

EULOGY ON CHIEF- JUSTICE CHASE

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649225859

Eulogy on Chief-Justice Chase by William M. Everts

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Cover @ 2017

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WILLIAM M. EVARTS

**EULOGY ON CHIEF-
JUSTICE CHASE**

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Evarts, W. M.

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EULOGY

ON

CHIEF-JUSTICE CHASE,

DELIVERED BY

W. M. Evarts
WILLIAM M. EVARTS.

BEFORE THE

ALUMNI OF DARTMOUTH COLLEGE, AT HANOVER, JUNE 24, 1874.

PUBLISHED AT THEIR REQUEST.

^C_A HANOVER, N. H.:
J. B. PARKER.
1874.

Evarts

EULOGY

OR

CHIEF-JUSTICE CHASE.

MR. PRESIDENT AND GENTLEMEN, THE ALUMNI OF DARTMOUTH COLLEGE: When, not many weeks since, the committee of your association did me the honor to invite me to present, in an address to the assembled graduates of the college, a commemoration of the life, the labors, and the fame of the very eminent man and greatly honored scholar of your discipline, lawyer, orator, senator, minister, magistrate, whom living a whole nation admired and revered, whom dead a whole nation laments, I felt that neither a just sense of public duty nor the obligations of personal affection would permit me to decline the task. Yielding, perhaps too readily, to the persuasions of your committee that somewhat close professional and public association with the Chief-Justice in the later years of his life, and the intimate enjoyment of his personal friendship, might excuse my want of that binding tie of fellowship in a commemoration, in which the venerated college does dutiful honor to a son, and the assembled alumni crown with their affection the memory of a brother, I dismissed also, upon the same persuasion, all anxious solitudes, which otherwise would have oppressed me, lest importunate and inextricable preoccupations of time and mind should disable me from presenting as considerable, and as considerate, a survey of the eminent character and celebrated career of Mr. Chase as should comport with them, or satisfy the just exigencies of the occasion.

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The commemoration which brings us together has about it nothing funeral, in sentiment or observance, to darken our minds or sadden our hearts to-day. The solemn rites of sepulture, the sobbings of sorrowing affection, the homage of public grief, the concourse of the great officers of state, the assemblage of venerable judges, the processions of the bar, of the clergy, of liberal and learned men, the attendant crowds of citizens of every social rank and station, both in the great city where he died, and at the national capital, have already graced his burial with all imaginable dignity and unmeasured reverence. To prolong or renew this pious office is no part of our duty to-day. Nor is the maturity or nurture which the college gives to those it calls its sons, bestowed as it is upon their mind and character, affected by the death of the body as is the heart of the natural mother; nor are you, his brethren in this foster care of the spirit, bowed with the same sense of bereavement as are natural kindred. The filial and fraternal relation which he bore to you, the college and the alumni, is hardly broken by his death, nor is he hidden from you by his burial. His completed natural life is but the assurance and perpetuation of the power, the fame, the example, which the discipline and culture here bestowed had for their object, and in which they find their continuing and ever-increasing glory. The energy here engendered has not ceased its beneficent activity, the torch here lighted still diffuses its illumination, and the fires here kindled still radiate their heat.

Not less certain is it that the spirit of this commemoration imposes no task of vindication or defense, and tolerates no tone of adulation or applause. The tenor of this life, the manifestation of this character, was open and public, before the eyes of all men, upon an eminent stage of action, displayed constantly on the high places of the world. No faculty that Mr. Chase possessed, no preparation of mind or of spirit, for great undertakings or for notable achievements, ever failed of exercise or exhibition for want of opportunity, or, being exercised or exhibited, missed commensurate recognition or responsive plaudits from his countrymen. His career shows no step backward, the places he filled were all of the highest, the services he rendered were the most difficult as well as the most eminent. If,

as the preacher proclaims, "time and chance happeneth to all," the times in which Mr. Chase lived permitted the widest scope to great abilities and the noblest forms of public service; and the fortunes of his life show the felicity of the occasions which befell him to draw out these abilities, and to receive these services. Not less complete was the round of public honors which crowned his public labors, and we have no occasion, here, to lament any shortcomings of prosperity or favor, or repeat the authentic judgment which the voices of his countrymen have pronounced upon his fame.

The simple office, then, which seems to me marked out for one who assumes this deputed service in the name of the college and for the friends of good learning, is, in so far as the just limits of time and circumstance will permit, to expose the main features of this celebrated life, "to decipher the man and his nature," to connect the true elements of his character and the moulding force of his education with the work he did, with the influence he wielded in life, with the power of the example which lives after him, and always to have in view, as the most fruitful uses of the hour, his relations to the men and events of his times, and, not less, his true place in history among the lawyers, orators, statesmen, magistrates of the land. *Vera non verba* is our maxim to-day; truth, not words, must mark the tribute the college pays to the sober dignity and solid worth of its distinguished son.

Born of a lineage, which on the father's side dates its American descent from the Puritan emigration of 1640, and on the mother's, finds her the first of that stock native to this country, the son of these parents took no contrariety of traits from the union of the blood of the English Puritans and the Scotch Covenanters, but rather harmonious corroboration of the characteristics of both. These, sturdy enough in either, combined in this descendant to produce as independent and resolute a nature for the conflicts and labors of his day, as any experience of trial or triumph, of proscription or persecution suffered or resisted, had required or supplied in the long history of the contests of these two congenial races with priests and potentates, with principalities and powers. Nothing could be less consonant with a just estimate of the strong traits of this lineage, than which

neither Hebrew, nor Grecian, nor Roman nurture has wrought for its heroes either a firmer fibre or a nobler virtue, than to ascribe its chief power to enthusiasm or fanaticism. Plain, sober, practical men and women as they were, there was no hard detail of every-day life that they were not equal to, no patient and cheerless sacrifice they could not endure, no vicissitude of adverse or prosperous fortune which they could not meet with unchecked serenity. If it be enthusiasm that in them the fear of God had cast out the fear of man, or fanaticism that they placed "things that are spiritually discerned" above the vain shows of the world of sense, in so far they were enthusiasts and fanatics. In every stern conflict, in every vast labor, in every intellectual and moral development of which this country has been the scene, without fainting or weariness they have borne their part, and in the conclusive triumph of the principles of the Puritans and their policies over all discordant, all opposing elements, which enter into the wide comprehension of American nationality, theirs be the praise which belongs to such well-doing.

The son of a farmer—a man of substance, and of credit with his neighbors, and not less with the people of his State—young Chase drew from his boyhood the vigor of body and of mind which rural life and labors are well calculated to nourish. Several of his father's brothers were graduates of this college, and reached high positions in Church and State. An unpropitious turn of the commercial affairs of the country nipped, with its frost, the growing prosperity of his father, whose death, soon following, left him, in tender years, and as one of a numerous family, to the sole care of his mother. With most scanty means, her thrift and energy sufficed to save her children from ignorance or declining manners; maintained their self-respect and independence; set them forth in the world well disciplined, stocked with good principles, and inspired with proud and honorable purposes. To the praise of this excellent woman, wherever the name of her great son shall be proclaimed, this, too, shall be told in remembrance of her: that a Christian's faith, and a mother's love, as high and pure as ever ennobled the most famous matrons of history, stamped the character and furnished the education which equipped him for the labors and the triumphs of his life. One cannot read her letters to her son

in college without the deepest emotion. How many such women were there, in the plain ranks of New England life, in her generation! How many are there now! Paying marvelous little heed to the discussion of women's rights, they show a wonderful addiction to the performance of women's duties.

His uncle, Bishop Chase of Ohio, assumed, for a time, the care and expense of his education, and this drew him to the West, where, under this tutelage, he pursued academic studies for two years. At the end of this time he returned to his mother's charge, entered the junior class of Dartmouth College, and graduated in the year 1826, at the age of eighteen. The only significance, in its impression on his future life, of this brief guardianship of the Western Bishop, was as the determining influence which fixed the chief city of the West in his choice as the forum and arena of his professional and public life. After spending four years in Washington; gaining his subsistence by teaching, a law-student with Mr. Wirt—then at the zenith of his faculties and his fame—studying men and manners at the capital, watching the new questions then shaping themselves for political action, observing the celebrated statesmen of the day, conversant with the great Chief-Justice Marshall and his learned associates on the bench of the Supreme Court, and with Webster, and Binney, and other famous lawyers at its bar, he was admitted to practice, and, at the age of twenty-two, established himself at Cincinnati, transferring thus, once and forever, his home from the New England of his family, his birth, his education, and his love, to the ruder but equally strenuous and more expansive society of the West.

While yet of tender years, following up the earlier pious instruction of his mother, and his own profound sense of religious obligations under the inculcation of the Bishop, he accepted the Episcopal Church as the body of Christian believers in whose communion he found the best support for the religious life he proposed to himself. When he left your college he had not wholly relinquished a purpose, once held, of adopting the clerical profession. His adhesion to the Christian faith was simple and constant and sincere, and he accepted it as the master and rule of his life, in devout confidence in the moral government of the world, as a present and real supremacy over the race of man

and all human affairs. He was all his life a great student of the Scriptures, and no modern speculations ever shook the solid reasons of his belief. When he entered the city of Washington, fresh from college, "the earnest prayer of his heart was, that God would give him work to do, and success in doing it." When he was laying out the plans of professional life, on his first establishment at Cincinnati, his invocation was, "May God enable me to be content with the consciousness of faithfully discharging all my duties, and deliver me from a too eager thirst for the applause and favor of men." All through the successive and manifold activities of his busy and strenuous life, when, to outward seeming, they were all worldly and personal, the same predominant sense of duty and religious responsibility animated and solemnized the whole.

At this point in his life we may draw the line between the period of education for the work he had before him and that work itself. What Mr. Chase was, at this time, in all the essential traits of his moral and intellectual character—in his views of life, its value, its just objects and aims, its social, moral, and religious responsibilities; in his views of himself, his duties, obligations, prospects, and possibilities; in his determinations and desires—such, it seems to me from the most attentive study of all these points—such, in a very marked degree, he continued to be at every stage of his ascent in life.

What, then, shall we assign as the decisive elements, the controlling constituents, of character—and what the assurance of their persistence and their force—which this youth could bring to the service of the State, or contribute to the advancement of society and the well-being of mankind?

These were simple, but, in combination, powerful, and adequate to fill out worthily the life of large opportunities which, though not yet foreseen to himself, was awaiting him.

The faculty of reason was very broad and strong in him, yet without being vast or surprising. It seized the sensible and practical relations of all subjects submitted to it, and firmly held them in its tenacious grasp; it exposed these relations to the apprehension of those whose opinion or action it behooved him to influence, by methods direct and sincere, discarding mere ingenuity, and disdaining the subtleness of insinuation. His educa-