

## AMBASSADOR CHOATE

**J**OSEPH HODGES CHOATE, an eminent American lawyer and diplomatist, was born at Salem, Mass., Jan. 24, 1832, and educated at Harvard University. He studied law at the Harvard Law School and in 1855 was admitted to the Bar. In the following year he removed to New York city, where he rapidly rose to eminence in his profession and was connected there with many of the most important legal cases. During the political campaign of 1856, Choate spoke frequently in support of Frémont, the Free-Soil candidate for the Presidency, and after that time became attached to the Republican party, although opposed to machine management. In 1898, as president of the American Bar Association, he made a memorable address before it in defence of trial by jury. He was president of the New York State Constitutional Convention in 1894, but until 1898 had held no political office. At the close of that year he succeeded Hon. John Hay as Ambassador from the United States to England, in which capacity he has been exceedingly popular in England, where he is widely and influentially known as a fine speaker and a man of great social and literary gifts.

### ORATION ON RUFUS CHOATE

DELIVERED AT THE UNVEILING OF THE STATUE OF RUFUS CHOATE  
IN THE COURT HOUSE OF BOSTON, OCTOBER 15, 1898

**M**ANY a noted orator, many a great lawyer, has been lost in oblivion in forty years after the grave closed over him, but I venture to believe that the bar of Suffolk, aye, the whole bar of America, and the people of Massachusetts, have kept the memory of no other man alive and green so long, so vividly and so lovingly, as that of Rufus Choate. Many of his characteristic utterances have become proverbial and the flashes of his wit, the play of his fancy, and the gorgeous pictures of his imagination are the constant themes of reminiscence wherever American lawyers assemble for social converse. What Mr. Dana so well said over his bier is still true to-day: "When as lawyers we meet together in tedious hours and seek to entertain ourselves, we find we do

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better with anecdotes of Mr. Choate than on our own original resources." The admirable biography of Professor Brown and his arguments, so far as they have been preserved, are text-books in the profession—and so the influence of his genius, character, and conduct is still potent and far-reaching in the land.

You will not expect me, upon such an occasion, to enter upon any narrative of his illustrious career, so familiar to you all, or to undertake any analysis of those remarkable powers which made it possible. All that has been done already by many appreciative admirers and has become a part of American literature. I can only attempt, in a most imperfect manner, to present a few of the leading traits of that marvellous personality which we hope that this striking statue will help to transmit to the students, lawyers and citizens who, in the coming years, shall throng these portals.

How it was that such an exotic nature, so ardent and tropical in all its manifestations, so truly southern and Italian in its impulses, and at the same time so robust and sturdy in its strength, could have been produced upon the bleak and barren soil of our northern cape and nurtured under the chilling blasts of its east winds is a mystery insoluble. Truly "this is the Lord's doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes."

In one of his speeches in the Senate he draws the distinction between "the cool and slow New England men and the mercurial children of the sun who sat down side by side in the presence of Washington to form our more perfect union."

If ever there was a mercurial child of the sun, it was himself most happily described. I am one of those who believe that the stuff that a man is made of has more to do with his career than any education or environment. The greatness

that is achieved, or is thrust upon some men, dwindles before that of him who is born great. His horoscope was propitious. The stars in their courses fought for him. The birthmark of genius, distinct and ineffaceable, was on his brow. He came of a long line of pious and devout ancestors, whose living was as plain as their thinking was high. It was from father and mother that he derived the flame of intellect, the glow of spirit, and the beauty of temperament that were so unique.

And his nurture to manhood was worthy of the child. It was "the nurture and admonition of the Lord." From that rough pine cradle, which is still preserved in the room where he was born, to his premature grave at the age of fifty-nine, it was one long course of training and discipline of mind and character, without pause or rest. It began with that well-thumbed and dog's-eared Bible from Hog Island, its leaves actually worn away by the pious hands that had turned them, read daily in the family from January to December, in at Genesis and out at Revelations every two years; and when a new child was born in the household the only celebration, the only festivity, was to turn back to the first chapter and read once more how "in the beginning God created the heaven and the earth" and all that in them is.

This book, so early absorbed and never forgotten, saturated his mind and spirit more than any other, more than all other books combined. It was at his tongue's end, at his fingers' ends—always close at hand until those last languid hours at Halifax, when it solaced his dying meditations. You can hardly find speech, argument or lecture of his, from first to last, that is not sprinkled and studded with biblical ideas and pictures and biblical words and phrases. To him the book of Job was a sublime poem. He knew the Psalms by heart

and dearly loved the prophets, and above all Isaiah, upon whose gorgeous imagery he made copious drafts. He pondered every word, read with most subtle keenness, and applied with happiest effect. One day, coming into the Crawford House, cold and shivering—and you remember how he could shiver—he caught sight of the blaze in the great fireplace and was instantly warm before the rays could reach him, exclaiming "Do you remember that verse in Isaiah, 'Aha! I am warm. I have seen the fire?'" and so his daily conversation was marked.

And upon this solid rock of the Scriptures he built a magnificent structure of knowledge and acquirement, to which few men in America have ever attained. History, philosophy, poetry, fiction, all came as grist to his mental mill. But with him time was too precious to read any trash; he could winnow the wheat from the chaff at sight, almost by touch. He sought knowledge, ideas, for their own sake and for the language in which they were conveyed.

I have heard a most learned jurist gloat over the purchase of the last sensational novel, and have seen a most distinguished bishop greedily devouring the stories of Gaboriau one after another, but Mr. Choate seemed to need no such counter-irritant or blister to draw the pain from his hurt mind. Business, company, family, sickness—nothing could rob him of his one hour each day in the company of illustrious writers of all ages. How his whole course of thought was tinged and embellished with the reflected light of the great Greek orators, historians and poets; how Roman history, fresh in the mind as the events of yesterday, supplied him with illustrations and supports for his own glowing thoughts and arguments, all of you who have either heard him or read him know.

But it was to the great domain of English literature that he daily turned for fireside companions and really kindred spirits. As he said in a letter to Sumner, with whom his literary fraternity was at one time very close: "Mind that Burke is the fourth Englishman,—Shakespeare, Bacon, Milton, Burke;" and then in one of those dashing outbursts of playful extravagance which were so characteristic of him, fearing that Sumner in his proposed review might fail to do full justice to the great ideal of both, he adds: "Out of Burke might be cut 50 Mackintoshes, 175 Macaulays, 40 Jeffreys, and 250 Sir Robert Peels, and leave him greater than Pitt and Fox together."

In the constant company of these great thinkers and writers he revelled and made their thoughts his own; and his insatiable memory seemed to store up all things committed to it, as the books not in daily use are stacked away in your public library, so that at that moment, with notice or without, he could lay his hand straightway upon them. What was once imbedded in the gray matter of his brain did not lie buried there, as with most of us, but grew and flourished and bore fruit. What he once read he seemed never to forget.

This love of study became a ruling passion in his earliest youth. To it he sacrificed all that the youth of our day—even the best of them—consider indispensable, and especially the culture and training of the body; and when we recall his pale face, worn and lined as it was in his later years, one of his most pathetic utterances is found in a letter to his son at school: "I hope that you are well and studious and among the best scholars. If this is so, I am willing you should play every day till the blood is ready to burst from your cheeks. Love the studies that will make you wise, useful, and happy

when there shall be no blood at all to be seen in your cheeks or lips."

He never rested from his delightful labors—and that is the pity of it—he took no vacations. Except for one short trip to Europe, when warned of a possible breakdown in 1850, an occasional day at Essex, a three days' journey to the White Mountains, was all that he allowed himself. Returning from such an outing in the summer of 1854, on which it was my great privilege to accompany him, he said, "That is my entire holiday for this year."

So that when he told Judge Warren so playfully that "The lawyer's vacation is the space between the question put to a witness and his answer," it was of himself almost literally true. Would that he had realized his constant dream of an ideal cottage in the old walnut grove in Essex, where he might spend whole summers with his books, his children, and his thoughts.

His splendid and blazing intellect, fed and enriched by constant study of the best thoughts of the great minds of the race; his all-persuasive eloquence, his teeming and radiant imagination, whirling his hearers along with it and sometimes overpowering himself, his brilliant and sportive fancy, lighting up the most arid subjects with the glow of sunrise, his prodigious and never-failing memory, and his playful wit, always bursting forth with irresistible impulse, have been the subject of scores of essays and criticisms, all struggling with the vain effort to describe and crystallize the fascinating and magical charm of his speech and his influence.

And now, in conclusion, let me speak of his patriotism. I have always believed that Mr. Webster, more than any other man, was entitled to the credit of that grand and universal outburst of devotion with which the whole north

sprang to arms in defence of the constitution and the Union many years after his death, when the first shot at Fort Sumter, like a fire-bell in the night, roused them from their slumber and convinced them that the great citadel of their liberties was in actual danger.

Differ as we may and must as to his final course in his declining years, the one great fact can never be blotted out, that the great work of his grand and noble life was the defence of the constitution—so that he came to be known of all men as its one defender—that for thirty years he preached to the listening nation the crusade of nationality and fired New England and the whole north with its spirit. He inspired them to believe that to uphold and preserve the Union against every foe was the first duty of the citizen; that if the Union was saved, all was saved; that if that was lost, all was lost. He molded better even than he knew. It was his great brain that designed, his flaming heart that forged, his sublime eloquence that welded the sword which was at last, when he was dust, to consummate his life's work and make liberty and union one and inseparable forever.

And so, in large measure, it was with Mr. Choate. His glowing heart went out to his country with the passionate ardor of a lover. He believed that the first duty of the lawyer, orator, scholar was to her. His best thoughts, his noblest words were always for her. Seven of the best years of his life, in the Senate and House of Representatives, at the greatest personal sacrifice he gave absolutely to her service.

On every important question that arose he made, with infinite study and research, one of the great speeches of the debate. He commanded the affectionate regard of his fellows and of the watchful and listening nation. He was a

profound and constant student of her history and revelled in tracing her growth and progress from Plymouth Rock and Salem Harbor until she filled the continent from sea to sea. He loved to trace the advance of the Puritan spirit, with which he was himself deeply imbued, from Winthrop and Endicott, and Carver and Standish, through all the heroic periods and events of colonial and revolutionary and national life, until in his own last years it dominated and guided all of free America.

He knew full well and displayed in his many splendid speeches and addresses that one unerring purpose of freedom and of union ran through her whole history; that there was no accident in it all; that all the generations, from the "Mayflower" down, marched to one measure and followed one flag; that all the struggles, all the self-sacrifice, all the prayers and the tears, all the fear of God, all the soul-trials, all the yearnings for national life, of more than two centuries, had contributed to make the country that he served and loved. He, too, preached, in season and out of season, the gospel of Nationality.

He was the faithful disciple of Webster while that great master lived, and after his death he bore aloft the same standard and maintained the same cause. Mr. Everett spoke nothing more than the truth when he said in Faneuil Hall, while all the bells were tolling, at the moment when the vessel bringing home the dead body of his life-long friend cast anchor in Boston harbor: "If ever there was a truly disinterested patriot, Rufus Choate was that man. In his political career there was no shade of selfishness. Had he been willing to purchase advancement at the price often paid for it, there was never a moment from the time he first made himself felt and known that he could not have commanded

anything that any party had to bestow. But he desired none of the rewards or honors of success."

He foresaw clearly that the division of the country into geographical parties must end in civil war. What he could not see was, that there was no other way—that only by cutting out slavery by the sword could America secure liberty and union too; but to the last drop of his blood and the last fibre of his being he prayed and pleaded for the life of the nation, according to his light. Neither of these great patriots lived to see the fearful spectacle which they had so eloquently deprecated.

But when at last the dread day came, and our young heroes marched forth to bleed and die for their country—their own sons among the foremost—they carried in their hearts the lessons which both had taught; and all Massachusetts, all New England, from the beginning, marched behind them, "carrying the flag and keeping step to the music of the Union," as he had bade them; and so, I say, let us award to them both their due share of the glory.

Thus to-day we consign this noble statue to the keeping of posterity, to remind them of "the patriot, jurist, orator, scholar, citizen, and friend," whom we are proud to have known and loved.