

**MEMORIAL ADDRESS ON
THE LIFE AND
CHARACTER OF THE
HON. JACOB COLLAMER**

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Memorial Address on the Life and Character of the Hon. Jacob Collamer by James Barrett

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JAMES BARRETT

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ON THE
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READ BEFORE THE
VERMONT HISTORICAL SOCIETY,

IN THE REPRESENTATIVES' HALL,

OCTOBER 20, 1868.

BY
JAMES BARRETT, LL. D.
JUDGE OF THE SUPREME COURT.

WOODSTOCK, Vt.
1868

ADDRESS.

MR. PRESIDENT, LADIES AND GENTLEMEN:

ALTHOUGH the official announcement of my appointment to the present service designated it as "an eulogy," I see that the published official notice of this meeting announces me for "An Address on the Life and Services of Hon. Jacob Collamer." I hence infer that a memorial, rather than an eulogic service will the better answer the proprieties and meet the expectations of this occasion. And this may well be so; for eulogy found free expression from eloquent and adequate tongues in the halls that had been honored by the presence and services of the illustrious dead, while the tear of present grief was dimming the eyes and moistening the cheeks of his surviving fellow senators and statesmen. It was omulously echoed by the many-tongued press of the nation. It was worthily and touchingly repeated in these Legislative halls by those commissioned to give utterance to the deep and universal grief, as well as to the unanimous and cordial "well done, good and faithful servant," of our stricken, yea, doubly stricken State; for within the feet four months our Foot had followed our Collamer from their lofty eminence on earth, to the bourne beyond the bitter waters.

The article before me is prepared as a sketch to be read, rather than an address to be delivered. While it is too brief for the subject, it is too long for the occasion. It is a kind of forced compromise between the subject and the occasion, and not entirely proper towards either. On account of its

length, I shall read it very rapidly,—not deliver it as an address, nor pronounce it as an oration. I proceed, then, and remark :

The present service is both sad and grateful—difficult, and yet a duty. The subject was a patron of my early professional life as a Judge of the Courts, and as a partner in business. For more than twenty-five years he was my neighbor and my familiar friend. He was, during all that time, conspicuous for his abilities,—most of the time filling high official positions, and constantly attaining a wider and more emphatic recognition for excellent qualities and character as a public man. I knew him too intimately, too minutely, I was too largely the beneficiary of his kindly favor, and withal, he has passed away too recently for me to be able to think of him attentively, and considerately to pass his life in review, without a sadness that is painful, springing from a fresh sense of personal bereavement. And yet, since he has gone to his higher reward, it is grateful, in this presence, to proffer a memorial tablet of his character and his worth, in the hope of edifying some in the present and in the coming time, to whom he is, and will be, less fully known than he was to me and others who walked the ways of active life in personal association with him.

In the very thoroughness of my knowledge of the life and qualities and character of the subject, lies, in great measure, the difficulty of doing properly the work before me; and this is enhanced by the peculiar sentiments with which he was regarded by me. The public interest in a public man is more begotten by a few leading things he does, his manner of doing them, and the more prominent traits of mind and morals, as indicating ability and character, than by the innumerable lesser things, and the minute interblended elements, that, in their aggregation and combined action, produce the entirety of the recognized, effective, public man. But in this instance, I can take in and appreciate the Jurist, the Judge, the Minister of State, the great

Senator, only through, and as the result of, my knowledge of him, derived from my personal relation to him, colored by my esteem for him springing from that relation.

The sketch which I may now present may fail, therefore, of finding appreciation and concurrence, in some respects, on the part of those who occupied different positions and held different relations to the subject from my own; and yet, I trust that my touches will not be so tinged with the glow of friendly partiality as to falsify to the general apprehension the picture I may draw.

The statistical biography of Judge Collamer is substantially as follows :

He was born in Troy, N. Y., on the 8th day of January, 1791, one of a family of three sons and five daughters. His father was of Colonial English origin, his ancestry being among the earliest settlers of Massachusetts. His mother was Colonial Dutch. His father was a house carpenter,—not favored in worldly prosperity. He and his increasing family were familiar with the unsupplied wants and destitution of the "*angusta domi*." He moved from Troy to Burlington, in this State, when Jacob was about four years old, and there he spent the residue of his life. As Jacob grew along in boyhood, his instinctive impulses, encouraged by the faculty of the College, caused him to aspire to a place in those halls of learning; and he set himself to the work of preparation under the instruction of some members of the faculty, at so early an age as to be admitted in 1806, at the age of about fifteen and a half years. He was the youngest member of his class, save one, the late Hon. Norman Williams,—also the pride and boast, as well as a precious ornament of my stricken town,—who was about nine months the younger. The class, consisting of seventeen, graduated in 1810,—Hon. Timothy Follet and Hon. David M. Camp being of the number. On graduating, he at once entered on the study of the law, and pursued it in St. Albans, under Mr. Langworthy and Hon. Benjamin Swift, subsequently one of our Senators in Congress,

and was admitted to the bar in 1813. In 1812 he was drafted into the detailed militia service, and served during the period of the draft as Lieutenant of Artillery in the frontier campaign.

On being admitted to the bar, he visited Barre, in the hope of arranging a business connection with Dennison Smith, then already established there as a young lawyer in successful practice. While there, an incident occurred which he used to relate with a mirthful relish. Mr. Smith was to attend a Justice trial in a neighboring town. Young Collamer accompanied him, to avail himself of an opportunity to make his first argument in the trial of a cause. It was in the winter season. He wore a long surtout, and under it, his only suit of clothes. In riding to the Court they got upset, and Collamer's pants suffered such an unseemly rent that he was compelled to wear his surtout throughout the trial. In due time they left, and, on getting to his quarters, he betook himself to his bed, while his friend Smith got the unfortunate breach repaired. With such *début*, he entered upon the career that bore him to the summits of professional and public renown.

Not making the proposed arrangement, he went to Randolph Centre and opened an office, doing such professional work as he could get to do, and helping his meagre income by collecting what was known as the United States "war tax." In 1814, he was aid to General French, and went forward with him, and the forces under his command, to join the army at Plattsburg,—arriving, however, in the evening, just after the battle was over. That night he went on shore in a skiff, to communicate with Gen. Strong, and ascertain and report the situation. In doing this he was fired upon by mistake by the American sentinels, but escaped their balls. He found Gen. Strong wrapped in his military cloak, and lying for rest on the open ground. He informed the General of his errand, and received information of what had taken place, and a communication to Gen. French,

thanking him for his patriotic efforts and offer, but saying that the occasion for his services had just transpired by the victory of the previous day.

Inducements presented themselves which led Judge Collamer to remove to Royalton in 1816, and there he remained till April, 1836, when he removed to Woodstock to reside during the remainder of his life. In the early years of his professional life he held the office of Register of Probate. On the 15th day of July, 1817, he was married, at St. Albans, to Miss Mary Stone, who still survives, the mother of his seven children, all of whom, save one, are living now. He four times represented Royalton in the Legislature, in the years 1821, 1822, 1827, and 1828. He was State's Attorney for the county of Windsor for the years 1822, 1823, and 1824. At the Commencement anniversary of his *Alma Mater* in 1828 he delivered the oration before the Phi Sigma Nu Society, which was printed by order of the Society. He was a member of the Constitutional Convention of January, 1836, which amended the Constitution by creating the Senate as a branch of the Legislature. That amendment has ever been largely attributed to the ability and zeal with which he urged it.

In 1833, without any prior intimation of such purpose, and without any expectation on his part, he was elected one of the Assistant Judges of the Supreme Court, to supply the vacancy caused by the election of Judge Williams as Chief, to succeed Judge Hutchinson, who had held the place from 1829, as the successor of Judge Prentiss. The Bench was filled by Williams, Chief Judge, Royce, Phelps, Collamer, and Mattocks. Judge Collamer remained on the Bench till 1842, when he declined a re-election. In 1835, Judge Redfield was chosen in place of Mattocks, and in 1838 Judge Bennett was chosen to fill the vacancy caused by the election of Judge Phelps to the United States Senate. On leaving the Bench, he opened an office and resumed the practice of the law in Woodstock, and did not thereafter

entirely abandon it, except while he was Postmaster-General, and Circuit Judge of Vermont, though, after 1848, he did not hold himself out for general business, nor keep an open office. In November, 1843, he was elected a Representative in Congress, and made haste to take his seat on the first Monday of December following, accompanied, as fellow-members—all newly elected—by Geo. P. Marsh, Solomon Foot, and Paul Dillingham; whose personal and public record since has caused the State to present them, as the mother of the Gracchi did her children, when her Campanian guest requested her to exhibit her jewels.

Judge Collamer, after three elections, declined a fourth, and consequently closed his membership of the lower house of Congress with the 3d day of March, 1849. He was then selected for Postmaster-General in Gen. Taylor's Cabinet, and held the office till the death of the President in July, 1850. In 1849, he was the first of her graduates to be honored by his *Alma Mater* with the degree of *Doctor of Laws*. In 1855 he received the like honor from the venerable Dartmouth. On the breaking up of the Taylor Cabinet Judge Collamer returned home with his family; and, by the legislature that fall, he was elected Circuit Judge under the remodelled Judiciary system, then just going into operation. He was given to understand that he could have his choice to be either Supreme Court or Circuit Judge, and he expressed a preference for the service of presiding in the County Courts. He held that office until he was elected Senator in Congress in October, 1854, to which office he was again elected in October, 1860. He was wearing his senatorial robes with ever increasing dignity and grace, till, on the evening of the 9th day of November, 1863, he

"—wrapped the drapery of his couch
About him and lay down to pleasant dreams."

Can rhetoric add aught to the eloquence of such a record as an eulogy upon the man? And yet the occasion properly