

**WENDELL PHILLIPS: A EULOGY
DELIVERED BEFORE THE
MUNICIPAL AUTHORITIES OF
BOSTON, MASS., APRIL 18TH,
1884**

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Wendell Phillips: a eulogy delivered before the municipal authorities of Boston, Mass., April 18th, 1884 by George William Curtis

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GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

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BY

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

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EULOGY.

MASSACHUSETTS is always rich in fitting voices to commemorate the virtues and services of her illustrious citizens, and in every strain of affectionate admiration and thoughtful discrimination, the legislature, the pulpit, and the press—his old associates, who saw the glory of his prime—the younger generation which cherishes the tradition of his devoted life, have spoken the praise of Wendell Phillips. But his native city has justly thought that the great work of his life was not local or limited; that it was as large as liberty and as broad as humanity, and that his name, therefore, is not the treasure of a State only, but a national possession. An orator whose consecrated eloquence, like the music of Amphion raising the wall of Thebes, was a chief force in giving to the American Union the impregnable defence of freedom, is a common benefactor; the West may well answer to the East, the South to the North, and Carolina and California, Minnesota and New York, mingle their sorrow with that of New England, and own in his death a common bereavement.

At other times, with every mournful ceremony of respect, the commonwealth and its chief city have lament-

ed their dead sons, conspicuous party leaders, who, in high official place, and with the formal commission of the State, have worthily maintained the ancient renown and the lofty faith of Massachusetts. But it is a private citizen whom we commemorate to-day, yet a public leader ; a man always foremost in political controversy, but who held no office, and belonged to no political party ; who swayed votes, but who seldom voted, and never for a mere party purpose ; and who, for the larger part of his active life, spurned the Constitution as a bond of iniquity, and the Union as a yoke of oppression. Yet, the official authority which decrees this commemoration—this great assembly which honors his memory—the press, which from sea to sea has celebrated his name—and I, who at your summons stand here to speak his eulogy, are all loyal to party, all revere the Constitution and maintain the Union, all hold the ballot to be the most sacred trust, and voting to be the highest duty of the citizen. As we recall the story of that life, the spectacle of to-day is one of the most significant in our history. This memorial rite is not a tribute to official service, to literary genius, to scientific distinction ; it is homage to personal character. It is the solemn public declaration that a life of transcendent purity of purpose, blended with commanding powers, devoted with absolute unselfishness, and with amazing results, to the welfare of the country and of humanity, is, in the American republic, an example so inspiring, a patriotism so lofty, and a public service so beneficent,

that, in contemplating them, discordant opinions, differing judgments, and the sharp sting of controversial speech, vanish like frost in a flood of sunshine. It is not the Samuel Adams who was impatient of Washington, and who doubted the Constitution, but the Samuel Adams of Faneuil Hall, of the Committee of Correspondence, of Concord and Lexington—Samuel Adams, the father of the Revolution, whom Massachusetts and America remember and revere.

The revolutionary tradition was the native air of Wendell Phillips. When he was born in this city, seventy-three years ago last November, some of the chief revolutionary figures still lingered. John Adams was living at Quincy, and Thomas Jefferson at Monticello; Elbridge Gerry was Governor of the State, James Madison was President, and the second war with England was at hand. Phillips was nine years old when, in 1820, the most important debate after the adoption of the Constitution, the debate of whose tumultuous culmination and triumphant close he was to be the great orator, began, and the second heroic epoch of our history, in which he was a master figure, opened in the long and threatening contest over the admission of Missouri. Unheeding the transactions which were shaking the land and setting the scene of his career, the young boy, of the best New England lineage and prospects, played upon Beacon Hill, and at the age of sixteen entered Harvard College. His classmates recall his manly pride and reserve, with the charming man-

ner, the delightful conversation, and the affluence of kindly humor, which was never lost. He sauntered and gently studied; not a devoted student, not in the bent of his mind, nor in the special direction of sympathy, forecasting the reformer, but already the orator and the easy master of the college platform; and still, in the memory of his old companions, he walks those college paths in unfading youth, a figure of patrician port, of sovereign grace—a prince coming to his kingdom.

The tranquil years at the university ended, and he graduated in 1831, the year of Nat. Turner's insurrection in Virginia; the year, also, in which Mr. Garrison issued the *Liberator*, and, for unequivocally proclaiming the principle of the Declaration of Independence was denounced as a public enemy. Like other gently nurtured Boston boys, Phillips began the study of law, and, as it proceeded, doubtless the sirens sang to him, as to the noble youth of every country and time. If, musing over Coke and Blackstone, in the full consciousness of ample powers and of fortunate opportunities, he sometimes forecast the future, he doubtless saw himself succeeding Fisher Ames, and Harrison Gray Otis, and Daniel Webster, rising from the Bar to the Legislature, from the Legislature to the Senate, from the Senate—who knew whither?—the idol of society, the applauded orator, the brilliant champion of the elegant repose and the cultivated conservatism of Massachusetts. The delight of social ease, the refined enjoyment

Presented
By

W. Phillips

F. E. Abbott

WENDELL PHILLIPS

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GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

it had seen one after another of those societies disband, until it was left almost alone to mourn the universal apathy. When Wendell Phillips was admitted to the bar in 1834, the slave interest in the United States, entrenched in the Constitution, in trade, in the church, in society, in historic tradition, and in the prejudice of race, had already become, although unconsciously to the country, one of the most powerful forces in the world. The English throne in 1625, the old French monarchy in 1780, the English aristocracy at the beginning of the century, were not so strong as slavery in this country fifty years ago. The grasp of England upon the American colonies before the Revolution was not so sure, and was never so menacing to liberty upon this continent, as the grasp of slavery upon the Union in the pleasant days when the young lawyer sat in his office careless of the anti-slavery agitation, and jesting with his old college comrades over the clients who did not come.

But on an October afternoon in 1835, while he was still sitting expectant in his office, the long-awaited client came, but in what an amazing form! The young lawyer was especially a Boston boy. He loved his native city with that lofty pride and intensity of local affection which are peculiar to her citizens. "I was born in Boston," he said long afterward, "and the good name of the old town is bound up with every fibre of my heart." In the mild afternoon his windows were open and the sound of unusual disturbance drew