



EDWARD EVERETT

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EDWARD EVERETT, a distinguished American statesman, orator, and author, professor of Greek literature at Harvard, Governor of Massachusetts (1835-39), and editor of the "North American Review," was born at Dorchester, Mass., April 11, 1794, and died at Boston, Jan. 15, 1865. He was educated at Harvard, where he graduated with high honors in 1811. In his twentieth year, he became pastor of a Unitarian Church at Cambridge, and soon gained distinction by his brilliant pulpit efforts. This charge he, however, resigned in 1815 to accept the chair of Eliot Professor of Greek at Harvard. To fit himself better for the duties of this post, he made a four years' visit to Europe, where he met many eminent men, and returned to his professorship, which he entered upon with arder and gave a great impetus to the study of Greek and its literature, as well as inspiration to general culture. He also for a time assumed the editorship of the "North American Review," and wrote and published a number of scholarly addresses. From 1824 to 1835 he was a member of Congress, and retired from the House to accept the governorship of his native State. In 1841, he was appointed United States Minister to England, and on his return was chosen president of his Alma Mater. In 1852, he became Secretary of State in Mr. Fillmore's Cabinet, and in the following year entered the United States Senate. Here he strove, but in vain, to avert civil war, and did useful work on committees. Of his public addresses the best known are one on Washington, which he wrote for the Mount Vernon Association fund, and to which he contributed personally \$100,000, and his eloquent oration at the dedication of the National Cemetery at Gettysburg. At his death, in his seventy-first year, the scholarly statesman and accomplished man of letters was greatly mourned. The great charm of Everett's orations consists in their symmetry and finish, and every page of his eloquence bespeaks the richly endowed and thorough scholar. He possessed a wide reputation abroad as well as at home, and above all, he had an acquaintance with the politics of the world, with the laws of this country and of nations, and with the history and policy of the countries of Europe. Mr. Everett had substantial claims to the character of a poet, and among his poetical compositions his dirge of "Alaric the Visigoth" and "Santa Croce" are worthy of special mention. Among his published works are several volumes of "Orations and Speeches." He had long contemplated a work upon international law, and at the time of his death was preparing a course of lectures on this theme. A life-long and unbroken friendship existed between Everett and Daniel Webster, and the cordial relations that united them were never disturbed by any misunderstanding or estrangement. During the Civil War, Everett labored zealously in defence of the Union, but was always disposed to extend the hand of fraternal reconciliation towards those whom he regarded as so greatly in the wrong.

PHI BETA KAPPA ORATION

DELIVERED AT CAMBRIDGE, AUGUST 26, 1824

MR. PRESIDENT AND GENTLEMEN,—In discharging the honorable trust of being the public organ of your sentiments on this occasion, I have been anxious that the hour, which we here pass together, should be occupied by those reflections exclusively, which belong to us as scholars. Our association in this fraternity is academical; we engaged in it before our alma mater dismissed us from her venerable roof to wander in the various paths of life; and we have now come together in the academical holidays, from every variety of pursuit, from almost every part of our country, to meet on common ground as the brethren of one literary household. The professional cares of life, like the conflicting tribes of Greece, have proclaimed to us a short armistice, that we may come up in peace to our Olympia.

But from the wide field of literary speculation and the innumerable subjects of meditation which arise in it, a selection must be made. And it has seemed to me proper that we should direct our thoughts, not merely to a subject of interest to scholars, but to one which may recommend itself as peculiarly appropriate to us. If "that old man eloquent, whom the dishonest victory at Cheronæa killed with report," could devote fifteen years to the composition of his Panegyric on Athens, I shall need no excuse to a society of American scholars, in choosing for the theme of an address, on an occasion like this, the peculiar motives to intellectual exertion in America. In this subject that curiosity which every

scholar feels in tracing and comparing the springs of mental activity is heightened and dignified by the important connection of the inquiry with the condition and prospects of our native land.

In the full comprehension of the terms, the motives to intellectual exertion in a country embrace the most important springs of national character. Pursued into its details, the study of these springs of national character is often little better than fanciful speculation. The questions, why Asia has almost always been the abode of despotism, and Europe more propitious to liberty; why the Egyptians were abject and melancholy; the Greeks inventive, elegant, and versatile; the Romans stern, saturnine, and, in matters of literature, for the most part servile imitators of a people whom they conquered, despised, and never equalled; why tribes of barbarians from the North and East, not known to differ essentially from each other, at the time of their settlement in Europe, should have laid the foundation of national characters so dissimilar as those of the Spanish, French, German, and English nations,—these are questions to which a few general answers may be attempted, that will probably be just and safe only in proportion as they are vague and comprehensive.

Difficult as it is, even in the individual man, to point out precisely the causes, under the influence of which members of the same community and of the same family, placed apparently in the same circumstances, grow up with characters the most diverse; it is infinitely more difficult to perform the same analysis on a subject so vast as a nation; where it is first not a small question what the character is, before you touch the inquiry into the circumstances by which it was formed.

But as, in the case of individual character, there are certain causes of undisputed and powerful operation; there are also in national character causes equally undisputed of improvement and excellence on the one hand, and of degeneracy and decline on the other. The philosophical student of history, the impartial observer of man, may often fix on circumstances, which, in their operation on the minds of the people, in furnishing the motives and giving the direction to intellectual exertion, have had the chief agency in making them what they were or are. Nor are there many exercises of the speculative principle more elevated than this. It is in the highest degree curious to trace physical facts into their political, intellectual and moral consequences; and to show how the climate, the geographical position, and even the particular topography of a region connect themselves by evident association, with the state of society, its predominating pursuits, and characteristic institutions.

In the case of other nations, particularly of those which in the great drama of the world have long since passed from the stage, these speculations are often only curious. The operation of a tropical climate in enervating and fitting a people for despotism; the influence of a broad river or a lofty chain of mountains in arresting the march of conquest or of emigration, and thus becoming the boundary not merely of governments, but of languages, literature, institutions, and character; the effect of a quarry of fine marble on the progress of the liberal arts; the agency of popular institutions in promoting popular eloquence, and the tremendous reaction of popular eloquence on the fortunes of a state: the comparative destiny of colonial settlements, of insular states, of tribes fortified in nature's Alpine battlements, or scattered over a smiling region of olive gardens and vineyards; these are all

topics, indeed, of rational curiosity and liberal speculation, but important only as they may illustrate the prospects of our own country.

It is therefore when we turn the inquiry to our country, when we survey its features, search its history, and contemplate its institutions, to see what the motives are, which are to excite and guide the minds of the people; when we dwell not on a distant, an uncertain, an almost forgotten past; but on an impending future, teeming with life and action, toward which we are rapidly and daily swept forward, and with which we stand in the dearest connection, which can bind the generations of man together; a future, which our own characters, our own actions, our own principles will do something to stamp with glory or shame; it is then that the inquiry becomes practical, momentous, and worthy the attention of every patriotic scholar. We then strive, as far as it is in the power of philosophical investigation to do it, to unfold our country's reverend auspices, to cast its great horoscope in the national sky, where many stars are waning, and many have set; to ascertain whether the soil which we love, as that where our fathers are laid and we shall presently be laid with them, will be trod in times to come by a people virtuous, enlightened, and free.

The first of the circumstances which are acting and will continue to act with a strong peculiarity among us, and which must prove one of the most powerful influences in exciting and directing the intellect of the country, is the new form of civil society, which has here been devised and established. I shall not wander so far from the literary limits of this occasion, nor into a field so oft trodden, as the praises of free political institutions. But the direct and appropriate influence on mental effort of institutions like ours has not

yet, perhaps, received the attention, which, from every American scholar, it richly deserves.

I have ventured to say that a new form of civil society has here been devised and established. The ancient Grecian republics, indeed, were free enough within the walls of the single city, of which most of them were wholly or chiefly composed; but to these single cities the freedom, as well as the power, was confined. Toward the confederated or tributary states the government was generally a despotism more capricious and not less stern than that of a single tyrant. Rome as a state was never free; in every period of her history, authentic and dubious, royal, republican, and imperial, her proud citizens were the slaves of an artful, accomplished, wealthy aristocracy; and nothing but the hard-fought battles of her stern tribunes can redeem her memory to the friends of liberty. In ancient and modern history there is no example before our own, of a purely elective and representative system. It is therefore on an entirely novel plan, that, in this country, the whole direction and influence of affairs; all the trusts and honors of society; the power of making, abrogating, and administering the laws; the whole civil authority and sway, from the highest post in the government to the smallest village trust, are put directly into the market of merit.

Whatsoever efficacy there is in high station and exalted honors to call out and exercise the powers, either by awakening the emulation of the aspirants or exciting the efforts of the incumbents, is here directly exerted on the largest mass of men with the smallest possible deductions. Nothing is bestowed on the chance of birth, nothing depends on proximity to the fountain of honor, nothing is to be acquired by espousing hereditary family interests; but whatever is desired

must be sought in the way of a broad, fair, personal competition. It requires little argument to show that such a system must most widely and most powerfully have the effect of appealing to whatever of energy the land contains; of searching out, with magnetic instinct, in the remotest quarters the latent ability of its children.

It may be objected, and it has been, that for want of a hereditary government, we lose that powerful spring of action which resides in the patronage of such a government, and must emanate from the crown. With many individuals, friendly to our popular institutions, it is nevertheless an opinion, that we must consent to lose something of the genial influence of princely and royal patronage on letters and arts, and find our consolation in the political benefits of our free system.

It may be doubted, however, whether this view be not entirely false. A crown is in itself a strip of velvet set with jewels; the dignity which it imparts and the honor with which it is invested depend on the numbers, resources, and the intelligence of the people who permit it to be worn. The crown of the late emperor of Hayti is said to have been one of the most brilliant in the world; and Theodore of Corsica, while confined for debt in the Fleet in London, sat on as high a throne as the king of England.

Since then the power and influence of the crown are really in the people, it seems preposterous to say that what increases the importance of the people can diminish the effect of that which proceeds from them, depends upon them, and reverts to them. Sovereignty, in all its truth and efficacy, exists here as much as ever it did at London, at Paris, at Rome, or at Susa. It exists, it is true, in an equal proportionate diffusion; a part of it belongs to the humblest citizen. The error

seems to be in confounding the idea of sovereignty with the quality of an individual sovereign.

Wheresoever Providence gathers into a nation the tribes of men, there a social life with its energies and functions is conferred; and this social life is sovereignty. By the healthful action of our representative system it is made to pervade the empire like the air; to reach the farthest, descend to the lowest and bind the distant together; it is made not only to co-operate with the successful and assist the prosperous, but to cheer the remote, "to remember the forgotten, to attend to the neglected, to visit the forsaken."

Before the rising of our republic in the world, the faculties of men have had but one weary pilgrimage to perform—to travel up to court. By an improvement on the Jewish polity, which enjoined on the nation a visit thrice a year to the holy city; the great, the munificent, the enlightened states of the ancient and modern world have required a constant residence on the chosen spot. Provincial has become another term for inferior and rude; and impolite, which once meant only rural, has got to signify in all our languages something little better than barbarous.

But since in the nature of things a small part only of the population of a large state can by physical possibility be crowded within the walls of a city, and there receive the genial beams of metropolitan favor, it follows that the great mass of men are cut off from the operation of some of the strongest excitements to exertion.

It is rightfully urged, then, as a great advantage of our system, that the excitements of society go down as low as its burdens, and search out and bring forward whatsoever of ability and zeal are comprehended within the limits of the land. This is but the beginning of the benefit or rather it

is not yet the benefit. It is the effect of this diffusion of privileges that is precious. Capacity and opportunity, the twin sisters, who can scarce subsist but with each other, are now brought together.

The people who are to choose, and from whose number are to be chosen, by their neighbors, the highest officers of state, infallibly feel an impulse to mental activity; they read, think, and compare; they found village schools, they collect social libraries, they prepare their children for the higher establishments of education. The world, I think, has been abused on the tendency of institutions perfectly popular. From the ill-organized states of antiquity, terrific examples of license and popular misrule are quoted, to prove that man requires to be protected from himself, without asking who is to protect him from the protector, himself also a man.

While from the very first settlement of America to the present day, the most prominent trait of our character has been to cherish and diffuse the means of education. The village schoolhouse and the village church are the monuments which the American people have erected to their freedom; to read, and write and think are the licentious practices which have characterized our democracy.

But it will be urged, perhaps, that though the effect of our institutions be to excite the intellect of the nation, they excite it too much in a political direction; that the division and subdivision of the country into states and districts, and the equal diffusion throughout them of political privileges and powers, whatever favorable effect in other ways they may produce, are attended by this evil,—that they kindle a political ambition where it would not and ought not be felt; and particularly that they are unfriendly in their operation on literature, as they call the aspiring youth from the patient

and laborious vigils of the student to plunge prematurely into the conflicts of the forum.

It may, however, be doubted whether there be any foundation whatever for a charge like this; and whether the fact, so far as it is one, that the talent and ambition of the country incline at present to a political course be not owing to causes wholly unconnected with the free character of our institutions. It need not be said that the administration of the government of a country, whether it be liberal or despotic, is the first thing to be provided for. Some persons must be employed in making and administering the laws before any other interest can receive attention.

Our fathers, the pilgrims, before they left the vessel in which for five months they had been tossed on the ocean before setting foot on the new world of their desire, drew up a simple constitution of government. As this is the first care in the order of nature it ever retains its paramount importance.

Society must be preserved in its constituted forms, or there is no safety for life, no security for property, no permanence for any institution, civil, moral, or religious. The first efforts then of social men are of necessity political. Apart from every call of ambition, honorable or selfish, of interest enlarged or mercenary, the care of the government is the first care of a civilized community. In the early stages of social progress, where there is little property and a scanty population, the whole strength of the society must be employed in its support and defence. Though we are constantly receding from these stages we have not wholly left them. Even our rapidly increasing population is and will for some time remain small compared with the space over which it is diffused; and this with the total absence of large hereditary fortunes

will create a demand for political services on the one hand, and a necessity of rendering them on the other. There is, then, no ground for ascribing the political tendency of the talent and activity of this country to an imagined incompatibility of popular institutions with the profound cultivation of letters. Suppose our government were changed to-morrow; that the five points of a stronger government were introduced, a hereditary sovereign, an order of nobility, an established church, a standing army, and a vigilant police; and that these should take the place of that admirable system, which now, like the genial air, pervades all, supports all, cheers all, and is nowhere seen.

Suppose this change made, and other circumstances to remain the same; our population no more dense, our boundaries as wide, and the accumulation of private wealth no more abundant. Would there, in the new state of things, be less interest in politics? By the terms of the supposition, the leading class of the community, the nobles, are to be politicians by birth.

By the nature of the case a large portion of the remainder who gain their livelihood by their industry and talents would be engrossed, not indeed in the free political competition which now prevails, but in pursuing the interests of rival court factions. One class only, the peasantry, would remain, which would take less interest in politics than the corresponding class in a free state; or rather, this is a new class, which invariably comes in with a strong government; and no one can seriously think the cause of science and literature would be promoted by substituting an European peasantry in the place of, perhaps, the most substantial uncorrupted population on earth, the American yeomanry.

Moreover, the evil in question is with us a self-correcting