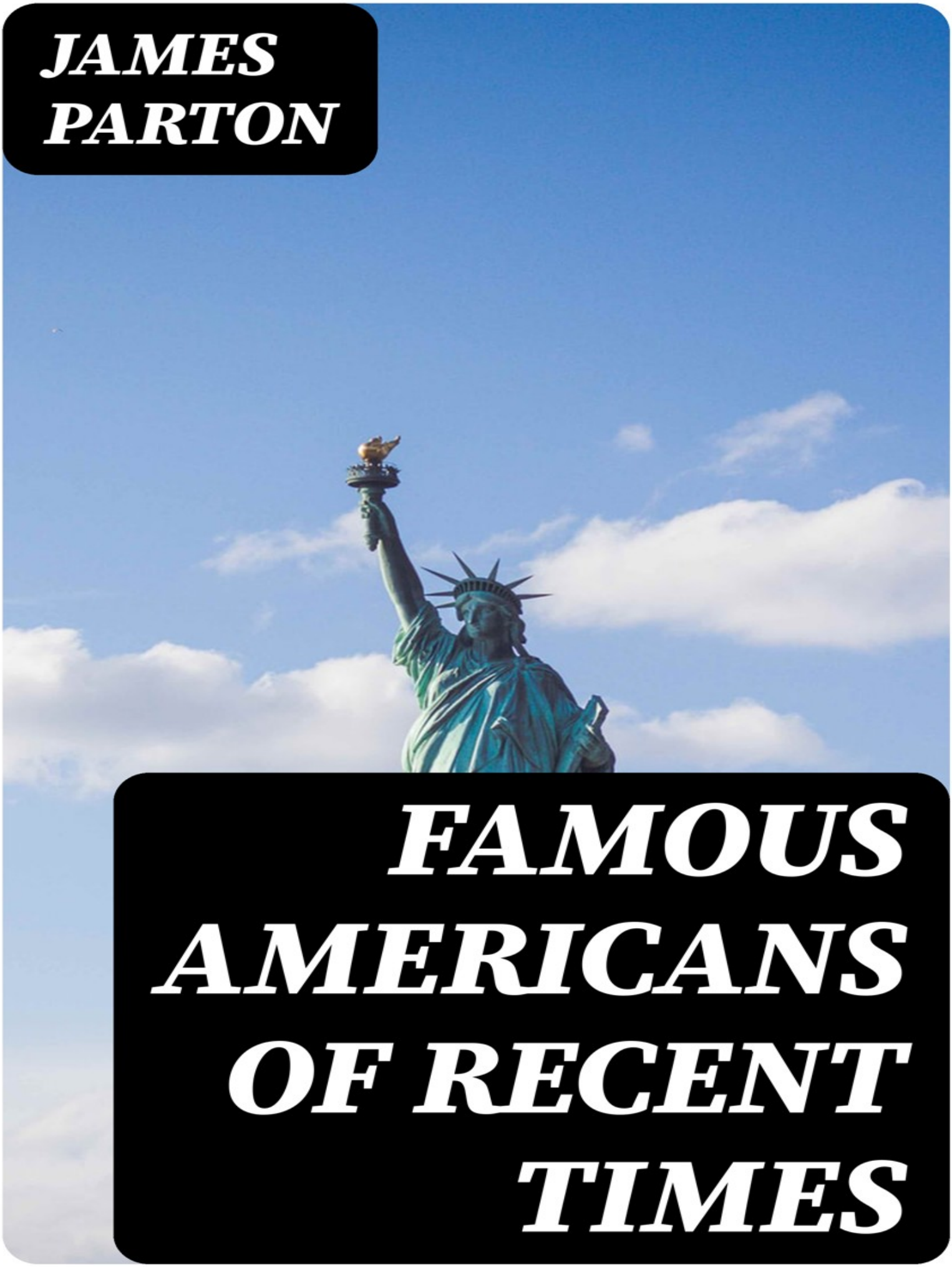
JAMES PARTON



# FAMOUS AMERICANS OF RECENT TIMES

**James Parton**

# Famous Americans of Recent Times

EAN 8596547335870

DigiCat, 2022
Contact: DigiCat@okpublishing.info

# Table of Contents

**HENRY CLAY**

**DANIEL WEBSTER**

**JOHN C. CALHOUN**

**JOHN RANDOLPH**

**STEPHEN GIRARD AND HIS COLLEGE**

**JAMES GORDON BENNETT AND THE NEW YORK HERALD**

**CHARLES GOODYEAR**

**HENRY WARD BEECHER AND HIS CHURCH**

**COMMODORE VANDERBILT**

**THEODOSIA BURR**

**JOHN JACOB ASTOR**

# Footnote

Table of Contents

The papers contained in this volume were originally published in the *North American Review*, with four exceptions. Those upon THEODOSIA BURR and JOHN JACOB ASTOR first appeared in *Harper's Magazine*; that upon COMMODORE VANDERBILT, in the *New York Ledger*; and that upon HENRY WARD BEECHER AND HIS CHURCH, in the *Atlantic Monthly*.

# HENRY CLAY.

Table of Contents

The close of the war removes the period preceding it to a great distance from us, so that we can judge its public men as though we were the "posterity" to whom they sometimes appealed. James Buchanan still haunts the neighborhood of Lancaster, a living man, giving and receiving dinners, paying his taxes, and taking his accustomed exercise; but as an historical figure he is as complete as Bolingbroke or Walpole. It is not merely that his work is done, nor that the results of his work are apparent; but the thing upon which he wrought, by their relation to which he and his contemporaries are to be estimated, has perished. The statesmen of his day, we can all now plainly see, inherited from the founders of the Republic a problem impossible of solution, with which some of them wrestled manfully, others

meanly, some wisely, others foolishly. If the workmen have not all passed away, the work is at once finished and destroyed, like the Russian ice-palace, laboriously built, then melted in the sun. We can now have the requisite sympathy with those late doctors of the body politic, who came to the consultation pledged not to attempt to *remove* the thorn from its flesh, and trained to regard it as the spear-head in the side of Epaminondas,—extract it, and the patient dies. In the writhings of the sufferer the barb has fallen out, and lo! he lives and is getting well. We can now forgive most of those blind healers, and even admire such of them as were honest and not cowards; for, in truth, it *was* an impossibility with which they had to grapple, and it was not one of their creating.

Of our public men of the sixty years preceding the war, Henry Clay was certainly the most shining figure. Was there ever a public man, not at the head of a state, so beloved as he? Who ever heard such cheers, so hearty, distinct, and ringing, as those which his name evoked? Men shed tears at his defeat, and women went to bed sick from pure sympathy with his disappointment. He could not travel during the last thirty years of his life, but only make progresses. When he left his home the public seized him and bore him along over the land, the committee of one State passing him on to the committee of another, and the hurrahs of one town dying away as those of the next caught his ear. The country seemed to place all its resources at his disposal; all commodities sought his acceptance. Passing through Newark once, he thoughtlessly ordered a carriage of a certain pattern: the same evening the carriage was at the

door of his hotel in New York, the gift of a few Newark friends. It was so everywhere and with everything. His house became at last a museum of curious gifts. There was the counterpane made for him by a lady ninety-three years of age, and Washington's camp-goblet given him by a lady of eighty; there were pistols, rifles, and fowling-pieces enough to defend a citadel; and, among a bundle of walking-sticks, was one cut for him from a tree that shaded Cicero's grave. There were gorgeous prayer-books, and Bibles of exceeding magnitude and splendor, and silver-ware in great profusion. On one occasion there arrived at Ashland the substantial present of twenty-three barrels of salt. In his old age, when his fine estate, through the misfortunes of his sons, was burdened with mortgages to the amount of thirty thousand dollars, and other large debts weighed heavily upon his soul, and he feared to be compelled to sell the home of fifty years and seek a strange abode, a few old friends secretly raised the needful sum, secretly paid the mortgages and discharged the debts, and then caused the aged orator to be informed of what had been done, but not of the names of the donors. "Could my life insure the success of Henry Clay, I would freely lay it down this day," exclaimed an old Rhode Island sea-captain on the morning of the Presidential election of 1844. Who has forgotten the passion of disappointment, the amazement and despair, at the result of that day's fatal work? Fatal we thought it then, little dreaming that, while it precipitated evil, it brought nearer the day of deliverance.

Our readers do not need to be reminded that popularity the most intense is not a proof of merit. The two most

mischievous men this country has ever produced were extremely popular,—one in a State, the other in every State,—and both for long periods of time. There are certain men and women and children who are natural heart-winners, and their gift of winning hearts seems something apart from their general character. We have known this sweet power over the affections of others to be possessed by very worthy and by very barren natures. There are good men who repel, and bad men who attract. We cannot, therefore, assent to the opinion held by many, that popularity is an evidence of shallowness or ill-desert. As there are pictures expressly designed to be looked at from a distance by great numbers of people at once,—the scenery of a theatre, for example,—so there are men who appear formed by Nature to stand forth before multitudes, captivating every eye, and gathering in great harvests of love with little effort. If, upon looking closely at these pictures and these men, we find them less admirable than they seemed at a distance, it is but fair to remember that they were not meant to be looked at closely, and that "scenery" has as much right to exist as a Dutch painting which bears the test of the microscope.

It must be confessed, however, that Henry Clay, who was for twenty-eight years a candidate for the Presidency, cultivated his popularity. Without ever being a hypocrite, he was habitually an actor; but the part which he enacted was Henry Clay exaggerated. He was naturally a most courteous man; but the consciousness of his position made him more elaborately and universally courteous than any man ever was from mere good-nature. A man on the stage must overdo his part, in order not to seem to underdo it. There

was a time when almost every visitor to the city of Washington desired, above all things, to be presented to three men there, Clay, Webster, and Calhoun, whom to have seen was a distinction. When the country member brought forward his agitated constituent on the floor of the Senate-chamber, and introduced him to Daniel Webster, the Expounder was likely enough to thrust a hand at him without so much as turning his head or discontinuing his occupation, and the stranger shrunk away painfully conscious of his insignificance. Calhoun, on the contrary, besides receiving him with civility, would converse with him, if opportunity favored, and treat him to a disquisition on the nature of government and the "beauty" of nullification, striving to make a lasting impression on his intellect. Clay would rise, extend his hand with that winning grace of his, and instantly captivate him by his all-conquering courtesy. He would call him by name, inquire respecting his health, the town whence he came, how long he had been in Washington, and send him away pleased with himself and enchanted with Henry Clay. And what was his delight to receive a few weeks after, in his distant village, a copy of the Kentuckian's last speech, bearing on the cover the frank of "H. Clay"! It was almost enough to make a man think of "running for Congress"! And, what was still more intoxicating, Mr. Clay, who had a surprising memory, would be likely, on meeting this individual two years after the introduction, to address him by name.

There was a gamy flavor, in those days, about Southern men, which was very pleasing to the people of the North. Reason teaches us that the barn-yard fowl is a more

meritorious bird than the game-cock; but the imagination does not assent to the proposition. Clay was at once game-cock and domestic fowl. His gestures called to mind the magnificently branching trees of his Kentucky forests, and his handwriting had the neatness and delicacy of a female copyist. There was a careless, graceful ease in his movements and attitudes, like those of an Indian, chief; but he was an exact man of business, who docketed his letters, and could send from Washington to Ashland for a document, telling in what pigeon-hole it could be found. Naturally impetuous, he acquired early in life an habitual moderation of statement, an habitual consideration for other men's self-love, which made him the pacificator of his time. The great compromiser was himself a compromise. The ideal of education is to tame men without lessening their vivacity,—to unite in them the freedom, the dignity, the prowess of a Tecumseh, with the serviceable qualities of the civilized man. This happy union is said to be sometimes produced in the pupils of the great public schools of England, who are savages on the play-ground and gentlemen in the school-room. In no man of our knowledge has there been combined so much of the best of the forest chief with so much of the good of the trained man of business as in Henry Clay. This was one secret of his power over classes of men so diverse as the hunters of Kentucky and the manufacturers of New England.

It used to be accounted a merit in a man to rise to high station from humble beginnings; but we now perceive that humble beginnings are favorable to the development of that force of character which wins the world's great prizes. Let us

never again commend any one for "rising" from obscurity to eminence, but reserve our special homage for those who have become respectable human beings in spite of having had every advantage procured for them by rich fathers. Henry Clay found an Eton, and an Oxford in Old Virginia that were better for *him* than those of Old England. Few men have been more truly fortunate in their education than he. It was said of a certain lady, that to know her was a liberal education; and there really have been, and are, women of whom that could be truly averred. But perhaps the greatest good fortune that can befall an intelligent and noble-minded youth is to come into intimate, confidential relations with a wise, learned, and good old man, one who has been greatly trusted and found worthy of trust, who knows the world by having long taken a leading part in its affairs, and has outlived illusions only to get a firmer footing in realities. This, indeed, is a liberal education; and this was the happiness of Henry Clay. Nothing in biography is so strange as the certainty with which a superior youth, in the most improbable circumstances, finds the mental nourishment he needs. Here, in the swampy region of Hanover County, Virginia, was a barefooted, ungainly urchin, a poor widow's son, without one influential relative on earth; and there, in Richmond, sat on the chancellor's bench George Wythe, venerable with years and honors, one of the grand old men of Old Virginia, the preceptor of Jefferson, signer of the Declaration of Independence, the most learned man in his profession, and one of the best men of any profession. Who could have foreseen that this friendless orphan, a Baptist preacher's son, in a State where to be a "dissenter" was

social inferiority, should have found in this eminent judge a friend, a mentor, a patron, a father?

Yet it came about in the most natural way. We catch our first glimpse of the boy when he sat in a little log school-house, without windows or floor, one of a humming score of shoeless boys, where a good-natured, irritable, drinking English schoolmaster taught him to read, write, and cipher as far as Practice. This was the only school he ever attended, and that was all he learned at it. His widowed mother, with her seven young children, her little farm, and two or three slaves, could do no more for him. Next, we see him a tall, awkward, slender stripling of thirteen, still barefoot, clad in homespun butternut of his mother's making, tilling her fields, and going to mill with his bag of corn strapped upon the family pony. At fourteen, in the year 1791, a place was found for him in a Richmond drug-store, where he served as errand-boy and youngest clerk for one year.

Then occurred the event which decided his career. His mother having married again, her husband had influence enough to procure for the lad the place of copying clerk in the office of the Court of Chancery. The young gentlemen then employed in the office of that court long remembered the entrance among them of their new comrade. He was fifteen at the time, but very tall for his age, very slender, very awkward, and far from handsome. His good mother had arrayed him in a full suit of pepper-and-salt "figginy," an old Virginia fabric of silk and cotton. His shirt and shirt-collar were stiffly starched, and his coat-tail stood out boldly behind him. The dandy law clerks of metropolitan Richmond

exchanged glances as this gawky figure entered, and took his place at a desk to begin his work. There was something in his manner which prevented their indulgence in the jests that usually greet the arrival of a country youth among city blades; and they afterwards congratulated one another that they had waited a little before beginning to tease him, for they soon found that he had brought with him from the country an exceedingly sharp tongue. Of his first service little is known, except the immense fact that he was a most diligent reader. It rests on better authority than "Campaign Lives," that, while his fellow-clerks went abroad in the evening in search of pleasure, this lad stayed at home with his books. It is a pleasure also to know that he had not a taste for the low vices. He came of sound English stock, of a family who would not have regarded drunkenness and debauchery as "sowing wild oats," but recoiled from the thought of them with horror. Clay was far from being a saint; but it is our privilege to believe of him that he was a clean, temperate, and studious young man.

Richmond, the town of the young Republic that had most in it of the metropolitan, proved to this aspiring youth as true a University as the printing-office in old Boston was to Benjamin Franklin; for he found in it the culture best suited to him and his circumstances. Chancellor Wythe, then sixty-seven years of age, overflowing with knowledge and good nature, was the president of that university. Its professors were the cluster of able men who had gone along with Washington and Jefferson in the measures which resulted in the independence of the country. Patrick Henry was there to teach him the arts of oratory. There was a flourishing and

famous debating society, the pride of the young men of Richmond, in which to try his half-fledged powers. The impulse given to thought by the American Revolution was quickened and prolonged by the thrilling news which every vessel brought from France of the revolution there. There was an atmosphere in Virginia favorable to the growth of a sympathetic mind. Young Clay's excellent handwriting brought him gradually into the most affectionate relations with Chancellor Wythe, whose aged hand trembled to such a degree that he was glad to borrow a copyist from the clerk's office. For nearly four years it was the young man's principal duty to copy the decisions of the venerable Chancellor, which were curiously learned and elaborate; for it was the bent of the Chancellor's mind to trace the law to its sources in the ancient world, and fortify his positions by citations from Greek and Latin authors. The Greek passages were a plague to the copyist, who knew not the alphabet of that language, but copied it, so to speak, by rote.

Here we have another proof that, no matter what a man's opportunities are, he only learns what is congenial with his nature and circumstances. Living under the influence of this learned judge, Henry Clay might have become a man of learning. George Wythe was a "scholar" in the ancient acceptation of the word. The whole education of his youth consisted in his acquiring the Latin language, which his mother taught him. Early inheriting a considerable fortune, he squandered it in dissipation, and sat down at thirty, a reformed man, to the study of the law. To his youthful Latin he now added Greek, which he studied assiduously for many years, becoming, probably, the best Greek scholar in

Virginia. His mind would have wholly lived in the ancient world, and been exclusively nourished from the ancient literatures, but for the necessities of his profession and the stirring political events of his later life. The Stamp Act and the Revolution varied and completed his education. His young copyist was not attracted by him to the study of Greek and Latin, nor did he catch from him the habit of probing a subject to the bottom, and ascending from the questions of the moment to universal principles. Henry Clay probed nothing to the bottom, except, perhaps, the game of whist; and though his instincts and tendencies were high and noble, he had no grasp of general truths. Under Wythe, he became a staunch Republican of the Jeffersonian school. Under Wythe, who emancipated his slaves before his death, and set apart a portion of his estate for their maintenance, he acquired a repugnance to slavery which he never lost. The Chancellor's learning and philosophy were not for him, and so he passed them by.

The tranquil wisdom of the judge was counteracted, in some degree, by the excitements of the debating society. As he grew older, the raw and awkward stripling became a young man whose every movement had a winning or a commanding grace. Handsome he never was; but his ruddy face and abundant light hair, the grandeur of his forehead and the speaking intelligence of his countenance, more than atoned for the irregularity of his features. His face, too, was a compromise. With all its vivacity of expression, there was always something that spoke of the Baptist preacher's son, —just as Andrew Jackson's face had the set expression of a Presbyterian elder. But of all the bodily gifts bestowed by

Nature upon this favored child, the most unique and admirable was his voice. Who ever heard one more melodious? There was a depth of tone in it, a volume, a compass, a rich and tender harmony, which invested all he said with majesty. We heard it last when he was an old man past seventy; and all he said was a few words of acknowledgment to a group of ladies in the largest hall in Philadelphia. He spoke only in the ordinary tone of conversation; but his voice filled the room as the organ fills a great cathedral, and the ladies stood spellbound as the swelling cadences rolled about the vast apartment. We have heard much of Whitefield's piercing voice and Patrick Henry's silvery tones, but we cannot believe that either of those natural orators possessed an organ superior to Clay's majestic bass. No one who ever heard him speak will find it difficult to believe what tradition reports, that he was the peerless star of the Richmond Debating Society in 1795.

Oratory was then in the highest vogue. Young Virginians did not need to look beyond the sea in order to learn that the orator was the man most in request in the dawn of freedom. Chatham, Burke, Fox, Sheridan, and Pitt were inconceivably imposing names at that day; but was not Patrick Henry the foremost man in Virginia, only because he could speak and entertain an audience? And what made John Adams President but his fiery utterances in favor of the Declaration of Independence? There were other speakers then in Virginia who would have had to this day a world-wide fame if they had spoken where the world could hear them. The tendency now is to undervalue oratory, and we regret it. We believe that, in a free country, every citizen

should be able to stand undaunted before his fellow-citizens, and give an account of the faith that is in him. It is no argument against oratory to point to the Disraelis of both countries, and say that a gift possessed by such men cannot be a valuable one. It is the unmanly timidity and shamefacedness of the rest of us that give to such men their preposterous importance. It were a calamity to America if, in the present rage for ball-playing and boat-rowing, which we heartily rejoice in, the debating society should be forgotten. Let us rather end the sway of oratory by all becoming orators. Most men who can talk well seated in a chair can *learn* to talk well standing on their legs; and a man who can move or instruct five persons in a small room can learn to move or instruct two thousand in a large one.

That Henry Clay cultivated his oratorical talent in Richmond, we have his own explicit testimony. He told a class of law students once that he owed his success in life to a habit early formed, and for some years continued, of reading daily in a book of history or science, and declaiming the substance of what he had read in some solitary place,—a cornfield, the forest, a barn, with only oxen and horses for auditors. "It is," said he,

> "to this early practice of the art of all arts that I am indebted for the primary and leading impulses that stimulated my progress, and have shaped and moulded my entire destiny."

We should be glad to know more of this self-training; but Mr. Clay's "campaign" biographers have stuffed their volumes too full of eulogy to leave room for such instructive details. We do not even know the books from which he

declaimed. Plutarch's Lives were favorite reading with him, we accidentally learn; and his speeches contain evidence that he was powerfully influenced by the writings of Dr. Franklin. We believe it was from Franklin that he learned very much of the art of managing men. Franklin, we think, aided this impetuous and exaggerating spirit to acquire his habitual moderation of statement, and that sleepless courtesy which, in his keenest encounters, generally kept him within parliamentary bounds, and enabled him to live pleasantly with men from whom he differed in opinion. Obsolete as many of his speeches are, from the transient nature of the topics of which they treat, they may still be studied with profit by young orators and old politicians as examples of parliamentary politeness. It was the good-natured and wise Franklin that helped him to this. It is certain, too, that at some part of his earlier life he read translations of Demosthenes; for of all modern orators Henry Clay was the most Demosthenian. Calhoun purposely and consciously imitated the Athenian orator; but Clay was a kindred spirit with Demosthenes. We could select passages from both these orators, and no man could tell which was American and which was Greek, unless he chanced to remember the passage. Tell us, gentle reader, were the sentences following spoken by Henry Clay after the war of 1812 *at* the Federalists who had opposed that war, or by Demosthenes against the degenerate Greeks who favored the designs of Philip?

> "From first to last I have uniformly pursued the just and virtuous course,—asserter of the honors, of the prerogatives, of the glory of my country. Studious

> to support them, zealous to advance them, my whole being is devoted to this glorious cause. I was never known to walk abroad with a face of joy and exultation at the success of the enemy, embracing and announcing the joyous tidings to those who I supposed would transmit it to the proper place. I was never known to receive the successes of my own country with trembling, with sighs, with my eyes bent to the earth, like those impious men who are the defamers of their country, as if by such conduct they were not defamers of themselves."

Is it Clay, or is it Demosthenes? Or have we made a mistake, and copied a passage from the speech of a Unionist of 1865?

After serving four years as clerk and amanuensis, barely earning a subsistence, Clay was advised by his venerable friend, the Chancellor, to study law; and a place was procured for him in the office of the Attorney-General of the State. In less than a year after formally beginning his studies he was admitted to the bar. This seems a short preparation; but the whole period of his connection with Chancellor Wythe was a study of the law. The Chancellor was what a certain other chancellor styles "a full man," and Henry Clay was a receptive youth.

When he had obtained his license to practise he was twenty years of age. Debating-society fame and drawing-room popularity do not, in an old commonwealth like Virginia, bring practice to a lawyer of twenty. But, as a distinguished French author has recently remarked of Julius Caesar, "In him was united the elegance of manner which

wins, to the energy of character which commands." He sought, therefore, a new sphere of exertion far from the refinements of Richmond. Kentucky, which Boone explored in 1770, was a part of Virginia when Clay was a child, and only became a State in 1792, when first he began to copy Chancellor Wythe's decisions. The first white family settled in it in 1775; but when our young barrister obtained his license, twenty-two years after, it contained a white population of nearly two hundred thousand. His mother, with five of her children and a second husband, had gone thither five years before. In 1797 Henry Clay removed to Lexington, the new State's oldest town and capital, though then containing, it is said, but fifty houses. He was a stranger there, and almost penniless. He took board, not knowing where the money was to come from to pay for it. There were already several lawyers of repute in the place. "I remember," said Mr. Clay, forty-five years after,

> "how comfortable I thought I should be if I could make one hundred pounds a year, Virginia money; and with what delight I received my first fifteen-shilling fee. My hopes were more than realized. I immediately rushed into a successful and lucrative practice."

In a year and a half he was in a position to marry the daughter of one of the first men of the State, Colonel Thomas Hart, a man exceedingly beloved in Lexington.

It is surprising how addicted to litigation were the early settlers of the Western States. The imperfect surveys of land, the universal habit of getting goods on credit at the store, and "difficulties" between individuals ending in

bloodshed, filled the court calendars with land disputes, suits for debt, and exciting murder cases, which gave to lawyers more importance and better chances of advancement than they possessed in the older States. Mr. Clay had two strings to his bow. Besides being a man of red tape and pigeon-holes, exact, methodical, and strictly attentive to business, he had a power over a Kentucky jury such as no other man has ever wielded. To this day nothing pleases aged Kentuckians better than to tell stories which they heard their fathers tell, of Clay's happy repartees to opposing counsel, his ingenious cross-questioning of witnesses, his sweeping torrents of invective, his captivating courtesy, his melting pathos. Single gestures, attitudes, tones, have come down to us through two or three memories, and still please the curious guest at Kentucky firesides. But when we turn to the cold records of this part of his life, we find little to justify his traditional celebrity. It appears that the principal use to which his talents were applied during the first years of his practice at the bar was in defending murderers. He seems to have shared the feeling which then prevailed in the Western country, that to defend a prisoner at the bar is a nobler thing than to assist in defending the public against his further depredations; and he threw all his force into the defence of some men who would have been "none the worse for a hanging." One day, in the streets of Lexington, a drunken fellow whom he had rescued from the murderer's doom cried out, "Here comes Mr. Clay, who saved my life." "Ah! my poor fellow," replied the advocate, "I fear I have saved too many like you, who ought to be hanged." The anecdotes printed of his exploits

in cheating the gallows of its due are of a quality which shows that the power of this man over a jury lay much in his manner. His delivery, which "bears absolute sway in oratory," was bewitching and irresistible, and gave to quite commonplace wit and very questionable sentiment an amazing power to please and subdue.

We are far from thinking that he was not a very able lawyer. Judge Story, we remember, before whom he argued a cause later in life, was of opinion that he would have won a high position at the bar of the Supreme Court, if he had not been early drawn away to public life. In Kentucky he was a brilliant, successful practitioner, such as Kentucky wanted and could appreciate. In a very few years he was the possessor of a fine estate near Lexington, and to the single slave who came to him as his share of his father's property were added several others. His wife being a skilful and vigorous manager, he was in independent circumstances, and ready to serve the public, if the public wished him, when he had been but ten years in his Western home. Thus he had a basis for a public career, without which few men can long serve the public with honor and success. And this was a principal reason of the former supremacy of Southern men in Washington; nearly all of them being men who owned land, which slaves tilled for them, whether they were present or absent.

The young lawyer took to politics very naturally. Posterity, which will judge the public men of that period chiefly by their course with regard to slavery, will note with pleasure that Clay's first public act was an attempt to deliver the infant State of Kentucky from that curse. The

State Constitution was to be remodelled in 1799. Fresh from the society of Chancellor Wythe, an abolitionist who had set free his own slaves,—fresh from Richmond, where every man of note, from Jefferson and Patrick Henry downwards, was an abolitionist,—Henry Clay began in 1798, being then twenty-one years of age, to write a series of articles for a newspaper, advocating the gradual abolition of slavery in Kentucky. He afterwards spoke on that side at public meetings. Young as he was, he took the lead of the public-spirited young men who strove to purge the State from this iniquity; but in the Convention the proposition was voted down by a majority so decisive as to banish the subject from politics for fifty years. Still more honorable was it in Mr. Clay, that, in 1829, when Calhoun was maturing nullification, he could publicly say that among the acts of his life which he reflected upon with most satisfaction was his youthful effort to secure emancipation in Kentucky.

The chapter of our history most abounding in all the elements of interest will be that one which will relate the rise and first national triumph of the Democratic party. Young Clay came to the Kentucky stump just when the country was at the crisis of the struggle between the Old and the New. But in Kentucky it was not a struggle; for the people there, mostly of Virginian birth, had been personally benefited by Jefferson's equalizing measures, and were in the fullest sympathy with his political doctrines. When, therefore, this brilliant and commanding youth, with that magnificent voice of his, and large gesticulation, mounted the wagon that usually served as platform in the open-air meetings of Kentucky, and gave forth, in fervid oratory, the

republican principles he had imbibed in Richmond, he won that immediate and intense popularity which an orator always wins who gives powerful expression to the sentiments of his hearers. We cannot wonder that, at the close of an impassioned address upon the Alien and Sedition Laws, the multitude should have pressed about him, and borne him aloft in triumph upon their shoulders; nor that Kentucky should have hastened to employ him in her public business as soon as he was of the requisite age. At thirty he was, to use the language of the stump, "Kentucky's favorite son," and incomparably the finest orator in the Western country. Kentucky had tried him, and found him perfectly to her mind. He was an easy, comfortable man to associate with, wholly in the Jeffersonian taste. His wit was not of the highest quality, but he had plenty of it; and if he said a good thing, he had such a way of saying it as gave it ten times its natural force. He chewed tobacco and took snuff,—practices which lowered the tone of his health all his life. In familiar conversation he used language of the most Western description; and he had a singularly careless, graceful way with him, that was in strong contrast with the vigor and dignity of his public efforts. He was an honest and brave young man, altogether above lying, hypocrisy, and meanness,—full of the idea of Republican America and her great destiny. The splendor of his talents concealed his defects and glorified his foibles; and Kentucky rejoiced in him, loved him, trusted him, and sent him forth to represent her in the national council.

During the first thirteen years of Henry Clay's active life as a politician,—from his twenty-first to his thirty-fourth

year,—he appears in politics only as the eloquent champion of the policy of Mr. Jefferson, whom he esteemed the first and best of living men. After defending him on the stump and aiding him in the Kentucky Legislature, he was sent in 1806, when he was scarcely thirty, to fill for one term a seat in the Senate of the United States, made vacant by the resignation of one of the Kentucky Senators. Mr. Jefferson received his affectionate young disciple with cordiality, and admitted him to his confidence. Clay had been recently defending Burr before a Kentucky court, entirely believing that his designs were lawful and sanctioned. Mr. Jefferson showed him the cipher letters of that mysterious and ill-starred adventurer, which convinced Mr. Clay that Burr was certainly a liar, if he was not a traitor. Mr. Jefferson's perplexity in 1806 was similar to that of Jackson in 1833,—too much money in the treasury. The revenue then was fifteen millions; and, after paying all the expenses of the government and the stipulated portion of the national debt, there was an obstinate and most embarrassing surplus. What to do with this irrepressible surplus was the question then discussed in Mr. Jefferson's Cabinet. The President, being a free-trader, would naturally have said, Reduce the duties. But the younger men of the party, who had no pet theories, and particularly our young Senator, who had just come in from a six weeks' horseback flounder over bridgeless roads, urged another solution of the difficulty,—Internal Improvements. But the President was a strict-constructionist, denied the authority of Congress to vote money for public works, and was fully committed to that opinion.

Mr. Jefferson yielded. The most beautiful theories will not always endure the wear and tear of practice. The President, it is true, still maintained that an amendment to the Constitution ought to precede appropriations for public works; but he said this very briefly and without emphasis, while he stated at some length, and with force, the desirableness of expending the surplus revenue in improving the country. As time wore on, less and less was said about the amendment, more and more about the importance of internal improvements; until, at last, the Republican party, under Clay, Adams, Calhoun, and Rush, went as far in this business of road-making and canal-digging as Hamilton himself could have desired. Thus it was that Jefferson rendered true his own saying, "We are all Federalists, we are all Republicans." Jefferson yielded, also, on the question of free-trade. There is a passage of a few lines in Mr. Jefferson's Message of 1806, the year of Henry Clay's first appearance in Washington, which may be regarded as the text of half the Kentuckian's speeches, and the inspiration of his public life. The President is discussing the question, What shall we do with the surplus?

> "Shall we suppress the impost, and give that advantage to foreign over domestic manufactures? On a few articles of more general and necessary use, the suppression, in due season, will doubtless be right; but the great mass of the articles upon which impost is paid are foreign luxuries, purchased by those only who are rich enough to afford themselves the use of them. Their patriotism would certainly prefer its continuance, and application to the great

> purposes of the public education, roads, rivers, canals, and such other objects of public improvement as it may be thought proper to add to the constitutional enumeration of Federal powers. By these operations, new channels of communication will be opened between the States, the lines of separation will disappear, their interests will be identified, and their union cemented by new and indissoluble bonds."

Upon these hints, the young Senator delayed not to speak and act; nor did he wait for an amendment to the Constitution. His first speech in the Senate was in favor of building a bridge over the Potomac; one of his first acts, to propose an appropriation of lands for a canal round the Falls of the Ohio at Louisville; and soon he brought forward a resolution directing the Secretary of the Treasury to report a system of roads and canals for the consideration of Congress. The seed of the President's Message had fallen into good ground.

Returning home at the end of the session, and reentering the Kentucky Legislature, we still find him a strict follower of Mr. Jefferson. In support of the President's non-intercourse policy (which was Franklin's policy of 1775 applied to the circumstances of 1808), Mr. Clay proposed that the members of the Legislature should bind themselves to wear nothing that was not of American manufacture. A Federalist, ignorant of the illustrious origin of this idea, ignorant that the homespun system had caused the repeal of the Stamp Act, and *would* have postponed the Revolution but for the accident of Lexington, denounced Mr. Clay's proposition as

the act of a shameless demagogue. Clay challenged this ill-informed gentleman, and a duel resulted, in which two shots were exchanged, and both antagonists were slightly wounded. Elected again to the Senate for an unexpired term, he reappeared in that body in 1809, and sat during two sessions. Homespun was again the theme of his speeches. His ideas on the subject of protecting and encouraging American manufactures were not derived from books, nor expressed in the language of political economy. At his own Kentucky home, Mrs. Clay, assisted by her servants, was spinning and weaving, knitting and sewing, most of the garments required in her little kingdom of six hundred acres, while her husband was away over the mountains serving his country. "Let the nation do what we Kentucky farmers are doing," said Mr. Clay to the Senate. "Let us manufacture enough to be independent of foreign nations in things essential,—no more." He discoursed on this subject in a very pleasant, humorous manner, without referring to the abstract principle involved, or employing any of the technical language of economists.

His service in the Senate during these two sessions enhanced his reputation greatly, and the galleries were filled when he was expected to speak, little known as he was to the nation at large. We have a glimpse of him in one of Washington Irving's letters of February, 1811:

> "Clay, from Kentucky, spoke against the Bank. He is one of the finest fellows I have seen here, and one of the finest orators in the Senate, though I believe the youngest man in it. The galleries, however, were so much crowded with ladies and gentlemen, and

such expectations had been expressed concerning his speech, that he was completely frightened, and acquitted himself very little to his own satisfaction. He is a man I have great personal regard for."

This was the anti-bank speech which General Jackson used to say had convinced him of the impolicy of a national bank, and which, with ingenious malice, he covertly quoted in making up his Bank Veto Message of 1832.

Mr. Clay's public life proper began in November, 1811, when he appeared in Washington as a member of the House of Representatives, and was immediately elected Speaker by the war party, by the decisive majority of thirty-one. He was then thirty-four years of age. His election to the Speakership on his first appearance in the House gave him, at once, national standing. His master in political doctrine and his partisan chief, Thomas Jefferson, was gone from the scene; and Clay could now be a planet instead of a satellite. Restive as he had been under the arrogant aggressions of England, he had schooled himself to patient waiting, aided by Jefferson's benign sentiments and great example. But his voice was now for war; and such was the temper of the public in those months, that the eloquence of Henry Clay, seconded by the power of the Speaker, rendered the war unavoidable.

It is agreed that to Henry Clay, Speaker of the House of Representatives, more than to any other individual, we owe the war of 1812. When the House hesitated, it was he who, descending from the chair, spoke so as to reassure it. When President Madison faltered, it was the stimulus of Clay's resistless presence that put heart into him again. If the

people seemed reluctant, it was Clay's trumpet harangues that fired their minds. And when the war was declared, it was he, more than President or Cabinet or War Committee, that carried it along upon his shoulders. All our wars begin in disaster; it was Clay who restored the country to confidence when it was disheartened by the loss of Detroit and its betrayed garrison. It was Clay alone who could encounter without flinching the acrid sarcasm of John Randolph, and exhibit the nothingness of his telling arguments. It was he alone who could adequately deal with Quincy of Massachusetts, who alluded to the Speaker and his friends as "young politicians, with their pin-feathers yet unshed, the shell still sticking upon them,—perfectly unfledged, though they fluttered and cackled on the floor." Clay it was whose clarion notes rang out over departing regiments, and kindled within them the martial fire; and it was Clay's speeches which the soldiers loved to read by the camp-fire. Fiery Jackson read them, and found them perfectly to his taste. Gentle Harrison read them to his Tippecanoe heroes. When the war was going all wrong in the first year, President Madison wished to appoint Clay Commander-in-Chief of the land forces; but, said Gallatin, "What shall we do without him in the House of Representatives?"

Henry Clay was not a man of blood. On the contrary, he was eminently pacific, both in his disposition and in his politics. Yet he believed in the war of 1812, and his whole heart was in it. The question occurs, then, Was it right and best for the United States to declare war against Great Britain in 1812? The proper answer to this question depends