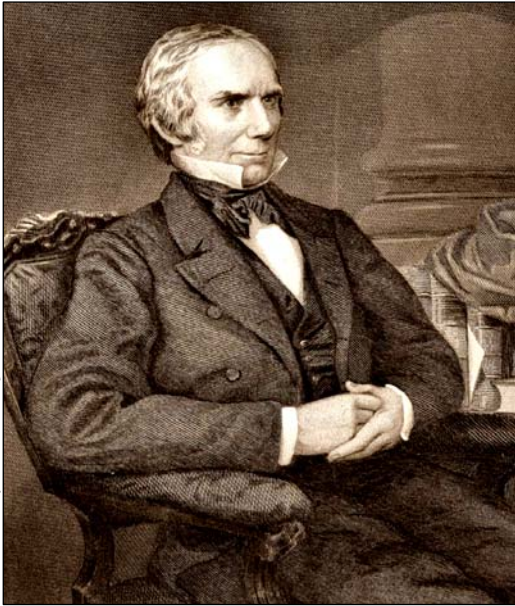


HENRY CLAY'S LAST YEARS

by J. O. Harrison

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF HENRY CLAY



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Senator and a Representative from Kentucky. Born in the district known as “the Slashes,” Hanover County, Va., April 12, 1777 ; attended the public schools ; studied law in Richmond, Va. ; admitted to the bar in 1797 and commenced practice in Lexington, Ky. ; member, State house of representatives 1803 ; elected as a Democratic Republican to the United States Senate to fill the vacancy caused by the resignation of John Adair and served from November 19, 1806, to March 3, 1807, despite being younger than the constitutional age limit of thirty years ; member, State house of representatives 1808-1809, and served as speaker in 1809 ; again elected as a Democratic Republican to the United States Senate to fill the vacancy caused by the

resignation of Buckner Thruston and served from January 4, 1810, to March 3, 1811 ; elected as a Democratic Republican to the Twelfth and Thirteenth Congresses and served from March 4, 1811, to January 19, 1814, when he resigned ; Speaker of the House of Representatives (Twelfth and Thirteenth Congresses) ; appointed one of the commissioners to negotiate the treaty of peace with Great Britain in 1814 ; elected as a Democratic Republican to the Fourteenth, Fifteenth, and Sixteenth Congresses (March 4, 1815-March 3, 1821) ; Speaker of the House of Representatives (Fourteenth, Fifteenth and Sixteenth Congresses) ; elected to the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Congresses and served from March 3, 1823, to March 6, 1825, when he resigned ; again served as Speaker of the House of Representatives (Eighteenth Congress) ; appointed Secretary of State by President John Quincy Adams 1825-1829 ; elected as a National Republican to the United States Senate on November 10, 1831, to fill the vacancy in the term commencing March 4, 1831 ; re-elected as a Whig in 1836 and served from November 10, 1831, until March 31, 1842, when he resigned ; chairman, Committee on Foreign Relations (Twenty-third and Twenty-fourth Congresses), Committee on Finance (Twenty-seventh Congress) ; unsuccessful presidential candidate of the Democratic Republican Party in 1824, of the National Republican Party in 1832, and of the Whig Party in 1844 ; again elected to the United States Senate and served from March 4, 1849, until his death in Washington, D.C., June 29, 1852 ; lay in state in the Rotunda of the U.S. Capitol, July 1, 1852 ; funeral services held in the Senate Chamber ; interment in Lexington Cemetery, Lexington, Ky.

(from *Biography Directory of the United States Congress*)

HENRY CLAY'S LAST YEARS

If it gives an old man any pleasure to recall even the trifles that were of interest to him when the world and its ways were new and fresh to him, my descendants, I am sure, will not regret that I have here recorded some of them for their entertainment. I feel that I can talk to them of trifles, which I would not speak of to the outside world. My chief purpose is to give my recollections of my intercourse with Mr. Clay, which for some years before his death was very intimate and confidential, and exceedingly agreeable to me, and also to give the impressions he made upon me.¹

My first recollection of Mr. Clay goes back to the fall of 1820 ; I was then in my seventeenth year, and a member of the junior class in the academical department of Transylvania University, now known as the Kentucky University. Court was in session, and led by curiosity I entered the crowded room. There stood Mr. Barry addressing the jury, and soon afterwards another gentleman behind the bar filled a glass tumbler with claret, and during a pause in Mr. Barry's argument handed it to him, saying as he did so, in a very cheery tone of voice, "*I'll treat you, though you are against me*". That gentleman was Mr. Clay. Mr. Barry, without manifesting any surprise, drank the claret just as if it were an ordinary occurrence, and went on with his argument. This incident is all that I remember of the whole case, and it fixed itself in my memory because it was something altogether new to me. I had never seen anything of the sort in the courts at home, with which I was pretty familiar, my father being the clerk of these courts. Mr. Barry, a rare orator, was then the leader of the "fierce Democracy" of Kentucky.

I again saw Mr. Clay in December of the same year, a day or two before Christmas. Being still at school in Lexington, and there being no public conveyance between it and Mount Sterling, my father had come to take me home for the holidays. We were by the fire in the hall of the hotel, when Mr. Clay came in, and seeing my father, he greeted him at once with the familiar air and tone of an old friend, grasped him by the hand, and addressing him by his given name inquired about his health. I was somewhat startled, because I had never before heard any one call my father by his given name ; but Mr. Clay's manner and the tones of his voice were so impressive, so natural, and apparently so sincere that my surprise was soon lost in my admiration of the man, and especially as my father seemed to be as much gratified by the meeting as Mr. Clay himself. After some friendly chat, Mr. Clay urged my father to spend the night at Ashland, inasmuch as he had much to say to him. My father declined the invitation because, as the roads were in very bad condition and the days short, he would not be able to reach home before dark unless he got an early start in the morning. Then said Mr. Clay, "*You of course must have breakfast before starting, and therefore you will lose no time by starting from the hotel at daybreak, and taking your breakfast at Ashland ; you know Ashland is directly on your route home*". My father accepted the invitation, and though we were at Ashland at an early hour the next morning, we found everything ready to receive us. No one was at the breakfast but Mr. and Mrs. Clay, my father and myself. The subjects talked of were the state of his health, which was not good, and that of his private affairs, which had suddenly become heavily embarrassed

¹ *The following reminiscences of Henry Clay, by his only surviving executor, were written without any view to their publication, and were intended solely for the perusal of the author's descendants, in the belief that it would interest them to know something of the confidential relations, which existed between Mr. Clay and the author. Especially it was the wish of the latter to convey to them the impression made upon him by his distinguished friend. It was with difficulty that we were able to convince Mr. Harrison that the world at large would place value upon these authentic and affectionate memorials.*

by his surety-ship for a large amount, which, according to my recollection, he mentioned as being \$40,000. He said that though he had been absent from Congress during its then session, but as his health had somewhat improved, and he had succeeded in putting the surety debt on a basis as satisfactory to himself as he had any reason to expect, he hoped to be able to leave for Washington immediately after the holidays, and to be in his seat in the House of Representatives in time to take part in the debate on the question as to the admission of Missouri into the Union as a slave State.

In speaking of this heavy debt and of the uncertain state of his health, and indeed of the general pressure, public and private, then on him, he uttered no complaint and manifested neither despondency nor gloom ; on the contrary, he was as bright and as cheery and as buoyant at that early breakfast as he was the evening before ; and when long years afterwards I got to know him well, I found this hopefulness and buoyancy of temperament were among his most marked and enduring characteristics. They were not only prominently displayed throughout the most stormy and anxious period of his life, say from 1825 to 1842, when he made his farewell address, but they gave a cheering glow to his conversation even when drooping under the heaviness of old age.

My own conjecture is that the large sum of about \$25,000 paid to the Northern Bank in Lexington, many years afterwards, by his friends, and without his knowledge, was in part at least the residue of that surety debt above referred to. Mr. John Tilford, president of that bank, in a published letter now before me, of date Lexington, May 20, 1845, says : "*Within the last two months I have received, from various sections of the United States, letters to my address containing money, which I was requested to apply to the payment of the Hon. H. Clay's debts, with no other information than that it was a contribution by friends who owed him a debt of gratitude for services he had rendered his country, etc. The amount so received was \$ 25,750*".

"*Who did this ?*" inquired Mr. Clay, with tears in his eyes and in his voice; to which Mr. Tilford replied, "*I do not know ; it is sufficient to say that it was not done by your enemies*".

As Mr. Clay was occupied by his public duties as Secretary of State at Washington, he was at home but seldom between 1825 and 1829 ; but, on his several visits, the ordinary courtesies between him and myself were observed, and I am gratified by being able to say that my admiration increased with my better acquaintance with him. It is not surprising, therefore, that I took especial care to be present whenever he addressed his constituents, the jury, or the court.

On my marriage, in 1830, Mr. and Mrs. Clay gave the bride and the groom a handsome entertainment. I, however, ascribed the compliment to the fact that the bride was a favorite niece of Mrs. Clay, and that fact no doubt contributed to bring us socially more frequently and more closely together until my removal to Vicksburg in 1835 ; but after my return from Vicksburg in 1840, and especially after I began housekeeping in 1841, and resumed the practice of law in Lexington in 1842, the social intercourse was renewed not only between our respective families, but between Mr. Clay and myself, until, at last, and for several years preceding his death, it ripened into an intercourse of rare confidence and trust, without any special effort on my part to bring it about. Indeed, it came about so naturally that I was never conscious of the precise time of its beginning. It was well known to the public, for instance, that I was never a member of his political party, and about as well known that I always entertained the highest respect and admiration for him ; and he was as fully aware of these facts as any of the public. I could say more on this subject, and to the same effect, but probably what I have said is enough to satisfy my descendants that, throughout my whole personal intercourse with

him, I maintained my own self-respect by a frank though civil and gentlemanly adherence to the principles of the Democratic party as I understood them. I must say, however, that when I came to the conclusion, as I did, that General Jackson indorsed, even if he did not originate, the foul calumny of bargain and intrigue between Mr. Adams and Mr. Clay, by which the one secured the Presidency - and the other the office of Secretary of State, I was placed by that conviction in a predicament very painful to myself. I, however, after due reflection, kept that matter to myself, and though the General had thereby lost his hold on my personal respect, yet I quietly moved on with the great body of the Democratic party ; for I was a Democrat by birth and conviction.

Mr. Clay for several years prior to his death seldom came to town without calling at my office ; the fact was indeed so well known that strangers wishing to pay him their respects were often referred to my office, and farmers in the county would often bring to its door a fine horse or a fine colt to exhibit to him.

They knew that he was a breeder of thorough-bred stock of every kind, from the shepherd dog to the high-mettled race-horse ; was an excellent judge of all such stock, and as much at home with the horse and horsemen as with senators and in the Senate.

An application to Mr. Clay, made by me in behalf of my son as a candidate for the Naval Academy, was the only personal favor I ever asked at his hands ; and had he given me no other evidence of his regard but this, I should feel under lasting obligation to him. I have, however, occasionally made personal appeals to him in behalf of others with whom I had no connection except personal regard, and in such cases, I never failed to secure what I applied for.

I never wrote to him in regard to such a matter but once. The post-office in this place became vacant in January 1852, by the death of the incumbent, a personal and political friend of Mr. Clay. The chief clerk at that time was a Democrat, without being a partisan, and desired to succeed to the place. He was in all respects competent, and had made himself very popular by his conduct in the office. He desired a letter from me to Mr. Clay, recommending him, and I was anxious that he should get the place. I felt, however, that I had no right to press a Democrat upon Mr. Clay. I, however, wrote to him upon the subject, stating the fact of the vacancy, and giving the names of the applicants, all of whom, I said, were his political friends except this gentleman. I said, further, that he had been chief clerk, was in every way competent, and if the question was submitted to the popular vote, he would, as I believed, receive a decided majority over any of his competitors.

Mr. Clay, by his letter of January 26, 1852, informed me that he had conferred with the Postmaster-General, and advised him to appoint my friend, which he had no doubt already had been, or shortly would be, done. On the next day after receiving this letter, the commission arrived. This letter was written by an amanuensis, Mr. Clay being then in very feeble health. His signature indicates considerable physical weakness.

My last interview with Mr. Clay was at Ashland, in the fall of 1851, on the day before his departure on his last trip to Washington. I was accompanied on that visit by General John C. Breckinridge and Major M. C. Johnson, then, as now, president of the Northern Bank at Lexington. The day was damp, chilly, and cloudy, and the visit, though very pleasant, was a gloomy one to us all. Mr. Clay was very feeble, though he remained in the parlor with us and accompanied us to the front door, where we bade him good-bye.

He was evidently affected, and, as if feeling, as we all felt, that we would never see him alive thereafter, before leaving the door he touched me on the shoulder, and stepping back a few paces, said in a very quiet voice, "*Remember that my will is in the*

custody of my wife". I was one of the executors of that will. The other two were his wife, Mrs. Lucretia Hart Clay, and the Honorable Thomas A. Marshall, then, and for many years, Judge and Chief Justice of the Court of Appeals of Kentucky. He was a nephew of John Marshall, the great Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of the United States, and one of the purest gentlemen I have ever known. As the testator had requested that no security should be required of us, we all qualified as executors without security. Mr. Clay's health for some months at Washington continued to be about the same as when he left home ; but in the spring of 1852, he began to grow daily weaker from a cough which it was impossible to relieve. On the 28th of April, 1852, I received a telegram from him in these words : "*Tell Thomas to come as soon as he can*".

His son Thomas, of course, immediately left for Washington, and remained there in attendance on his father until his death, on the 29th of June following. Among Mr. Clay's last words, if not his very last, as reported to me by his son, were, "*Thomas, I am dying ; telegraph Mr. Harrison*". That dispatch was received by me a few minutes after his death, and delivered to Mrs. Clay. That I secured the confidence of this illustrious man, and under circumstances somewhat peculiar retained it to his dying hour, is among the most pleasant memories of my long and somewhat eventful life. Though aware of my political status, yet he never attempted to influence my vote or to change in any way my political convictions.

Surprise has occasionally been expressed by strangers that some of Mr. Clay's family were not with him during his long illness at Washington. There was no occasion for any such surprise ; he was devoted to his family, and they to him. His affection for them made him unwilling to call any of them from their homes when he did not need them, and therefore in his letters to them, some of which I have seen, he entreated them to remain where they were until he should need their services, when they would be notified ; he said also that he was carefully attended to, all his wants were actually anticipated by his attendants, and that he was as comfortable as he could be at his own home. He had his own hired servant, James G. Marshall, whom I met after his death, and who by his intelligence and gentlemanly manner made a most favorable impression on me.

Mr. Clay knew that his son James was then upon his farm near St. Louis, and that the elder brother Thomas, residing near Lexington, could leave home with less inconvenience than any other member of the family, but he preferred that none of them should come until requested by him. Thomas was called for by the dispatch, and he left for Washington immediately upon receiving it.

Thomas returned with the funeral cortege, and some time after probate of the will handed me the document marked "Memoranda of H. Clay". It has no date, but is probably the last document ever signed by Mr. Clay. It was written by Thomas from his father's dictation, and but a few days before his death, as Thomas informed me. I have the original now in my scrapbook. It is as follows :

"I leave with you a check on Messrs. Corcoran & Riggs for any balance standing to my credit in the books of their bank at the time you present the check. The balance now is about \$1,600, but it may be diminished before you have occasion to apply for it".

"Mr. Underwood will draw from the secretary of the Senate any balance due to me there for my services, and pay it over to you."

"Out of these funds I wish you to pay Dr. Hall's bill, the apothecary's bill, and Dr. Francis Jackson's bill of Philadelphia."

"Whatever may be necessary to pay those debts, and may be necessary to bear your expenses to Kentucky, had better be appropriated and reserved accordingly, and

the balance to be converted in a hank check on New York, which will be safer to carry and more valuable in Kentucky.”

“I have settled with James G. Marshall, my servant, and at the end of this month he will have paid me all that I have advanced him, and I shall owe him two dollars. The deed for his lot in Detroit, which he assigned to me as security for being his endorser on a note in bank, is in my little trunk in your mother’s room, in the bundle marked ‘Notes and valuable papers’. I wish the deed taken out and delivered to James, as the matter is settled.”

“The Messrs. Hunter, who have bought my Illinois land, have been very punctual in paying me the purchase money as it became due heretofore. The last payment of \$2,000 is due at Christmas. They have written to me that they will come over and pay it, and at the same time receive a pair of Durham calves as a present, which I promised them. I wish that promise fulfilled. The heifer I bought of Mr. Hunt, being a descendant of the imported cow Lucretia, I designed for one of the animals to be presented.”

“There is a note of upwards of \$1,000 among my papers in the pocket-hook, well secured and payable in New Orleans next November. My executors ought to send it down there for collection.”

“H. Clay.”

I reproduce this document to illustrate some of Mr. Clay’s personal traits, which it does more distinctly and completely than any other paper I have seen. It does not illustrate him as the great orator or statesman, or as the greater leader of men, but illustrates the man just as he had been, and was, in his daily intercourse with the world. In all his dealings he was as exact and as watchful of his personal credit as a banker should be. In his last moments he displayed in this document the particularity and exactness that had characterized him in all his business transactions, and in the same document he displayed his sense of justness by specifying the debts to be paid out of his means then in Washington, and by specifying the rights of the colored servant, James G. Marshall, with such particularity that he would have no difficulty in the assertion of his own rights. And, lastly, who but Henry Clay would, in that extreme hour, have recollected a voluntary promise in regard to the gift of a pair of calves, made probably a year or so before ? *“I wish,”* said he, *“that promise fulfilled”*; and it was fulfilled. I was somewhat curious to see the man whom Mr. Clay recollected at such a time, and in connection with such a promise. I saw him when he came for and took the calves home ; he was a plain, uneducated, and obscure man, whose hard hands proved that his life had been a hard one.

As I was the youngest of the three executors, the active duties and general administration of the assets devolved chiefly upon me ; though no important step was taken unless approved by the three, and by the sons, especially Thomas and James, who, or whose families, were the residuary devisees. Although the whole of the estate, including the two hundred acres, part of the Ashland tract, devised to his son John M. Clay, and a tract of about one hundred and twenty-five acres known as Mansfield, and devised to the family of his son Thomas H. Clay, was of the value of about \$100,000, yet there was but little trouble in the administration : first, because the estate was unembarrassed, and secondly, because his sons cheerfully gave me all the assistance in their power, and they were much more familiar with the assets than I was.

The final settlement of our trust as executors was made at the October term of court in 1860, and was satisfactory to the family as well as to ourselves. It was approved by the court, and the executors were released from further responsibility. At this time

the estate was not entirely distributed as directed by the will, and could not be until Mrs. Clay's death, which occurred about three or four years afterwards. My reason for making this settlement, and applying for my discharge, was that I was about to remove to New Orleans, and knew that I could no longer perform personally my duties as executor. The other executors were unwilling to act without me ; they therefore joined in the settlement and in the application to be discharged, and thereupon the estate passed into other hands.

It may be proper for me to make some reference to the children of Mr. Clay, whom I knew intimately, and towards some of whom I sustained very confidential relations. James B. Clay was appointed by General Taylor, in 1849, *chargé d'affaires* to Portugal, and so far as I know, or believe, discharged the duties of that trust to the satisfaction of the Government. His father, I know, was gratified by the belief that his son had performed those duties to the satisfaction of Mr. Webster, then Secretary of State. In 1857, he was nominated by the Democratic convention for the Ashland district as its candidate for Congress, and was elected, after a heated and bitter contest, over his able Whig competitor, Roger W. Hanson, by a small majority ; but for him to have been elected as a Democrat from that district, by even a small majority, was in itself a great triumph. He died in Canada during our civil war, having fled there with his family as to a place of refuge during those troublous times. Had he survived the war, he would doubtless have been crowned with even more exalted honors. Roger Hanson, his competitor, went South, and joining his fortune with the Confederacy rose to eminence, becoming a brigadier-general in the army, and died a few days after the battle of Stone River, from a wound received in that action.

The son T. H. Clay was elected to the Legislature from Fayette County, Ky., during the war, and was afterwards appointed by Mr. Lincoln Minister to Nicaragua ; which position he filled to the satisfaction of the Government, so far as I know or have heard. He died at his home several years after his return from that mission.

His son Henry was graduated from West Point, and during the war with Mexico was lieutenant-colonel of a Kentucky regiment, of which W. R. McKee was colonel. Both were mortally wounded at the great battle of Buena Vista while leading their regiment in a charge upon the enemy. And thus, three of the sons of Mr. Clay have passed with honors into the history of their country.

The youngest son, John M. Clay, is yet living on part of the old homestead, and is one of the best farmers in the county. He has never held public office, nor indeed sought to hold any, having no ambition in that direction, but is one of our most respectable and respected citizens, and one of my best friends.

Ashland, so memorable as the home of Henry Clay, is now in possession of two of his descendants. His son John M. Clay still owns the two hundred acres devised him by his father's will, and from his front door the monument erected to his father is distinctly visible, though two miles distant. The residue, about three hundred and twenty-five acres, is occupied and owned by Colonel H. C. McDowell, who married the daughter and only surviving child of Colonel Henry Clay. And thus, a long-cherished hope of the illustrious father and grandfather has been realized. His beloved Ashland is owned and occupied by some of his own descendants, and I trust that it may pass from one generation of them to the next while the world stands.

Though I have given to some extent some of the traits of Mr. Clay, and though I am now past my eightieth year, yet I feel that I must attempt to make the picture of him somewhat more complete and accurate.

Mr. Clay was tall and broad-shouldered without being bulky or fleshy, and when at all excited was of stately and commanding presence. Though his long limbs were loosely put together, yet his manner was neither awkward nor uncouth, nor ever embarrassed ; on the contrary, it was easy and natural, and wholly unpretentious ; it was the easy, nonchalant air of a man accustomed to the ways of the world, and conscious that he was at least the peer of the foremost in every crowd in which he happened to be. Indeed, my own opinion is that he was never in the slightest degree, even in his early youth, awed by the presence of anyone ; he never seemed to feel, and my belief is he never felt, that he was ever at any time in the presence of any one superior to himself. And therefore he was not only strikingly at ease, but at home, wherever he was, whether among his neighbors or strangers, whether at a social gathering, or at the bar, or as the Speaker of the House of Representatives, or on the floor of the Senate ; and in my judgment he would have felt equally at home at a conference with kings and emperors. He seemed to have not only an instinctive consciousness of his own strength, but of his own special capacity for leadership. Therefore he would take the lead to himself as if unconsciously, whatever the occasion, and as naturally and as gracefully as if it were his birthright ; and few there were, if any, who ever seemed to be surprised that he had taken the place for which nature appeared to have designed him. Indeed, without any appearance of self-assertion on his part, and as if unconsciously to himself, there was a something in his presence and his manner that gave to him an authoritative air, and made him for the time the central, the commanding figure of the group about him. Persons who never saw him, and who of course never felt the potency of his presence and manner, can hardly understand the sort of impression made on others by what was called the magnetism of the man. They would probably infer from my general account of him that there must have been in his presence and manner some manifestation of arrogance and vanity ; there was, however, in his general intercourse no manifestation of either. I think he was as free from vanity as any one I ever knew. Though often with him, I never knew him to make himself the hero of his own story ; and when questioned, as he occasionally was by me and by others in my presence, in regard to any matter in which he had taken a prominent part, he would merely state the facts, the several steps by which results were reached, and then the naked results, just as if there was nothing remarkable in the part he had taken. But whatever the occasion or his mood, and whatever the company or the subject of the conversation, there was a something in his self-poised presence and manner that impressed those around him that within his personality and beneath that manner there was a power, a force of character, to be respected, feared, followed, and honored. Had this quiet force been arrogantly or ostentatiously displayed, it would have broken the charm that made him so attractive and at the same time so commanding. I never saw any approach to any such display, unless possibly in some stormy debate, when with a monarch's voice and in an attitude of lofty defiance he would spurn assaults, whether direct or indirect, upon his principles, his consistency, or his honor.

Probably the idea I have attempted above to describe would be more readily seen by an illustration than by my description of it. Though we were often together, and though we talked of any matter, however unimportant, that casually came up, yet I was never with him, whether alone or in company, without feeling that I was in the presence of a great man. My supposition was that this feeling on my part was the result of my personal admiration, or possibly of some peculiarity in my own temperament ; but on inquiry of others less emotional than myself, I found that in every instance the

impression made on them by his presence and manner was identical with that made on me.

Mr. Clay's complexion was very fair; so fair, indeed, that I had supposed that his hair, when a young man, must have been of a sandy or yellowish tint ; and on expressing that opinion to Mrs. Clay several years after his death, I was greatly surprised by her prompt reply, "*You were never more mistaken ; he had when a young man the whitest head of hair I ever saw*".

His eyes were gray, and when excited were full of fire ; his forehead high and capacious, with a tendency to baldness ; his nose prominent, very slightly arched, and finely formed. His mouth was unusually large without being disfiguring. It, however, was so large as to attract immediate notice ; so large, indeed, that, as he said, he never learned how to spit ; he had learned to snuff and smoke tobacco, and but for his unmanageable mouth he would probably have learned to chew also.

His chief physical peculiarity, however, was in the structure of his nervous system ; it was so delicately strung that a word, a touch, a memory would set it in motion. But though his nervous system was thus sensitive, yet his emotions, however greatly excited, were of themselves never strong enough to disturb the self poise of his deliberate judgment. His convictions were fixed as fate, and yet, as I thought, he was the most emotional man I ever knew. I have seen his eyes fill instantly on shaking the hand of an old friend, however obscure, who had stood by him in his early struggles, and whom after a long interval he had suddenly met. I have seen the letter of a grandchild, then residing in a distant State, drop from his hand when he was reading it aloud to some members of his family. His eyes were too full of tears to see, and his speech too full of emotion to utter the touching words of the child. I read the letter : there was not even a suggestion in it to give pain ; it was only a loving letter of a child, full of tender messages to her grandmother and to him.

His sympathies were wide as human nature, and were alive not only to its struggles and its virtues, but even to its infirmities ; and, in case of any great affliction in the family of a friend or neighbor, his condolence was ever ready, and in a manner and tone of voice as tender and touching and as natural as if the affliction were his own.

This emotional quality so natural to him, and always so naturally shown, was a marked characteristic and a great element of his power over the heart. His magnetic power was a natural result of the lofty, the unmistakable and generously tempered manliness of the man.

The muscles of his face, even in his old age, never had any of the rigidity or leathery appearance or toughness which sometimes accompanies old age ; on the contrary, his features even then were apparently as tender and as flexible as a child's, and expressed as naturally and as readily as the features of a child the emotion of the moment, whatever that emotion was ; and when in high debate his every muscle, his whole physical structure, would be alive with the lofty passion that was giving fire and force to every thought he uttered. I have never seen anyone but himself whose entire physical structure so readily and so naturally responded to its own emotions and passions ; nor ever heard any voice but his own that so harmonized with whatever he felt and uttered. Indeed, when there would seem to be no occasion for any great emotion or for the display of it, yet if the subject presented issues of great concern to his client, to the public, or to himself, his heart, full of the subject, and as if impressed with its responsibility, would manifest its emotion not only in the preliminary outlines of the facts to be considered, but frequently even before he had uttered a word. You would see the emotion in his whole person as he slowly rose to his feet ; you would see it in his

drooping posture, in the deathly pallor of his face, in his brimful eye, in the spasmodic twitching of his under lip ; and upon the utterance of the first sentence you would hear it in the touching tones of his magnetic voice. These all harmonized naturally and without effort with the passions and utterances of the moment. It was nature visibly at work, and bringing into harmonious action before your eyes all the great elements, mental, moral, and physical ; and this rare combination of forces actively at work, in high debate, gave to his eloquence a naturalness, a concentrated earnestness and impetuosity that for the time was overwhelming. It awed men even when they were not convinced by him.

Mr. Clay's father, a Baptist preacher in humble circumstances, and with a large family, was himself somewhat distinguished in his day for eloquence. I have seen a letter written more than sixty years ago by a gentleman in Virginia who knew Mr. Clay's father, in which he states that crowds would come to hear him when it was known that he would preach. This letter was written to Mr. Clay and found among his papers. He died in 1781, when the son Henry was between four and five years old, and thereupon the widow took charge of the small estate and seven fatherless children. It was a heavy burden, but Providence had thrown it on her, and she proved equal to it ; at least so thought her illustrious son. He always paid to her the most loving attention until her death in 1827, and never mentioned her but with reverence, gratitude, and love. A tasteful but modest monument placed by him over her grave now stands near the conspicuous shaft afterwards erected by the public to his own memory.

The widow did what she could for all her children, though she could do but little towards their school education. She sent Henry to a common country school in the Slashes of Hanover, where he learned to read, write, and cipher. Thereupon his school education ended forever. When not at school he aided in the family maintenance by such labor as a boy could do on the small farm. This was the daily routine, until in 1792 his stepfather, Captain Watkins, who seems to have felt a special interest in this stepson, made an arrangement with the clerk of the High Court of Chancery of Richmond, Virginia, by which this country boy, this uneducated orphan, secured not only employment as deputy clerk, but maintenance while so employed.

Present occupation and present maintenance were matters of first necessity to him, and these being for the time secure, his mother and stepfather removed to Kentucky, and left the impulsive, penniless boy at the age of fifteen, amid the temptations of city life, to his own guidance ; and yet this uneducated orphan, without money or any especial friends to superintend his associations or his habits, apparently alone in the world, became in after years and at an early period of his long life the observed of all observers, not only as the most commanding speaker the National House of Representatives ever had, but as the most commanding orator and the lordliest leader of his day. There was not a crisis during his public career to which he was unequal, nor a storm threatening to wreck the Union in which he was not the pilot who weathered that storm. His faith in his own strength and in his own capacity to hold the helm and guide the ship was unflinching, and he had the happy gift of inspiring his friends with a like confidence in his capacity and strength. "*Who sails with me comes safe to land*" was alike his faith and their faith, and had he been alive in 1860 and 1861, every heart and every eye would have turned to him to take the helm again.

How do I account for a career so remarkable, when its beginning was under circumstances apparently so unpropitious ? In the first place, nature had endowed him with great possibilities, which, naturally developed and matured, were bound to fit him for a great career. In other words, greatness in his case was inevitable, unless his elementary forces, mental, moral, and physical, were dwarfed or perverted by some

unnatural or unpropitious training in his childhood and youth. Second, that fortunately for him his innate faculties, his possibilities, were neither in his childhood nor in his boyhood nor in his early manhood subjected to any narrow or unnatural training ; on the contrary, all his surroundings in his infancy and until he could walk alone, a man among men, were by the chances of life or by the hand of Providence the very surroundings of all others, then within his reach, the most likely to develop naturally and to their full completeness, the peculiar faculties with which nature had endowed him.

Fortunately Mr. Clay's real education, that sort of education which aroused and stimulated into activity his elementary faculties, neither began nor ended at the country school in the Slashes of Hanover. What he learned at that country school was, to be sure, of service to him, but of service only as a humble instrument in the hands of the boy. Had he, however, learned nothing else, had his whole education been limited to the little he learned at that school, his great possibilities would never have been developed, and he no doubt would have lived and died in obscurity, unhonored and unsung. Nature, however, did not lose sight of the orphan son of the Baptist preacher, though tossed as he had been into the big world at the age of fifteen, apparently alone and dependent upon his daily labor for his daily bread. The world is a hard school and full of hazard to an impulsive boy, even when guided by the watchful eye of the parent. But however hard and hazardous the world may be to an impulsive boy, thrown into it at the age of fifteen, and on his own resources, yet in his case, and by a fortunate succession of circumstances unexpected and apparently of but little importance at the time, the arrangement under which he was left at that age and to his own guidance, amid the temptations of the city of Richmond, was not only the most fortunate event of his life, but probably the very best arrangement for the natural development of all powers.

I, however, am not writing the biography of Mr. Clay. Those who expect to see in this sketch the particulars of his life will be disappointed. My sole purpose in undertaking this labor in the eighty-first year of my age was to preserve in a family scrap-book, for my descendants, the letters written by him to me, as well as other original papers of some interest bearing his signature ; and while engaged in that work it occurred to me that it would add to the interest of the autographs were I to give my personal recollections of him, and the impression he had made on me. I regret that the same idea did not occur to me at an earlier day, before time and toil and the troubles incident to a long life had worn me out. I ought to have begun the work, if at all, twenty years ago, when my mind was more active and my memory fresher. But as I did not undertake it for the public, but wholly for the entertainment of my descendants, I do not regret, and am sure they will not regret, that I, even in my old age, undertook on their account to do what I have done, however meager my reminiscences may seem, or however inartistic the style and the manner in which those reminiscences have been presented. Having completed a task I set for myself, and as well as under the circumstances I could, I now bring it to a close by annexing a few facts and anecdotes which tend to throw some light on the character of Mr. Clay.

In a conversation in regard to General Washington, an inquiry was made of Mr. Clay as to his information in regard to certain vices imputed to the General by tradition. "Ah," said Mr. Clay, "*General Washington was so good and great a man that no tradition to his disparagement should be remembered or repeated*".

About the time of General Taylor's nomination by the Whig convention as its candidate for the presidency, there was believed to be an estrangement between Mr. Clay and Mr. Crittenden. It was the more noticed because the two had been known as

life-long friends, both personal and political. Yet I never heard Mr. Clay speak of it, though I have heard the matter discussed in his presence while he was reading a newspaper. During this estrangement I read a letter from Mr. Clay to his wife, containing a message to me, saying that President Fillmore had consulted him in regard to the appointment of Attorney-General, and that he had advised him to appoint Mr. Crittenden to that office. In the same letter, he expressed the wish that his family should be kind to Mr. Crittenden. As to any real reconciliation between the two, I have no knowledge, but I have strong doubts.

During the administration of General Jackson, the public was startled by the rumor of a defalcation in the Post-Office Department, the Hon. W. T. Barry of Lexington city being the Postmaster-General. Mr. Clay, then in the Senate, was leader of the opposition to General Jackson and to his administration. The party struggle was fierce and bitter, and, besides, Mr. Barry was a decided partisan of General Jackson, in whose cabinet he was, and had led the opposition in Kentucky to Mr. Clay and Mr. Adams. Under the circumstances, Mr. Barry had no right to expect liberal treatment at the hands of Mr. Clay. Yet when the matter was in some way before the Senate, Mr. Clay took occasion to say in substance that the rumored defalcation might be true, but even if true he was sure that Mr. Barry had no personal connection with it ; that he had known Mr. Barry many years, and vouched for the integrity of the man. Mr. Barry on the next day paid his personal respects to Mr. Clay, and from that time on their former pleasant intercourse was resumed.

During the many years of my intimacy with Mr. Clay, there was only one occasion on which I ever heard him speak harshly of any public man of his time, and that was in allusion to Mr. Seward. Though open as day on every public question, and though in fierce debate never afraid to throw a thunderbolt whenever in his opinion the occasion called for it, yet in his usual intercourse he was exceedingly reserved in his criticism of other public men.

Mr. Clay was very fond of pleasantries and occasionally indulged in a sort of persiflage, and when in the humor could say things without giving offense which, but for his peculiar manner and tone of voice and the pleasant twinkle of his eye, would have been somewhat offensive to a "touchy" person.

The following instance illustrates what I mean. It is well known that there were occasionally very unpleasant encounters in the Senate between Colonel Benton and Mr. Clay. To say the least, there was no love between the two. Colonel Benton, however, and Mrs. Clay were cousins, and the Colonel, notwithstanding the unpleasant passes between Mr. Clay and himself, was in the habit of calling at Ashland to pay his personal respects to her ; and she on such occasions was always glad to see him, for she was somewhat proud of her Hart blood, of which family Colonel Benton was a member, his mother being a Hart. On one of these occasions, my wife called at Ashland and found Colonel Benton and Mr. Clay in the parlor together. In a few moments, Mrs. Clay made her appearance, and as she entered, Mr. Clay, in a tone of charming banter and with a sort of mischievous humor in his eye, rose, and pointing to her said, "*There, Colonel, is a member of my family who never abused you*". The effect was irresistible. All caught the idea and joined in a hearty laugh, and no one seemed to enjoy the very suggestive allusion more than the Colonel himself.

The following incident, however, was tinged with no such attempt at humor. It is well known that Mr. Tyler signalized his administration by betraying the confidence of the Whig party, by which he had been elected Vice-President. Suspicions and rumors were soon afloat that Mr. Tyler would not be true to the platform on which he was

elected, and before these suspicions were absolutely confirmed by his own subsequent action, Mr. Clay, the leader of the Whig party, made a morning call on the President at the White House, and on entering the room said to Mr. Tyler, "*Am I to understand that the two gentlemen I met as I came up the steps to your room are the advisers of the President ?*". The two gentlemen referred to were Mr. Cushing of Massachusetts and Governor Wise of Virginia. Both these gentlemen were Democratic politicians, and leaders of what was known then as the "Corporal's Guard". They had been closeted with Mr. Tyler just before Mr. Clay came, and he evidently understood the purport of their visit. Mr. Clay's remark was made in a very stately though civil manner. Mr. Tyler's face flushed up very quickly, but what his reply was I do not now remember. This incident was told me by a gentleman who was present, and I am satisfied of its correctness.

On the morning of the day when President Harrison was expected to send to the Senate the names of the members of his Cabinet, someone remarked, in the presence of Mr. Clay, Mr. Crittenden, and several other members of Congress that Mr. Webster was to be Secretary of the Treasury. "*Oh, no,*" said Mr. Clay, "*Mr. Webster is to take the Department of State*". "*That,*" said the first speaker, "*was the original programme, but as Mr. Webster prefers the Treasury Department, the President has consented to appoint him to the Treasury*". Instantly and in his most impassioned manner Mr. Clay replied, "*I will oppose it ; I will denounce it in open Senate. The State Department is the proper place for Mr. Webster*". This incident was communicated to me by the Hon. Richard Hawes, who at the time it occurred, in 1841, was a member of Congress from the Ashland district, and was present at the conversation. It is enough to say that Mr. Webster was nominated and confirmed Secretary of State, and Mr. Clay was satisfied.

It may not be amiss to say in conclusion that though he was not a scholar, though he had no knowledge of the metaphysics or rhetoric or logic of the schools, and in fact had a hearty contempt for all three of them, yet Mr. Clay's knowledge was always equal to the demands of his great career. In what debate did he ever fail "to reach the height of the great argument" the occasion called for ? Or in what debate did any competitor because of his ripe scholarship pluck the laurel from his brow ?

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Monument to Henry Clay in the Capitol grounds of Richmond, Va., photographed in 1865. It was removed in 1930 (LC)