

We seem to see his form and hear his deep grave speech everywhere. By some felicity of his personal life; by some wise, deep, or beautiful word spoken or written; by some service of his own, or some commemoration of the services of others, it has come to pass that "our granite hills, our inland seas and prairies, and fresh, unbounded, magnificent wilderness;" our encircling ocean; the resting-place of the Pilgrims; our new-born sister of the Pacific; our popular assemblies; our free schools; all our cherished doctrines of education, and of the influence of religion, and material policy and law, and the constitution, give us back his name. What American landscape will you look on; what subject of American interest will you study; what source of hope or of anxiety, as an American, will you acknowledge that it does not recall him?

I have reserved, until I could treat it as a separate and final topic, the consideration of the morality of Mr. Webster's public character and life. To his true fame—to the kind and degree of influence which that large series of great actions and those embodied thoughts of great intellect are to exert on the future—this is the all-important consideration. In the last speech which he made in the Senate—the last of those which he made, as he said, for the constitution and the Union, and which he might have commended, as Bacon his name and memory, "to men's charitable speeches, to foreign nations, and the next ages"—yet with a better hope he asserted, "The ends I aim at shall be those of my country, my God, and truth." Is that praise his?

Until the seventh day of March, 1850, I think it would have been accorded to him by an almost universal acclaim, as general and as expressive of profound and intelligent conviction, and of enthusiasm, love, and trust, as ever saluted

conspicuous statesmanship, tried by many crises of affairs in a great nation, agitated ever by parties, and wholly free.

That he had admitted into his heart a desire to win, by deserving them, the highest forms of public honor, many would have said; and they who loved him most fondly and felt the truest solicitude that he should carry a good conscience and pure fame brightening to the end, would not have feared to concede. For he was not ignorant of himself; and he therefore knew that there was nothing within the Union, constitution, and law too high or too large or too difficult for him. He believed that his natural or his acquired abilities and his policy of administration would contribute to the true glory of America; and he held no theory of ethics which required him to disparage, to suppress, to ignore vast capacities of public service merely because they were his own. If the fleets of Greece were assembling and her tribes buckling on their arms from Laconia to Mount Olympus, from the promontory of Sunium to the isle farthest to the west, and the great epic action was opening, it was not for him to feign insanity or idiocy to escape the perils and the honor of command. But that all this in him had been ever in subordination to a principled and beautiful public virtue; that every sectional bias, every party tie, as well as every personal aspiring, had been uniformly held by him for nothing against the claims of country; that nothing lower than country seemed worthy enough—nothing smaller than country large enough—for that great heart, would not have been questioned by a whisper. Ah! if at any hour before that day he had died; how would then the great procession of the people of America—the great triumphal procession of the dead—have moved onward to his grave—the sublimity of national sorrow, not contrasted, not outraged by one feeble voice of calumny!

In that antecedent public life, embracing from 1812 to 1850—a period of thirty-eight years—I find grandest proofs of the genuineness and comprehensiveness of his patriotism, and the boldness and manliness of his public virtue. He began his career of politics as a Federalist. Such was his father—so beloved and revered; such his literary and professional companions; such, although by no very decisive or certain preponderance, the community in which he was bred and was to live. Under that name of party he entered Congress, personally, and by connection, opposed to the war, which was thought to bear with such extreme sectional severity upon the North and East. And yet one might almost say that the only thing he imbibed from Federalists or Federalism was love and admiration for the constitution as the means of union. That passion he did inherit from them; that he cherished.

He came into Congress, opposed, as I have said, to the war; and behold him, if you would judge of the quality of his political ethics, in opposition. Did those eloquent lips, at a time of life when vehemence and imprudence are expected, if ever, and not ungraceful, let fall ever one word of faction? Did he ever deny one power to the general government which the soundest expositors of all creeds have allowed it? Did he ever breathe a syllable which could excite a region, a State, a family of States, against the Union,—which could hold out hope or aid to the enemy?—which sought or tended to turn back or to chill the fiery tide of a new and intense nationality, then bursting up, to flow and burn till all things appointed to America to do shall be fulfilled? These questions, in their substance, he put to Mr. Calhoun, in 1838, in the Senate, and that great man—one of the authors of the war—just then, only then, in relations unfriendly to Mr. Webster, and who

had just insinuated a reproach on his conduct in the war, was silent. Did Mr. Webster content himself even with objecting to the details of the mode in which the administration waged the war? No, indeed. Taught by his constitutional studies that the Union was made in part for commerce, familiar with the habits of our long line of coast, knowing well how many sailors and fishermen driven from every sea by embargo and war, burned to go to the gun-deck and avenge the long wrongs of England on the element where she had inflicted them, his opposition to the war manifested itself by teaching the nation that the deck was her field of fame. *Non illi imperium pelagi sævumque tridentem, sed nobis, sorte datum.*

But I might recall other evidence of the sterling and unusual qualities of his public virtue. Look in how manly a sort he not merely conducted a particular argument or a particular speech, but in how manly a sort, in how high a moral tone, he uniformly dealt with the mind of his country. Politicians got an advantage of him for this while he lived; let the dead have just praise to-day. Our public life is one long electioneering, and even Burke tells you that at popular elections the most rigorous casuists will remit something of their severity. But where do you find him flattering his countrymen, indirectly or directly, for a vote? On what did he ever place himself but good counsels and useful service? His arts were manly arts, and he never saw a day of temptation when he would not rather fall than stand on any other. Who ever heard that voice cheering the people on to rapacity, to injustice, to a vain and guilty glory? Who ever saw that pencil of light hold up a picture of manifest destiny to dazzle the fancy? How anxiously rather, in season and out, by the energetic eloquence of his youth, by his counsels bequeathed on the verge of a timely grave, he preferred to teach that by

all possible acquired sobriety of mind, by asking reverently of the past, by obedience to the law, by habits of patient and legitimate labor, by the cultivation of the mind, by the fear and worship of God, we educate ourselves for the future that is revealing. Men said he did not sympathize with the masses, because his phraseology was rather of an old and simple school, rejecting the nauseous and vain repetitions of humanity and philanthropy and progress and brotherhood, in which may lurk heresies so dreadful, of socialism or disunion; in which a selfish, hollow, and shallow ambition may mask itself,—the siren song which would lure the pilot from his course. But I say that he did sympathize with them; and because he did he came to them not with adulation but with truth; not with words to please but with measures to serve them; not that his popular sympathies were less but that his personal and intellectual dignity and his public morality were greater.

And on the seventh day of March, and down to the final scene, might he not still say as ever before, that "all the ends he aimed at were his country's, his God's, and truth's." He declared, "I speak to-day for the preservation of the Union. Hear me for my cause. I speak to-day out of a solicitous and anxious heart for the restoration to the country of that quiet and harmony which make the blessings of this Union so rich and so dear to us all. These are the motives and the sole motives that influence me." If in that declaration he was sincere, was he not bound in conscience to give the counsels of that day? What were they? What was the single one for which his political morality was called in question? Only that a provision of the federal constitution ordaining the restitution of fugitive slaves should be executed according to its true meaning. This only. And might he not in good

conscience keep the constitution in this part and in all for the preservation of the Union?

Under his oath to support it and to support it all, and with his opinions of that duty so long held, proclaimed uniformly, in whose vindication on some great days he had found the chief opportunity of his personal glory, might he not in good conscience support it and all of it, even if he could not—and no human intelligence could certainly—know that the extreme evil would follow, in immediate consequence, its violation? Was it so recent a doctrine of his that the constitution was obligatory upon the national and individual conscience that you should ascribe it to sudden and irresistible temptation? Why, what had he, quite down to the seventh of March, that more truly individualized him?—what had he more characteristically his own?—wherewithal had he to glory more or other than all beside, than this very doctrine of the sacred and permanent obligation to support each and all parts of that great compact of union and justice? Had not this been his distinction, his speciality,—almost the foible of his greatness,—the darling and master passion ever? Consider that that was a sentiment which had been part of his conscious nature for more than sixty years; that from the time he bought his first copy of the constitution on the handkerchief, and revered parental lips had commended it to him with all other holy and beautiful things, along with lessons of reverence to God and the belief and love of his Scriptures, along with the doctrine of the catechism, the unequalled music of Watts, the name of Washington,—there had never been an hour that he had not held it the master-work of man,—just in its ethics, consummate in its practical wisdom, paramount in its injunctions; that every year of life had deepened the original impression; that as his mind opened and his as-

sociations widened he found that every one for whom he felt respect, instructors, theological and moral teachers, his entire party connection, the opposite party, and the whole country, so held it, too; that its fruits of more than half a century of union, of happiness, of renown, bore constant and clear witness to it in his mind, and that it chanced that certain emergent and rare occasions had devolved on him to stand forth to maintain it, to vindicate its interpretation, to vindicate its authority, to unfold its workings and uses; that he had so acquitted himself of that opportunity as to have won the title of its expounder and defender, so that his proudest memories, his most prized renown, referred to it and were entwined with it—and say whether with such antecedents, readiness to execute or disposition to evade, would have been the hardest to explain; likeliest to suggest the surmise of a new temptation! He who knows anything of man knows that his vote for beginning the restoration of harmony by keeping the whole constitution was determined, was necessitated, by the great law of sequences,—a great law of cause and effect running back to his mother's arms, as resistless as the law which moves the system about the sun,—and that he must have given it, although it had been opened to him in vision, that within the next natural day his "eyes should be turned to behold for the last time the sun in heaven."

To accuse him in that act of "sinning against his own conscience" is to charge one of these things: either that no well-instructed conscience can approve and maintain the constitution, and each of its parts, and therefore that his, by inference, did not approve it; or that he had never employed the proper means of instructing his conscience, and therefore its approval, if it were given, was itself an immorality. The accuser must assert one of these propositions. He will not

deny, I take it for granted, that the conscience requires to be instructed by political teaching in order to guide the citizen or the public man aright, in the matter of political duties. Will he say that the moral sentiments alone, whatever their origin—whether factitious and derivative, or parcel of the spirit of the child and born with it—that they alone, by force of strict and mere ethical training, become qualified to pronounce authoritatively whether the constitution, or any other vast and complex civil policy, as a whole, whereby a nation is created and preserved, ought to have been made or ought to be executed? Will he venture to tell you, that if your conscience approves the Union, the constitution in all its parts, and the law which administers it, that you are bound to obey and uphold them; and if it disapproves, you must, according to your measure, and in your circles of agitation, disobey and subvert them and leave the matter there—forgetting or designedly omitting to tell you also that you are bound in all good faith and diligence to resort to studies and to teachers *ab extra*—in order to determine whether the conscience ought to approve or disapprove the Union, the constitution, and the law, in view of the whole aggregate of their nature and fruits? Does he not perfectly know that this moral faculty, however trained, by mere moral institution, specifically directed to that end, to be tender, sensitive, and peremptory, is totally unequal to decide on any action or any thing but the very simplest; that which produces the most palpable and immediate result of unmixed good, or unmixed evil; and that when it comes to judge on the great mixed cases of the world, where the consequences are numerous, their development slow and successive, the light and shadow of a blended and multi-form good and evil spread out on the lifetime of a nation, that then morality must borrow from history; from politics;

from reason operating on history and politics, her elements of determination? I think he must agree to this. He must agree, I think, that to single out one provision in a political system of many parts and of elaborate interdependence, to take it all alone, exactly as it stands and without attention to its origin and history; the necessities, morally resistless, which prescribed its introduction into the system, the unmeasured good in other forms which its allowance buys, the unmeasured evil in other forms which its allowance hinders—without attention to these, to present it in all “the nakedness of a metaphysical abstraction” to the mere sensibilities; and ask if it is not inhuman, and if they answer according to their kind, that it is, then to say that the problem is solved and the right of disobedience is made clear—he must agree that this is not to exalt reason and conscience but to outrage both. He must agree that although the supremacy of conscience is absolute whether the decision be right or wrong, that is, according to the real qualities of things or not, that there lies back of the actual conscience, and its actual decisions the great anterior duty of having a conscience that shall decide according to the real qualities of things; that to this vast attainment some adequate knowledge of the real qualities of the things which are to be subjected to its inspection is indispensable; that if the matter to be judged of is anything so large, complex, and conventional as the duty of the citizen, or the public man, to the State; the duty of preserving or destroying the order of things in which we are born; the duty of executing or violating one of the provisions of organic law which the country, having a wide and clear view before and after, had deemed a needful instrumental means for the preservation of that order; that then it is not enough to relegate the citizen, or the public man, to a higher law, and an in-

terior illumination, and leave him there. Such discourse is “as the stars, which give so little light because they are so high.” He must agree that in such case morality itself should go to school. There must be science as well as conscience, as old Fuller has said. She must herself learn of history; she must learn of politics; she must consult the builders of the State, the living and the dead, to know its value, its aspects in the long run, on happiness and morals; its dangers; the means of its preservation; the maxims and arts imperial of its glory. To fit her to be the mistress of civil life, he will agree that she must come out for a space from the interior round of emotions, and subjective states and contemplations, and introspection, “cloistered, unexercised, unbreathed,”—and, carrying with her nothing but her tenderness, her scrupulosity, and her love of truth, survey the objective realities of the State; ponder thoughtfully on the complications, and impediments, and antagonisms which make the noblest politics but an aspiring, an approximation, a compromise, a type, a shadow of good to come, “the buying of great blessings at great prices,”—and there learn civil duty *secundum subjectam materiam*. “Add to your virtue knowledge”—or it is no virtue.

And now, is he who accuses Mr. Webster of “sinning against his own conscience,” quite sure that he knows that that conscience—well instructed by profoundest political studies and thoughts of the reason, well instructed by an appropriate moral institution sedulously applied, did not commend and approve his conduct to himself? Does he know that he had not anxiously and maturely studied the ethics of the constitution, and as a question of ethics, but of ethics applied to a stupendous problem of practical life, and had not become satisfied that they were right? Does he know that he

had not done this when his faculties were all at their best and his motives under no suspicion? May not such an enquirer, for aught you can know, may not that great mind have verily and conscientiously thought that he had learned in that investigation many things? May he not have thought that he learned that the duty of the inhabitants of the free States, in that day's extremity, to the republic, the duty at all events of statesmen to the republic, is a little too large and delicate and difficult to be all comprehended in the single emotion of compassion for one class of persons in the commonwealth, or in carrying out the single principle of abstract and natural and violent justice to one class? May he not have thought that he found there some stupendous exemplifications of what we read of in books of casuistry, the "dialectics of conscience," as conflicts of duties; such things as the conflicts of the greater with the less; conflicts of the attainable with the visionary; conflicts of the real with the seeming; and may he not have been soothed to learn that the evil which he found in this part of the constitution was the least of two; was unavoidable; was compensated; was justified; was commanded, as by a voice from the Mount, by a more exceeding and enduring good? May he not have thought that he had learned that the grandest, most difficult, most pleasing to God, of the achievements of secular wisdom and philanthropy is the building of a State; that of the first class of grandeur and difficulty and acceptableness to him, in this kind, was the building of our own; that unless everybody of consequence enough to be heard of in the age and generation of Washington—unless that whole age and generation were in a conspiracy to cheat themselves, and history, and posterity, a certain policy of concession and forbearance of region to region was indispensable to rear that master-work of man; and that

that same policy of concession and forbearance is as indispensable, more so, now, to afford a rational ground of hope for its preservation? May he not have thought that he had learned that the obligation, if such in any sense you may call it, of one State to allow itself to become an asylum for those flying from slavery into another State, was an obligation of benevolence, of humanity only, not of justice; that it must therefore on ethical principles be exercised under all the limitations which regulate and condition the benevolence of States; that therefore each is to exercise it in strict subordination to its own interests, estimated by a wise statesmanship and a well-instructed public conscience; that benevolence itself, even its ministrations of mere good will, is an affair of measure and of proportions; and must choose sometimes between the greater good and the less; that if, to the highest degree, and widest diffusion of human happiness, a union of States such as ours, some free, some not so, was necessary; and to such union the constitution was necessary; and to such a constitution this clause was necessary, humanity itself prescribes it and presides in it? May he not have thought that he learned that there are proposed to humanity in this world many fields of beneficent exertion; some larger, some smaller, some more, some less expensive and profitable to till; that among these it is always lawful, and often indispensable, to make a choice; that sometimes, to acquire the right or the ability to labor in one, it is needful to covenant not to invade another; and that such covenant, in partial restraint, rather in reasonable direction of philanthropy is good in the forum of conscience; and setting out with these very elementary maxims of practical morals, may he not have thought that he learned from the careful study of the facts of our history and opinions that to acquire the power of advancing