

**ORATION, BEFORE THE PHI
BETA KAPPA SOCIETY OF THE
UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO,
TUESDAY, JUNE 17, 1902**

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Oration, before the Phi Beta Kappa society of the University of Chicago, Tuesday, June 17, 1902
by Charles Francis Adams

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CHARLES FRANCIS ADAMS

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WITH COMPLIMENTS OF
CHARLES F. ADAMS,
23 COURT ST., BOSTON.

ORATION

BY
CHARLES FRANCIS ADAMS

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THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO,

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“Whom doth the king delight to honour? that is the question of questions concerning the king's own honour. Show me the man you honour; I know by that symptom, better than by any other, what kind of man you yourself are. For you show me there what your ideal of manhood is; what kind of man you long inexpressibly to be, and would thank the gods, with your whole soul, for being if you could.”

“Who is to have a Statue? means, Whom shall we consecrate and set apart as one of our sacred men? Sacred; that all men may see him, be reminded of him, and, by new example added to old perpetual precept, be taught what is real worth in man. Whom do you wish us to resemble? Him you set on a high column, that all men, looking on it, may be continually apprised of the duty you expect from them.” — *Thomas Carlyle*, “*Latter-Day Pamphlets*.” (1850.)

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“SHALL CROMWELL HAVE A STATUE?”

At about 3 o'clock of the afternoon of September 3rd, 1658, the day of Worcester and of Dunbar, and as a great tempest was wearing itself to rest, Oliver Cromwell died. He died in London, in the palace of Whitehall; that palace of the great banqueting hall, through whose central window Charles I. had walked forth to the scaffold a little less than ten years before. A few weeks later, “with a more than regal solemnity,” the body of the great Lord Protector was carried to Westminster Abbey, and there buried “amongst Kings.” Two years then elapsed; and, on the twelfth anniversary of King Charles's execution, the remains of the usurper, having been disinterred by a unanimous vote of the Convention Parliament, were hung at Tyburn. The trunk was then buried under the gallows, while Cromwell's head was set on a pole over the roof of Westminster Hall. Nearly two centuries of execration ensued, until, in the sixth generation, the earlier verdict was challenged, and the question at last asked:—“Shall Cromwell have a statue?” Cromwell, the traitor, the usurper, the execrable murderer of the martyred Charles! At first, and for long, the suggestion was looked upon almost as an impiety, and, as such, scornfully repelled. Not only did the old loyal King-worship of England recoil from the thought, but, indignantly appealing to the church, it declared that no such distinction could be granted so long as there remained in the prayer-book a form of supplication for “King Charles, the Martyr,” and of “praise and thanksgiving for the wonderful deliverance of these kingdoms from the great rebellion, and all the other miseries and oppressions consequent thereon, under which they had so long groaned.” None the less, the demand was insistent; and at last, but only after two full centuries had elapsed

and a third was well advanced, was the verdict of 1661 reversed. Today the bronze effigy of Oliver Cromwell, — massive in size, rugged in feature, characteristic in attitude, — stands defiantly in the yard of that Westminster Hall, from a pole on the top of which, twelve score years ago, the flesh crumbled from his skull.

In this dramatic reversal of an accepted verdict, — this complete revision of opinions once deemed settled and immutable, — there is, I submit, a lesson, — an academic lesson. The present occasion is essentially educational. The Phi Beta Kappa oration, as it is called, is the last, the crowning utterance of the college year, and very properly is expected to deal with some fitting theme in a kindred spirit. I propose to do so today; but in a fashion somewhat exceptional. The phases of moral and intellectual growth through which the English race has passed on the subject of Cromwell's statue afford, I submit, to the reflecting man an educational study of exceptional interest. In the first place, it was a growth of two centuries; in the second place it marks the passage of a nation from an existence under the traditions of feudalism to one under the principles of self-government; finally it illustrates the gradual development of that broad spirit of tolerance which, coming with time and study, measures the men and events of the past independently of the prejudices and passions which obscure and distort the immediate vision.

We, too, as well as the English, have had our "Great Rebellion." It came to a dramatic close thirty-seven years since; as theirs came to a close not less dramatic some seven times thirty-seven years since. We, also, as they in their time, formed our contemporaneous judgments and recorded our verdicts, assumed to be irreversible, of the men, the issues and the events of the great conflict; and those verdicts and judgments, in our case as in theirs, will unquestionably be revised, modified, and

in not a few cases wholly reversed. Better knowledge, calmer reflection, and a more judicial frame of mind come with the passage of the years; in time passions subside, prejudices disappear, truth asserts itself. In England this process has been going on for over two centuries and a half, with what result Cromwell's statue stands as proof. We live in another age and a different environment; and, as fifty years of Europe out-measure in their growth a cycle of Cathay, so I hold one year of twentieth century America works more progress in thought than thirty-seven years of Britain during the interval between its Great Rebellion and ours. We who took active part in the Civil War have not yet wholly vanished from the stage; the rear guard of the Grand Army, we linger. To-day is separated from the death of Lincoln by the same number of years only which separated "the Glorious Revolution of 1688" from the execution of Charles Stuart; yet to us is already given to look back on the events of which we were a part with the same perspective effects with which the Victorian Englishman looks back on the men and events of the Commonwealth.

I propose on this occasion to do so; and reverting to my text,— "Shall Cromwell have a Statue" — and reading that text in the gloss of Carlyle's *Latter-Day Pamphlet* utterance, I quote you Horace's familiar precept,

*Mutato nomine, de te
Fabula narratur,*

and ask abruptly, "Shall Robert E. Lee have a Statue? I propose also to offer to your consideration some reasons why he should, and, assuredly, will have one, if not now, then presently.

Shortly after Lee's death, in October, 1870, leave was asked in the United States Senate, by Mr. McCreery, of

Kentucky, to introduce a Joint Resolution providing for the return of the estate and mansion of Arlington to the family of the deceased Confederate Commander-in-chief. In view of the use which had then already been made of Arlington as a military cemetery, this proposal, involving, as it necessarily did, a removal of the dead, naturally led to warm debate. The proposition was one not to be considered. If a defect in the title of the government existed, it must in some way be cured, as, subsequently, it was cured. But I call attention to the debate because Charles Sumner, then a Senator from Massachusetts, participated in it, using the following language: — "Eloquent Senators have already characterized the proposition and the traitor it seeks to commemorate. I am not disposed to speak of General Lee. It is enough to say he stands high in the catalogue of those who have imbrued their hands in their country's blood. I hand him over to the avenging pen of History." This was when Lee had been just two months dead; but, three-quarters of a century after the Protector's skull had been removed from over the roof of Westminster Hall, Pope wrote in similar spirit:

" See Cromwell, damn'd to everlasting fame ;"

and, sixteen years later, — four-fifths of a century after Cromwell's disentombment at Westminster, and reburial at Tyburn, — a period from the death of Lee equal to that which will have elapsed in 1950, Gray wrote of the Stoke Pogis churchyard —

" Some mute inglorious Milton here may rest,
Some Cromwell guiltless of his country's blood."

And now, a century and a half later, Cromwell's statue looms defiantly up in front of the Parliament House. When, therefore, an appeal is in such cases made to the "avenging pen of History," it is well to bear this instance in mind, while recalling perchance that other line

of a greater than Pope, or Gray, or Sumner, —

“Thus the whirligig of time brings in his revenges.”

Was then Robert E. Lee a “traitor” — was he also guilty of his “country’s blood?” These questions I propose now to discuss. I am one of those who, in other days, was arrayed in the ranks which confronted Lee; one of those whom Lee baffled and beat, but who, finally, baffled and beat Lee. As one thus formerly lined up against him, these questions I propose to discuss in the calmer and cooler, and altogether more reasonable light which comes to most men, when a whole generation of the human race lies buried between them and the issues and actors upon which we undertake to pass.

Was Robert E. Lee a traitor? Technically, I think he was indisputably a traitor to the United States; for a traitor, as I understand it technically, is one guilty of the crime of treason; or, as the Century Dictionary puts it, violating his allegiance to the chief authority of the State; while treason against the United States is specifically defined in the Constitution as “levying war” against it, or “giving their enemies aid and comfort.” That Robert E. Lee did levy war against the United States can, I suppose, no more be denied than that he gave “aid and comfort” to its enemies. This technically; but, in history, there is treason and treason, as there are traitors and traitors. And, furthermore, if Robert E. Lee was a traitor, so also, and indisputably were George Washington, Oliver Cromwell, John Hampden, and William of Orange. The list might be extended indefinitely; but these will suffice. There can be no question that every one of those named violated his allegiance, and gave aid and comfort to the enemies of his sovereign. Washington furnishes a precedent at every point. A Virginian like Lee, he was also a British subject; he had fought under the British flag, as Lee had fought under