

**TRIBUTE OF THE MASSACHUSETTS
HISTORICAL SOCIETY TO THE MEMORY
OF THEIR LATE SENIOR MEMBER AND
FORMER PRESIDENT, THE HON. JAMES
SAVAGE, LL. D., MARCH 13, 1873**

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Tribute of the Massachusetts historical society to the memory of their late senior member and former president, the Hon. James Savage, LL. D., March 13,1873 by Boston Massachusetts Historical Society

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TRIBUTE.

At a stated meeting of the Massachusetts Historical Society, on the evening of the 13th of March, 1873, at the house of their associate, R. M. Mason, Esq.; the President, the Hon. ROBERT C. WINTHROP, spoke as follows:—

GENTLEMEN OF THE MASSACHUSETTS HISTORICAL SOCIETY:

We have so recently been called to attend the funeral of our late venerable Senior Member and former President, the Hon. James Savage, that it is only as a matter for record that his death, on Saturday, the 8th inst., requires any formal announcement to the Society this evening. I need hardly say that we cannot consider it a subject for the expression of sorrow. Even those nearest and dearest to him, who have so tenderly watched over him in his infirmities, during the last eight or nine years, must have abundant consolation for their bereavement. We may all, indeed, have found cause for satisfaction and gratitude, as we learned that, in the good providence of God, our aged friend was at length happily released from the burdens of the flesh, and of the spirit, which have weighed upon him so heavily since he had come to fourscore years.

Yet none of us, I am sure, can see his name disappearing at last from the very top of our living roll, altogether without emotion; and, certainly, not without pausing to pay a more

than common tribute of respect and affection to his memory. Quite apart from all the personal qualities and associations which had endeared him to us so warmly, we cannot forget that the removal of his name from our roll has sundered the last link between our Society of this generation and that little company of Historical Students and lovers of antiquity in which it originated more than eighty years ago. We have, it is true, still in our ranks, and we rejoice to remember that it is so, more than one of those who have seen as many years of human life as our departed friend. But there is no one now left, among our existing members, whose relation to our Society commenced within a quarter of a century of the date of his election; no one, who witnessed the small beginnings of our work, or who was associated, as he was, with any of those by whom that work was originally organized.

Mr. Savage was chosen a member of this Society on the 28th of January, 1813. He had thus been a member for a little more than sixty years, — a longer term than any on our records, as I believe, except that of the late venerable Josiah Quincy, who had completed his sixty-eighth year of continuous membership, when he died, in 1864, at ninety-two years of age.

When Mr. Savage was elected, Dr. Jeremy Belknap, our honored founder; Governor Sullivan, our first President; the Rev. Dr. Thacher, and the Hon. George Richards Minot, were, indeed, no more. But the Rev. Dr. Eliot, the Rev. Dr. Freeman, the Hon. William Tudor, Thomas Wallcut, Esq., the Hon. James Winthrop, and the Hon. William Baylies, — six of our Decemvirs, — six of the ten whose election dates back to the 24th of January, 1791, and who on that day met together and organized the Society, — were still living and active members. With them, when Mr. Savage was elected, were associated, among others, Governor Gore, then the President of the Society; Judge Davis, and Lieutenant-Governor Winthrop, who succeeded him in that office; Dr. Manassah Cutler,

who, twenty years before, had led the way of the pioneer emigrants to the Ohio River; Dr. Thaddeus Mason Harris, Dr. Prince and Dr. Bentley, of Salem; Dr. Homer, of Newton; Dr. Morse, the Geographer; Dr. Abel Holmes, the Annalist; John Adams, Caleb Strong, Alden Bradford, Professors Peck and McKean, President Kirkland, and Dr. Pierce,—besides Josiah Quincy and John Quincy Adams, whose membership,—to a few of us, at least,—is something more than a tradition.

Mr. Savage was but twenty-nine years of age, when he became associated with these men in our ranks; and as no professional or public duties ever took him far away from his native place, for any considerable length of time, his services to our Society, and his attendance at its meetings, were in the way of being, and unquestionably were, more prolonged, continuous, and constant, than those of any other member, from its foundation.

Accordingly, we find him Librarian, from 1814 to 1818; a member of the Publishing Committee of five several volumes of our Collections, in 1815, 1816, 1819, 1823, and 1825; Treasurer from 1820 to 1839; a member of the Standing Committee from 1818 to 1820, and from 1835 to 1841; and the President of the Society from 1841 to 1855. Having then passed the term of threescore years and ten, he claimed, as he certainly had a right to claim, an honorable dismission from the routine of official duty.

It seems but yesterday, that I succeeded him in this chair, at the close of our Annual Meeting, on the 12th of April, 1855, when, on motion of our late accomplished associate, Mr. Ticknor, it was unanimously resolved, "That the members of this Society,—mindful of the excellent services which, for fourteen years, the Hon. James Savage has rendered as its President, and of his peculiar fitness for that place, not only on all other grounds, but from his extraordinarily accurate knowledge of whatever relates to the early history of New

England, — do now express their great regret at his resignation, and offer him their thanks for his long-trying and uniform fidelity to their interests." It seems but yesterday, that, in taking the seat which he had so held and honored, I was speaking of that fulness of information, that richness of reminiscence, that raciness of remark and repartee, which had so often given the highest relish to our monthly meetings, which was then to be lost to the chair; — and which is now lost to us for ever. Eighteen years have since passed away, during the first half of which he continued to be one of our most punctual and assiduous members, ever entering our rooms with that eager, animated, joyous look, which betokened that he felt as much pleasure as he imparted. Since then, for us, all has been silence.

Was I not right, Gentlemen, in suggesting that, while his name remained at the head of our roll, even though it were only a name, or even but the shadow of a name, we seemed to have a living tie to the old traditions, the old worthies, and the old workers and organizers, of our Society, which is now finally sundered? Certainly, his death at this moment, — just as we are about entering on the occupation of our reconstructed Halls, — seems to conspire most impressively with that event, in marking still a new departure for our Society, still another era in its history, when the responsibilities for its future usefulness and honor are to be unshared with even one of those who had been witnesses, or partakers in any way, of its early experiences and its narrower fortunes. Certainly, it seems to call upon us, — as we enter on that era, with nothing left of the Founders and their early associates and followers except their inspiring memory and example, — for a warmer interest in the welfare of the Institution which they so loved and honored, and for a deeper devotion to the work for which they established it.

The most interesting and valuable contributions, which were made by Mr. Savage to our own published volumes, were un-

doubtedly his "Gleanings for New England History," prepared by him immediately on his return from a summer visit to England in 1842, and which were followed by "More," and "More Gleanings," not long afterwards.

But the great historical labors of his life, his two Editions and Annotations of "Winthrop's History of New England from 1630 to 1649," and his wonderful Genealogical Dictionary of New England, were hardly less in our service than if they had formed a part of our own Collections. If a new edition of the Winthrop, certainly, should ever be demanded, it might well be placed side by side with the Bradford, and under the care of the same hand, among the publications of this Society, and it would be a fit monument to the memory of our departed friend.

I am aware, however, Gentlemen, that we are all thinking at this moment much more of the man we have lost, than of his services to our Society, or of his work in the cause of New England History, which can never be lost. He comes back to many of us, to-night, as he was twenty years ago, in the old Pilgrim Chair, before the old Provincial Desk, in the old dusty rooms of our Society, — before the name of Thomas Dowse had been breathed among us; or, certainly, before his benefactions, by the marvellous alchemy of good George Livermore, had transmuted all that belonged to us into something more precious than gold.

He was at that day, — and with those surroundings, — the perfect impersonation of an Antiquary, in form and feature, in speech and in spirit. He had few or none of the smoothnesses and roundnesses of conventional life; and though he did not affect or cultivate singularity, he by no means scorned that part of his nature which rendered him singular. He would be called, in common parlance, — and he has often been called, — a man of strong and even intense prejudices. Yet I think he never prejudged any thing or anybody. It was only when he had known any person in society, or had studied any person

or any passage in history, that he conceived opinions which nothing could change, and which clung to him, and he to them, ever afterwards. His impulsive and even explosive utterances of such opinions were never to be forgotten by those who witnessed them. Still less could any one ever forget his exuberant exultations, when his searches and researches were rewarded, by verifying some disputed date, or discovering some historical fact, or by lighting upon some lost historical manuscript. He rejoiced, as the Psalmist describes it, "as one that findeth great spoil." His "Eureka" had all the elation and ecstasy of that of the old philosopher of Syracuse.

He was eminently a character, even for a Tale or a Drama. His marked peculiarities would have given a vivid interest to any story, and his racy utterances would have enlivened any dialogue. If he had chanced to have been one of the neighbors of Sir Walter Scott, he could never have escaped the fate, let me rather say the felicity, which befell so many of those neighbors, of figuring in one of the Waverley Novels.

I remember that Thackeray once passed an evening with him at my own house, at a meeting of the old Wednesday Night Club of 1770, of which he was so long a member. When I met Thackeray afterwards, his immediate remark was, "I want to see that quaint, charming, old Mr. Savage again."

In a conversation with Walter Savage Landor, then eighty years old, at his own villa in Florence, in 1860, he greeted me by saying, "I know all about your family and the old Founder of New England;" and then he forthwith went on to speak of the Savage family, whose name he bore, including the old Earl of Rivers and our James Savage, of Boston, whose edition of Winthrop he had evidently seen. There were occasional scintillations and coruscations exhibited in common by Landor himself and by our departed friend, which might have indicated an affinity or consanguinity, even after the genealogists had failed to trace them.