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REMINISCENCES OF PATRICK HENRY.

From my earliest childhood I had been accustomed to hear of the eloquence of Patrick Henry. On this subject there existed but one opinion in the country. The power of his eloquence was felt equally by the learned and the unlearned. No man who ever heard him speak, on any important occasion, could fail to admit his uncommon power over the minds of his hearers. The occasions on which he made his greatest efforts have been recorded by Mr. Wirt, in his *Life of Henry*. What I propose in this brief article is to mention only what I observed myself more than half a century ago.

Being then a young man, just entering on a profession in which good speaking was very important, it was natural for me to observe the oratory of celebrated men. I was anxious to ascertain the true secret of their power; or what it was which enabled them to sway the minds of hearers, almost at their will.

In executing a mission from the Synod of Virginia, in the year 1794, I had to pass through the county of Prince Edward, where Mr. Henry then resided. Understanding that he was to appear before the Circuit Court, which met in that

county, in defence of three men charged with murder, I determined to seize the opportunity of observing for myself the eloquence of this extraordinary orator.

It was with some difficulty I obtained a seat in front of the bar, where I could have a full view of the speaker, as well as hear him distinctly. But I had to submit to a severe penance in gratifying my curiosity; for the whole day was occupied with the examination of witnesses, in which Mr. Henry was aided by two other lawyers.

In person, Mr. Henry was lean rather than fleshy. He was rather above than below the common height, but had a stoop in the shoulders which prevented him from appearing as tall as he really was. In his moments of animation, he had the habit of straightening his frame, and adding to his apparent stature. He wore a brown wig, which exhibited no indication of any great care in the dressing. Over his shoulders he wore a brown camlet cloak. Under this his clothing was black; something the worse for wear. The expression of his countenance was that of solemnity and deep earnestness. His mind appeared to be always absorbed in what, for the time, occupied his attention. His forehead was high and spacious, and the skin of his face more than usually wrinkled for a man of fifty. His eyes were small and deeply set in his head, but were of a bright blue colour, and twinkled much in their sockets. In short, Mr. Henry's appearance had nothing very remarkable, as he sat at rest. You might readily have taken him for a common planter, who cared very little about his personal appearance. In his manners he was uniformly respectful and courteous. Candles were brought into the court house, when the examination of the witnesses closed; and the judges put it to the option of the bar, whether they would go on with the argument that night or adjourn until the next day. Paul Carrington, jun., the attorney for the state, a man of large size, and uncommon dignity of person and manner, as also an accomplished lawyer, professed his willingness to proceed immediately, while

the testimony was fresh in the minds of all. Now for the first time I heard Mr. Henry make any thing of a speech; and though it was short, it satisfied me of one thing, which I had particularly desired to have decided; namely, whether like a player he merely assumed the appearance of feeling. His manner of addressing the court was profoundly respectful. He would be willing to proceed with the trial, but, said he, "My heart is so oppressed with the weight of responsibility which rests upon me, having the lives of three fellow citizens depending, probably, on the exertion which I may be able to make in their behalf, (here he turned to the prisoners behind him,) that I do not feel able to proceed to-night. I hope the court will indulge me, and postpone the trial till the morning." The impression made by these few words was such as I assure myself no one can ever conceive, by seeing them in print. In the countenance, action, and intonation of the speaker, there was expressed such an intensity of feeling, that all my doubts were dispelled; never again did I question whether Henry felt, or only acted a feeling. Indeed, I experienced an instantaneous sympathy with him in the emotions which he expressed; and I have no doubt the same sympathy was felt by every hearer.

As a matter of course the proceedings were deferred till the next morning. I was early at my post; the judges were soon on the bench, and the prisoners at the bar. Mr. Carrington, afterwards Judge Carrington, opened with a clear and dignified speech, and presented the evidence to the jury. Every thing seemed perfectly plain. Two brothers and a brother-in-law met two other persons in pursuit of a slave, supposed to be harboured by the brothers. After some altercation and mutual abuse, one of the brothers, whose name was John Ford, raised a loaded gun which he was carrying, and presenting it to the breast of one of the other pair, shot him dead, in open day. There was no doubt about the fact. Indeed, it was not denied. There had been no other provocation than opprobrious words. It is presumed that the

opinion of every juror was made up, from merely hearing the testimony ; as Tom Harvey, the principal witness, who was acting as constable on the occasion, appeared to be a respectable man. For the clearer understanding of what follows, it must be observed that the said constable, in order to distinguish him from another of the name, was commonly called 'Butterwood Harvey;' as he lived on Butterwood Creek.

Mr. Henry, it is believed, understanding that the people were on their guard against his faculty of moving the passions and through them influencing the judgment, did not resort to the pathetic, as much as was his usual practice in criminal cases. His main object appeared to be, throughout, to cast discredit on the testimony of Tom Harvey. This he attempted by causing the law respecting riots to be read by one of his assistants. It appeared in evidence, that Tom Harvey had taken upon him to act as constable, without being in commission; and that with a posse of men he had entered the house of one of the Fords in search of the negro, and had put Mrs. Ford, in her husband's absence, into a great terror, while she was in a very delicate condition, near the time of her confinement.

As he descanted on the evidence, he would often turn to Tom Harvey—a large, bold looking man—and with the most sarcastic look would call him by some name of contempt; "this Butterwood Tom Harvey," "this *would-be-constable*," &c. By such expressions, his contempt for the man was communicated to the hearers. I own I felt it gaining on me, in spite of my better judgment; so that before he was done, the impression was strong on my mind that Butterwood Harvey was undeserving of the smallest credit. This impression, however, I found I could counteract, the moment I had time for reflection. The only part of the speech in which he manifested his power of touching the feelings strongly, was where he dwelt on the irruption of the company into Ford's house, in circumstances so perilous to the

solitary wife. This appeal to the sensibility of husbands—and he knew that all the jury stood in this relation—was overwhelming. If the verdict could have been rendered immediately after this burst of the pathetic, every man, at least every husband in the house, would have been for rejecting Harvey's testimony; if not for hanging him forthwith. It was fortunate that the illusion of such eloquence is transient, and is soon dissipated by the exercise of sober reason. I confess, however, that nothing which I then heard so convinced me of the advocate's power, as the speech of five minutes, which he made when he requested that the trial might be adjourned till the next day.

In addition to this it so happened that I heard the last public speech which Mr. Henry ever made. It was delivered at Charlotte, from the portico of the court house, to an assembly in the open air. In the American edition of the *New Edinburgh Encyclopaedia* an account of this speech and its effects is given, so charged with exaggeration as to be grossly incorrect. There is more truth in the statements contained in Mr. Wirt's memoir. In point of fact, the performance had little impression beyond the transient pleasure afforded to the friends of the administration, and the pain inflicted on the Anti-federalists, his former political friends. Mr. Henry came to the place with difficulty, and was plainly destitute of his wonted vigour and commanding power. The speech was nevertheless a noble effort, such as could have proceeded from none but a patriotic heart. In the course of his remarks, Mr. Henry (as is correctly stated by Mr. Wirt) after speaking of Washington at the head of a numerous and well appointed army, exclaimed, "And where is the citizen of America who will dare to lift his hand against the father of his country, to point a weapon at the breast of the man who had so often led them to battle and victory?" An intoxicated man cried, "I could." "No," answered Mr. Henry, rising aloft in all his majesty, and in a voice most solemn and penetrating, "No; you durst not do it; in such a parricidal attempt, the steel would drop from your nerveless arm!"

Mr. Henry was followed by a speaker afterwards noted in our national history; I mean John Randolph of Roanoke; but the aged orator did not remain to witness the debut of his young opponent. Randolph began by saying that he had admired that man more than any on whom the sun had shone, but that now he was constrained to differ from him *toto coelo*. But Randolph was suffering with the hoarseness of a cold, and could scarcely utter an audible sentence. All that is alleged in the Encyclopaedia, about Henry's returning to the platform and replying with extraordinary effect, is pure fabrication. The fact is as above stated: Henry retired to the house, as if unwilling to listen, and requested a friend to report to him any thing which might require an answer. But he made no reply, nor did he again present himself to the people. I was amidst the crowd, standing near to Creed Taylor, then an eminent lawyer, and afterwards a judge; who made remarks to those around him, during the speech, declaring among other things that the old man was in his dotage. It is much to be regretted that a statement so untrue should be perpetuated in a work of such value and celebrity.

Patrick Henry had several sisters, with one of whom, the wife of Colonel Meredith of New Glasgow, I was acquainted. Mrs. Meredith was not only a woman of unfeigned piety, but was in my judgment as eloquent as her brother; nor have I ever met with a lady who equalled her in powers of conversation.

At an early period of my ministry, it became my duty to preach the funeral sermon of Mr. James Hunt, the father of the late Rev. James Hunt, of Montgomery county, Maryland. The death occurred at the house of a son who lived on Stanton river: Mr. Henry's residence, Red Hill, was a few miles distant, on the same river. Having been long a friend of the deceased, Mr. Henry attended the funeral, and remained to dine with the company; on which occasion I was introduced to him by Captain William Craighead, who

had been an elder in President Davies's church. These gentlemen had been friends in Hanover, but had not met for many years. The two old gentlemen met with great cordiality, and seemed to have high enjoyment in talking of old times.

On the retrospect of so many years I may be permitted to express my views of the extraordinary effects of Henry's eloquence. The remark is obvious, in application not only to him but to all great orators, that we cannot ascribe these effects merely to their intellectual conceptions, or their cogent reasonings, however great: these conceptions and reasons, when put on paper, often fall dead. They are often inferior to the arguments of men whose utterances have little impression. It has indeed been often said, both of Whitefield and of Henry, that their discourses, when reduced to writing, show poorly by the side of the productions of men who are no orators. Let me illustrate this, by the testimony of one whom I remember as a friend of my youth. General Posey was a revolutionary officer, who was second in command, under Wayne, in the expedition against the Indians; a man of observation and cool judgment. He was in attendance on the debates of that famous convention in which there were so many displays of deliberative eloquence. He assured me, that after the hearing of Patrick Henry's most celebrated speech in that body, he felt himself as fully persuaded that the Constitution if adopted would be our ruin, as of his own existence. Yet subsequent reflection restored his former judgment, and his well considered opinion resumed its place.

The power of Henry's eloquence was due, first, to the greatness of his emotion and passion, accompanied with a versatility which enabled him to assume at once any emotion or passion which was suited to his ends. Not less indispensable, secondly, was a matchless perfection of the organs of expression, including the entire apparatus of voice, intonation, pause, gesture, attitude, and indescribable play of countenance. In no instance did he ever indulge in an expres-

sion that was not instantly recognised as nature itself: yet some of his penetrating and subduing tones were absolutely peculiar, and as inimitable as they were indescribable. These were felt by every hearer, in all their force. His mightiest feelings were sometimes indicated and communicated by a long pause, aided by an eloquent aspect, and some significant use of his finger. The sympathy between mind and mind is inexplicable. Where the channels of communication are open, the faculty of revealing inward passion great, and the expression of it sudden and visible, the effects are extraordinary. Let these shocks of influence be repeated again and again, and all other opinions and ideas are for the moment absorbed or excluded; the whole mind is brought into unison with that of the speaker; and the spell-bound listener, till the cause ceases, is under an entire fascination. Then perhaps the charm ceases, upon reflection, and the infatuated hearer resumes his ordinary state.

Patrick Henry of course owed much to his singular insight into the feelings of the common mind. In great cases, he scanned his jury, and formed his mental estimate; on this basis he founded his appeals to their predilections and character. It is what other advocates do, in a lesser degree. When he knew that there were conscientious or religious men among the jury, he would most solemnly address himself to their sense of right, and would adroitly bring in scriptural citations. If this handle was not offered, he would lay bare the sensibility of patriotism. Thus it was, when he succeeded in rescuing the man who had deliberately shot down a neighbour; who moreover lay under the odious suspicion of being a tory, and who was proved to have refused supplies to a brigade of the American army.

A learned and intelligent gentleman stated to me that he once heard Mr. Henry's defence of a man arraigned for a capital crime. So clear and abundant was the evidence, that my informant was unable to conceive any grounds of defence, especially after the law had been ably placed before the jury

by the attorney for the commonwealth. For a long time after Henry began, he never once adverted to the merits of the case or the arguments of the prosecution, but went off into a most captivating and discursive oration on general topics, expressing opinions in perfect accordance with those of his hearers ; until having fully succeeded in obliterating every impression of his opponent's speech, he obliquely approached the subject, and as occasion was offered dealt forth strokes which seemed to tell upon the minds of the jury. In this case, it should be added, the force of truth prevailed over the art of the consummate orator.

A. A.

A BATTLE SONG FOR HUNGARY.

I.

Our Fatherland 's in danger !
Arouse from hill and vale,
From rocky steep, and forest shade,
With helm, and plume, and mail :
The tyrant's heel is on our soil,
His hordes are on our plain,
Oh ! drive these thirsty blood-hound's back
Into their homes again.

II.

The shouts of gathering legions
The whispering breezes bear,
And splintering lance, and bugle horn,
Break on the startled air ;
But we will hush the battle drum
Awhile, and bend the knee,
And ask that He will make us strong,
And set our Country free !