriotism; but it was for Washington to conceive and to execute; and what he declared with the pen in the cabinet to conclude with the sword in the field. Other men would have been proud of the honor of pre-eminence in either department; but Washington drank deep of the glory of each, and was not intoxicated with the draught: for he was subject to temptation on a most signal occasion, yet his virtue and patriotism failed not in the hour of trial.

Success had crowned his efforts against a foreign foe. His followers, stung with the ingratitude of a preserved country, who refused the poor tribute of soldiers' wages, were united to him by the strongest ties — the sense of common suffering and injustice. Inflammatory letters were industriously circulated throughout the army by an insidious enemy. The republic, in its very infancy, was about to pass the way of all democracies, and on the eve of yielding up her dearly bought liberties to her chieftain. Then do we see the gray-headed patriot coming forward in deep and sorrowful mood, and hear his faltering voice entreating them to spare themselves — to spare him — what? An ignominious death? No! to spare him the titles, the honors, the arbitrary power, for which others have deemed the risk of life not too dear a sacrifice. Raising the intercepted letters to his face, while the gathering tears suffused his sight, he uttered those memorable words, "My eyes have grown dim in the service of my country." Where in the long annals of the reputed sayings of departed sages shall we find the equal of this more than eloquence — this pouring forth of the soul? It was then

that tyranny was rebuked, and liberty drew immortal inspiration. For selfishness and power were disrobed of their tinsel ornaments, ambition loosed his deadly grasp, and liberty and virtue, in union, winged their heavenly flight!

I pass over his virtues and his public acts. His virtues are known, and more appropriately mentioned by our firesides and in the private circle. 'Tis there we love to dwell upon the scenes of his infancy, and the virtuous impressions made upon his tender mind in the day when the destiny of empires is in the hands of a woman. Well for mankind that he was in the hands of a mother, a woman who, in those days filled the high rank allotted her by nature, to be the instructress, as well as the plaything companion of man. His public acts — they are inwoven without constitution and laws. They are known and appreciated by the politician and the jurist; and are more immediately objects for the contemplation of those concerned in the administration of the government.

What then remains for this occasion? Washington is gone, and his virtues and his exploits are reserved for mention at other times. The effects, my countrymen, the effects! "The man dies, but his memory lives." How many like the great Emmet have died, and left only a name to attract our admiration for their virtues, and our regret for their untimely fall, to excite to deeds which they would, but could not affect! But what has Washington left behind save the glory of a name? The independent mind, the conscious pride, the ennobling principle of the soul — a nation of freemen.

What did he leave? He left us to ourselves. This is the sum of our liberties, the first principle of government, the power of public opinion — public opinion, the only perma-

ment power on earth. When did a people flourish like Americans? Yet where, in a time of peace, has more use been made with the pen, or less with the sword of power? When did a religion flourish like the Christian, since they have done away with intolerance? Since men have come to believe and know that physical force cannot affect the immortal part, and that religion is between the conscience and the Creator only. He of 622, who with the sword propagated his doctrines throughout Arabia, and the greater part of the barbarian world; against the power of whose tenets the physical force of all Christendom was opposed in vain; under the effective operations of freedom of opinion, is fast passing the way of all error.

Napoleon, the contemporary of our Washington, is fast dying away from the lips of men. He who shook the whole civilized earth — who, in an age of knowledge and concert among nations, held the world at bay — at whose exploits the imagination becomes bewildered — who, in the eve of his glory, was honored with the pathetic appellation of “the last, lone, captive of millions in war,” — even he is now known only in history. The vast empire was fast tumbling to ruins while he yet held the sword. He passed away and left “no successor” there! The unhallowed light which obscured is gone; but brightly beams, yet, the name of Washington!

This freedom of opinion, which has done so much for the political and religious liberty of America, has not been confined to this continent. People of other countries begin to inquire, to examine, and to reason for themselves. Error has fled before it, and the most inveterate prejudices are dissolved and gone. Such unlimited remedy has in some cases indeed apparently proved injurious, but the evil is to be attributed

to the peculiarity of the attendant circumstances, or the ill-timed application. Let us not force our tenets upon foreigners. For if we subject opinion to coercion, who shall be our inquisitors?

No; let us do as we have done, as we are now doing, and then call upon the nations to examine, to scrutinize, and to condemn! No! they cannot look upon America to-day, and pity — for the gladdened heart disclaims all woe. They cannot look upon her and deride, for genius, and literature, and science are soaring above the high places of birth and pageantry. They cannot look upon us and defy, for the hearts of thirteen millions are warm in virtuous emulation; their arms steeled in the cause of their country. Her productions are wafted to every shore; her flag is seen waving in every sea. She has wrested the glorious motto from the once queen of the seas, and high on our banner, by the stars and stripes, is seen:

“Columbia needs no bulwark,
No towers along the steep,
Her march is o'er the mountain wave,
Her home is on the deep.”

But on this day of freemen's rejoicings, and all this mutual congratulation, “this feast of the soul, this pure banquet of the heart,” does no painful reflection rush across the unquiet conscience? no blush of insincerity suffuse the countenance, where joy and gratitude should hold undivided sway? When we come this day, as one great family, to lay our poor offering on the altar, to that God who holds the destinies of nations in his hand, are there none afar off, cast down and sorrowful, who dare not approach the common altar; who cannot put their hands to their hearts, and say: “Oh, Washington, what art thou to us? Are we not also freemen?”

Then what a mockery is here! Foolish man, lay down thy offering, go thy way, become reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy offering.

In the language of Thomas Jefferson:

“Can the liberties of a nation be sure when we remove their only firm basis, a conviction in the minds of the people, that these liberties are the gift of God? that they are not to be violated but with his wrath? Indeed, I tremble for my country, when I reflect that God is just; that his justice cannot sleep forever; that a revolution of the wheel of fortune, a change of situation, is among possible events; that it may become probable by supernatural interference! The Almighty has no attribute which can take side with us in that event.”

And shall these things be? 'Tis fit that he should chide who bears the shame! How long, my own, my native land, shall thy exiled sons dare to raise their voice only in a land of strangers, in behalf of thy best interests -- the cause of reason, religion, and humanity?

But ye philanthropists, if so ye term yourselves -- whether real or feigned, I care not -- leave us to ourselves. Give opinion full scope; examine, scrutinize, condemn, but let us alone. Know ye not yet the human heart? It has its affections, but it has its jealousies and its revenge, too! But, if you attempt to snatch justice from our arms -- our destined bride, lovely maid of every perfection -- we will plunge the assassin's dagger to her heart -- to be mourned by her followers as well as by her destroyers!

“Leave us to ourselves,” should be the motto of our republic, the first principle of national legislation. Not license to lawlessness and crime; not that liberty which is so often shouted forth without meaning -- defiance of wholesome laws and their severe and rigid execution. But let us alone

-- let us exercise reason and public opinion as regards our temporal interests as well as our immortal welfare.

If we come to honor Washington to-day, to sanction his principles, which have been approved in times past, I cannot forbear pressing upon the minds of my audience, from various parts of the Union, the necessity to concede something to public opinion in the construction of our federal league; to be indulgent to one another. If you do not, my countrymen, I very much fear that this, the first centennial celebration of the birth of Washington, will be the last on which a mighty nation will have met.

It is a principle generally admitted among politicians that the most despotic government in peace is the most efficient in war, and the reverse. This principle applied to us admits of much limitation. If we war with foreigners, and all united, I venture to say we are the most powerful nation on earth, comparing our physical resources; for we war not for a change of masters, but for ourselves -- for freedom. But, if we war with each other, which God forbid, we are the weakest nation in existence; because we are the farthest removed from executive influence; more subject to individual will.

Our strength is in public opinion, in unanimity. We revolt on the most favorable circumstances. No ignominious death of traitors awaits us; defeat, at worst, is but an unwilling marriage with a haughty, but yet loving lord. States come to the contest, armed, provided, unanimous; fighting ostensibly under the banner of the constitution, if not in supposable cases, in the real spirit of our federal league.

I would not speak lightly of the constitution of America; long may it exist to the honor of its framers, and the greater glory of those who support it well; but I should not deem it

safe to appeal to the letter of any copy, in defiance of the great original, written in the breast of every American.

It needs not the eye of divination to see that differences of interest will naturally arise in this vast extent of territory. Washington saw it; we see it. Let us not flatter ourselves that these differences will be merged by the revolution of time, or the increase of space. While I now speak, a voice is heard imploring concession, founded upon claims, warmly and conscientiously supported — no matter whether they be real or imaginary.

In the political arena the glove is already thrown down; the great Northern and Southern champions stand in sullen defiance; bristling crests are seen extending to the extreme verge of the lists; the mystery of intense feeling pervades the hosts; "*non tumultus, non quies: quale magni metus, et magnæ iræ silentium est.*"

My countrymen, this must not be; the issues are too great to depend upon the fall of one man. 'Tis yours — you, the people of the United States — to look well to it!

The warning voice of Cassandra is abroad! May not a blinded people rest secure in disbelief and derision, till the birthright left us by our Washington is lost! till we shall be aroused by the rushing ruins of a once "glorious union!"