


GEORGE BANCROFT

EORGE BANCROFT, American historian, statesman, and diplomatist, was born at Worcester, Mass., Oct. 3, 1800, and died at Washington, D. C., Jan. 17, 1891. At the age of seventeen, he graduated at Harvard University and proceeded to Germany, where he studied literature, theology, and history, and at Göttingen obtained the degree of Ph. D. At Berlin, he made the acquaintance of Humboldt and other distinguished Germans, and at Jena became intimate with Goethe. He returned to America in 1822 and for a time was tutor in Greek at Harvard. In 1830, he was elected to the legislature, but refused to take his seat; the following year he declined a nomination to the Senate. In 1834, he published the first volume of his "History of the United States," which was finished only in 1874. In 1835, he removed from Northampton to Springfield, and in 1838 was appointed collector of the port of Boston. In 1844, he was nominated as Democratic Governor of Massachusetts, but failed of election. During the presidency of Polk he was Secretary of the Navy, and was instrumental in founding the naval academy at Annapolis. He also, by his instructions to our fleet, aided in securing the acquisition of California during the war with Mexico. In 1846, he became Minister to England, and successfully urged on the British Government the adoption of more liberal laws of navigation. In 1867, he was sent as Minister to Prussia; in 1868 to the North German Confederation; and in 1871 to the German Empire, where he remained three years. Among Bancroft's minor publications are the orations which he delivered at various times: at Northampton on July 4, 1826; on the death of Andrew Jackson, delivered at Washington (June 27, 1845); the memorial address on the life and character of Abraham Lincoln, delivered before the two houses of Congress (Feb. 12, 1866). His last address was read before the American Historical Society (April 27, 1886), of which he was president. Few Americans have enjoyed wider fame, or deservedly had greater honor paid them.

ORATION ON ANDREW JACKSON

DELIVERED AT THE COMMEMORATION OF HIS DEATH IN WASHINGTON,
JUNE 27, 1845

WE ARE met to commemorate the virtues of one who shed his blood for our independence, took part in winning the territory and forming the early institutions of the west, and was imbued with all the great ideas which constitute the moral force of our country. On the spot where he gave his solemn fealty to the people—here, where he pledged him-

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self before the world to freedom, to the constitution, and to the laws—we meet to pay our tribute to the memory of the last great name, which gathers round itself all the associations that form the glory of America.

South Carolina gave a birthplace to Andrew Jackson. On its remote frontier, far up on the forest-clad banks of the Catawba, in a region where the settlers were just beginning to cluster, his eye first saw the light. There his infancy sported in the ancient forests, and his mind was nursed to freedom by their influence. He was the youngest son of an Irish emigrant, of Scottish origin, who, two years after the great war of Frederick of Prussia, fled to America for relief from indigence and oppression. His birth was in 1767, at a time when the people of our land were but a body of dependent colonists, scarcely more than two millions in number, scattered along an immense coast, with no army, or navy, or union; and exposed to the attempts of England to control America by the aid of military force. His boyhood grew up in the midst of the contest with Great Britain. The first great political truth that reached his heart, was, that all men are free and equal; the first great fact that beamed on his understanding was his country's independence.

The strife, as it increased, came near the shades of his own upland residence. As a boy of thirteen he witnessed the scenes of horror that accompany civil war; and when but a year older, with an elder brother, he shouldered his musket and went forth to strike a blow for his country.

Joyous era for America and for humanity! But for him, the orphan boy, the events were full of agony and grief. His father was no more. His oldest brother fell a victim to the war of the Revolution; another, his companion in arms, died of wounds received in their joint captivity; his mother went

down to the grave a victim to grief and efforts to rescue her sons; and when peace came he was alone in the world, with no kindred to cherish him and little inheritance but his own untried powers.

The nation which emancipated itself from British rule organizes itself; the confederation gives way to the constitution; the perfecting of that constitution—that grand event of the thousand years of modern history—is accomplished; America exists as a people, gains unity as a government, and assumes its place among the nations of the earth.

The next great office to be performed by America is the taking possession of the wilderness. The magnificent western valley cried out to the civilization of popular power that the season had come for its occupation by cultivated man.

Behold, then, our orphan hero, sternly earnest, consecrated to humanity from childhood by sorrow, having neither father, nor mother, nor sister, nor surviving brother, so young and yet so solitary, and therefore bound the more closely to collective man—behold him elect for his lot to go forth and assist in laying the foundations of society in the great valley of the Mississippi.

At the very time when Washington was pledging his own and future generations to the support of the popular institutions which were to be the light of the human race—at the time when the governments of the Old World were rocking to their centre, and the mighty fabric that had come down from the middle ages was falling in—the adventurous Jackson, in the radiant glory and boundless hope and confident intrepidity of twenty-one, plunged into the wilderness, crossed the great mountain barrier that divides the western waters from the Atlantic, followed the paths of the early hunters and fugitives, and, not content with the nearer

neighborhood to his parent State, went still further and further to the west till he found his home in the most beautiful region on the Cumberland. There, from the first, he was recognized as the great pioneer; and in his courage the coming emigrants were sure to find a shield.

The lovers of adventure began to pour themselves into the territory whose delicious climate and fertile soil invited the presence of social man. The hunter, with his rifle and his axe, attended by his wife and children; the herdsman, driving the few cattle that were to multiply as they browsed; the cultivator of the soil,—all came to the inviting region. Wherever the bending mountains opened a pass—wherever the buffaloes and the beasts of the forest had made a trace, these sons of nature, children of humanity, in the highest sentiment of personal freedom, came to occupy the lovely wilderness whose prairies blossomed everywhere profusely with wild flowers—whose woods in spring put to shame by their magnificence the cultivated gardens of man.

And now that these unlettered fugitives, educated only by the spirit of freedom, destitute of dead letter erudition, but sharing the living ideas of the age, had made their homes in the west, what would follow? Would they degrade themselves to ignorance and infidelity? Would they make the solitudes of the desert excuses for licentiousness? Would the hatred of excessive restraint lead them to live in unorganized society, destitute of laws and fixed institutions?

At a time when European society was becoming broken in pieces, scattered, disunited, and resolved into its elements, a scene ensued in Tennessee, than which nothing more beautifully grand is recorded in the annals of the race.

These adventurers in the wilderness longed to come together in organized society. The overshadowing genius of

their time inspired them with good designs and filled them with the counsels of wisdom. Dwellers in the forest, freest of the free, bound in the spirit, they came up by their representatives, on foot, on horseback, through the forest, along the streams, by the buffalo traces, by the Indian paths, by the blazed forest avenues, to meet in convention among the mountains of Knoxville and devise for themselves a constitution. Andrew Jackson was there, the greatest man of them all—modest, bold, determined, demanding nothing for himself, and shrinking from nothing that his heart approved.

The convention came together on the eleventh day of January, 1796, and finished its work on the sixth day of February. How had the wisdom of the Old World vainly tasked itself to devise constitutions that could at least be the subject of experiment. The men of Tennessee in less than twenty-five days perfected a fabric which, in its essential forms, was to last forever. They came together full of faith and reverence, of love to humanity, of confidence in truth. In the simplicity of wisdom they constructed their system, acting under higher influences than they were conscious of;

“They wrought in sad sincerity,
Themselves from God they could not free;
They builded better than they knew;
The conscious stones to beauty grew.”

In the instrument which they adopted they embodied their faith in God and in the immortal nature of man. They gave the right of suffrage to every freeman; they vindicated the sanctity of reason by securing freedom of speech and of the press; they revered the voice of God as it speaks in the soul, by asserting the indefeasible right of man to worship the Infinite according to his conscience; they established the freedom and equality of elections; and they de-

manded from every future legislator a solemn oath, “never to consent to any act or thing whatever that shall have even a tendency to lessen the rights of the people.”

These majestic lawgivers, wiser than the Solons, and Lycurguses, and Numas of the Old World,—these prophetic founders of a State, who embodied in their constitution the sublimest truths of humanity, acted without reference to human praises. They took no pains to vaunt their deeds; and when their work was done knew not that they had finished one of the sublimest acts ever performed among men. They left no record as to whose agency was conspicuous, whose eloquence swayed, whose generous will predominated; nor should we know, but for tradition, confirmed by what followed among themselves.

The men of Tennessee were now a people and they were to send forth a man to stand for them in the Congress of the United States—that avenue to glory—that home of eloquence—the citadel of popular power; and with one consent they united in selecting the foremost man among their lawgivers—Andrew Jackson.

The love of his constituents followed him to the American Congress; and he had served but a single term when the State of Tennessee made him one of its representatives in the American Senate, of which Jefferson was at the time the presiding officer.

Thus when he was scarcely more than thirty he had guided the settlement of the wilderness; swayed the deliberations of a people in establishing their fundamental laws; acted as their representative, and again as the representative of his organized commonwealth, disciplined to a knowledge of the power of the people and the power of the States; the associate of republican statesmen, the friend and companion of Jefferson.

The men who framed the constitution of the United States, many of them did not know the innate life and self-preserving energy of their work. They feared that freedom could not endure, and they planned a strong government for its protection. During his short career in Congress Jackson showed his quiet, deeply seated, innate, intuitive faith in human freedom, and in the institutions which rested on that faith. He was ever, by his votes and opinions, found among those who had confidence in humanity; and in the great division of minds this child of the woodlands, this representative of forest life in the west, appeared modestly and firmly on the side of liberty. It did not occur to him to doubt the right of man to the free development of his powers; it did not occur to him to place a guardianship over the people; it did not occur to him to seek to give durability to popular institutions by conceding to government a strength independent of popular will.

From the first he was attached to the fundamental doctrines of popular power and of the policy that favors it; and though his reverence for Washington surpassed his reverence for any human being, he voted against the address from the House of Representatives to Washington on his retirement, because its language appeared to sanction the financial policy which he believed hostile to the true principles of a republic.

During his period of service in the Senate Jackson was elected major-general by the brigadiers and field officers of the militia of Tennessee. Resigning his place in the Senate he was made judge of the supreme court in law and equity; such was the confidence in his clearness of judgment, his vigor of will, and his integrity of purpose, to deal justly among the turbulent who crowded into the new settlements of Tennessee.

Thus, in the short period of nine years, Andrew Jackson was signalized by as many evidences of public esteem as could fall to the lot of man. The pioneer of the wilderness, the defender of its stations, he was the lawgiver of a new people, their sole representative in Congress, the representative of the State in the Senate, the highest in military command, the highest in judicial office. He seemed to be recognized as the first in love of liberty, in the science of legislation, in sagacity, and integrity.

Delighting in private life he would have resigned his place on the bench, but the whole country demanded his continued service. "Nature," they cried, "never designed that your powers of thought and independence of mind should be lost in retirement." But after a few years, relieving himself from the cares of the court, he gave himself to the activity and the independent life of a husbandman. He carried into retirement the fame of natural intelligence, and was cherished as "a prompt, frank, and ardent soul." His vigor of character gave him the lead among all with whom he associated, and his name was familiarly spoken round every hearthstone in Tennessee. Men loved to discuss his qualities. All discerned his power, and when the vehemence and impetuosity of his nature were observed upon, there were not wanting those who saw beneath the blazing fires of his genius the solidity of his judgment.

His hospitable roof sheltered the emigrant and the pioneer; and as they made their way to their new homes they filled the mountain sides and the valleys with his praise.

Connecting himself for a season with a man of business, Jackson soon discerned the misconduct of his associate. It marked his character, that he insisted, himself, on paying every obligation that had been contracted; and rather than

endure the vassalage of debt he instantly parted with the rich domain which his early enterprise had acquired—with his own mansion—with the fields which he himself had first tamed to the ploughshare—with the forest whose trees were as familiar to him as his friends—and chose rather to dwell for a time in a rude log cabin in the pride of independence and integrity.

On all great occasions his influence was deferred to. When Jefferson had acquired for the country the whole of Louisiana, and there seemed some hesitancy on the part of Spain to acknowledge our possession, the services of Jackson were solicited by the national administration, and would have been called into full exercise but for the peaceful termination of the incidents that occasioned the summons.

In the long series of aggressions on the freedom of the seas, and the rights of the American flag, Jackson, though in his inland home the roar of the breakers was never heard and the mariner never was seen, resented the injuries wantonly inflicted on our commerce and on our sailors, and adhered to the new maritime code of Republicanism.

When the continuance of wrong compelled the nation to resort to arms, Jackson, led by the instinctive knowledge of his own greatness, yet with true modesty of nature, confessed his willingness to be employed on the Canada frontier and aspired to the command to which Winchester was appointed. We may ask, what would have been the result if the conduct of the Northwestern army had, at the opening of the war, been intrusted to a man who in action was ever so fortunate that he seemed to have made destiny capitulate to his vehement will?

The path of duty led him in another direction. On the declaration of war twenty-five hundred volunteers had risen

at his word to follow his standard; but by countermanding orders from the seat of government the movement was without effect.

A new and greater danger hung over the West. The Indian tribes were to make one last effort to restore it to its solitude and recover it for savage life. The brave, relentless Shawnees—who from time immemorial had strolled from the waters of the Ohio to the rivers of Alabama—were animated by Tecumseh and his brother, the Prophet, speaking to them as with the voice of the Great Spirit, and urging the Creek nation to desperate massacres. Their ruthless cruelty spared neither sex nor age; the infant and its mother, the planter and his family, who had fled for refuge to the fortress, the garrison that capitulated, all were slain and not a vestige of defence was left in the country. The cry of the West demanded Jackson for its defender; and though his arm was then fractured by a ball and hung in a sling, he placed himself at the head of the volunteers of Tennessee and resolved to terminate forever the hereditary struggle.

Who can tell the horrors of that campaign? Who can paint rightly the obstacles which Jackson overcame—mountains, the scarcity of untenanted forests, winter, the failure of supplies from the settlements, the insubordination of troops, mutiny, menaces of desertion? Who can measure the wonderful power over men by which his personal prowess and attractive energy drew them in midwinter from their homes, across mountains and morasses, and through trackless deserts? Who can describe the personal heroism of Jackson, never sparing himself, beyond any of his men encountering toil and fatigue, sharing every labor of the camp and of the march, foremost in every danger; giving up his horse to the invalid soldier, while he himself waded through the swamps

on foot? None equalled him in power of endurance; and the private soldiers, as they found him passing them on the march, exclaimed, "He is as tough as the hickory." "Yes," they cried to one another, "there goes Old Hickory!"

Then followed the memorable events of the double battles of Emuckfaw, and the glorious victory of Tohopeka, where the anger of the general against the faltering was more appalling than the war-whoop and the rifle of the savage; the fiercely contested field of Enotochopco, where the general, as he attempted to draw his sword to cut down a flying colonel who was leading a regiment from the field, broke again the arm which was but newly knit together; and, quietly replacing it in the sling, with his commanding voice arrested the flight of the troops and himself led them back to victory.

In six short months of vehement action the most terrible Indian war in our annals was brought to a close; the prophets were silenced; the consecrated region of the Creek nation reduced. Through scenes of blood the avenging hero sought only the path to peace. Thus Alabama, a part of Mississippi, a part of his own Tennessee, and the highway to the Floridas, were his gifts to the Union. These were his trophies.

Genius as extraordinary as military events can call forth was summoned into action in this rapid, efficient, and most fortunately conducted war. The hero descended the water-courses of Alabama to the neighborhood of Pensacola, and longed to plant the eagle of his country on its battlements.

Time would fail, and words be wanting, were I to dwell on the magical influence of his appearance in New Orleans. His presence dissipated gloom and dispelled alarm; at once he changed the aspect of despair into a confidence of security and a hope of acquiring glory. Every man knows the tale of the sudden, and yet deliberate daring which led him, on

the night of the twenty-third of December, to precipitate his little army on his foes, in the thick darkness, before they grew familiar with their encampment, scattering dismay through veteran regiments of England, defeating them, and arresting their progress by a far inferior force.

Who shall recount the counsels of prudence, the kindling words of eloquence, that gushed from his lips to cheer his soldiers, his skirmishes and battles, till that eventful morning when the day at Bunker Hill had its fulfilment in the glorious battle of New Orleans, and American independence stood before the world in the majesty of triumphant power!

These were great victories for the nation; over himself he won a greater. Had not Jackson been renowned for the impetuosity of his passions, for his defiance of others' authority, and the unbending vigor of his self-will? Behold the savior of Louisiana, all garlanded with victory, viewing around him the city he had preserved, the maidens and children whom his heroism had protected, yet standing in the presence of a petty judge, who gratifies his wounded vanity by an abuse of his judicial power. Every breast in the crowded audience heaves with indignation. He, the passionate, the impetuous,—he whose power was to be humbled, whose honor questioned, whose laurels tarnished, alone stood sublimely serene; and when the craven judge trembled, and faltered, and dared not proceed, himself, the arraigned one, bade him take courage, and stood by the law even when the law was made the instrument of insult and wrong on himself at the moment of his most perfect claim to the highest civic honors.

His country, when it grew to hold many more millions, the generation that then was coming in, has risen up to do homage to the magnanimity of that hour. Woman, whose feeling is always right, did honor from the first to the purity

of his heroism. The people of Louisiana, to the latest age, will cherish his name as their greatest benefactor.

The culture of Jackson's mind had been much promoted by his services and associations in the war. His discipline of himself as the chief in command, his intimate relations with men like Livingston, the wonderful deeds in which he bore a part, all matured his judgment and mellowed his character.

Peace came with its delights; once more the country rushed forward in the development of its powers; once more the arts of industry healed the wounds that war had inflicted; and, from commerce and agriculture and manufactures, wealth gushed abundantly under the free activity of unrestrained enterprise. And Jackson returned to his own fields and his own pursuits, to cherish his plantation, to care for his servants, to enjoy the affection of the most kind and devoted wife, whom he respected with the gentlest deference, and loved with a spotless purity.

There he stood, like one of the mightiest forest trees of his own West, vigorous and colossal, sending its summit to the skies, and growing on its native soil in wild and inimitable magnificence, careless of beholders. From every part of the country he received appeals to his political ambition, and the severe modesty of his well-balanced mind turned them all aside. He was happy in his farm, happy in seclusion, happy in his family, happy within himself.

But the passions of the southern Indians were not allayed by the peace with Great Britain; and foreign emissaries were still among them, to inflame and direct their malignity. Jackson was called forth by his country to restrain the cruelty of the treacherous and unsparing Seminoles. It was in the train of the events of this war that he placed the American eagle on St. Mark's and above the ancient towers of St.

Augustine. His deeds in that war, of themselves, form a monument to human power, to the celerity of his genius, to the creative fertility of his resources, to his intuitive sagacity. As Spain, in his judgment, had committed aggressions, he would have emancipated her islands; of the Havana, he caused the reconnoissance to be made; and, with an army of five thousand men, he stood ready to guarantee her redemption from colonial thralldom.

But when peace was restored, and his office was accomplished, his physical strength sunk under the pestilential influence of the climate, and, fast yielding to disease, he was borne in a litter across the swamps of Florida toward his home. It was Jackson's character that he never solicited aid from any one; but he never forgot those who rendered him service in the hour of need. At a time when all around him believed him near his end, his wife hastened to his side; and, by her tenderness and nursing care, her patient assiduity, and the soothing influence of devoted love, withheld him from the grave.

He would have remained quietly at his home, but that he was privately informed his conduct was to be attainted by some intended congressional proceedings; he came, therefore, into the presence of the people's representatives at Washington, only to vindicate his name; and, when that was achieved, he once more returned to his seclusion among the groves of the Hermitage.

It was not his own ambition which brought him again to the public view. The affection of Tennessee compelled him to resume a seat on the floor of the American Senate, and, after a long series of the intensest political strife, Andrew Jackson was elected President of the United States.

Far from advancing his own pretensions, he always kept

them back, and had for years repressed the solicitations of his friends to become a candidate. He felt sensibly that he was devoid of scientific culture, and little familiar with letters; and he never obtruded his opinions, or preferred claims to place. But, whenever his advice was demanded, he was always ready to pronounce it; and whenever his country invoked his services, he did not shrink even from the station which had been filled by the most cultivated men our nation had produced.

Behold, then, the unlettered man of the West, the nursling of the wilds, the farmer of the Hermitage, little versed in books, unconnected by science with the traditions of the past, raised by the will of the people to the highest pinnacle of honor, to the central post in the civilization of republican freedom, to the office where all the powers of the earth would watch his actions—where his words would be repeated through the world, and his spirit be the moving star to guide the nations. What policy will he pursue? What wisdom will he bring with him from the forest? What rules of duty will he evolve from the oracles of his own mind?

The man of the West came as the inspired prophet of the West; he came as one free from the bonds of hereditary or established custom; he came with no superior but conscience, no oracle but his native judgment; and, true to his origin and his education, true to the conditions and circumstances of his advancement, he valued right more than usage; he reverted from the pressure of established interests to the energy of first principles.

We tread on ashes, where the fire is not yet extinguished; yet not to dwell on his career as President were to leave out of view the grandest illustrations of his magnanimity.

The legislation of the United States had followed the

precedents of the legislation of European monarchies; it was the office of Jackson to lift the country out of the European forms of legislation, and to open to it a career resting on American sentiment and American freedom. He would have freedom everywhere—freedom under the restraints of right; freedom of industry, of commerce, of mind, of universal action; freedom, unshackled by restrictive privileges, unrestrained by the thralldom of monopolies.

The unity of his mind and his consistency were without a parallel. Guided by natural dialectics, he developed the political doctrines that suited every emergency, with a precision and a harmony that no theorist could hope to equal. On every subject in politics he was thoroughly and profoundly and immovably radical; and would sit for hours, and in a continued flow of remark make the application of his principles to every question that could arise in legislation, or in the interpretation of the constitution.

His expression of himself was so clear that his influence pervaded not our land only, but all America and all mankind. They say that in the physical world the magnetic fluid is so diffused that its vibrations are discernible simultaneously in every part of the globe. So it is with the element of freedom. And as Jackson developed its doctrines from their source in the mind of humanity, the popular sympathy was moved and agitated throughout the world, till his name grew everywhere to be the symbol of popular power.

Himself the witness of the ruthlessness of savage life, he planned the removal of the Indian tribes beyond the limits of the organized States; and it is the result of his determined policy that the region east of the Mississippi has been transferred to the exclusive possession of cultivated man.

A pupil of the wilderness, his heart was with the pioneers