

A FEW WORDS ABOUT HENRY CLAY.

HENRY CLAY was of the sanguineous temperament. "His nature," as he said of himself, "was warm, his temper ardent, his disposition enthusiastic." He was of a light complexion with light hair. His eyes were blue, and when he was excited were singularly brilliant and attractive. His forehead was high and full of promise of intelligence. In stature he was over six feet. Spare and long-limbed, he stood erect as if full of vigor and vitality, and ever ready to command. His countenance expressed perpetual wakefulness and activity. His voice was music itself, and yet penetrating and far-reaching, enchanting the listener; his words flowed rapidly, without sing-song or mannerism, in a clear and steady stream. Neither in public nor in private did he know how to be dull. His nature was quickly sensitive; his emotions, like his thoughts, moved swiftly, and were not always under his control. He was sometimes like a sportsman who takes pleasure in pursuing his game; and sometimes could chide with petulance. I was present once when in the Senate he was provoked by what he thought the tedious opposition of a Senator of advanced old age, and in his anger he applied to him the two lines of Pope:

"Old politicians chew on wisdom past,
And totter on in business to the last."

But if he was not master of the art of self-restraint and self-government, he never took home with him a feeling of resentment; never stored up in memory grievances or enmities; never harbored an approach to malice or a hidden discontent or dislike.

As a party leader he was impatient of reserve or resistance, and ever ready to crack the whip over any one that should show a disposition to hang back, sparing not even men of as much ability as himself.

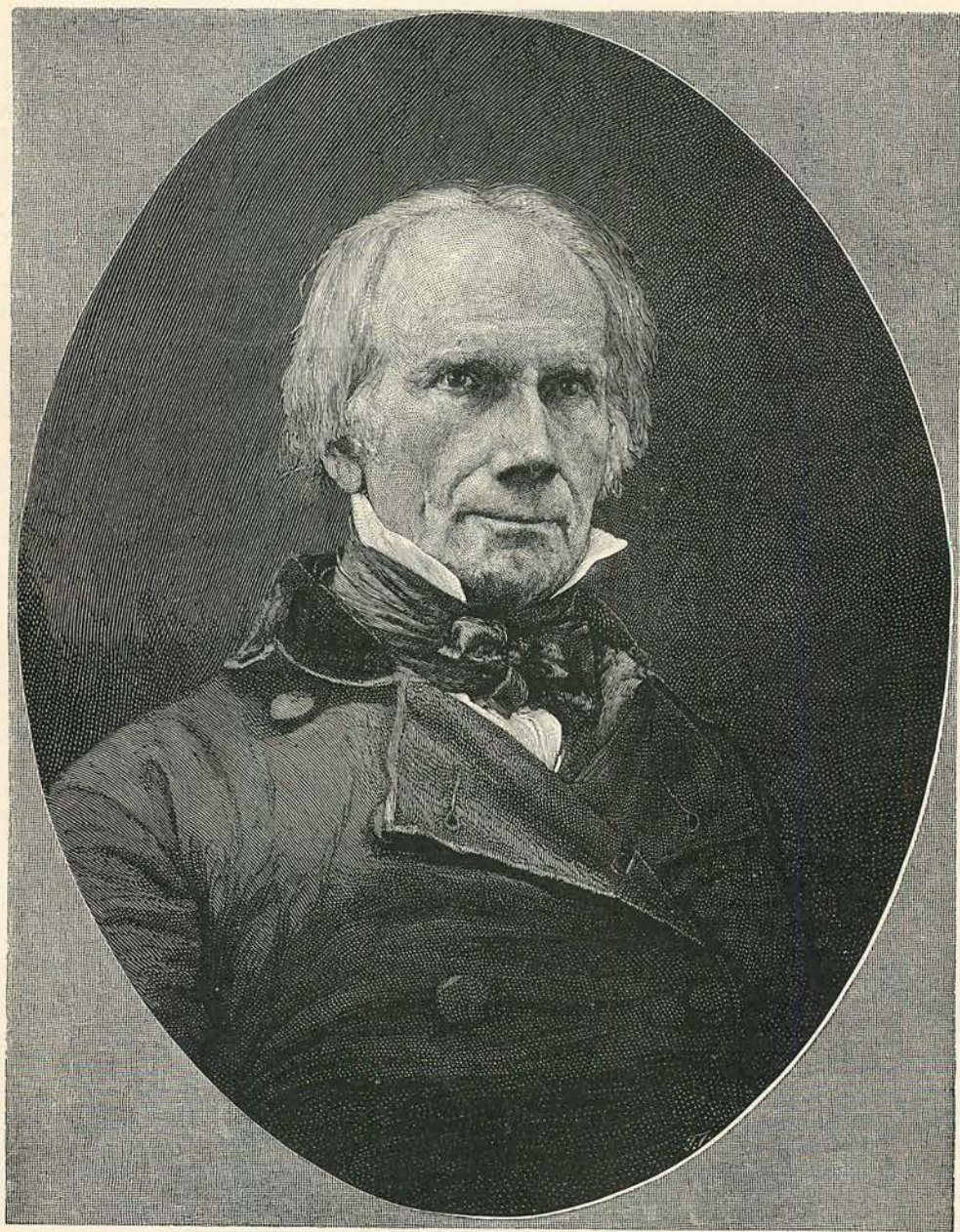
When he first became distinguished before the nation, he astonished by his seemingly inexhaustible physical strength; and the public mind made up its opinion, half fabulous, and yet in substance true, that he knew nothing of fatigue; that after a long day's service as Speaker of the House of Representatives, or as the leading debater when the House was in committee and the session continued into the night, he would at the adjournment come forth, as if watching and long and close attention to business had refreshed him and left him only more eager for the gay society of his

friends. But years flew over him, and this man of an heroic mold, of mental activity that could not be worn out, of physical forces that defied fatigue, in his seventy-fifth year could not hide from himself the symptoms of decline.

Philadelphia, seemingly by some divine right of succession, has always a constellation of men, adepts in the science of life, and alike skillful and successful in practice. At that time Samuel Jackson, one of the great physicians of his day, was in the zenith of his fame, and was well known for his genial kindness of nature as well as for consummate skill in his profession.

When Henry Clay was debating in his mind the nature of his disease, and as yet had not quite renounced the hope of a renewal of his days of action, he sought counsel of Samuel Jackson. He was greatly in earnest and wanted to know the truth, the exact and whole truth. His question was, if the evident decline in his strength was so far beyond relief that he must surely die soon. He required an explicit answer, without color or reserve, however unpleasant it might be for the physician to announce an unfavorable result. Dr. Jackson made a careful examination of his condition, found the case to be a clear one, and had the courage to make to the hero of a hundred parliamentary battles a faithful report. The great statesman received the communication that for him life was near its close, not without concern, but yet with the fortitude of resignation. He declared that he had no dread of death, but he was still troubled by one fear, which was probably suggested to him by the recollection of the magnificent constitution with which he had started in life. That fear was not of death, but of the mode of dying; he had a terrible apprehension that his last hours would be hours of anguish in a long agonizing struggle between life and death; this and this only, he said, was the thought that now lay heavily on his mind. Dr. Jackson explained to him the nature of his malady and the smooth and tranquil channel in which it was to run, and assured him with a sagacity which did not admit of question, that in his last hour he would die as quietly as an infant falls asleep in its cradle. "You give me infinite relief," answered Clay. The chief terror which death had for him vanished.

Clay left not an enemy behind him. John Caldwell Calhoun began his national career as a member of the twelfth House of Repre-



HENRY CLAY.

[ENGRAVED BY T. JOHNSON, AFTER A PHOTOGRAPH BY ROCKWOOD, FROM THE DAGUERRETYPE OWNED BY ALFRED HASSACK.]

sentatives. He took his seat in Congress in November, 1811, just two days too late to give his vote for Henry Clay as Speaker.

Calhoun was immediately drawn into the closest relations with Clay, alike from admiration of his talents and agreement with his mode of treating the great questions of that day.

He always remembered this earliest part of his public service with perfect satisfaction. It was from him I learned that he and Clay were of one mind on our foreign relations, and that for their zeal in support of the honor of the country against the long-continued aggressions of Britain, they two and others of the House, of whom he named only Bibb, were known at the time by the name of "the war mess."

Twelve years later, the two became estranged from each other, and the parts which they severally took corresponded to the differences in their character. Clay was a man by the character of his mind inclined to compromises; Calhoun was in his logic unyielding, and ever ready to push the principle which he supported to its extreme results. In 1823 each of them was put forward as a candidate for the Presidency at the ensuing election. In vain did the friends of Calhoun strive to restrain his ambition. Seaton, of the "National Intelligencer," taking a morning walk with him near the banks of the Potomac, struggled to induce him to abide his time, saying: "If you succeed now, you will be through with your two terms while you are still too young for retirement; and what occupation will you find when the eight years are over?" He answered: "I will retire and write my memoirs." Yet Calhoun, moved by very different notions from those which dictated the restraining advice of Seaton, assented to being the candidate for the second place; Andrew Jackson and many competitors being candidates for the first. It seemed that all parties were courting Calhoun, that he was the favorite of the nation; while Andrew Jackson for the moment signally failed, Calhoun was borne into the chair of

the Vice-President by the vote of more than two-thirds of the electors.

The political antagonism between Clay and Calhoun never ceased; their relations of personal amity were broken off, and remained so for about a quarter of a century. But not very long before the death of Calhoun, Clay took pains to let his own strong desire for an interview of reconciliation be made known to his old friend and hearty associate in the time of our second war for independence. The invitation was readily accepted. In the interview between the two statesmen, at which Andrew Pickens Butler, senator from South Carolina, was present, Clay showed genial self-possession and charm of manner that was remarked upon at the time and remembered; while the manner of Calhoun bore something of embarrassment and constraint.

Party records, biographies, and histories might lead to a supposition that the suspension of personal relations between Clay and Andrew Jackson raged more fiercely than in truth was the case. Jackson did full justice to Clay as a man of warm affections, which extended not to his family and friends only, but to his country.

Of our great statesmen, Madison is the one who held Henry Clay in the highest esteem; and in conversation freely applauded him, because on all occasions he manifested a fixed purpose to prevent a conflict between the States.

In the character of Clay, that which will commend him most to posterity is his love of the Union; or, to take a more comprehensive form of expression, his patriotism, his love for his country, his love for his whole country. He repeatedly declares in his letters that on crossing the ocean to serve in a foreign land, every tie of party was forgotten, and that he knew himself only as an American. At home he could be impetuous, swift in decision, unflinching, of an imperative will; and yet in his action as a guiding statesman, whenever measures came up that threatened to rend the continent in twain, he was inflexible in his resolve to uphold the Constitution and the Union.

George Bancroft.

