

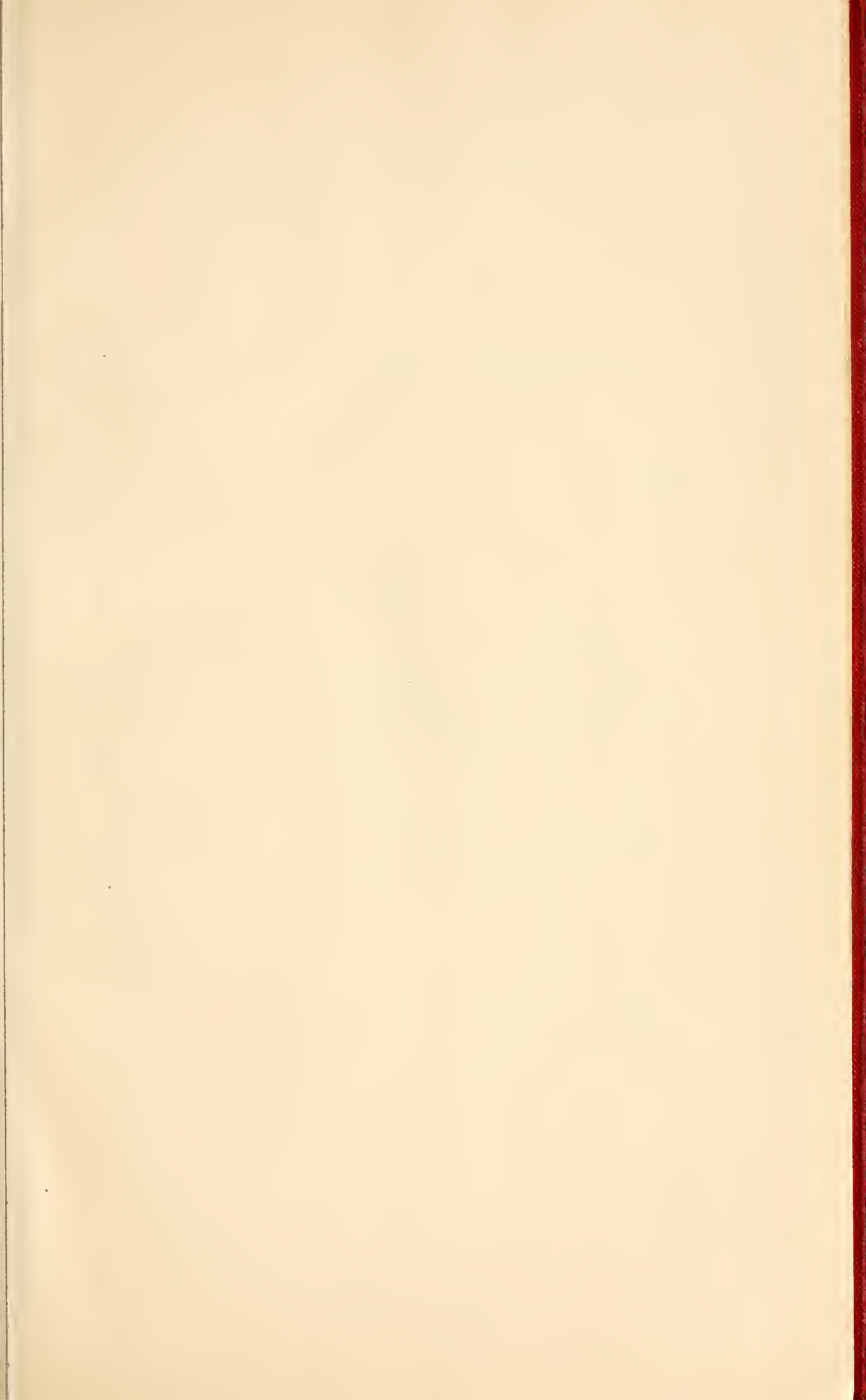
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THE LIFE AND TIMES
OF
WILLIAM HARRIS CRAWFORD,
OF GEORGIA.

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AN ADDRESS

DELIVERED BY CHARLES N. WEST, A. M.,

BEFORE THE

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ADDRESS.

Mr. President and Gentlemen of the Society :

ABOUT sixty years ago, could you have strolled into the little court-room in the village of Lexington, near our Georgian Athens, you would have seen presiding as judge a very tall and strongly built man of somewhat more than middle age, but who, upon closer scrutiny, had the appearance of one who had grown older than his actual years. Observing him only very slightly, you would have said to yourself that this judge was apparently far above his bar of lawyers and his court-room company, and, had you known nothing of his history, you would have marveled how it had happened to him in life that such a man as he was should be there upon that bench.

A large, long head, with bold brow, from beneath which a pair of shrewd, kindly gray eyes looked straight at you,—seemingly straight through you—a large nose, firm compressed lips—the firmest lips you ever saw—full round chin, and strong jaw, made up a face too strong and commanding, but for that kindly expression in those bluish gray eyes. And those eyes! What a world of experience and thought

in them and in that characteristic mark between the brows! What firmness of intent and tenacity of purpose in that mouth, and the lower part of the face.

The court over which he presided was the ordinary rural Superior Court-room, that so many of you have often seen. In front of the clerk, a small saw-dust covered space filled with tables, at which sat the little local bar, and some circuit-riding lawyers—big guns from neighboring towns; behind them a crowd of countrymen sitting on rough pine benches, and intent on the proceedings, each with a certain cowl-like, cud-chewing movement of face; rustic sheriffs and rustic bailiffs walking around amid bar and juries—hats on for sign of office, and full of self-importance. From his high desk, down upon the scene of petty strife and perpetual small appeal to the weaknesses of the human heart, in jury assembled, looked this man, who would have had no fit place anywhere in that room except upon the judge's seat, and hardly seemed fitly placed there. He was not sixty years of age at the time of which I am speaking, but his life was already lived, and had for him nothing but memories. I think that often as he turned his head from the wearisome crowd, and gazed absently through the dingy little windows, his thoughts must have escaped from that dull environment, and carried him far away into strange scenes, in which he had played no small part with people whose names you may yet find in history.

About 1811, if vagrant curiosity had carried you into the Senate of the United States, or if you had gone there with a mind to hear Mr. James A. Bayard, of Delaware, or old John Gaillard, of South Carolina, you would have seen the same man whom I have described controlling the deliberations of the Senate as its president. There were no marks of age upon his countenance then ; but youth—determination—power.

While Bonaparte, with burning heart, was restlessly pacing the terraces of Elba, if you had been in France and were sufficiently conspicuous to ask presentation to Louis XVIII., our friend of the court-room would have been the proper person there to do this service for you as the American Minister to the Tuilleries ; and no one in Paris could half so well commend you—only a semi-barbarian—to Mme. de Stael as her friend, that man, one of the gayest of diplomats there.

If in 1820 you had been allowed to see the Cabinet of President Monroe in council met, you would perhaps have thought it very stupid. Mr. Monroe was not inspiring ; John C. Calhoun was very stately ; and the satisfying goodness of John Quincy Adams, Secretary of State, was always chilling. But a strong, quick step might be heard, and the man of the court would stride in, breezy—alert—towering six feet three ; and forthwith the Cabinet would brighten, and look as if something quite pleasant had befallen each of them, except John Quincy, who would afterwards go home

with black rage and despair tugging at his heart because all men so loved the Secretary of the Treasury, even to the intolerable point of wishing to make him President.

Such were some of the scenes through which the absent thought of the Superior Court judge must have wandered at times. His name was William Harris Crawford, of Georgia. He achieved no great feat in statesmanship. He wrote no page of original thought that is now read, or which in any likelihood has ever been seen by anyone in this room. He lived an active, busy, bustling life, and died, leaving little else than personal memories behind him—memories which have so far passed away that his name now evokes nothing more than a vague recollection that some such man once lived. Yet he was the ablest, greatest man ever in this State; and it will be my task to-night to bring him back to us for a short half hour; to clothe his name with circumstances of fact; and to call back from tradition and the criticisms of friends and foes a trace—only a trace, perhaps—of the powerful personality which once was his, and now is dead almost beyond recall.

Georgia claims Mr. Crawford as her son, and his affection for her affords certainly some color for her claim. She cannot say that she gave him the honors that he received. She cannot even urge in his case the most dubious of all preferences shown by a distinguished child—that of birth upon her soil—a mark of

approval which the person most concerned cannot very well either prevent or confer, but which nevertheless seems to be as highly esteemed by most nationalities as if the wise infant had so decided. But to such honor as may be derived from Crawford's birth Virginia is really entitled ; and such is the curious strength of the particular national vanity to which I have just adverted, that this circumstance of his advent in the State of the "Mother of Presidents" had afterwards far more to do with his favor in the eyes of a Congressional caucus than any assistance received from his adopted State.

Mr. Crawford having been born in Amherst County, Virginia, in 1771, in 1779 his family removed to Edgefield County, South Carolina, and in 1783 to Columbia County, Georgia. History records the name of neither his father nor mother, while assuredly the industrious genealogist inquiring of the many reputable people of this State connected by blood or marriage with the Crawford family, would find no mystery in his search for either. They were certainly Scotch people of excellent origin and character. Georgia became their final home, and there, near the banks of what was then the crystal Savannah, they passed the remainder of their toilsome days, and reared a family of six lusty sons of great size, one of them only of great mental stature, and with him solely we have to do.

You can easily fancy the scenes of young Crawford's early life. The Revolutionary War was hardly over

when the family settled in Georgia, and a tide of immigration was pouring south into the lovely country north of Augusta. We may suppose without danger of mistake that the Crawfords were almost pioneers in Columbia County, so far as permanent settlement is concerned ; and it is certain that the future statesman's youthful days were passed in the midst of those scenes of rudeness and hardship which are inseparable from the opening of a country by the advance guard. As a lad he followed the plow with his stalwart brothers, but, fortunately for his education, his county was favored by the residence there of an excellent teacher in the person of Dr. Moses Waddel, to whom Crawford first became pupil, and, afterwards, assistant. Subsequently he taught school in Augusta, at the famous old Richmond Academy, until 1799, when, having in the meantime studied law, he was admitted to the bar, and removed to Lexington, in Oglethorpe County, not many miles away from his old home, or from the principal town of that portion of the State. Augusta itself was then scarcely more than a large village—a small straggling town along the river bank—to which the interior farmers, not then very many or very prosperous, but plain, hardworking country folk, laboriously carried their produce in carts, to bring back with them their economical purchases ; and the adjoining counties and villages, while rapidly opening up and developing under the tide of life pouring over the Savannah river, resembled in none of the circumstances

of living that cotton belt of Georgia which we have known. Masses of forest stretched westward from the river, broken only by an occasional clearing made by such people as Crawford's family, and crossed by very few and rough roads; until, not far north of the small hamlet to which Crawford had removed, was reached the wild domain still possessed by the Creeks and Cherokees.

An infant before the Revolutionary war—a lad in its hard times—and a young man in the rough settling day of the eastern counties, we cannot suppose that Crawford commenced his career with much of what we now consider personal cultivation. Indeed, uncontradicted tradition attributes to him, during the course of his whole life, a want of refinement,—a disqualification which brings his natural abilities into only sharper outline, when we realize, that, so born and bred, he afterwards became rather a favorite in that foreign capital which esteemed refinement and elegance of manner the highest of virtues, and in which a *faux pas* in etiquette was worse than a crime.

He was not altogether unknown to the people of the State when he commenced to practice law. Not only had he, as a teacher in a very popular school, before the days of moral suasion, established close relations with many of its young men, but he had come before the people in one political matter of the greatest gravity. There was great excitement in Georgia in those days, concerning what is known as the Yazoo

fraud. Georgia had a splendid empire of land westward, even to the Mississippi, upon which greedy eyes had fastened. Eyes from Virginia—eyes from South Carolina—no lack of similar eyes from Georgia herself—all covetous, hungry, wolf-like. Very pliable legislatures to be found, and a Governor Matthews, with honest intentions, perhaps, and undoubted personal bravery, but without sufficient capacity to withstand subtle assaults upon his mind. Now here were admirable opportunities for personal work and artful influences—not unlike development days again in Georgia after 1866. Personal work and influences—no doubt termed energy and enterprise by the owners of the multitudinous greedy eyes—had due effect upon persuadable legislatures and befogged Governor, and the State's empire was shared out liberally, to the great disgust of most Georgians, some of whom—many of whom—we may hope were honest, and many we may be sure were mournful, chiefly because no slice of the loaf had come to them. But honest or covetous, patriotic or revengeful, a fine ferment arose—Georgia in a turmoil. One Senator, James Gunn, backing the owners of the greedy eyes; the other, James Jackson, resigning his seat to hurry home and fight the industrious developers. I think that in these days Jackson would have staid in Washington, and let the other men do the fighting. But home he came, and wrote and talked, and then and thus came on hotter wrath and a new legislature, who undid—as far as new

steps could undo the old—the canny work of the last; and then with solemn procession and formal proclamation consigned to fire—some say to fire drawn from Heaven—the bill and act, which had been the State's visible outcome of the Yazoo fraud. What delight must young Crawford have found in all this fury and ferment over patent bribery and corruptible legislatures. Being young, of course he was on the patriotic side; and while still a school teacher, in the winter of 1795 addressed a petition to the Governor, intended to stiffen up that weak gubernatorial spine and to enlighten that pondering brain against fatal compliance with the wishes of the covetous. But while the petition was fruitless, its writer was not forgotten; for as soon as he came to the bar, and yet unknown as a lawyer, he and Marbury were appointed to digest the laws of this State—a distinction clearly attributable to conspicuousness not derived from his own profession.

A classical scholar, a lawyer, and not disinclined to take a hand in matters political, we need not be surprised to find Crawford in 1802 in the legislature, where he sat until 1806, when, upon the death of Senator George Jones, he was elected Senator of the United States in his place.

In this election Mr. Crawford may be said to have literally fought his way. Duels were of course a common mode of settlement of disputes, and he had the bad fortune to kill one bully by the name of Van Allen, a first cousin of Martin Van Buren; and to be

wounded by another, afterwards governor of this State. To Governor Clark he was subsequently indebted for much distress, for he always remained Crawford's bitter enemy, and the fountain of all sorts of calumnies and murderous assaults on his character. In Crawford's worse contest, while the presidency was trembling in the balance, there came from Georgia a poisonous arrow shot by Clark with intent to kill. There is some satisfaction in recording that although the presidency was not for Crawford, it was not Clark's shaft that brought down the mighty game.

Through easy ways, or rough ways, to the Senate Crawford went. Now here was a real man, given by Georgia to the country—the best man that Georgia ever had—with full complement of qualities for greatness in him, but with little more when the gift was made. Just thirty-four years old—not seven years from his teacher's desk, what political views did he have to commend him in the highest council. Fancy how far off the Capital really was. By land the journey there from Georgia required more time than now to go around the world. No daily paper in the up-country recording the views of political parties: political thinkers not in touch with each other, either to agree or to expose: no crystalization of men or thought, in Georgia, in matters national. Nothing but the obsolete remains of former contests over federalism, become now in most men's minds a mere tradition since the adoption of a Federal Constitution,

however immortal and imperishably true many of the rejected contentions may have been and may yet show themselves to be.

The stock of political views held by Crawford when he went to the Senate, upon such matters as finance, political economy, foreign relations, and naval and war administration, would not to-day suffice for the editorial management of a country weekly. But the big brain was there, and his career shows that he took in and assimilated political knowledge with the rapidity of a perfect mental digestion. Only notice his strides as he walks in ways political, towering among his brother Senators. A tyro in politics—in five years President of the Senate. An infant in foreign affairs—in seven years an excellent Minister to France. A novice in matters of war—in nine years an acceptable Secretary of War. Certainly ignorant of all finance—in ten years a most successful administrator of the Treasury. That present, the rough diamond so given by Georgia to the country was never returned to the keeping of the State until worn out, its brilliancy gone, and nearly useless. Five years only the representative of the State—always after that the nation's man, until he was able to serve the nation no longer. The country saw that it had in him a man beyond most men—of such mind, and nerve, and heart, that he could remain no State's man, but belonged to the largest sphere of work for which men were born; and the nation took him from

the State, and kept him in her service, in this or that high office, and would have made him its chief; and never did he cease to rise, and never did he go back one step in his wonderful career, until his splendid frame gave way.

Doubtless, deep and laborious digging into the records of the Senate in those seven years of his life there will show what Crawford learned to think about many matters. Labor useless enough to us for the purposes of this search for the man; revealing, if we could follow and sum up his utterances, some glimpses perhaps of the great capacity which made him soon acknowledged to be the first among men of his sort: but needless digging in the presence of the great fact of a luminous intelligence always equal to the step before him. In 1812 he was elected President *pro tem.* of the Senate upon the sickness of Vice-President Clinton. English aggression was at that time rampant, as it had been for years; and during those years war was always impending. Between Bonaparte absorbent of the earth, and England combining, cajoling, bribing, persuading, compelling the earth against Bonaparte, what escape was there for the poor little much despised republic? First Citizen Genet almost forced her into arms against France; and afterwards she could not decently evade the issue with France's foe, for which in truth that foe was little to blame. For that war Crawford was not at first in-

clined, but he finally believed it to be an inevitable necessity, and the sooner over the better.

If the traditions handed down in writing by men who knew him and his times well are to be believed, President Madison quickly recognized in him the breadth of mind which rapidly changed Crawford—an uninformed countryman from Georgia—into a statesman, able to understand and deal with the greatest international affairs: and frequently sought, obtained, and relied upon his advice. The probability of the truth of this tradition is enhanced by the fact that in 1813 Madison offered Mr. Crawford the portfolio of War, which for some reason not known to me was declined. Little glory had come to the army out of that war, and little was yet to come until Jackson's victory at New Orleans after the peace was signed; and it may be that Crawford saw in the peculiar features of the army of this country an undertaking against which any man's genius would be feeble and incompetent until the people would be more persuaded to resign individual rights for the public safety. At any rate, he declined and was not responsible for the absurd military failures of the war: but, instead of the office so refused, accepted, in April, 1813, the appointment of Minister to France.

Mr. Crawford arrived at Lorient, France, on July 11, 1813, having crossed the ocean on board the United States brig *Argus*. What were his adventures in eluding British cruisers history does not re-

cord, but to France he got safely, and found it in a momentous year. Napoleon's mistakes, of the sort that caused his ruin, had all been made, and future mistakes scarcely could count against him.

Spain, with its record of failures, blunders, savage coercion, and desperate Saragossa, lay behind him. Burning Moscow, and a forlorn escape of gaunt and starving remnants of a grand army over snowy wastes were of the last year's wretched work. All Europe, except Austria and Saxony, had joined hands against him; and Austria and Saxony counted the days until they could safely turn their coats. Lutzen and Bautzen had been hardly fought, in vain; and the tiger at bay was facing his enemies in armistice before closing in final grapple.

When Crawford arrived in Paris, Austria had not turned against her Corsican son-in-law, and Dresden had not been fought. All France was a great military camp. The conscripts, down to the boys of sixteen years, had gone to lay their bones in German fields. The *Moniteur* was daily resounding the proclamations, appeals and lying bulletins of the great gladiator. France, ever self-deceived, was hopeful still of her emperor's success; proud of his glory, and agonized over her bankruptcy in money and men. Her women were mourning their lost children, and, with hearts almost stilled from fear, awaited the next day's news. They said, "So the cold came and our army perished. And now those who are leaving us are the same as already dead."

Says a charming writer :

“ On the 8th of January a large placard was posted on the town hall stating that the emperor would levy, after a *Senatus Consultus*, as they said in those days, in the first place, 150,000 conscripts of 1813 ; then 100 cohorts of the first call of 1812, who thought they had already escaped ; then 100,000 conscripts of from 1809 to 1812, and so on to the end. So that every loophole was closed, and we would have a larger army than before the Russian expedition.”

Such was the condition of France, and its desperate mind outside of Paris, while Crawford was journeying from Lorient to Paris, where he arrived on July 15th. But Paris was gay, as Paris has always been gay, except in memorable days not so long ago ; and Crawford, though not for some time officially received by the emperor, and having done those things that American ministers should do, made the most of Paris. Only the records of state departments will show why he was not received at once ; and it affords a curious instance of the absolutely personal government of Bonaparte.

There was practically no ministry of foreign affairs in Paris, the Duke de Bassano, who was permitted to masquerade as foreign minister, being kept by Napoleon at his hand, so that he could know and control every word to foreign powers. He himself had things upon his mind at Dresden and Leipsic of a kind that gave him no time to think of a modest American

minister, and it was November before he hastily got back to Paris and civil affairs, when at last Crawford was pleasantly received.

The records of our own state department show of this reception that, as he had expected, his first interview with the duke took place on the 13th of November, and was followed on the next day by his official reception, which, as he wrote on the 19th, "was intended to be as acceptable to me as it could be made."

Not only did the emperor acquit himself of the common official amenities, but took pains, "after mass," says Crawford, "to be particularly pleasant with the minister plenipotentiary, asking him a number of questions, and praising the manner in which our contention with Great Britain had been conducted, and making flattering mention of the many great men of the United States." And thus the new minister was received into the good graces of the moribund empire, the emperor complimenting the Americans present upon the grand air of their representative.*

Tradition hands down to us for Crawford a great social success in Paris, and books have recorded the fact without circumstances. One patriotic admirer has written that he gained the favor of Parisian society by his open manners and instructive conversation.

Crawford was so apt, and fell in so easily with things around him that we find no difficulty about the open manners; and if we had any reason to think that he

* Parton's Life of Andrew Jackson, p. 345.

spoke French, we might easily credit the instructive conversation. Perhaps he acquired it while he was awaiting the return of the peripatetic ministry of foreign affairs; but I fear that we must suspect that his conquests and friendships, like those of most American ministers, were confined to those persons who spoke his own language. Still they were many in Paris; enough to create a sufficiently large society for the truth, in our eyes, of the statement that he was much liked, even though of "limited learning and unpolished manners," as another quite partial writer* puts it. The fact must be that his gaiety of heart and bonhommie served him in place of that refinement so dearly loved by Frenchmen.

The manners of the better class of Americans never did,—even to later times than those of Crawford,—commend themselves to the thorough Parisian. How that poor Frenchman, the Chevalier de Bacourt, must have suffered in that horrid American contact when he was minister at Washington as late as 1842. He writhes in his agony of spirit, and caps the climax of his miseries by an account of a state dinner of President Tyler, speaking thus of Mr. Webster, the secretary of state :

"The Madeira wine, of which he drank entirely too much, made him, not only amiable in the American sense, but most tenderly affectionate. He took my arms with both hands and said, 'My dear Bacourt,

* Ex-Gov. George R. Gilmer's "Georgians."

I am so glad to see you to-night. More so than I ever felt at any other time. I do not know why. Perhaps I have not been so friendly with you as I ought to have been ; but if you are willing, we will become bosom friends. You will find me a good comrade. Come and see me every day without ceremony. It will give me great pleasure, my dear Bacourt, for really I think you are charming.' ”

“ This flattering declaration was made with a drunken stammer, and—shall I dare to say it?—with hiccoughs, which made it very disagreeable to be near this minister of foreign affairs.”

Bacourt was finical and critical, but the fact remains that, while America could justly be proud of its youthful vigor and vitality ; of its growth and pluck ; of its brains and energy, the manners of its politicians were not those in which Parisian society rejoiced. Even Thackeray—who was himself of rough ways, though of gentle heart—even Thackeray, in no wise averse to, or critical of, the American gentleman, cannot forbear a caricature of an American minister to France :

“ So he, the doctor, nodded to the queen of France, but kept his hat on as he faced the French monarch, and did not cease whittling the cane he carried in his hand. ‘ I was waiting for you, sir,’ the king said peevishly, in spite of the alarmed pressure that the queen gave his royal arm. ‘ The business of the republic, sire, must take precedence even of your majesty’s wishes,’ replied Dr. Franklin. ‘ When I was a poor printer’s boy, and ran errands, no lad could be more punct-

ual than poor Ben Franklin; but all other things must yield to the service of the United States of North America. I have done. What would you, sire?' And the intrepid republican eyed the monarch with a serene and easy dignity which made the descendant of St. Louis feel ill at ease."

Satire aside, we have sufficient accounts of American statesmen abroad to let us realize the grain of truth in the picture of American stalwartness.

But it behooves a speaker to this society to be a little tender in his remarks concerning the personal carriage and behavior of American ministers, remembering that we have rejoiced in the possession of four such gentlemen.

As to them we have no authentic accounts, and must have recourse to charitable surmises.

In Crawford's case we know not only what he was, and what he would be likely to have done, but, if time permitted, more than one vivid picture of him in that rôle could be given, betraying the free and easy feeling which always characterized him wherever he was.

To my mind, the period of Crawford's stay in Paris presents itself as the most stirring and interesting time of recent centuries. In the scant two years of his residence there, he saw France driven back across the Rhine, desperately battling with combined and advancing Europe; Napoleon at bay, and no one so wise as even then to say whether he would be finally crushed, or would, by some wonderful stroke of his

immense genius free himself, and defeat combined Europe. He saw sad Fontainebleau ; Napoleon ruined ; abdicating ; made emperor of a little island ; Marie Louise gone, never to see her throne again. He saw Alexander I., Francis of Austria, Frederick William of Prussia, Talleyrand, and all the great powers in congress assembled, deciding the future of Europe. He was there when the creole empress, the type and embodiment of American creole grace and beauty, was dying, sustained, enwrapt and transfigured to the last breath by her love for the merciless man who loved yet deserted her, her fading accents caught by Napoleon's Russian foe, weeping by her bedside. He saw Louis XVIII. restored, with his horde of bankrupt emigrants ; the new reign with its processions and pious expiations. He saw Napoleon's *militaires*, with their war-worn faces and drooping moustachios wandering through France, homeless, despised and starving. He saw Lafayette and Madam De Stael, and became their intimate friend. He saw all Paris shouting "*Vive le roi*," and the next day crying just as lustily, "*Vive l'empereur*."

He saw Ney sent out to oppose the invader, and witnessed his return by the emperor's side. He saw the Bourbons again fugitives from the kingdom, and the beginning of the famous Hundred Days ; and these things seen, that foreign life ended for him.

During the Hundred Days he returned to his own country and never went abroad again.

Were not those scenes notable things for the superior court Judge to recall in that little court-room when he would sit, weary of petty business, upon his small judicial throne?

When Crawford came back to the United States Mr. Madison was still the president, and he hastened to offer to the returning minister the same portfolio of war which he had declined in 1816, and which he ³ now accepted. But his tenure of this office was very short; for, by the election of 1816, Mr. Monroe, becoming president, selected Mr. Crawford for his secretary of the treasury, with John Quincy Adams, secretary of state, and John C. Calhoun, secretary of war. Thus in the president's cabinet were three men, each of whom hoped to succeed his chief.

It is difficult to fancy men of more opposite characteristics than the secretary of state and the secretary of the treasury. Adams,—cold, severe, unapproachable, with burning ambition, and fear that his disposition was such as would certainly exclude him.

Crawford,—open, gay: already so much the favorite that he had been a caucus candidate before Monroe's nomination, and was deemed the latter's sure successor.

The Puritan could never understand Crawford's command of men and his hold upon their hearts. To him it seemed mere jugglery, and, as he would gloomily

stand upon the Capitol steps, wrapped in his own morbid fancies, and see Crawford march gaily off with some brother statesman, arm-in-arm, and roaring with laughter over some good story or ridiculous joke, in the blackness of his despair he would murmur to himself that it was "intrigue, all intrigue," and would go home to his closet and record his venom, enforced by pious observations, and religious verses.

They sat together in the same cabinet for eight years, in every hour of which Adams hated Crawford with a measureless hatred,—of which we will see something again.

Residence abroad must have been of great service to Crawford. The change was noticed by his friends at home, one of whom writes that when he returned home his appearance and manners made him the most imposing gentleman ever seen in Georgia. Fancy the appearance of the young country lawyer from upper Georgia when he went to Washington, in 1807; and then picture to yourself the same adaptive man after seven years in the Senate, and two such years as I have mentioned in France, and it may not be difficult to believe in the friend's impression.

A little circumstance shows how completely Crawford suited himself to his environment. During his life in Washington as secretary of the treasury he used a service of silver so handsome that when he went back finally to Georgia it was bought by the government for the White House. His needs may

have required the sale, but that service would, in no event, have gone with him to Georgia. Oglethorpe County was no place for silver services, and Crawford knew too well that amongst those people there was no room for that sort of style, if he had any political hopes, and those hopes he still must have had.

I suppose that when he returned from Paris he was in the best of his life and powers. Only forty-three years of age, with wide experience, his abilities enlarged by varied use, he was fit for the best and hardest work that an American statesman can be called to do; and this was shown by his discharge of the duties of the treasury for eight years. Parton says of him at that time: "His position, in fact, was then so commanding and advantageous that his not reaching the presidency prior was either that he disdained intrigue or was an unskillful politician."*

In the beginning Adams chuckled over the outlook for the secretary of the treasury and even hoped that he would not rise to the difficulties.

"The banks are breaking all over the country," says he, "some in a sneaking and some in an impudent manner. Some with sophisticating evasions, and others with the front of highwaymen. Our greatest evil is the question between debtor and creditor, into which the banks have plunged us deeper than would have been possible without them. The bank debtors are everywhere so numerous and powerful that they

* Parton's Life of Andrew Jackson, p. 345.

control the newspapers throughout the Union, and give the discussion a turn extremely erroneous and prostrate every principle of political economy. Crawford has labors and perils enough before him in the management of the finances for the next three years."

But he did manage those finances with consummate skill and perfect success and surmounted every peril; and his administration of the treasury, commencing in clouds and storms, ended in clear skies and brilliant sunshine.

Seen at this distance the figures that surrounded him in those eight years loom up like far away shores in peaceful profile, and not until you come to read contemporaneous history can you fancy the agitations and intrigues that kept them in restless movement. Parties then had not crystallized around great principles, but personal qualities, personal ambitions, personal followings and personal attacks were the characteristics of the contests for the greatest prize far more than now. Even now, when party is everything, and men are least considered, the eye of the country is constantly attracted by and turned upon the personal behavior of prominent men; sometimes in the political family of the man they seek to supplant. But in 1820 and 1824 party differences were almost dead, and the struggle was between the friends of Clay, Calhoun, Jackson, Adams and Crawford. The friends of each reviled, intrigued against and freely lied about

the others; and it may be said with regret that the principals were not free from taint.

In all this ignoble contention it is with pleasure that we can feel that the Georgian bore himself like a man, and though ever attacked by the small pack who attended the heels of their particular hero, came out with untarnished reputation. Such assaults were usually made in private, from mouth to mouth; seldom through the public prints. But Crawford was so conspicuous and dangerous an enemy that he became an exception.

A man by the name of Ninian Edwards, an Illinois politician of note, an ex-senator, and partisan of Adams, preferred charges against him to the senate, characterizing his administration of the treasury as corrupt.

A special committee was appointed, upon which were Webster, and John Randolph, of Roanoke; and after a thorough examination Crawford was completely exonerated. This incident is labelled in history as the "A. B. plot," and it may give some satisfaction to know that after the verdict was rendered the author of the plot, who had just been appointed governor of a territory, was forced to resign, and disappeared from national public and political life forever.

It has been generally supposed that Mr. Crawford's chief opportunity for the presidency arose in the contest of 1824. But such was not the case. When he returned from France, in 1815, and became secretary

of war in Mr. Madison's cabinet, it lay with him entirely whether he should be president or not.

In 1815 he and Mr. Monroe were rivals for the nomination of the congressional caucus of what was known as the Republican party.

Dr. Jabez Hammond, referring to this contest in his "Political History of New York," and comparing the aspirants, says :

"William H. Crawford was a self-made man. He was possessed of a vigorous intellect, strictly honest and honorable in his political conduct, sternly independent, and of great decision of character. On the other hand, Mr. Monroe, although he had been long in public life, a considerable part of which consisted in the execution of diplomatic agencies, was, speaking of him as a candidate for the presidency, not distinguished for vigor of intellect, or for decision of character, independence of action, or indeed for any extraordinary public services. He made no pretensions to distinction as a writer, or eloquence as a public speaker. He seems to have owed his success in life to great caution, prudence, and deliberation in everything he said or did."

Dr. Hammond was a member of that caucus, and remarks that "When Congress first assembled, as between Crawford and Monroe, I have not a particle of doubt that a majority of the Republican members were for the former. But the caucus was put off from time to time, until the session was considerably advanced, and such was the influence of the administra-

tion on its own friends, or from other causes unknown to me, when the grand caucus was held Mr. Crawford received fifty-four votes and Mr. Monroe sixty-five, who was therefore nominated for president.

“Governor Tompkins was nominated for vice-president. Of the members from New York, I believe that Messrs. Irving, Throop and Birdseye were the only ones who voted for Monroe.”

There seems no room to doubt that the election of Mr. Monroe was chiefly due to Mr. Crawford’s voluntary postponement of his claims. In effect he declined the nomination in favor of Mr. Monroe, and this procedure, together with the show of strength made by his adherents in the caucus, was supposed to place him before all others in the line of succession.*

I have already alluded to Crawford’s bitterest enemy. It is curious to see how hatred for the brilliant statesman had possessed the Puritan’s heart. If it had died its natural death—if Mr. Adams had simply disliked the other man as one man may detest another, and then,—successful or failing in ambition,—passed on his way, leaving the bitterness of feeling to fade away from memory as do all emotions of any one man, I would not now speak of this matter. But it was his habit, for good or bad, to keep a diary of his life, in which he freely noted his opinions of his fellow men, with self-gratulation upon his own performances and successes. In those pages his feelings toward Craw-

* Parton’s Life of Andrew Jackson.

ford occupy a prominent place, and his son* has seen fit to publish them. You will find them in any large library. They are upon our own shelves, and ten thousand readers know Mr. Crawford by its pages to one in any other way.

Having thus freely given them to the world, I am at liberty to speak of the feeling so freely displayed and published.

Nothing could exceed its intensity. It was the fruit of political jealousy heightened by the constant sight of an attractive rival and morbid introspection.

Says he at one time in his diary, "Crawford was made a candidate against Monroe, and in the legislative caucus nearly outvoted him. He therefore considers himself as the natural successor, and has made all his arrangements accordingly."

And, at another, turning his melancholy thoughts in upon himself, he felt, and said as the opinion of the world, "The result is, that I am a man of reserved, cold, austere and forbidding manners. My political adversaries say a gloomy misanthrope; and my personal enemies an unsocial savage. With a knowledge of the actual defect in my character, I have not the pliability to reform it."

Here was cause enough for hate—which requires neither logic nor reason.

The picture is so forbidding that I would not trouble you with its recorded and published expression but

* Hon. Charles Francis Adams.

for a curious conclusion which the merest justice requires me to notice. The years from 1816 to 1824 were spent in leaving to posterity—intentionally and avowedly to posterity—his dislike of and opinions concerning his great rival. You will find them liberally besprinkling the pages which he bequeathed to his children, and I quote incidentally a few of the extracts here and there found, in which this statesman—afterward president of the United States—made known his opinions in this solemn way to those of his own blood.

I quote his exact language. Says he :

“The important and critical interests of the country are those, the management of which belongs to the department of state. Those incidental to the treasury are in a state which would give an able financier an opportunity to display his talents ; but Crawford has no talents as a financier. He is just and barely equal to the current routine of the business of his office. His talent is intrigue.”

And at another time :

“Crawford is not unwilling to see this disagreement between the president and congress fester and inflame. It will all turn to his account.”

“Aug. 19, 1820. The delays and hesitation of the president and the connivance of Crawford in regard to these most infamous transactions have forced me to push the subject again and again.”

"Crawford's intense passion is unbridled ambition, and he has great address in his conduct, though he has exposed to so many the nakedness of his heart that he cannot be called very profound. His ambition has been inflamed by success far beyond either his services or talents; the former of which are very slight, and the latter much over-rated."

And again:

"Crawford's efforts to screen Mitchell from punishment are marked with desperation. It is impossible he should believe him innocent, but at heart he thinks slave smuggling no crime, and supposes his own political fortune depends upon Mitchell being cleared. The whole transaction is a succession of malpractices to screen Mitchell from punishment."

And again:

"They have been the uniform supporters and champions of the president and his administration against that disguised and insidious but most venomous opposition which Crawford has pursued against it."

And mark you, this remark is made as to the conduct of the secretary of the treasury concerning his own chief's administration.

And again:

"Crawford has been a worm preying upon the vitals of the administration within its own body."

And again :

"The pamphlet has produced an effect unfavorable to Crawford's reputation as a man, and the present state of the treasury does him no credit as a financier."

And again :

"A worthless and desperate man against whom I have been compelled to testify in a court of justice, attempts in the face of his own conscience to save himself from infamy by discrediting my testimony, and finds in Mr. Crawford a ready and willing auxiliary, to support him in this scandalous purpose. Crawford solemnly deposes in a court of justice that which is not true."

He adds a grudging concession to conscience :

"I cannot yet bring myself to believe that it has been by wilful falsehood. . . . Crawford's deposition throughout is marked by a prevaricating spirit of embarrassment."

But enough of such quotations, selected almost at random from many similar. They show with precision what Mr. Adams wished his posterity to believe was—really and truly, and in the privacy of communion with his own heart, and, it may be said from the presence of numerous calls upon his Maker, in communion with his God,—his faith. He wrote it, kept it, and handed it down to posterity without a single word to show that at any time afterwards he had changed

his mind or saw his errors of fact. Summed up briefly, they mean that he said and believed, or tried to believe, that Mr. Crawford was a man of small capacity, without financial ability; in fact, a mere intriguer. That he was treacherous, unfaithful to his chief, and an enemy of the cabinet of which he was a member. That he was false to the government; false to his associates; and false in the mere bearing of testimony. Incapable, a desperate intriguer, treacherous, deceitful and lying. That is what he wished posterity to believe of the man who was his rival. You will find no change in those sentiments down to the 9th day of February, 1825, when this recording angel was elected President of the United States. So far from any change of mind you will find the same venomous pen on the 28th day of December, 1827, while Crawford was presiding over his little court in Georgia, transmitting the same opinion in these words:

"Treachery of the deepest dye is at the bottom of Crawford's character. It was before his palsy, combined with strong mental powers little cultivated and a desperate energy of soul. The whole composition was more like Milton's fallen angels than any man I ever knew, except that Milton made his devils true to each other."

And now what is to be thought of this man, who, while so feeling and so writing, on the 10th day of February, 1825, offered the place of secretary of the treasury, a seat in his own cabinet, and the manage-

ment of the nation's finances to the man whom he has thus recorded in vitriolic phrases as guilty of incapacity, unscrupulousness, base treachery and perjury.

If the rest of the world had thought as Mr. Adams said he did; if Mr. Crawford had been esteemed in the same way by his chief—Mr. Monroe—and by the other public men with whom he was in daily contact, there might be some ground for the theory that in making this offer Mr. Adams yielded to political necessity and was merely weak. But such is not the case. He stands alone among his contemporaries in his views of Mr. Crawford. In his rage and jealousy he wrote feelings and thoughts untrue and unworthy of him. He did himself the injustice to hand down those expressions to his posterity, unchanged by subsequent reflection and a returning sense of justice; and so he has gone forth in print to the world the author of groundless, unqualified, and unretracted libels against an eminent man, whose chief fault was his prospect of success in the great race in which they were entered. But the truth and our opinions of the persons will not change the verdict of future readers of American biography upon the character of the great Georgian.

A man seldom appears to his own generation as he genuinely is. Some know one phase of his character, some another; few the same. As to living men you will hear unlimited differences of opinion from those

who know them best; and only shadowy, distorted reflections of the fact—the real fact of the veritable man—exist in the minds of those who know him only by repute. At hand and all around us are false views, mistaken opinions, narrow prejudices, foolish admirations, and unmerited approvals as to the living men we see, of sufficient mark or vigor to call for a personal judgment upon them. And then when generations have passed, and the acute lines of personality have become dim in the distance, nothing is left except the large acts which make up the figure seen, unless the sketch is filled out and perfected by contemporaneous minute evidence, to which the genuine man falls a helpless victim, or which surrounds him with a nimbus of perfection, as the witness may be an enemy or partisan friend—an Adams or a Boswell.

That minute evidence has been furnished concerning Crawford by Adams. Vouched for by the hand of a pious president of the United States, the offspring of jealous hate will be read and naturally accepted by the American student when the present earnest protest to this little Society will have died away forever, even should that protest by any chance have the good fortune of a single day's recollection. And we may rest assured that, notwithstanding that we are now able to see through those thousands of pages of bitter feeling to the genuine man there pilloried, that man will go down to history not our Crawford—the gay, brilliant, open and wise—but Adams's Crawford; the low, base, incapable, lying intriguer.

Do what we may we can never help it. The enemy has defaced one of God's noblest works for all human time.

Fortunately for Mr. Crawford's vindication at this late day before us—even this small part of a world, too easily fatigued by defensive exposures—he was not the solitary animosity nourished by John Quincy Adams's heart; and the whole of this painful subject and exhibition of the morose infirmity coloring the feeling of this president of the United States may be well summed up by one sentence which he himself has written, and which must always stand out as his unconscious and unreversed verdict upon himself. After Crawford was sleeping the sleep that knows no strife, nor jealousy, no success and no failures, and could trouble him no more, Adams wrote:

"But from the day that I quitted the walls of Harvard, H. G. Otis, Theophilus Parsons, Timothy Pickering, James A. Bayard, Henry Clay, Jonathan Russell, William H. Crawford, John C. Calhoun, Andrew Jackson, Daniel Webster, John Davis, W. B. Giles, and John Randolph, have used up their faculties in base and dirty tricks to thwart my progress in life and destroy my character."

In this conviction we may well leave him and his commentaries upon the great of his day. Some of these men were fairly decent and "indifferent honest." It is most unlikely that they were all his enemies; but if, in fact, they were, I suspect that the world

could not fail to think that they had indeed just cause for their dislike.

In most respects, however, Mr. Crawford's life in Washington was not only successful but exceedingly happy until he was stricken with paralysis, in the early part of 1824. Up to that moment there seems to have been no doubt in the minds of his contemporaries that he would be the next president. He was the favorite of the Republican party, so-called, in Congress, and was the nominee of the congressional caucus. He was opposed by Mr. Clay, General Jackson, Mr. Adams and Mr. Calhoun. It is wonderful to read the intriguing of that day—how they mined and counter-mined; bargained and out-bargained; bought and sold. It is certain that Mr. Crawford would have been elected but for a bargain consummated between the friends of Mr. Adams and Mr. Clay, by which Mr. Clay's friends voted for Mr. Adams, who was to make, and did actually make Mr. Clay his secretary of state—a bargain afterwards alluded to by John Randolph, on the floor of the House, as a combination between the "blackleg and the Puritan," which delicate expression found its event in a ball subsequently shot by Clay through Randolph's coat. While the combination was sufficient to have produced Mr. Crawford's defeat, many people have contended to this day that but for his ill health he would have been

elected. This I have not been able to verify, while it still remains certain that his health was also a sufficient consideration to have excluded him from the race. A very short time afterwards he resigned himself to the inevitable; and from that atmosphere of fierce contention and pestilential intrigue; of busy industry and national thought; of the hopes of friends and the fears of foes, he came back to the quiet and stillness of Georgia rural life, where, in 1827, he was appointed judge of the superior court of the circuit in which his home was situated.

Such a return must have been to him equal to death itself. He was in his prime when stricken; only fifty-two years; the most conspicuous figure of the administration, and full of buoyant life and sanguine and well founded hope. The future had in it for him the highest possibilities attainable in this country. To feel himself stricken down while yet his arm should be strong; to be bound hand and foot; to understand and know that while he was yet alive and might live for many years, the doors to the American political paradise, that for which he would cheerfully have given many years of his life, were closed. That the great future for him was gone must have been agony beyond expression—a veritable sentence of death, worse than death. It would be strange indeed if Crawford realized at once the length and breadth of this decree of living death, and the indications are too clear that realize it he did not. } His struggle with

hopeless fate was desperate. While friends watched with anxious eye and daily less of hope, he battled on. He could not bring his mind, or rather his heart, to believe that his vigor had fled forever. He would not retire from the contest; and the love and admiration and devotion of his friends clung to him and abided by him, and exhibited themselves at last in splendid fidelity, by forty-one congressional votes for the poor paralyzed statesman, in the final count for the presidency.

A pathetic account is given by a member of the caucus of the manner in which Mr. Crawford received the news of the action of Congress:

"Three of the warmest of the partisans of Crawford repaired to his residence to announce to him the sudden failure of all his hopes. Mr. Cobb was one of the three, but he dared not witness the shock of his chief's disappointment. The other two, Messrs. Macon and Lowery, went into the room of the ambitious invalid.

"Crawford was calmly reclining in his easy chair, while one of his family read to him from a newspaper. Macon saluted him, and made known the result with delicacy, though with ill-concealed feeling. The invalid statesman gave a look of profound surprise, and remained silent and pensive for many minutes, evidently schooling his mind to a becoming tolerance of the event which had forever thwarted his political elevation.

"He then entered freely into conversation, and commented freely on the circumstances of the election as

though he had never been known as a candidate. He even jested and rallied his friend Cobb, whose excess of feeling had forbidden him to see Crawford until the shock had passed, for he knew that the enfeebled veteran would be shocked.

"The conversation on the part of these friends was not untinged with bitterness and spite, vented against the prominent actors in both the adverse political factions, but more especially against those of the successful party, as being more immediately responsible for the crushing overthrow of their own beloved candidate. Crawford himself refrained from giving utterance to the least exceptional sentiment, and behaved during the remainder of his stay in Washington with a mildness and urbanity befitting one of his exalted station, who had just staked and lost his political fortune." *

But even when the contest was over and he had retired to his plain Georgia home, there is reason to believe that he did not resign himself to the prospect of a terminated career.

Ever and anon the eyes of the great men of the nation were turned towards that modest house in Oglethorpe County, where the judge was living, and people were sent to see him personally, and to report whether he would ever be his old self again; and I do suppose that at times it must have been so that as news would come to him of political changes, and of the varied fortunes in life of his old comrades, the old

* Cobb's Leisure Labors.

statesman's eye would flash, and he would gather himself together as though to rise and go forth again into the fury and fierce turmoil of the personal politics of that day. No doubt his soul yearned for the din and tumult; the attack and defense; the sweet incense of flattery, and even the delights of repellable slander; for the "foul fat furrows of the circus" that

"Splashed and seethed and shrieked."

But that was not to be his good or bad fortune. From 1827 to 1834 he discharged the duties of judge of a circuit with great diligence and fidelity. I doubt if he were a good lawyer, and I strongly suspect that he was a poor judge so far as decisions by the books—in many cases the printed record of former judicial narrowness—are concerned; but with his great mind he made himself the law of his court, and we may not doubt that justice was executed in that circuit as fully, impartially, and intelligently as it would have been by the best book lawyer on the bench. His decisions were most likely not based on precedents, but they made most excellent laws for the people of Oglethorpe County and of his circuit. And then, after ruling his little domain with a firm hand and broad mind for seven years, saying many a wise thing and cracking many a mellow joke, he died, and was buried amongst his own people.

In this hasty narration of Crawford's life I wish that I were able to point to you some great work that he achieved ; some lasting memorial that he either made or wrote. But such was not the career or character of the man, nor was it of the men of his times. He and they—and he probably the greatest mind of them all—were not men of that sort of aim or life. Monroe was president, and is now chiefly known by a dogma of American exclusive sovereignty. Clay, Calhoun, Randolph, Webster, and the other great names of that era come down to us immortal by their speeches, and too often by their mistakes. But they accomplished little notable, of good, that remains. They wrote nothing except speeches that transmits them to us in sentence now worth reading.¹ I suppose that had occasion offered—if any great question had been evoked or forced itself upon the country, the master mind that so easily overcame antecedents, and made himself whatever was demanded by the hour, would have conquered the opportunity, and thus have handed himself down to generations of readers of American history. But such were not his times. His was the life of a man of affairs ; the doing every day of those things that were to be successfully done in that department of the government to which he was called. There was no creative opportunity ; no abiding mark to be made on the tablet of the country's life ; and neither time nor inclination served him for thought and study and productiveness in fields out-

side of that which each year absorbed his energies. And thus it was that he died and left no mark behind him ; no great work done ; no fruits of his splendid mind bequeathed to the world ; no wisdom to be accepted ; no novel views to be disputed. And that is the pity of it, and would seem to be the pitiful epitaph that should be inscribed upon the memorial tablets of nearly all the statesmen of his day. Jefferson, Madison, and Hamilton stand forth with all their virtues and all their errors, yet constructive, creative, productive ; while the rest are dead ; useless and unprofitable to this generation, except in the fruition of the official work of their day, and in the constitutional development of the nation evoked from congressional argument and struggle.

Is it not a woeful misfortune to mankind that such should be the outcome and ascertainable result of the life of a creature so splendidly gifted as must have been this man Crawford ; so far above, not only his environment, but the mass of all living people ; so liberally endowed with all good things that nature could bestow, and yet to go hence leaving no more behind him than a name scarcely rememberable for an even score of years ; known only as the possessor of wonderful talents that enabled him to go without falter or stop from the legislature of his rustic State to the highest national honors.

But I turn always from these painful reflections to the picture of Crawford as he must have been, and,

indeed, certainly was, before stricken with paralysis. I see the giant so clearly in the cabinet of Mr. Monroe, the keen bright eyes ever changing from the light aroused by earnest debate on questions of state, to the sparkle of merriment over some ludicrous side. I like best to think of him as he would speak with broadest view of Forsyth's troubles with Spain, or Andrew Jackson ruling with high hand in Florida, or the financial interests of the country. I see him at his best, and I give myself some comfort in so seeing him, when he would infuse his own light heart into the cabinet itself in suggesting to the President, with a sly twinkle of those kindly eyes, about the wording of a public document, which he said should be made, as Governor Telfair instructed his secretary, "a little more mysterious"; or when an appointment to office of an impartial person was under consideration, jesting about a man in Georgia who had two sons with whom he was dissatisfied, and being told that a certain cause in court was to be referred to two indifferent men, said it ought then to be referred to his two sons, for they were "two of the damnedest indifferent men in the State."

To me, this picture of the gay, wise and brilliant statesman is the pleasantest part of the life of Crawford; and thus remembering him we may leave him to his successes and his calamity; to the hopes of his friends and the fears of his enemies, and, I trust that you feel with me, to our love, and sympathy, and admiration.







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