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No. 3.

WILLIAM EARL CHATHAM.

PRIZE ESSAY BY THOMAS W. WILSON, '79, OF N. C.

Beneath Westminster Abbey's arched roof, with commanding mien, haughty features, and gesture of authority, stands the statue of Chatham. Visitors to the venerable old church may see in the hard lines of the cold marble the lifeless yet life-like reproduction of the striking form of the great statesman; but to all who have learned, in the pages of history, to comprehend the character and work of Chatham, this piece of stone must seem to fall very far short of bringing before their imaginations the real person of the great Commoner. A skillful sculptor might trace the lines of cunning policy and of secret scheming, the habitual air of authority upon the face of a Metternich, and we would recognize the man himself in his effigy; he might chisel the marks of cruel purpose, of uncurbed and defiant ambition, of pitiless despotism upon the spare visage of a Richelieu, and we could wish for no better reminder of the man; he might preserve the deep-cut wrinkles that spoke of thought, the firmly-set mouth that indicated an inflexible determination, upon the open countenance of a Hampden; but the marble must have the warmth

of life infused into it by the hand of God before it could resemble the dwelling of Chatham's high-wrought, passionate, many-sided nature.

It is indeed the diversity of his genius which first strikes us as we look back to the elder Pitt. In him consummate powers kept company with small weaknesses, strong wisdom stood side by side with weak folly, truthfulness and earnestness were contrasted with affectation and pedantry. To the careless student of history Pitt's character, made up as it was of qualities the very opposites of each other, might at first seem to have been inconsistent with itself. But it was a character of great power, because in reality of singular unity. His many talents, his capacity for good, his capacity for evil, his wisdom, his folly, his strength, his weakness, apparently at war among themselves, were reconciled and brought into harmony by the concentrating power of strong convictions. Prior to a thoughtful investigation of the history of his times, however, there would seem to be some cause for surprise that such a man as Pitt should have risen to the head of the state when he did; for few men's tempers ever clashed more roughly with their surroundings, ever sympathized less with the tastes and tendencies of the day, than did the temper of the great Commoner. Indeed he harmonized with his age in nothing but in affectation, and even his affectation had an earnestness and a frankness about it which did not belong to the all-pervading affectation of the society around him. He was in everything enthusiastically earnest, and his age laughed at earnestness; he was vehement, and his age affected coldness and indifference; he was sternly virtuous, scorning corruption, and his age was skeptical of virtue, nursing corruption; he had eager, burning beliefs and was actuated by a warm love for principle, and his age delighted in doubtings and questionings, was guided by no principle save that of expediency; he was used constantly and confidently to appeal to the higher, brighter, purer instincts of human nature, and his age doubted the existence of any such instincts, nay, even argued from its

own experience that all human nature was low and pulseless. He stood, in fact, almost alone—above the masses who, from sheer admiration, supported him, and in their enthusiasm idolized him; separated by all his tastes and sympathies from those classes of society with which he was naturally thrown by virtue of his high public station.

That a man thus isolated from his fellows should wield undisputed power over them seems at first beyond explanation. But as we study his character more closely the mystery which hangs around his ability to exercise unquestioned authority over those who were entirely out of sympathy with him clears rapidly away. The elements of his power are not far to seek. They lay almost altogether within himself. Outwardly he was every inch a leader. Every attitude, every gesture, each play of feature, each tone of voice bore witness of a will that must be master. And men were speedily convinced of the depth and strength of the nature thus outwardly shadowed forth. They bowed to a will which itself bent to no obstacle; they feared, even while they sneered at, the personal purity which gave such a keen edge to his attacks upon corrupt opponents. Their hearts instinctively warmed toward a man whose patriotism was so real. Selfish policies fell beneath the onsets of a man whose great intellect gave such resistless force to the convictions he so boldly avowed.

Pitt's nature was so passionate as to be almost tragic, rendering his career an essentially dramatic one. Passion indeed was the ground-work of his character; and because, led on by ardor, he trod steadily onward toward the ends he had marked out for himself, the name of Chatham has become to Englishmen a synonym of the highest statesmanship. And certainly, if we conceive of statesmanship as being that resolute and vigorous advance towards the realization of high, definite, and consistent aims which issues from the unreserved devotion of a strong intellect to the service of the state and to the solution of all the multiform problems of public policy, Pitt's statesmanship was

of the highest order. His devotion to his country's service was as intense as it was entire; and the intellect whose every power he brought to bear upon the direction of her affairs compassed its duty with a vigor commensurate with its colossal proportions. To enquire why Pitt so completely identified himself with the fortunes of England would be an invidious task. The motives which prompt to great deeds are often as hidden as the deeds themselves are conspicuous. Pitt's self-love was boundless, and small men can, therefore, see nothing in his high aims but an inordinate desire to gratify ambition, to exalt self. But to those who believe that there is some nobility in human nature, and especially to those who can see how small a part of his real character Pitt's egotism constituted, his ardent, absorbing patriotism is sufficient cause for the belief that there was much of true disinterestedness in his great career.

Each quality of Pitt's mind bespoke the ardor of his nature. Even his affectation and his pedantry, like his love and determination and pride, had caught the hue of passion. It was impossible for such a man to espouse any cause with coldness. With him every act must be an act of warm enthusiasm. His mind was strong and clear, his will was unswerving, his convictions were uncompromising, his imagination was powerful enough to invest all plans of national policy with a poetic charm, his confidence in himself was implicit, his love for his country was real and intense. Of course, then, he entered into the realities of public life with all the vigor of a large and earnest soul, with all the keen interest imparted by a vivid imagination, and it is not strange that his policy was well-defined and determined, straightforward and brilliant. The startling, far-reaching results of his administration, moulding the future history of the world, were such as appealed to the admiration and won the approbation of a people the very marrow of whose nature is a spirit of adventure, enterprise, conquest. What could be more impressive than a policy which, in winning India for the English Crown, built a great empire in the far East; in driving the French from

America, made our great republic a possibility in the far West; and, in lending constant and effective aid to Prussia's great Frederick, prepared the destiny of her greater Bismarck? Such having been the work of the elder Pitt, Englishmen may justly regard him as high among the greatest statesmen of a great race. And yet his errors were many and grave. They were, however, such as are incident upon a policy whose authors seek, with whole-souled ardor, with keen enthusiasm, to carry out great principles in all their integrity. Such a policy is always admirable in the abstract, but, in practice, is seldom safe. In a free government, founded upon public opinion, the governmental machinery is so nicely balanced, opposite parties, opposing forces of thought, generally exercise powers so nearly equal, that great principles must be worked out cautiously, step by step, seldom attaining triumphant ascendancy by a course of uninterrupted success—by only a few bold and rapid strokes. Public opinion must not be outstripped, but kept pace with. Time, indeed, has traced out to their end all the greater lines of policy which, in their beginnings, bore indications of the strokes of Pitt's decided hand. But he had lain in his grave many years before some of the most prominent measures which he had advocated were carried out in their fullness; and during his lifetime, while he was still a power in the state, even his towering influence fell powerless when he sought to force his country to follow the paths of foreign policy which he had cleared for her, and which he had shown to be the only roads to honor and safety. The enormous strain which war had brought upon the Treasury was thought to be cause for serious alarm, and the reaction thus brought about, seconded by the sinister influence of an unscrupulous king, thrust a ruinous peace upon the country. Pitt left the Cabinet to be re-stricken by the disease which finally sapped the strength of his imperial intellect. His life drew rapidly toward its close; but he had done enough to set a seal to his fame—enough to mark *that* as the highest type of statesmanship which, with conscientious purity, by an undeviating course, with cool judgment

and prompt determination, with a bright hope and a passionate patriotism, overpowering opposition, subordinating party to national interests, constantly and confidently seeks to build a great policy upon broad, deep, homogeneous principles. Such, with all its small follies and minor inconsistencies, despite disfiguring arrogance and overbearing pride, was the statesmanship of William Pitt.

If, because his statesmanship was whole-souled and dazzlingly successful, we do not wonder that William Pitt has been considered worthy of a place among the very first of English statesmen, still less can we be surprised that he has been called the first of Parliamentary orators. If the passionate intensity which entered so largely into the texture of his character lent so much of force, so much brilliant boldness, to his plans of administration, what masterly power must it have imparted to his oratory! Passion is the pith of eloquence. But it alone cannot make the consummate orator; for while it gives strength, it may be rugged and cumbersome. Imagination must be present to give it wings and a graceful flight. And one of the most striking features of Pitt's mind was "a poetic imaginativeness" which set his words fairly aglow with beauty. While vivid passion blazed out in his orations, the reality of the convictions he so fearlessly uttered hid the exaggeration of his diction, transfiguring all that was bombastic and ungraceful, and clothing with real grace his theatrical airs. Unfortunately our only trustworthy information concerning his oratorical powers comes from meagre tradition. Those who had seen his noble figure in striking action, his eagle eye alight with the thoughts that stirred within him, have left us only some scanty outlines of his more brilliant thoughts and most memorable flights of rhetoric. The main bodies of all his great speeches, those thoughts which constituted the warp and woof of his masterly statements of political truths and his moving appeals in behalf of a broad, patriotic, and consistent state policy, are irretrievably lost to us. But, aside from the unanimous testimony of his contemporaries, the fragmentary

utterances which we know to have fallen from his own lips bear ample witness to his unrivalled powers, being laden, even for us, with much of their old potency. Even upon the printed page, the echo of his impassioned accents seems yet to linger about his words. Although in his youthful studies of Demosthenes he had failed to catch the great Athenian's purity of style, he recognized, as the movings of a kindred spirit, his burning vehemence. Athens had at times responded as one man to the rapid, vehement, cogent sentences of Demosthenes; the British Parliament, the English nation, harkened with glad eagerness to the organ tones of Pitt's eloquence, and dared not disobey.

William Pitt was the second of that long line of great commoners of which gifted, wise, unscrupulous Robert Walpole was the first, and which has moulded English policy down to the day of shrewd, fickle, brilliant, plausible Benjamin Disraeli. In one respect Pitt resembled the now exalted Jew: he had an unhesitating, almost boundless confidence in himself, in the wisdom of his own aims. But Beaconsfield loves and has confidence in himself alone; Pitt loved and trusted the English people as well—for he was himself an Englishman!

With Pitt's acceptance of an earldom not only his official power but also much of his innate greatness passed away. Disease had unmanned him, and he refused to aid his country at a time of sorest need, thus, in a moment of folly, well nigh undoing the great work of a memorable lifetime. William Pitt was a noble statesman; the Earl of Chatham was a noble ruin. But in his death we catch a faint glimmer of his old manhood. Under the deepening shadow of a gathering storm we obtain a last glimpse of Chatham, as he stands, himself a wreck, holding up before a blind Ministry a picture of the dark ruin which was awaiting them. With some of his old haughtiness the austere old man rises to answer one who had dared to reply to him, and falls, never to rise again.