

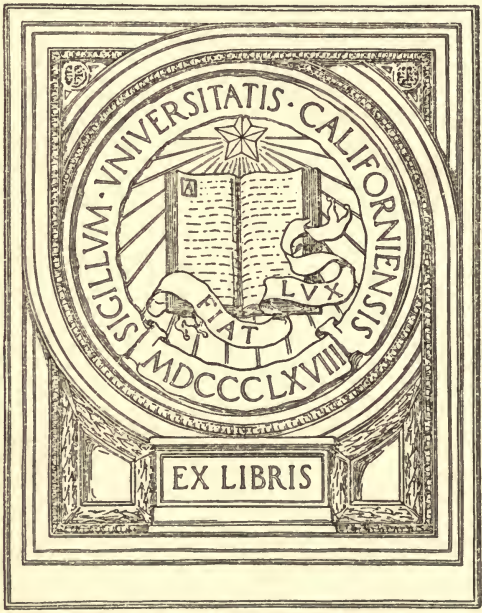
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HENRY CLAY

BIOGRAPHY

OF

HENRY CLAY.

BY GEORGE D. PRENTICE, ESQ.

Hartford :

SAMUEL HANMER, JR. AND JOHN JAY PHELPS,
PUBLISHERS.

1831.

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District of Connecticut, ss.

BE IT REMEMBERED, That on the fourth day of December, in the fifty-fifth year of the independence of the United States of America, Samuel Hanmer, Jr. and John Jay Phelps, of the said district, have deposited in this office the title of a book, the right whereof they claim as proprietors, in the words following, to wit:

"Biography of Henry Clay. By George D. Prentice, Esq."

In conformity to the act of congress of the United States, entitled, "an act for the encouragement of learning, by securing the copies of maps, charts, and books, to the authors and proprietors of such copies, during the times therein mentioned," and also to the act, entitled, "an act supplementary to an act, entitled, 'an act for the encouragement of learning, by securing the copies of maps, charts, and books, to the authors and proprietors of such copies, during the times therein mentioned, and extending the benefits thereof to the arts of designing engraving, and etching, historical and other prints.'"

CHARLES A. INGERSOLL,
Clerk of the District of Connecticut.

A true copy of record, examined and sealed by me,

CHARLES A. INGERSOLL,
Clerk of the District of Connecticut.

Gift of Prof. C. A. Hoagland

PREFACE.

I SHOULD be blind indeed to the present state of publick feeling, not to be aware, that, in presenting this volume to the publick, I am exposing my name, humble as it is, to much obloquy. This, however, is a matter of little consequence. I have guarded myself against the more disagreeable effects of abuse, by endeavouring not to deserve it. My motives are good; and hence I am willing that the breath of political malice should, like the wind, "blow where it listeth," and I shall not stop to inquire "whence it cometh or whither it goeth."

The publick are perhaps apprized, that most of the following pages have been prepared at Lexington, near the residence of Mr. Clay. From this circumstance, I deem it proper to say, that Mr. C. is, in no degree, responsible for the manner or matter of a single paragraph in the volume. I have often had the pleasure of meeting him in society, but I am confident that he has communicated to me far less information, with regard to himself, than he would naturally have done, had he not known that I was preparing a sketch of his life. Some months ago, my Publishers applied to him, by letter, to know whether he was willing that his Biography should be given to the world. In his answer, he stated, that, as his acts were before his fellow-citizens, he could properly exercise no censorship or control over the comments, either of friends or enemies; but, that he must frankly acknowledge the repugnance of his own private feelings to the contemplated publication. Had I read this answer in season, I should have remained in New-England.

For many of the imperfections of this volume, the intelligent reader will require no apology. During the greater part of my stay in Kentucky, I have been unable, from indisposition, to endure the labour of writing; and hence, when my health has permitted, I have necessarily written with a degree of haste wholly inconsistent with the care and attention which, under other circumstances, I should certainly have bestowed upon my work. The necessity of sending the manuscript to New-England, sheet by sheet, without even allowing myself time to preserve copies of it, has undoubtedly led to some errors of plan and arrangement. The same necessity, together with that of limiting the volume to a given number of pages, has compelled me to omit several important incidents in the more recent portion of Mr. Clay's history.

I am not unaware, that the written history of a man, whose life exhibits no adventures, save those of an intellectual character, is seldom read with that enthusiasm, which is generally called forth by the story even of a second rate chieftain. The reading community are more fond of tracing the progress of action than of thought, although the latter is the source of the former. They can gaze with rapture upon the beauty or magnificence of the stream, without caring to understand the mysteries of the power by which the fountain-wave is cast up from its secret home. The achievements of the great intelligences of the age are too little regarded. If mankind would be careful to trace the mental histories of the mighty ones of the earth; if they would but mark the gradual unfolding of the principles, the powers, and the passions, of those great master spirits, that give form and pressure to the ages in which they live; each generation would be furnished with an amount of moral power, by which it might elevate itself into a nobler sphere of being, and leave behind it a long train of glory for the illumination of posterity. Henry Clay is such a man—one, whose moral and mental history should be regarded as a portion of the common riches of the human race—one of those noble-minded existences, from whom the world's happiness and glory are yet to spring; and there is more profit in scanning the mind of such a being—in marking the origin, the combination, and the development of its powerful elements—than in contem-

plating the successes of all the military conquerors, from Alexander to Napoleon.

I have already been freely charged with undertaking the Biography of Henry Clay, with a view to influence an approaching political election. That I have formed my opinions on the subject of that election is certainly true. That I wish, by every honourable means, to diffuse those opinions, is equally true; and if this sketch of what Mr. Clay has done—this imperfect detail of his struggles and his triumphs in his country's cause—shall have a tendency to quell the spirit of detraction, that, for years, has been pursuing him with a malice not of this world, the result of my labours will, thus far, be gratifying to my feelings. This is no place for the discussion of political topics; yet, I cannot forbear saying, that, if the personal enemies of Henry Clay succeed, to the extent of their present efforts, his achievements and his reward will bear a parallel to those of the Titan, who, for his divine gift to the human race, was doomed to undying agonies.

In the following work, I have, when speaking of Mr. Clay's intellectual efforts upon the floor of Congress, endeavoured to give, in most cases, a general idea of the arguments by which he sustained his opinions. I am sensible that I have, in no case, done these arguments justice; but, perhaps the faint and disfigured copies which I have given, may have the effect to turn the attention of some of my readers to the glorious originals. Whenever attempting an outline of Mr. C.'s arguments, I have used his phraseology or my own, according as I found either the one or the other best adapted to my purpose.

THE AUTHOR.

Lexington, Kentucky, November 14th, 1830.



BIOGRAPHY
OF
HENRY CLAY.

SECTION FIRST.

THE life of Mr. Clay is so thoroughly interwoven with the civil and political history of the country, that it would be impossible to do full justice to it, without embracing a range of topics and an exactness of detail, that would extend the present volume far beyond the limits which we must necessarily allot to it. During the last twenty years, scarce a single great and salutary measure has been adopted, upon which the signet of his wisdom is not set, and therefore we may well leave to the Nation's future historian the task of furnishing a minute record of his intellectual achievements. Our task will be of a less ambitious character.

Henry Clay was born in Hanover county, Virginia, on the 12th of April, 1777. His father, a clergyman of considerable talent and high respectability, died while Henry was yet a child. By the kindness of a gentleman in Virginia, we have been furnished with a variety of interesting anecdotes in relation to the ancestors of the subject of these memoirs, but we scarce deem it expedient to give them to the publick. We are writing the life of a man, whose fame, whatever it may be, is his own creation, and not an inheritance from his progenitors. His claims to

distinction are rested on something better than a penny's worth of ribbon transmitted from generation to generation—the light which hovers around his name, is something more glorious than the phosphorick ray, that gleams from amid the bones of a buried ancestry.

At an early age, Henry Clay, having obtained a common-school education, was placed in the office of Mr. Tinsley, Clerk of the High Court of Chancery, at Richmond, Virginia. In this situation, he met occasionally with the distinguished men of the State, and, at length, by his amiable deportment, and his striking displays of intellect, attracted the attention and gained the friendship of Chancellor Wythe and Governor Brooke, who, by their joint advice, persuaded him, at the age of nineteen, to undertake the study of the law. For this study he seemed peculiarly fitted, both by genius and inclination, and so assiduous was he in his application to it, that, at the age of twenty, he was admitted to practice. Soon afterward he went to Lexington, Kentucky, but, instead of entering immediately upon his professional career, still confined himself to his legal studies, with the determination of making himself thoroughly master of the great principles of law, before he assumed the responsibility of practice. Up to this period, he had never made an effort at public speaking, and was wholly unconscious of his own oratorical powers, although it is said, that his style of conversation was universally admired by his associates, for its extreme correctness and elegance. The first display of his powers of extemporaneous eloquence was made under peculiar circumstances. Soon after his removal to Lexington, he joined a Debating Society in that place, but continued, for some weeks, to attend its meetings, without offering to take part in its discussions. On one occasion, however, when the vote on an interesting question, which had been

the subject of debate, was about to be taken, Mr. Clay remarked, in a low but audible whisper, that the subject did not appear to him to have been exhausted. This remark was overheard by several of the members, who, from their high opinion of his powers, had long wished to persuade him to participate in the debates of the Society, and they addressed the Chairman simultaneously—“*Do not put the question yet—Mr. Clay will speak.*” The attention of the Society was now, of course, directed to Mr. Clay, who, not having sufficient confidence to resist the appeal, arose under extraordinary embarrassment, and commenced his speech, by saying—“*Gentlemen of the Jury.*” The members of the Society, all of whom were his personal friends, were unwilling to increase his agitation by seeming to take notice of his mistake, and he repeated it several times in a stammering tone, till, at length, he gradually gained confidence from his own efforts, and finally, concentrating all his vigorous and disciplined powers upon the subject in debate, he surprised his audience with a beauty and compass of voice, an exuberance of eloquence, and a force of argument, well worthy of a veteran Orator. A gentleman who heard this speech, has assured us, that it would hardly suffer in comparison with those brilliant efforts of its author, which have since thrilled like a voice of salvation through the country. It is scarcely necessary to add, that his reputation as a speaker was at once established, and that he immediately became a leading champion in all the debates of the Society. The circumstances attending the first speech of Mr. Clay, and that of Mr. Burke, were strikingly similar. We have somewhere read, that the latter orator, like the former, gained in a Debating Society the first knowledge of his own vast powers, and was there first visited by visions of coming glory.

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