

**EULOGY ON THE HON. LEVI  
WOODBURY: PRONOUNCED  
AT PORTSMOUTH, N. H.,  
OCTOBER 16, 1851**

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Eulogy on the Hon. Levi Woodbury: Pronounced at Portsmouth, N. H., October 16, 1851 by  
Robert Rantoul

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**ROBERT RANTOUL**

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*Rantoul, Robert, Jr.*

©

# EULOGY

ON THE

HON. LEVI WOODBURY,

PRONOUNCED AT

PORTSMOUTH, N. H.

OCTOBER 16, 1851,

AT THE REQUEST OF THE CITY GOVERNMENT,

BY HON. ROBERT RANTOUL, JR.

PORTSMOUTH:

PUBLISHED BY VOTE OF THE CITY COUNCIL.

C. W. BREWSTER & SON, PRINTERS.

1852.

## EULOGY.

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THE nothingness of this our mortal state is a lesson perpetually taught, and perpetually forgotten. Poetry has exhausted all conceivable emblems of frailty in varied illustrations of the fleeting life of man—a flower cut down and withered before its noon has passed, a shade, a breath, a tale that is told. Sober history is full of facts as pertinent to this view, and quite as startling, as anything that fancy has drawn from her inexhaustible storehouse. Alexander, the festive cup dashed from his hands, while he exults that Europe is at last avenged on Asia; Cæsar, stumbling at the threshold of his empire, just as he steps boldly forward to the mightiest task ever undertaken by man, the organization of a new political world out of the chaotic ruins of past impracticabilities; Chatham, whose warning voice is suddenly quenched, while amidst the assembled nobility of Britain he deprecates the dismemberment of his native realm—these, and the innumerable host of the departed great, exemplify the melancholy theme. Philosophy never tires of contemplating these edifying contrasts. The royal moralist, as he reflected on them, summed up the wisdom of his times in one disheartening apothegm, “vanity of vanities, all is vanity:” but the christian sage, gathering consolation from adversity, and divine instruction from God’s chastisements, repeats the prayer of an earlier faith, “so teach us to number our days that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom.”

These admonitions, enforced as they are daily by the happening to some among us of that event which sooner or later happeneth alike to all, are drowned nevertheless in the turmoil of the busy world. It is only the louder call that awakens our attention, when death has struck some shining mark, and compels us to pause, and ponder on the transitory tenure of our earthly existence. Then it is that, comparing the brief and hurried passage of man over the stage on which he acts, well or ill, his appointed part, with the apparent stability and permanent duration of material nature around him, we echo back the universal never ceasing wail of all past generations, from the remotest antiquity, "surely the days of man are few, and full of trouble."

A sentiment common to our race must be founded in our nature. Doubtless it springs from instincts implanted in us for the wisest purposes. Doubtless it ought not to be eradicated, and hardly to be weakened, even if it were in the power of a stern and stoical philosophy that it should be. Doubtless the expression in which this sentiment manifests itself is just and true; but it is a partial expression, and far, very far indeed from the truest, most just, completest idea of man's mission and destiny on earth.

Life is not short that answers life's great end. Between the eternity that precedes him and the eternity that is to follow him, a little portion of time is severed, and allotted to man. Measured by comparison with the infinitude of ages before and after, how insignificant: measured by the opportunities which it includes, and the responsibilities which it involves, how ample. Looking upward to the throne of God from whence he springs—looking downward into that abyss of annihilation into which he feels that he cannot sink forever, he recognizes in whose image he is created, and claims that his being shall partake of the eternity of its author. He realizes also the position and purpose of his existence in the universe of which he composes a part;

that there is a work to be done, a work for him to do ; and if he performs worthily the work worthy to be done, which falls within his reach of talent, and his appropriate sphere of duty, his life is long enough, end when it may ; and neither he, nor those who love him, should repine, but rather rejoice, when he receives at last the benediction, " well done, good and faithful servant, enter thou into the joy of thy Lord."

The eminent statesman and jurist whose loss has brought us together this day, though not old in the number of his years, may be truly deemed to have lived much. From his childhood to his last illness, no day, it might almost be said no hour, was without its task. The maxim of the first and greatest Roman Emperor, "think nothing done while aught remains to do," the exhortation of the Hebrew monarch, "whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with all thy might, for there is no work or labor or device in the grave whither thou goest," seemed to be forever sounding in his ears, and urging him on to the indefatigable discharge of all that devolved upon him. In unwearied devotion to the fulfilment of every known obligation, never have I known, heard, or read of any man that surpassed, and scarcely any that has equalled him. The history, character, and influence on the world, of one so constituted, and so governing and conducting his faculties, furnish a fruitful occasion for interesting commentary, and a most instructive subject for our deliberate consideration.

LEVI WOODBURY was born at Francestown, New-Hampshire, on the twenty-second of December, 1789. He was of the oldest Massachusetts stock, being descended from John Woodbury who emigrated from Somersetshire in England in the year 1624, and was one of the original settlers of the town of Beverly, where the family are still numerous. "He was an energetic, faithful, and worthy" founder of the Bay State Colony, in which he preceded both Winthrop and Endicott, and in whose transactions he took an active part long after their arrival. The Hon. Peter Woodbury, father of



Levi Woodbury, removed from Beverly to New-Hampshire in 1773. From this puritan ancestry he inherited the robust Saxon constitution, and solid qualities, both of mind and body, which characterize all the members of this extensive family now scattered through many different towns of Massachusetts and New-Hampshire.

Levi Woodbury entered Dartmouth College, Hanover, New-Hampshire, in October, 1805, and was distinguished during his connection with that institution by the intensity and constancy of his application to the prescribed course of study. He was graduated with honor in 1809; and, in September of the same year, he joined the celebrated law school of Judges Reeves and Gould, at Litchfield, Connecticut, where with an ardor never intermitted or relaxed, he pursued his legal education upon a scale and plan remarkably liberal for the period at which it was adopted. He completed his professional preparation at Boston, Exeter and Frankestown; and in September, 1812, commenced the practice of the law in his native village. He soon attained a high rank at the bar, and, as a natural consequence, commanded an extensive and constantly increasing business as an advocate as well as an attorney.

The circumstances which preceded and accompanied the declaration of war between the United States and Great Britain now agitated profoundly the public mind through every section of the country. It was impossible that Mr. Woodbury should not be attracted by discussions so animating, in which interests so momentous were concerned, and that he should not strongly sympathize with either the supporters or the opponents of the national policy adopted in that crisis. His prepossessions dated from his early boyhood; these, a careful examination of the questions at issue served only to confirm; he embraced, with the enthusiasm of an honest and deep conviction, as his father had done from the time of the first division on national grounds, the general

system of views characteristic of the political connection then and ever since that time styled the democratic party. Into their cause he threw his whole soul; and the people of his native state, ever ready to appreciate active talent and efficient zeal, soon begun to reckon him among their leaders in the contest. His first public service in any official capacity was upon his appointment as Secretary to the Senate of New-Hampshire, in June 1816. In December of the same year he received the commission of Judge of the Superior Court of New-Hampshire, and the wisdom of his appointment was confirmed by the admirable manner in which he filled the various functions of that character, and supplied the want of long experience at that early age, by the inherent force of his abilities, and habits of application.

It was the remark of one who knew him well, that "in the discharge of the arduous and responsible duties of the station, he evinced the most estimable qualifications of a judge—diligence, firmness, patience, and good temper. His familiarity with legal principles, and reach of mind, combined with his suavity of manners and moral courage, enabled him to conduct jury trials with great satisfaction to the public—while his judicial opinions showed great research, and accurate discrimination."

In June, 1819, he was married to Elizabeth W. Clapp, daughter of Hon. Asa Clapp, of Portland, Maine, and took up his residence in this city, which, as is well known to you all, he ever afterward regarded as his home.

In March, 1823, he was elected Governor of New-Hampshire; and in that post he gave good earnest of that administrative genius destined to be so beneficially manifested in more conspicuous stations, and a wider sphere of usefulness.

He was chosen in 1825 to represent Portsmouth in the Legislature of the State, and immediately upon his entrance into the House he was elected Speaker of that body, though he had never before held a seat in any deliberative assembly.

He presided with urbanity, tact and impartiality, and met, and overcame, without embarrassment, all the emergencies of that onerous office.

Already, therefore, had he exhibited, in the successful conduct of such various trusts, not merely uncommon strength, but also a wonderful versatility of intellect. He shrunk from no effort, he avoided no responsibility, and he was found and acknowledged, not by partial friends only, but by rivals and opponents, to be equal to all. Young as he yet was, yet with an observation keen and ever awake, and a memory peculiarly accurate and retentive, he had amassed no ordinary store of useful information, and gathered rich harvests of experience. Much as he had performed in the service of his native state, firmly as he had established a reputation not unenviable, and wide spread, thoroughly as he had exercised and mastered his own powers of investigation, persuasion, conviction, decision and action, his whole life hitherto had been one continued preliminary discipline qualifying him to enter on a broader field, and to influence and direct the more extended and complicated interests of millions of his fellow men.

Let us cast back our eyes for a moment to the forming period of his public character. Through what an ordeal must young ambition pass! Consider who they were that fixed the standard of talent at the New-Hampshire bar in the first quarter of the nineteenth century. There were giants in the land in those days. It was customary for the advocates whose professional aid was in most request at that time to attend the Courts from county to county through the state, as the leading barristers ride the circuit in England. Every important trial was a tournament in which these established celebrities were matched against each other, or against any rash adventurer who dared to enter the lists with them. In the ratio of her population, New Hampshire has contributed more mental and moral strength to the bar, to the Senate