

**ORATION ON THE LIFE, CHARACTER AND  
PUBLIC SERVICES OF THE HON. JOHN C.  
CALHOUN, DELIVERED BEFORE THE  
LADIES' CALHOUN MONUMENT  
ASSOCIATION, AND THE PUBLIC, AT  
CHARLESTON, SOUTH CAROLINA**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649300662

Oration on the life, character and public services of the Hon. John C. Calhoun, delivered before the Ladies' Calhoun monument association, and the public, at Charleston, South Carolina by L. Q. C. Lamar

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Cover @ 2017

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*L. Q. C. Lamar*

*From Prof. A. C. McLaughlin*

*Oct. 27. 81*

# ORATION

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LIFE, CHARACTER AND PUBLIC SERVICES

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HON. JOHN C. CALHOUN,

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AND THE PUBLIC,

AT CHARLESTON, SOUTH CAROLINA.

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BY THE

HON. L. Q. C. LAMAR,

AS REVISED BY HIMSELF.

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CHARLESTON, S. C.  
LUCAS, RICHARDSON & CO., BOOK AND JOB PRINTERS.  
No. 130 EAST BAY STREET.  
1888.

## ORATION OF THE HON. L. Q. C. LAMAR.

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**W**<sup>©</sup> E are assembled to unveil the statue which has been erected to commemorate the life and services of John Caldwell Calhoun. It is an interesting fact that this statue is reared, not in the centre of political power, (the Capital of the Nation,) or in the emporium of American material civilization, but in his own native State, where he lived all his life and where he was buried. This circumstance is in harmony with the life and character of the man. One of the most impressive traits of that life and character was the attachment between himself and the people of South Carolina. His devotion to their welfare was sleepless, and they always felt a deep, unflinching, proud and affectionate reliance upon his wisdom and leadership. This faith in him grew out of the fact that he was, notwithstanding his imposing position as a national statesman, a home man; a man identified in sentiment and sympathy with his own people, who, as neighbors and friends, standing face to face with him, had that insight into his private life and character which is seldom, if ever, disclosed in the public arena—the real life of motive, and purpose, and feeling. In this intimacy of personal intercourse, wherein the qualities of mind and heart are unconsciously drawn out, there was revealed to them a noble, lovely character, full of tenderness and self-sacrifice, gentleness and candor, and a simplicity and beautiful truth of soul which made him the light of their eyes and the pride of their heart.

Mr. Calhoun had a profound faith in the worth and dignity and destiny of man as the noblest of all God's creatures on earth, endowed with those great faculties and capacities which fit him, through society and free institutions, under Divine superintendence, for progress, development and perfection. Conscious of his own great powers, he must have been; but exalted as he was in position, thought and purpose, so far was he from

feeling that these advantages lifted him above and apart from the mass of men, that he regarded them as so many ties of union and brotherhood with his fellow-men, to be devoted to their welfare and happiness. Whenever, therefore, he returned from the brilliant scenes of the National Capital to his home, instead of coming as a great Senator, to be admired at a distance, he met the people as friends and brothers, all of whom, of every degree and class and character, felt in the warm grasp of his hand a fraternal regard that entered with deep and unaffected sympathy into their feelings, their interests, their wants, their sorrows and their joys.

Their instinctive perception of the genuine greatness of the man, of his open-hearted largeness of nature, the simple, unostentatious, disinterested consecration of mind and heart to the promotion of the virtue and happiness and liberty of his people, naturally drew them into a closer attachment, a deeper and an almost personal co-operation in his high aspirations and aims.

When not in the actual discharge of his official duties he spent his time in retirement at his private home at Fort Hill. He was occupied in agriculture, in which he took the deepest interest. Would that I had the power to portray a Southern planter's home! The sweet and noble associations, the pure, refining and elevating atmosphere of a household presided over by a Southern matron; the tranquil yet active occupations of a large land owner—full of interest and high moral responsibilities; the alliance between man's intellect and nature's laws of production; the hospitality, heartfelt, simple and generous. The Southern planter was far from being the self-indulgent, indolent, coarse and overbearing person that he has sometimes been pictured. He was, in general, careful, patient, provident, industrious, forbearing, and yet firm and determined. These were the qualities which enabled him to take a race of untamed savages, with habits that could only inspire disgust, with no arts, no single tradition of civilization, and out of such a people to make the finest body of agricultural and domestic laborers that the world has ever seen; and, indeed, to elevate them in the scale of rational existence to such a height as to cause them to be deemed fit for admission into the charmed circle of American freedom, and to be clothed with the rights and duties of American citizenship.

The Southern planter penetrated the dense forests, the tangled brake, the gloomy wilderness of our river swamps, where pestilence had its abode, and there, day by day and year by year, amidst exposure, hardship and sickness, his foresight, his prudence, his self-reliance, his adaptation of means to ends were called into requisition. In the communion with himself, in the opportunities for continued study, and in the daily and yearly provision for a numerous body of dependents—for all of whom he felt himself responsible, about whom his anxieties were ever alive, whose tasks he apportioned and whose labors he directed—he was educated in those faculties and personal qualities which enabled him to emerge from his solitude and preside in the County Court, or become a member of his State Legislature; to discharge the duties of local magistracy, or to take his place in the National councils.

The solution of the enigmas of the so-called slave power may be sought here. Its basis lay in that cool, vigorous judgment and unerring sense applicable to the ordinary affairs and intercourse of men which the Southern mode of life engendered and fostered. The habits of industry, firmness of purpose, fidelity to dependents, self-reliance, and the sentiment of justice in all the various relations of life which were necessary to the management of a well-ordered plantation, fitted men to guide legislatures and command armies.

In confirmation of what I say, I have only to point to the fact that it was in such communities as these that a Washington, a Jackson, a Taylor, a Lee, and a host of others, acquired those qualities which enabled them, in the position in which their country placed them, to add such undying lustre to the American name. It was in such communities that men like Jefferson, Madison, Monroe, Polk, Lowndes, Calhoun, Clay, Macon, Marshall, Taney and many others whom I could mention, acquired those characteristics which their countrymen, both North and South, instinctively discerned whenever they were "called upon to face some awful moment to which Heaven has joined great issues, good or bad, for human kind."

Another reason why this statue should be erected to his memory is that it is due to him for his intellectual contributions to the age in which he lived. Apart from his career as a statesman in the House of Representatives, where he was conspicuous



for his nationality in maintaining the independence of his country among the powers of the world; apart from his seven years service in a Cabinet office, where his powerful mind impressed itself on the organization and practical operations of the executive department of the Government; apart from his long years of service as Vice-President of the United States; apart from that unparalleled parliamentary career in the United States Senate, where, opposed by those giants of debate, the mighty Webster of the North, and Clay of the West, backed by other Senators gifted with talents of the highest order, he, single-handed, maintained his position in those grand orations, one of which the best of judges has pronounced "unsurpassed by any recorded in modern or ancient times, not even excepting that of the great Athenian, on the crown;" putting I say, out of view all his achievements and measures as a public man, constituting as they do some of the brightest chapters in the history of this country, he has left, in his writings, considered as the productions of an author, a legacy which will perpetuate the sway of his immortal thought over the minds of men. In these writings he has given to the world profound studies and original views upon the principles of government and free institutions; the deepest analysis and the most systematic classification of those universal laws which, hidden from ordinary observation, operate silently on human society and influence the fate of nations in all ages of the world.

His published speeches, although made upon the political measures and the national policies of the particular time, are philosophical expositions of the genius and structure and principles of the American Constitution, replete with the deepest wisdom and the most unerring sagacity. Each speech is a consistent chapter of a continuous discourse, a harmonious part of a connected system of political science, which will place their author among those great spirits who bless and instruct mankind long after the celebrity of politicians and statesmen has faded from remembrance.

But there is a third reason why South Carolina should have on her soil a statue to Calhoun, and that is his stainless purity of life, his sterling virtue and integrity of character. This, more than any other, was the cause of his unparalleled hold upon the love, reverence and trust of his people. With ample

opportunity to promote his private interests in the high trusts he held, he was as fastidious as Washington, and never accepted gifts. So simple was his life, so unostentatious and frugal in his habits that he was never incumbered in his public duties by the thought of a benefaction even from his friends. His was the greatness of a soul which, fired with love of virtue, consecrated itself to truth and duty, and, with unfaltering confidence in God, was ever ready to be immolated in the cause of right and country. This moral excellence, this uprightness of motive and action, was the granite foundation of his character, underlying and supporting the splendid superstructure of his noble and exalted qualities of genius, eloquence, wisdom and patriotism. The people of South Carolina, whatever may be their admiration of brilliant intellect and the achievements of statesmanship, have never yet put their country's interest and honour under the leadership of any one unless they had confidence in his moral superiority. In erecting this statue to Calhoun they feel that they render and perpetuate their homage to the majesty of moral rectitude.

And now, fellow citizens, I must take him away from your hearts, where he is enshrined in choicest affection and reverence; and bear him before those stern, ultimate judges—history, posterity, country and God. These are to take the exact measure of his life, his services, his character and his motives, without any favor or affection, and with the inflexible tests and scrutiny of justice.

In the early history of our Republic two different powers were in the presence of each other—the principle of local State sovereignty and that of National union. Although both of these powers were to be found in the embryo of our political system, they existed in confusion and without precise legal definition, both having claims to urge and facts to allege in support of their respective pretension to supremacy. The principle of State sovereignty was the first brought into operation, and, therefore, preceded the other in legal recognition and actual predominance. Previous to the Declaration of Independence, the colonies were each a distinct political community; each had its own separate political organization, the legislation of which extended no farther than its own territorial limits. The only political bond which held them in union was the sovereignty of

the British nation. When they threw that off, the States had no common Government. The general sovereignty over them as a whole disappeared and ceased to exist, at least in visible and legal embodiment of organized power, and passed into the several States, which had become each independent and sovereign in its own right. The Constitution was framed by delegates elected by the Legislatures. It was the work of the sovereign States, as independent, separate communities. It was ratified by conventions of these separate States, each acting for itself. By this Constitution certain well-defined and specified powers were delegated to the Federal Government; but it expressly declared that "the powers not herein delegated to the United States by the Constitution, nor prohibited to the States, are reserved to the States respectively, or to the people."

If the constitutional history of the United States had stopped with the adoption of the Federal Constitution by the original thirteen States, it would hardly be questioned that this Government was a Government of sovereign States with every attribute of State sovereignty retained in its system. But the law of development applies to human society as much as to any other created being. In all nations in which there are any stirrings of constitutional life there is more than one fundamental principle or power. These several principles or elements are not all developed at the same time or in equal degree. Events and influences will develop one element into ascendancy; subsequent conditions and events may cause a different element to shoot forward and overcome the others. Now, although the Declaration of Independence and the Articles of Confederation and the Constitution of the United States were all based upon the assumption of the independence and sovereignty of the several States, yet in point of historical fact the inhabitants of the American colonies, both before and after independence, were, in many important respects, one people. These colonies, as one body politic, were one people in being subject to the authority of the British sovereign; they were one people as being subject in their civil and social relations to the common law of England; they were one people respecting their rights as Englishmen, which, to the honor of England, were planted by their cradles in the infancy of their colonial existence; they were one people in language, in blood, in manners, and especially in being sub-