Charles Krauth

The Life and Character of Henry Clay

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A Discourse On The Life And Character Of Henry Clay

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A Discourse On The Life And Character Of Henry Clay

By Charles Krauth, D.D.

PROFESSOR IN THE THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY, GETTYSBURG, PA.

Delivered At The Request Of The Citizens Of Gettysburg, In Christ's Church, July 9th, 1852

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Acknowledgment

GETTYSBURG, JULY 9TH, 1852. Reverend and Dear Sir, We desire to express to you our thanks for the appropriate and excellent Discourse, to which we have, this day, listened and, on behalf of the citizens of Gettysburg, we respectfully request a copy of the same for publication. We have the honor to be, With great respect, Yours, etc.

Moses M'CLEAN, M. L. STOEVER, J. B. DANNER, W. W. PAXTON, ABRAM ARNOLD, T. WARREN, D. M'CONAUGHY, R. G. M'CREARY, A. B. KURTZ, JOHN L. HILL, G. SWOPE, J. D. PAXTON, COMMITTEE OF ARRANGEMENT. Rev. C. P. Krauth, D. D. *Professor in the Theological Seminary*.

Gettysburg, July 9th, 1852.

Gentlemen,

Your polite note, informing me of the feelings and wishes you entertain s in regard to the Address delivered, at your request, as a tribute to the memory of Henry Clay, has just been received; and without delay, I would Inform you, that having been honored by my fellow-citizens, without distinction of party, to render the service, and having very cheerfully complied, I with equal readiness will meet your wishes in putting into your hands the Address in manuscript, to be disposed of as you may deem best.

With sincere regard, I am your friend, and fellow-citizen,

C. P. KRAUTH.

To the Hon. Moses M'Clean, Prof. M. L. Stoever, Hon. J. B. Danner, W. W. Paxton, esq. Abram Arnold, Esq. T. Warren, Esq. D. M'Conaughy, Esq. K. G. M'Creary, Esq. K. G. M'Creary, Esq. A. B. Kurtz, Esq. John L. Hill, M. D. G. Swope, Esq. Col. J. D. Paxton, Committee of Arrangement.

Henry Clay

Job 5:26: Thou shalt come to thy grave in a full age, like as a shock of corn cometh in his season.

LIFE, as it has been lived, presents itself to us with very different aspects. Sometimes it has scarcely commenced, until it is brought to a close. Again, it proceeds farther, but reaches no maturity, and develops no decided results. In other instances, it is seen full of promise, but hope is frustrated in an early grave. Extended through many years, in some cases its duration is marked by no praiseworthy acts, illustrated by no noble deeds, and no grief is produced by its close. The remembrance is feeble, and stirs no emotion in the breast. The record of many a life is a record of crime, and every association with it painful in the extreme. Mingled feelings of approbation and disapprobation are appropriate and felt when the career of some men is reviewed. There is a life, sometimes lived by men, the remembrance of which is accompanied with high gratification, and the study of which is attended by great good. Such a life we propose, on the present occasion, to describe, and then to inquire how far it was realized in the orator, statesman and patriot whose death, mourned by our great republic with intense sorrow, has given occasion to this day's solemnities. Such a life may be called the perfection of life, and this is our theme.

It is, first, a life which has been extended (o its normal length, terminated when physical vigor has decayed under the hand of time, and the powers of the mind have become disproportionate to the tenement in which they have been exercised.

Life, extended through three-score years and ten, has opportunities of enjoyment and action which, whilst they are highly desirable, seem necessary to render it what it should be. Otherwise it falls short of what it might be, and what it is more or less prepared to be. In our early years knowledge is acquired, first, through the senses, and then by reflection. The period of pupilage passed, we enter upon the active duties of life, prepared to some extent, for the attainment and diffusion of happiness. Advancing years, study and experience ripen our faculties and qualify us for higher and more efficient agency, and it is only when we are carried through all the stages, till we reach the natural terminus, that we can fully perform the part assigned us, and bring our resources to bear completely upon the great objects of life. To us it may appear mysterious, and it is so, no doubt, why, upon the view which commends itself to our reason, and has the high sanction of our holy religion, that life is the gift of a mighty Being, unbounded in benevolence, though sovereign in power, the resumption of which depends upon his fiat, it should in any instance fail to reach its extreme acme; faith instructs us to bow in humble submission to the arrangements of the divine throne; still, whilst we indulge in no complaint, whisper no murmur, thank the hand that smites, we can only consider that life perfect, which combines with other elements an extension commensurate with the capacity of efficient action. It certainly was the conception of the writer, whose words we have chosen, rather as a motto than a text, that one of the ingredients of an earthly condition, such as is communicated to the favorites of God, is not only "to be at league with the stones of the field," and to have the beasts of the field at peace with us, " to know that our tabernacle shall be in peace, and that we shall visit our habitation and not sin;" but in addition, to come to the grave in a full age, like as a shock of corn cometh in his season; that is, as explained by Barnes, in his commentary on this book; "thou shalt come to thy grave in full age, thou shalt have long life; thou shalt not be cut down prematurely, nor by any sudden calamity." " Like as a shock of corn cometh in his season." " As a sheaf of grain is harvested, when it is fully ripe." This is a beautiful comparison, and the meaning is obvious. He would not be cut off, before his plans were fully matured; before the fruits of righteousness had ripened in his life. He would be taken away, when he was ripe for heaven; as the yellow grain is for harvest. Grain is not cut down when it is green; and the meaning of Eliphaz is, that it is as desirable that man should live to a good old age, before he is gathered to his fathers, as it is that grain should be suffered to stand until it is fully ripe."

But after all, life is nothing, except as a means to an end, and we might justly consider its prolongation an evil, if it were spent in inaction and in sin; if it aimed at no good, and accomplished nothing commendable. In carrying out our description, we must introduce another feature, and we select the accomplishment of something, much, that is beneficial to man. Years of indolence, years devoted to sensual enjoyments, years of rebellion against God and God's law, are no parts of a picture of life in perfection. Such living can scarcely be dignified with the appellation life; it is, indeed, death; it is devoid of true vitality, consummates nothing desirable for him who lives it, or for him who lives aside of it. When, however, it is distinguished by active efforts for the promotion of man's weal, consecrated to untiring toils for the advancement of his interests, in their widest range when it marks its path, and that path good, and moves in it steadily and undismayed, through sunshine and storm, praise and blame, then our graduation of its excellence has a proper foundation, and we can accord it our homage, in proportion to the fidelity with which it has gone forward. Such a life leaves an indentation, which can be seen even by feeble visual powers. Although fidelity is the criterion, by which worth is measured, its success may not always be in the ratio of appliance, still means and ends are so close in their connection, the ligatures of action and result are so numerous, that we may expect, with almost entire certainty, a life of well directed diligence to be honored with achievements not to be contemned. It is not necessary that any one object should exclusively claim our attention and monopolize our powers, to warrant the commendation of which we speak. One man may labor in one occupation, another in another. The legislator, the magistrate in every grade, the jurist, the physician, the divine, the orator, the statesman, the merchant, the mechanic, the laborer, and the tiller of the soil – the man who thinks for others, whose opportunities of thinking for themselves are few and far between, and publishes his thoughts in newspapers, pamphlets and books, all promote the great ends of life, all if actuated by the right spirit, render obedience to their great master, and all are a blessing to their kind. There are some stations in life, which require higher endowments than others; there are some minds, which are more highly gifted than others; there are men, whose opportunities of distinction are much greater than others; there are spheres of action, which excite a more lively interest than others; there are deeds, which in lustre far transcend the ordinary measure; but it matters not, our life is, in reality, not so much perfected by the circle, in which we move, as by the manner, in which we move in the circle, for which we were designed.

The life, under contemplation, is honored – honored by the intelligent and good. That the praise of our fellow-men is not worthless, we may fearlessly assert. Regard to it, in what we do, may not be condemned as a principle of action. – Though not the sole, though not the highest motive in the range of impulses to duty, it occupies an important, if a subordinate place. A proper appreciation of our conduct by those, who know what we have done, and for whom our energies have gone forth, is a claim, which can be made good in any court exercising equity powers. It should not be regarded as a proper desire to solicit more, than we can fairly establish by unequivocal testimony to belong to us; it should not be considered creditable to ask more, than we deserve. Although, in human life, the fair presumption is, because man's pretensions are, in reality, so very humble, that no man's desert will be inadequately recompensed, so that there will be occasion to arraign the justice of the divine administration; yet it may happen in other relations than those existing between man and his Maker, and in reference to other decisions based upon claims far inferior to those of our Creator upon us, that that may be withheld from us, to which we are entitled, and the honor may not be bestowed, which we have fairly won. It is in these circumstances, that the man of lofty principles and conscious rectitude, retiring within himself, feels that he is independent of the smiles of his fellow-men around him, and in the consciousness that his services, though without remuneration, actuated by motives originating much above the level of this world, are subservient to most important ends, feels that his happiness is beyond the reach of human power, and that the injustice, with which he is visited, cannot destroy his peace. It is nevertheless true, that there does seem to be something wanting in that life, which having signalized itself by great efforts in the cause of humanity, and toiled successfully for man's bliss, receives no laudation, such as it merits, and is unrecognized in the grateful expressions of its numerous beneficiaries. It excites our pity, it may be, our indignation, when worth is unrewarded, and the crown is deposited on unworthy brows. It is true, a re-acting mental influence may evoke a philosophy nurtured in the school of Jesus of Nazareth, which may render us acquiescent, and teach us to regard as best what has been permitted, if not ordered. Nevertheless, in the exercise of our judgment, it is natural for us to regard that life as imperfect, which has had such a destiny. If not always, it is certainly frequently the case, that in this world merit meets an appropriate reward, that the man of high virtue is honored, that the successful laborer in the service of man is glorified by man. It may not always be to the extent thought best; it may not be in the

form, which is preferred, but it will be in ways sufficiently clear, and often with more indubitable proof of sincerity, than a first glance would surmise. A life then, of which there is some just appreciation, a life, which is rewarded with some appropriate honors, that has received the homage which it fairly challenged, that life has an important constituent of life in perfection.

It is, too, when in the retrospect, facts stand out, which can be contemplated with interest and studied with profit, it is when examining, after it has closed, the way in which a man hath walked in his journey through this world, we see brilliant points, which fix our gaze and light us to spiritual treasures; it is then, too, that our verdict strengthens in force, that such a life has been favored with choice influences, and should be posited high in our regards. That is a true life, that is a glorious life, that is a life worthy the name, which stands out from other lives, and still lives on after it has passed away, and long and ever and speaks and inspires respect and gratitude, and constitutes a model, which has done much, and still diffuses its leaven, leavening and leavening, more and more, and more and more, the mighty mass. Something of great value appears before us, when we think of the men that were, whose day and generation owed them, and paid them too, with a hearty good will, many thanks, going down, setting in their course, but looming up anon with bright effulgence, and guiding, by their light, many a wanderer in the pathway of life, directing his feet to safe places, and to a happy home, aiding his vision in inspecting earthly scenes, and guiding him on to God's rest. Such men have indeed lived, because their lives are worth being recorded, and being recorded, they are read with interest, and read with interest, they deposit salutary truth, and awaken desires of the best kind. When, too, in the annals of a country, our name stands conspicuous, when it is linked to events, on which the happiness of millions depended, when it is bound to measures but for which all that we hold dearest would be lost, then it is that our species, illustrious by such achievements, tower high in our vision, we become prepared to swell high their praises, and feel that we can be their pupils with transcendent gain.

Finally, we mention in our picture of the life of perfection, a happy termination, a peaceful departure, a joyful transition to a more elevated sphere. The life, that does not end well, is not what life should be. It must not merely end with calmness, without visible apprehension. It must not close with stupid insensibility or atheistic contempt. How then! It must, in its last hours, be sustained by the hope of a blissful immortality, based on the atoning blood of Jesus Christ, the son of man and the Son of God. It must testify, as it runs out, the power of faith, and leave the assurance that, through abounding grace, all will be well, when the world recedes and disappears. Any life, which must be traced to death, and the death that dies not, which is a transfer from whatever glitter of earth to the worm, that never dies and the fire, that never is quenched, is indeed a miserable life. Something it may have done for others, it has done nothing for itself. We may then add this to our enumeration, and pronounce it necessary to the perfection of life, that it should be closed with a death, such as the Christian and no one else can die.

We inquire, in the second place, how far such a life was realized in that great man, Henry Clay, whose death, in common with our countrymen of every party, we now mourn.

In the first particular, it was very fully realized. He lived long, and passed beyond the usually assigned limit of human life. The three-score years and ten were not the measure of his days. Five more were added to the number - a lengthening of his span most eventful and glorious. He was born in the State of Virginia, in the county of Hanover, in the year 1777. His father was a preacher of that gospel, which the Son of God brought to our world as the healer of our sorrows and the means^{*} of our redemption. I think it unnecessary to speak in any detail of his life. It is known to us all. No one of our statesmen, those who have lived during our time, has been so much before the public, none has been so well known. His name is one of the most familiar in our nation. It is known to us all, that in his early life he struggled with difficulties. Wealth was not his. Orphanage was. Few advantages were enjoyed by him. He devoted himself to the study of law, and removing to that great State whose favorite son he has so long been, and where his honored bones will, as he desired, rest, and whither the hearts of his countrymen will follow them, and many an affectionate pilgrimage will be performed in time to come; he there entered upon the practice of his profession, and attained an eminence so high, that he takes his place among the greatest lawyers, the most brilliant and successful pleaders of our land. His earlier fame, great as it was, and deservedly great, seems to be obscured by his later career of brilliancy and power. It was no doubt, however, in his forensic life, that he successfully cultivated those great powers of oratory, that wonderful sagacity in thoroughly examining a subject, that high power of analysis, that great facility of combination, which have excited so much admiration, not only in this great republic, but throughout the civilized world, and particularly, where liberty dwells, for nearly half a century. Extraordinary must have been his gifts, who, mainly by his own unaided efforts, rose so high. His life, long, vigorous, healthy, was spent mainly in the service of his country. He lived for this great American republic. He served in the popular branch of our national legislature many years. He was honored with the speakership, an office for which we have often seen such powerful struggles in our day, in repeated instances. He was the master spirit in that legislative assembly in a day in which intellectual giants were his competitors, and in popularity he was without a rival. He was chosen by one of. the most distinguished of our presidents, together with other citizens of great eminence, to negotiate that peace which, following the war of 1812, was so honorable and so welcome to our country. As Secretary of State under the younger Adams, he was part and parcel of an administration which will ever be conspicuous in our history, and occupy a bright page in our national annals. In the Senate, in which he so long acted, he displayed a power and variety of eloquence, a wisdom and patriotism, a conciliatory temper, a spirit of pacification, in most trying times, which fairly entitle him to the praise of the great orator, the profound statesman, the pure patriot, the great pacificator. In this service he died, and from his death-couch uttered words of admonition, powerfully influential in restraining the passions of men, and moderating the fury of fanaticism.

"As he lived long, so he accomplished much," says one of our eminent statesmen, still adorning our national senate, who knew him well, and knew him from the commencement of his career, Lewis Cass – I quote from his recent tribute to the mighty dead, in the senate chamber of the Union – says he, "That he exercised a powerful influence within the sphere of his action through the whole country, indeed we all feel and know; and we know, too, the eminent endowments which gave him this high distinction. Frank and fearless in the expression of his opinions, and in the performance of his duties, with rare powers of eloquence, which never failed to rivet the attention of his auditory, which always commanded admiration, even when they did not carry conviction; prompt in decision, and firm in action, and with a vigorous intellect, trained in the contests of a stirring life, and strengthened by enlarged experience and observation, joined withal to an ardent love of country, and to great purity of purpose; these were the elements of his power and success." On this occasion, it would not be proper to refer specifically to the great acts in which he was engaged, or the important services which he rendered! On some points there would be diversity of opinion; but I think all will admit that he was an ardent friend of the liberty and independence of his country; that he was the friend of universal liberty, that he was ready to hail its appearance in any land, and prompt in its rise, as in the case of South America and Greece, to cheer it on, and to extend to it recognition; that he loved his country, and loved it well, that he cherished the union of these States with an ardent affection, and that in an honorable, upright, but at the same time pacific spirit, he aimed at the good of his country, and his whole country. All will admit, not only that he was a statesman, and a great statesman, in the very highest rank of our civilians, and that he was, in this department, truly national. "Who," says Mr. Breckenridge, "does not remember the three periods when the American system of government was exposed to its severest trials? And who does not know that when history shall relate the struggles that preceded, and the dangers which were arrested by the Missouri Compromise, the Tariff Compromise of 1832, and the adjustment of 1850, the same pages will record the genius, the eloquence, and the patriotism of Henry Clay?"

The time allotted to this exercise would be very inadequate to make known, even in a small degree, the services rendered by Henry Clay to the men of his vicinage, the commonwealth in which he lived, and the nation he adorned. That his life was spent in incessant labors, that he aimed to exert a beneficial influence on a broad scale, that he effected a vast amount, that the measures, which he advocated and consummated, produced great effects, and in the highest degree salutary, that they will appear in strong light in our history, no one can doubt, and we are authorized, therefore, to regard his life as having been blessed with that characteristic of life in perfection, that it was a life eminently distinguished by the good which it performed.

Who can tell the evils which would have ensued, if the great measures, to which we have alluded, had not been proposed and carried? Would we this day be a united and happy people, prosperous beyond example, and with a most brilliant career opening before us, the envy of tyrants, and the boast of the friends of freedom the world over? Would we be living in peace with all men, governing ourselves, promoting by our efforts pure morality and genuine religion; sitting under our own vine and fig tree, there being none to hurt or make us afraid? Would education, would Christianity be receiving the attention and exercising the ever increasing influence, which, it is notorious, that they now do? As these and similar interrogatories are answered by us, the answers will be associated with one name, the name of Clay, whose clear intellect saw, and whose prompt invention devised, the remedy for the grievous diseases of the body politic. In view of all may we say, *Well done good and faithful servant!*

An honored life was his too. The honor of office he enjoyed to a very great extent; the honor of party attachment to a degree, which has never certainly been surpassed, and rarely equaled in our country; the honor of the highest esteem from many of the best men in the country, who, differing from him, or not sustaining him politically, nevertheless, were ready to concede to him the very highest place amongst American statesmen and patriots. Look at the interest with which his death-couch was watched by this nation, at the profound sympathy, which was felt all over the land, at the sorrow and joy as his life ebbed and flowed, expressed by all those who agreed with him, and those that did not, and what shall we render as the solution of all this? What can we – but this, that his worth was great, and that the work which he had performed was such, as having benefited all, and destined to extend its benign influence to generations yet unborn, was entitled to the warmest gratitude of an intelligent people. Hear the wail of sorrow which has gone up, and is yet going up from our land, the unbought grief of millions of freemen! Behold the demonstrations of respect, which from the Congress of the Union, through our great cities, and even in our hamlets, and wherever hid sarcophagus appears, as it winds its way to its last resting place, and what must we think? A great man has fallen! and more, one dear to his country, to his whole country, to men of every shade of opinion, has passed away! His honors will not be transient; his is a deathless name; it will live on, it will live in the admiring recollection of our children, and childrens' children, and future ages of freeborn Americans will call him blessed!

His was a life too, which can be studied with advantage. – The young man, who turns his attention to it, and no one, whose studies embrace the history of man will fail to do so, will not only find a most rich biography, instructive and stirring in a preeminent degree, will see what can be effected by talent and perseverance in our republican country, but he will meet with

encouragement to prosecute, however great may be his difficulties, his worldly mission. The lessons, which may be learned from the life of Henry Clay, are numerous and valuable. From it may be learned the importance of industry and the power of effort. From it may be learned that a combination of the suaviter in modo and fortiter in re are mighty levers in our political quarries. He may learn, that love of country is a passion which, whilst it adorns, leads on to true glory. He may learn, that he, who toils for his fellowmen, will not be unremunerated. He may learn, that gifts of elocution and the art of suasion, that rich thoughts and glowing expressions, exercise a mighty mastery over the human heart. He may learn that when a man's ways are right, even his opponents will be his eulogists. He may learn too, that when the last trying hour comes, that religion's influences are needed by the high and mighty, as well as by the ignoble and low, and that our support in the death-struggle is derived, not from our brilliant services, the homage that is paid us by an admiring world, the attentions which are bestowed by affectionate friends, but from the Gospel of Christ and his peace speaking blood, and the gracious influences of the Holy Ghost, the Comforter.

The termination of his life was peaceful. The truth of the Christian religion at no time, we believe, in his life, appeared to him doubtful. Its mighty evidences controlled his convictions and obtained his intellectual homage. Its secret influences seemed to reach his heart, whilst he was actively engaged in the strife of party and the turmoils of public life. Much as he had, he felt that there was one thing that he had not; that peace of God, that passeth all understanding. He believed in the reality of spiritual religion; he had it near him, and saw in one, his faithful companion in life's sorrows, its beauty and its power. He inherited, shall I say, a sense of its value; for he was the child of piety, and the image of the authors of his being was enveloped with Christian sacredness. Years before his death he, the strong man and the mighty man, bowed in profession at the cross of the Redeemer, and by that beautiful rite of our holy faith, the baptism of water, solemnly swore allegiance to heaven's king. He was a communicant in that church, which he had selected, in preference to others, and appeared at her altars with his fellow-Christians of every rank, to partake of the body and blood of the son of God. The accounts which we have of his last hours, the words of the man of God, who ministered to him as he departed, are exceedingly affecting and instructive, and satisfy us most perfectly, that his death was the death of a Christian, and that his was a gracious reception, when he entered the spirit-world and appeared before his God.

Whilst we thank God for what he gave him strength to perform, that he continued him long to his country, and that he has now removed him most propitiously and mercifully, let us seek to imitate his virtues and to follow his example. May we love our country as he loved it; toil for it as he did! May it be our aim to perpetuate the blessings, which he did so much to retain! May we strive so to live, that both the record of our life and of our death shall testify, that we feared God and worked righteousness! Young men, we present to you the example, well deserving of your imitation, of Henry Clay, who preferred right to power, who, through evil report and good, was not forsaken by his integrity; whose heart, so far as his country was concerned, could not reproach him; and, in a word, in whom the elements were so mixed, that nature might stand up, and say to all the world, *This was a man*!

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How Can You Find Peace With God?

The most important thing to grasp is that no one is made right with God by the good things he or she might do. Justification is by faith only, and that faith resting on what Jesus Christ did. It is by believing and trusting in His one-time *substitutionary* death for your sins.

Read your Bible steadily. God works His power in human beings through His Word. Where the Word is, God the Holy Spirit is always present.

Suggested Reading: New Testament Conversions by Pastor George Gerberding

Benediction

Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy, To the only wise God our Savior, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen. (Jude 1:24-25)

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