

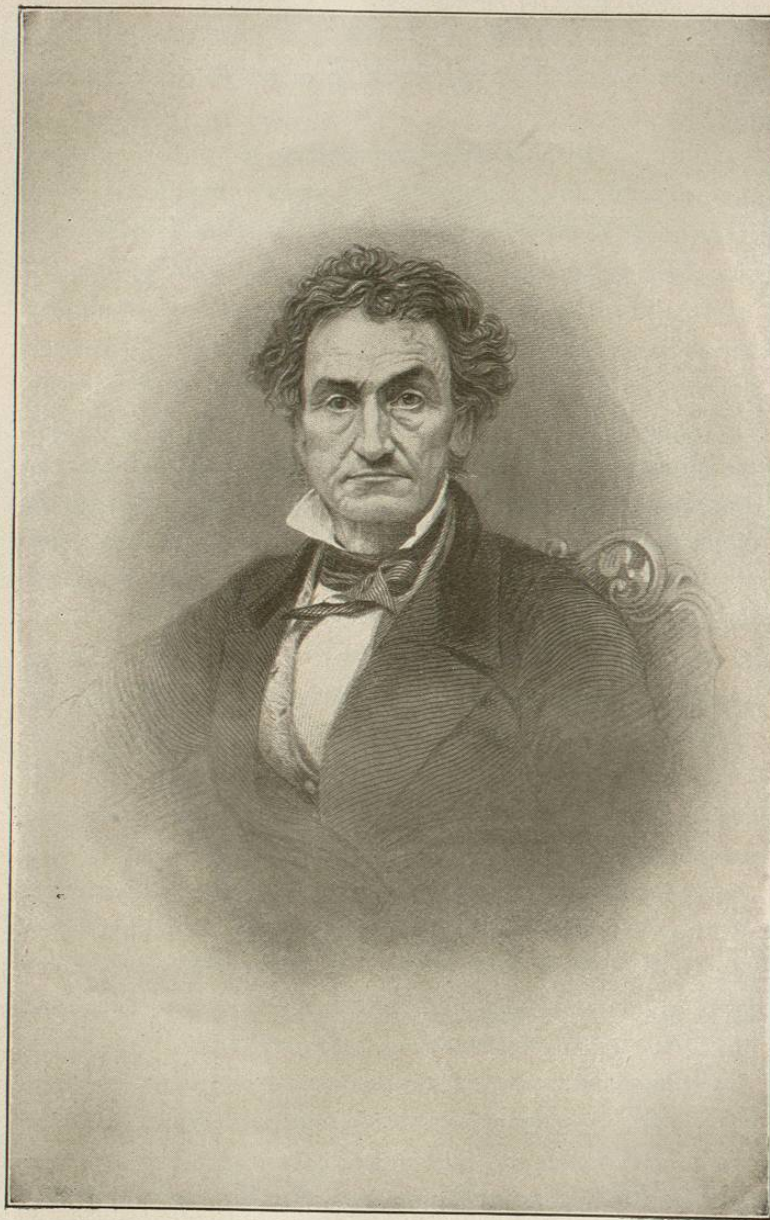
RUFUS CHOATE

RUFUS CHOATE, celebrated American statesman, lawyer, and orator, was born at Essex, Mass., Oct. 1, 1799, and died at Halifax, Nova Scotia, July 13, 1859. He graduated from Dartmouth College in 1819, was admitted to the Bar in 1823, and, next to Daniel Webster, reached the highest place in the profession attained by any contemporary lawyer in New England. He was sent to Congress as a representative of Massachusetts in 1830, and reelected two years later. When Daniel Webster became Secretary of State in Harrison's Cabinet, Choate took Webster's place in the Senate, and retained it until 1845. He died in his sixtieth year.

EULOGY ON WEBSTER¹

WEBSTER possessed the element of an impressive character, inspiring regard, trust, and admiration, not unmingled with love. It had, I think, intrinsically a charm such as belongs only to a good, noble, and beautiful nature. In its combination with so much fame, so much force of will, and so much intellect, it filled and fascinated the imagination and heart. It was affectionate in childhood and youth, and it was more than ever so in the few last months of his long life. It is the universal testimony that he gave to his parents, in largest measure, honor, love, obedience; that he eagerly appropriated the first means which he could command to relieve the father from the debts contracted to educate his brother and himself; that he selected his first place of professional practice that he might soothe the coming on of his old age. . . .

Equally beautiful was his love of all his kindred and of all



RUFUS CHOATE

his friends. When I hear him accused of selfishness, and a cold, bad nature, I recall him lying sleepless all night, not without tears of boyhood, conferring with Ezekiel how the darling desire of both hearts should be compassed, and he, too, admitted to the precious privileges of education; courageously pleading the cause of both brothers in the morning; prevailing by the wise and discerning affection of the mother; suspending his studies of the law, and registering deeds and teaching school to earn the means, for both, of availing themselves of the opportunity which the parental self-sacrifice had placed within their reach; loving him through life, mourning him when dead, with a love and a sorrow very wonderful, passing the sorrow of woman; I recall the husband, the father of the living and of the early departed, the friend, the counsellor of many years, and my heart grows too full and liquid for the refutation of words.

His affectionate nature, craving ever friendship, as well as the presence of kindred blood, diffused itself through all his private life, gave sincerity to all his hospitalities, kindness to his eye, warmth to the pressure of his hand; made his greatness and genius unbend themselves to the playfulness of childhood, flowed out in graceful memories indulged of the past or the dead, of incidents when life was young and promised to be happy,—gave generous sketches of his rivals,—the high contention now hidden by the handful of earth,—hours passed fifty years ago with great authors, recalled for the vernal emotions which then they made to live and revel in the soul. And from these conversations of friendship, no man—no man, old or young—went away to remember one word of profaneness, one allusion of indelicacy, one impure thought, one unbelieving suggestion, one doubt cast on the reality of virtue, of patriotism, of enthusiasm, of the progress

of man,—one doubt cast on righteousness, or temperance, or judgment to come.

Every one of his tastes and recreations announced the same type of character. His love of agriculture, of sports in the open air, of the outward world in starlight and storms, and sea and boundless wilderness,—partly a result of the influences of the first fourteen years of his life, perpetuated like its other affections and its other lessons of a mother's love,—the Psalms, the Bible, the stories of the wars,—partly the return of an unsophisticated and healthful nature, tiring, for a space, of the idle business of political life, its distinctions, its artificialities, to employments, to sensations which interest without agitating the universal race alike, as God has framed it, in which one feels himself only a man, fashioned from the earth, set to till it, appointed to return to it, yet made in the image of his Maker, and with a spirit that shall not die,—all displayed a man whom the most various intercourse with the world, the longest career of strife and honors, the consciousness of intellectual supremacy, the coming in of a wide fame, constantly enlarging, left, as he was at first, natural, simple, manly, genial, kind.

You will all concur, I think, with a learned friend who thus calls my attention to the resemblance of his character, in some of these particulars, to that of Walter Scott:—

“Nature endowed both with athletic frames, and a noble presence; both passionately loved rural life, its labors and sports; possessed a manly simplicity, free from all affectation, genial and social tastes, full minds, and happy elocution; both stamped themselves with indelible marks upon the age in which they lived; both were laborious, and always with high and virtuous aims, ardent in patriotism, overflowing with love of ‘kindred blood,’ and, above all, frank and unostentatious Christians.”

I have learned by evidence the most direct and satisfactory, that in the last months of his life, the whole affectionateness of his nature; his consideration of others; his gentleness; his desire to make them happy and to see them happy, seemed to come out in more and more beautiful and habitual expression than ever before. The long day's public tasks were felt to be done; the cares, the uncertainties, the mental conflicts of high place, were ended; and he came home to recover himself for the few years which he might still expect would be his before he should go hence to be here no more. And there, I am assured and fully believe, no unbecoming regrets pursued him; no discontent, as for injustice suffered or expectations unfulfilled; no self-reproach for anything done or anything omitted by himself; no irritation, no peevishness unworthy of his noble nature; but instead, love and hope for his country, when she became the subject of conversation; and for all around him, the dearest and most indifferent, for all breathing things about him, the overflow of the kindest heart growing in gentleness and benevolence; paternal, patriarchal affections, seeming to become more natural, warm, and communicative every hour. Softer and yet brighter grew the tints on the sky of parting day; and the last lingering rays, more even than the glories of noon, announced how divine was the source from which they proceeded; how incapable to be quenched; how certain to rise on a morning which no night should follow.

Such a character was made to be loved. It was loved. Those who knew and saw it in its hour of calm—those who could repose on that soft green—loved him. His plain neighbors loved him; and one said, when he was laid in his grave, “How lonesome the world seems!” Educated young men loved him. The ministers of the gospel, the general in-

telligence of the country, the masses afar off, loved him. True, they had not found in his speeches, read by millions, so much adulation of the people; so much of the music which robs the public reason of itself; so many phrases of humanity and philanthropy; and some had told them he was lofty and cold,—solitary in his greatness; but every year they came nearer and nearer to him, and as they came nearer, they loved him better; they heard how tender the son had been, the husband, the brother, the father, the friend, and neighbor; that he was plain, simple, natural, generous, hospitable,—the heart larger than the brain; that he loved little children and revered God, the Scriptures, the Sabbath-day, the constitution, and the law,—and their hearts clave unto him. More than any other man of his age, he has had a greater influence upon the world. It might almost be said that “his presence would set the church-bells ringing, and give school-boys a holiday,—would bring children from school and old men from the chimney-corner, to gaze on him ere he died.” The great and unavailing lamentation first revealed the deep place he had in the hearts of his countrymen.

You are now to add to this his extraordinary power of influencing the convictions of others by speech, and you have completed the survey of the means of his greatness. And here, again, I begin, by admiring an aggregate made up of excellences and triumphs, ordinarily deemed incompatible. He spoke with consummate ability to the bench, and yet exactly as, according to every sound canon of taste and ethics, the bench ought to be addressed. He spoke with consummate ability to the jury, and yet exactly as, according to every sound canon, that totally different tribunal ought to be addressed. In the halls of Congress, before the people assembled for political discussion in masses, before audiences

smaller and more select, assembled for some solemn commemoration of the past or of the dead,—in each of these, again, his speech, of the first form of ability, was exactly adapted, also, to the critical proprieties of the place; each achieved, when delivered, the most instant and specific success of eloquence,—some of them in a splendid and remarkable degree; and yet, stranger still, when reduced to writing, as they fell from his lips, they compose a body of reading,—in many volumes,—solid, clear, rich, and full of harmony,—a classical and permanent political literature.

And yet all these modes of his eloquence, exactly adapted each to its stage and its end, were stamped with his image and superscription, identified by characteristics incapable to be counterfeited and impossible to be mistaken. The same high power of reason, intent in every one to explore and display some truth; some truth of judicial, or historical, or biographical fact; some truth of law, deduced by construction, perhaps, or by illation; some truth of policy, for want whereof a nation, generations, may be the worse,—reason seeking and unfolding truth; the same tone, in all, of deep earnestness, expressive of strong desire that that which he felt to be important should be accepted as true, and spring up to action; the same transparent, plain, forcible, and direct speech, conveying his exact thought to the mind,—not something less or more; the same sovereignty of form, of brow, and eye, and tone, and manner,—everywhere the intellectual king of men, standing before you,—that same marvellousness of qualities and results, residing, I know not where, in words, in pictures, in the ordering of ideas, in felicities indescribable, by means whereof, coming from his tongue, all things seemed mended,—truth seemed more true, probability more plausible, greatness more grand, goodness more awful, every affection more

tender than when coming from other tongues,—these are, in all, his eloquence. But sometimes it became individualized and discriminated even from itself; sometimes place and circumstances, great interests at stake, a stage, an audience fitted for the highest historic action, a crisis, personal or national, upon him, stirred the depths of that emotional nature, as the anger of the goddess stirs the sea on which the great epic is beginning; strong passions, themselves kindled to intensity, quickened every faculty to a new life; the stimulated associations of ideas brought all treasures of thought and knowledge within command, the spell, which often held his imagination fast, dissolved, and she arose and gave him to choose of her urn of gold; earnestness became vehemence, the simple, perspicuous, measured, and direct language became a headlong, full, and burning tide of speech; the discourse of reason, wisdom, gravity, and beauty, changed to that *Δεινότης*, that rarest consummate eloquence,—grand, rapid, pathetic, terrible; the *aliquid immensum infinitumque* that Cicero might have recognized; the master triumph of man in the rarest opportunity of his noblest power.

Such elevation above himself, in congressional debate, was most uncommon. Some such there were in the great discussions of executive power following the removal of the deposits, which they who heard them will never forget, and some which rest in the tradition of hearers only. But there were other fields of oratory on which, under the influence of more uncommon springs of inspiration, he exemplified, in still other forms, an eloquence in which I do not know that he has had a superior among men. Addressing masses by tens of thousands in the open air, on the urgent political questions of the day, or designated to lead the meditations of an hour devoted to the remembrance of some national era, or of

some incident marking the progress of the nation, and lifting him up to a view of what is, and what is past, and some indistinct revelation of the glory that lies in the future, or of some great historical name, just borne by the nation to his tomb—we have learned that then and there, at the base of Bunker Hill, before the corner-stone was laid, and again when from the finished column the centuries looked on him; in Faneuil Hall, mourning for those with whose spoken or written eloquence of freedom its arches had so often resounded; on the Rock of Plymouth; before the Capitol, of which there shall not be one stone left on another before his memory shall have ceased to live—in such scenes, unfettered by the laws of forensic or parliamentary debate; multitudes uncounted lifting up their eyes to him; some great historical scenes of America around; all symbols of her glory and art and power and fortune there; voices of the past, not unheard; shapes beckoning from the future, not unseen—sometimes that mighty intellect, borne upwards to a height and kindled to an illumination which we shall see no more, wrought out, as it were, in an instant a picture of vision, warning, prediction; the progress of the nation; the contrasts of its eras; the heroic deaths; the motives to patriotism; the maxims and arts imperial by which the glory has been gathered and may be heightened—wrought out, in an instant, a picture to fade only when all record of our mind shall die.

In looking over the public remains of his oratory, it is striking to remark how, even in that most sober and massive understanding and nature, you see gathered and expressed the characteristic sentiments and the passing time of our America. It is the strong old oak which ascends before you; yet our soil, our heaven, are attested in it as perfectly as if it were a flower that could grow in no other climate and in

no other hour of the year or day. Let me instance in one thing only. It is a peculiarity of some schools of eloquence that they embody and utter, not merely the individual genius and character of the speaker, but a national consciousness—a national era, a mood, a hope, a dread, a despair—in which you listen to the spoken history of the time. There is an eloquence of an expiring nation, such as seems to sadden the glorious speech of Demosthenes; such as breathes grand and gloomy from the visions of the prophets of the last days of Israel and Judah; such as gave a spell to the expression of Grattan and of Kossuth—the sweetest, most mournful, most awful of the words which man may utter, or which man may hear—the eloquence of a perishing nation. There is another eloquence, in which the national consciousness of a young or renewed and vast strength, of trust in a dazzling, certain, and limitless future, an inward glorying in victories yet to be won, sounds out as by voice of clarion, challenging to contest for the highest prize of earth; such as that in which the leader of Israel in its first days holds up to the new nation the Land of Promise; such as that which in the well-imagined speeches scattered by Livy over the history of the “majestic series of victories” speaks the Roman consciousness of growing aggrandizement which should subject the world; such as that through which, at the tribunes of her revolution, in the bulletins of her rising soldier, France told to the world her dream of glory. And of this kind somewhat is ours; cheerful, hopeful, trusting, as befits youth and spring; the eloquence of a State beginning to ascend to the first class of power, eminence, and consideration, and conscious of itself. It is to no purpose that they tell you it is in bad taste; that it partakes of arrogance and vanity; that a true national good breeding would not know, or seem to know, whether the

nation is old or young; whether the tides of being are in their flow or ebb; whether these coursers of the sun are sinking slowly to rest, wearied with a journey of a thousand years, or just bounding from the Orient unbreathed. Higher laws than those of taste determine the consciousness of nations. Higher laws than those of taste determine the general forms of the expression of that consciousness. Let the downward age of America find its orators and poets and artists to erect its spirit, or grace and soothe its dying; be it ours to go up with Webster to the Rock, the Monument, the Capitol, and bid “the distant generations hail!”

In this connection remark, somewhat more generally, to how extraordinary an extent he had by his acts, words, thoughts, or the events of his life, associated himself forever in the memory of all of us, with every historical incident, or at least with every historical epoch; with every policy; with every glory; with every great name and fundamental institution, and grand or beautiful image, which are peculiarly and properly American. Look backwards to the planting of Plymouth and Jamestown; to the various scenes of colonial life in peace and war; to the opening and march and close of the revolutionary drama—to the age of the constitution; to Washington and Franklin and Adams and Jefferson; to the whole train of causes from the Reformation downwards, which prepared us to be Republicans; to that other train of causes which led us to be Unionists—look round on field, workshop, and deck, and hear the music of labor rewarded, fed, and protected—look on the bright sisterhood of the States, each singing as a seraph in her motion, yet blending in a common beam and swelling a common harmony—and there is nothing which does not bring him by some tie to the memory of America.