

" T H A D D E U S   S T E V E N S . "

A N   A D D R E S S .

by

J .   H A Y   B R O W N .

Delivered at the Dedication of the Boys' High School,

Lancaster, Pa.

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For the erection of this chaste and beautiful building, complete in all of its appointments, and about to be dedicated to the great cause of public education, the directors of the School District of the City of Lancaster are to be most highly commended, and the people whose boys are to come here in pursuit of useful knowledge are to be congratulated on the work which has been so well done by ~~their~~ representatives in the School Board.

Today the common schools of Pennsylvania are its crowning glory; eighty-five years ago not one of them existed. In the constitution of the state, adopted in 1790, the provision relating to education was, "The legislature shall, as soon as conveniently may be, provide by law for the establishment of schools throughout the state in such manner that the poor may be taught gratis." For more than forty years thereafter there was not a free school in Pennsylvania, except here and there ~~xxxxxx~~ for the children of the poor, and the child who entered one of them did so branded as a pauper.



Few parents availed themselves of this condition of humiliation to themselves and their children, and ignorance was the doom of the poor man's child. Now there is no spot within the broad limits of this imperial commonwealth so obscure as to be without its public school, where, under the common school system fostered and maintained by the state, the children of the rich and the poor may meet on equal ground and are given equal chance to acquire substantial learning. From these schools---the colleges of the people---men and women have gone out for more than four score years, and are still going out to act well their part in this land of freedom. Men distinguished in every vocation in life have known no other schools. To their support the state has contributed large sums from the public treasury, the appropriations to them having amounted to \$198,000,000 during the last twenty-six years. The state's great and beneficent system of public education is known of all its citizens, and is their chief pride;



but how many of them seem to know what is due to the memory of the man whose matchlessly heroic championship of free schools in his adopted state resulted in their establishment in it. To him, more than to any other man, or any body of men, is due the present happy condition of free education in Pennsylvania, and I avail myself of this opportunity to tell from truthful records what he did, and to speak of the debt to him of the present generation, and of those which are to follow. Nunc occasio est et tempus.

In 1814 there came to Pennsylvania from the green mountains of New England a young graduate of Dartmouth college. He sojourned for a while at York, and became a teacher in the academy of the county founded shortly after the close of the revolutionary war. The quaint walls of the building in which he taught still stand, as they stood then, and the old school---of precious memory to many---still flourishes within them. In due time the young New Englander became a member of the bar of this state, and, in 181<sup>6</sup>, Thaddeus Stevens, friendless and poor, a stranger from a distant state, began



his great career at Gettysburg. The proprieties of this occasion forbid that I <sup>should</sup> speak of him as a lawyer, pre-eminent as he was in his profession, and I shall forbear, for the same reason, to dwell upon the services he rendered to his country as the Great Commoner in the lower house of congress, where he served as chairman of the Ways and Means and Appropriation committees during the four years of that momentous contest, which was to determine whether this nation should survive or be added to the list of the world's fallen republics. I ask your indulgence as I refer to what Mr. Stevens did for the cause of education in his adopted state, for no son of Pennsylvania, born on her soil, ever did what he wrought for the uplifting of her people.

The first appearance of Mr. Stevens in public life was in 1833, when he became a member of the legislature from the county of Adams. At the session immediately preceding, a literary and scientific institution in Gettysburg, known as the Gettysburg Gymnasium, was erected into Pennsylvania College, for "the education



of youth in the learned languages, the arts, sciences, and useful literature." These words were written into the charter of the college by Mr. Stevens, and the curriculum which they established cannot be improved. The pendulum of education may, for a while, swing away from it, but sooner or later will come back to it. The best equipment for any one of the learned professions comes from that broad and generous culture of the humanities, which has stood the test of long experience, despite the practical utilitarian and scientific trend of modern thought; and it has not yet been demonstrated that any school of educational training lays so good a foundation for substantial professional success as the well approved, systematic study of the classics, mathematics, natural science, history and philosophy.

The deplorable neglect of the commonwealth to provide for the free education of its children still continued when Mr. Stevens began his legislative career. Immediately after his successful effort in behalf of Pennsylvania College, he devoted himself to the establishment of free schools. Through his untiring zeal in their cause there was, laid, eighty-four years ago



the lasting foundation of our present public school system, and the blot on the constitution of 1790 was no longer the shame of the state. But the amazing truth, now almost forgotten, is that immediately after April 1, 1834---the date of the approval by the governor of the state of the act to establish a general system of education by common schools---there arose the most violent and bitter opposition to it. Intense popular revolt extended from the Delaware to the Ohio when it was discovered that the system would involve increased taxation. A maddened populace clamored for the repeal of the law. It led to scenes never before or since witnessed in the state. In many districts the contest between those in favor of the establishment of the new law and those determined to reject it became so bitter that party, and even church, ties were for a time broken, the rich arraying themselves against the poor, and the business and social relations of whole neighborhoods were greatly disturbed. Father and sons took different sides, and in certain localities an outspoken free school man was scarcely allowed to live in peace or transact or-



dinary business. The newspapers of the day were crowded with communications or publications on the school law, and it was the leading topic of discussion for months in hundreds of localities, wherever the people were accustomed to assemble, at shops, stores, or taverns, and on days of elections or public sales. Enmities were created between individuals and families that outlasted the lifetime of those concerned. This condition existed when the general election was held in the fall of 1834, and there were then sent to the state capitol from 38 of the 51 counties of the commonwealth, senators and representatives instructed by their constituents to repeal the free school act which had been passed at the preceding session. Among the legislators so chosen was Mr. Stevens, and he took his seat at the opening of the general assembly for the session of the winter of 1834 and 1835. He had been re-elected by a small majority, in view of his support of the free school act, and was instructed by his constituents to vote for its repeal. The senate promptly repealed it, by a vote of nearly two to one, thirteen senators who had voted for it a



few months before casting their votes against it. The repealing bill of the senate was promptly sent to the house, anxiously waiting to concur, and then followed a scene unsurpassed, if ever equalled, in the annals of legislative proceedings in ancient or modern times. The hall was packed to suffocation. Nearly the entire senate and most of the principal officers of the state were present. Mr. Stevens, in the prime of his manhood, fearless of the wrath of his constituents, and defiant of the maddened populace, boldly moved to substitute for the repealing act of the senate one which strengthened the act which the senate had repealed. In appealing to those he knew were committed to the repeal, these were among his memorable words, which should appear in an appropriate text book in every free school in the commonwealth, and I assume the risk of a strain upon your patience as I repeat them to those who have never heard them:

"I will briefly give you the reasons why I shall oppose the repeal of the school law. This law was passed at the last session of the Legislature with unexampled unanimity, but one member of this House voting



against it. It has not yet come into operation, and none of its effects have been tested by experience in Pennsylvania. To repeal it now, before its practical effects have been discovered, would argue that it contained some glaring and pernicious defect, and that the last Legislature acted under some strong and fatal delusion which blinded every man of them to the interests of the Commonwealth.

"It would seem to be humiliating to be under the necessity, in the nineteenth century, of entering into a formal argument to prove the utility, and to free governments, the absolute necessity, of education. More than two thousand years ago, the deity who presided over intellectual endowments ranked highest for dignity, chastity and virtue, among the goddesses worshipped by cultivated pagans. And I will not insult this House or our constituents by supposing any course of reasoning necessary to convince them of its high importance. Such necessity would be degrading to a Christian age and a free republic.



"Many complain of the school tax, not so much on account of its amount, as because it is for the benefit of others and not themselves. This is a mistake. It is for their own benefit, inasmuch as it perpetuates the government and ensures the due administration of the laws under which they live, and by which their lives and property are protected. Why do they not urge the same objection against all other taxes? The industrious, thrifty, rich farmer pays a heavy county tax to support criminal courts, build jails, and pay sheriffs and jail-keepers, and yet probably he never has had and never will have any direct personal use for either. He never gets the worth of his money by being tried for a crime before the court, allowed the privilege of the jail on conviction, or receiving an equivalent from the sheriff or his hangmen officers! He cheerfully pays the tax which is necessary to support and punish convicts, but loudly complains of that which goes to prevent his fellow-being from becoming a criminal, and to obviate the necessity of those humiliating institutions.

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"But we are told that this law is unpopular, that the people desire its repeal. Has it not always been so with every new reform in the condition of man? Old habits and old prejudices are hard to be removed from the mind. Every new improvement which has been gradually leading man from the savage through the civilized up to a highly cultivated state, has required the most strenuous and often perilous exertions of the wise and the good. But, sir, much of its unpopularity is chargeable upon the vile arts of unprincipled demagogues. Instead of attempting to remove the honest misapprehensions of the people, they cater to their prejudices, and take advantage of them, to gain low, dirty, temporary, local triumphs. I do not charge this on any particular party. Unfortunately, almost the only spot on which all parties meet in union, is this ground of common infamy!

"I have seen the present chief magistrate of this Commonwealth violently assailed as the projector and father of this law. I am not the eulogist of that gentleman; he has been guilty of many deep political sins!



But he deserves the undying gratitude of the people, for the steady, untiring zeal which he has manifested in favor of common schools. I will not say his exertions in that cause have covered all, but they have atoned for many of his errors. I trust that the people of this State will never be called upon to choose between a supporter and an opposer of free schools. But if it should come to that, if that is to be made the turning point on which we are to cast our suffrages, if the opponent of education were my most intimate personal and political friend, and the free school candidate my most obnoxious enemy, I should deem it my duty, as a patriot, at this moment of our intellectual crisis, to forget all other considerations and to place myself, unhesitatingly and cordially, in the ranks of him whose banner streams in light!

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"But will this Legislature---will the wise guardians ~~xxx~~ of the dearest interests of a great Commonwealth, consent to surrender the high advantages and brilliant prospects which this law promises, because it is desired by worthy gentlemen, who, in a moment of causeless panic



and popular delusion, sailed into power on a Tartarian flood?—a flood of ignorance, darker, and to the intelligent mind, more dreadful, than that accursed Stygian pool, at which mortals and immortals tremble! Sir, it seems to me that the liberal and enlightened proceedings of the last Legislature have aroused the demon of ignorance from his slumber; and maddened at the threatened loss of his murky empire, his discordant howlings are heard in every part of our land.

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"The barbarous and disgraceful cry, which we hear abroad in some parts of our land, 'that learning makes us worse---that education makes men rogues,' should find no echo within these walls. Those who hold such doctrines anywhere would be the objects of bitter detestation if they were not rather the pitiable subjects of commiseration. For even voluntary fools require our compassion as well as natural idiots.

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"Let all, therefore, who would sustain the charac-



ter of the philosopher or philanthropist, sustain this law. Those who would add thereto the glory of the hero can acquire it here, for in the present state of feeling in Pennsylvania, I am willing to admit, that but little less dangerous to the public man is the war-club and battle-axe of savage ignorance than to the Lion-Hearted Richard was the keen scimitar of the Saracen. He who would oppose it, either through inability to comprehend the advantages of general education, or from unwillingness to bestow them on all his fellow-citizens, even to the lowest and the poorest, or from dread of popular vengeance, seems to me to want either the head of the philosopher, the heart of the philanthropist, or the nerve of the hero.

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"Who would not rather do one living deed than to have his ashes enshrined in ever-burnished gold? Sir, I trust that when we come to act on this question, we shall take lofty ground---look beyond the narrow space which now circumscribes our vision---beyond the passing, fleeting point of time on which we stand---and so cast



our votes that the blessing of education shall be conferred on every son of Pennsylvania---shall be carried home to the poorest child of the poorest inhabitant of the meanest hut of your mountains, so that even he may be prepared to act well his part in this land of freemen, and lay on earth a broad and a solid foundation for that enduring knowledge which goes on increasing through increasing eternity." When ~~this~~<sup>he</sup> sublimely heroic man sat down no one dared speak. The roll of the house was immediately called, and, by a nearly two-thirds vote, the great free school system of the state was saved from the defeat which had faced it less than an hour before. Senators, thrilled by the great effort, rushed back to their chamber to undo what they had done the day before, and immediately concurred, with a few unimportant amendments, in the house substitute bill. This mastery of mind over popular prejudice and passion has no parallel to which any one can point, and yet how few know the matchless story, even here where <sup>Mr. Stevens</sup> ~~he~~ finished his great career.

The re-conversion of the legislators to the cause



of free education, through the effective preaching of Mr. Stevens, was not followed by as sudden a change of heart by the people. After their representatives had disregarded their instructions they became still more obdurate and stiff-necked in their opposition to general education at their expense, and Governor Wolf, the political antagonist of Mr. Stevens, who, however, stood with him in defiance of a large majority of his party, then dominant in the state, in the struggle for the establishment and salvation of the common school system, was denied renomination by his united party. It split on the question of popular education, and, while one wing, in favor of such education, named him for a third term, the other nominated, in opposition to him, Rev. H. A. Muhlenberg, a Lutheran minister, to lead them in the gubernatorial campaign of 1835, under a banner bearing the words, "No school tax. No free schools." Muhlenberg, himself, was a gentleman of liberal culture, born of a family always foremost in the work of education, but he was a Lutheran clergyman, and the Lutheran church



at that time, having, with other denominations, parochial schools, was, as a body, hostile to the new state system, which it feared would destroy them. The Wolf men boldly accepted the issue and fought their battle under a flag which bore on its folds, "Public Education", but at the election Wolf became a martyr to his great idea of education for all, the poorest as well as the richest, and went down to defeat when Joseph Ritner was chosen as his successor. With the true spirit of a martyr, however, he remained unshaken in his belief, and his last message to the legislature contained these hopeful words: "There can be no doubt that as the system advances into more general use and its advantages become more apparent, it will increase in favor with the people generally, but especially with the more liberal minded and intelligent; that the friends of a virtuous and moral education, to be extended to all the children within our<sup>7</sup> extensive Commonwealth, will eventually triumph, and with the adoption of a few modifications, some of which I understand will be suggested in the report of the Superintendent of Common Schools, there is every reason for



confident assurance that the system will work its way into public favor, and will eventually be universally accepted and approved."

The intense interest of Mr. Stevens in the cause of education was not confined to the public schools. On March 10, 1838, he spoke in the house of representatives in favor of a bill for the establishment of a School of Arts in the City of Philadelphia and for the promotion and acquisition of useful knowledge by endowing the colleges, academies, and female seminaries of the state. This speech, though less pointed, forceful and severe than the former one from which I have quoted, poured forth the eloquence of a polished scholar. Hear his eloquent words, now almost utterly forgotten. When I sought for them in two of the leading libraries of the state I was told by the head of each that they were not to be found. Every friend of higher education should know them, for he said:

"I am comparatively a stranger among you---born in another, in a distant state---no parent or kindred of



mine did, does, or probably ever will dwell within your borders. I have none of those strong cords to bind me to your honor and your interest---yet, if there is any one thing on earth which I ardently desire above all others, it is to see Pennsylvania standing up in her intellectual, as she confessedly does in her physical resources---high above all her confederate rivals. How shameful, then, would it be, for these her native sons to feel less so, when the dust of their ancestors is mingled with her soil---their friends and relatives enjoy her present prosperity---and their descendants, for long ages to come, will partake of her happiness or misery, her glory, or her infamy?

"How are we to secure for our country this great good---this meed of earthly immortality? Not by riches, which some gentlemen so highly value. Croesus is remembered only to be despised. What was it that has given such fresh and durable renown to the comparatively circumscribed and barren territory of Athens, of Sparta,



of all Greece? Not her wealth. Sparta was more renowned even for her poverty, than was ever the silken Persian with his heaps of gold. It was not her military grandeur; for, sir, great as she was in arms, she was still greater, and is more renowned for her arts and sciences. Which will longest live---the name and the fame of Solon, or the victors and victories of Marathon and Salamis? Which will soonest die---(if indeed either be destructible) the name of the law-giver of Sparta, or of his fellow countryman<sup>a</sup>, the mighty captain of Thermopylae?---Whatever may be said of her deeds of patriotic valor, her true and lasting glory will ever be found in her civil institutions---in the wisdom of her laws, her academic groves, the schools and porticoes of her philosophers, the writings of her poets, and the forum of her orators. If we are not altogether insensible to such considerations, let us, in our humble way, do all in our power, not only to lay broad and deep the foundations, but to build the beautiful superstructure, and raise high the monuments of science. For, when



every thing else that belongs to this nation, shall have yielded to the scythe of the destroyer, their smooth and polished surfaces alone shall withstand the rust, and bid defiance to the tooth of time. \* \* \*

"I have often thought, and wished, that I was the owner of the trustee of the whole mountain of Ophir. I would scatter its yellow dirt upon the human intellect, until, if there be one fertilizing property in it, every young idea would shoot forth with overshadowing luxuriance. But why do we seek arguments to prove what ought never to be doubted---the high utility and glory of liberal learning? The necessity to do so contradicts the fondest theories of ancient philosophers. They vainly it seems, believed that man would go on progressively from one degree of improvement to another, ~~untill~~ until he attained perfection.

"When we compare the arts, and sciences, the knowledge which existed in antiquity, with those of modern times---the architecture and the sculpture of Egypt and of Babylon; the poetry, painting and eloquence of Greece and Rome, with those of modern Europe and America, we



are humbled and mortified, at our little advance in any, and inferiority in most of them.

"To all reflecting minds, it must be a melancholy consideration, that in the middle of the nineteenth century---amidst the noon-day of the Christian Era, we are compelled to raise our feeble voices in defence or in eulogy of that cause which long ages ago was rendered immortal by the verses of Homer and the polished prose of Cicero."

If there be any here who would ask why I did not choose some other theme for this occasion, my prompt reply would be, that when I recalled how, in recent days, the memory of the man of whom I have spoken has been cruelly libelled in the moving films of the country, with brutal disregard of the truth as to his personal, as well as to his political life, I felt that here would be the place and now would be the time to speak of what he did for his adopted state and to remind its people of what he had done for them in teaching them to cherish ~~xxxxxxx~~ education. Lest they forget what they owe



him, reminding them of it will always be justified. Truthfully has it been said of him that there is not a child in Pennsylvania, conning a spelling book beneath the humble rafters of a village school, who does not owe him gratitude; not a citizen, rejoicing in that security which is found only in liberal institutions, founded on the equal rights of all, who is not his debtor. If he had his failings, who is without them, and history will forget them as it bends with reverence before his exalted labors by which humanity has been advanced. His name is among the illustrious, which are the common property and pride of mankind. During his long life, which stretched from the torches of the French revolution to beyond the peace at Appomattox, he was the ceaseless, tireless and fearless champion of human rights. For more than thirty years, while living, his name was known to the people of the nation as that of an intrepid champion of human rights and human progress. With ignorance, injustice and tyranny, he waged a war as long, as uncompromising and as bitter as that which Hannibal waged against Rome. By night and by day, in success and in adversity,



in the strength of his youth, the maturity of manhood and the lengthened years of an honored old age, he was in his iron harness contending for the right, always ready for battle, and always entering it with the spirit of Luther in his reply to Spalatin, "Go, tell your master that though there should be as many devils at Worms as there are tiles on its roofs I would enter it." With an energy that was tireless, a devotion to truth that no difficulties could discourage, no dangers appal, and no temptations could divert, he pursued his principles, and ~~lived~~ lived to behold them triumphantly established.

Trained at Dartmouth college and inspired by her teachings, Thaddeus Stevens came into Pennsylvania to teach, to sympathize with the poor and the orphan, and to become the successful champion of the cause of public education, at a time when no other man could have saved it from defeat. His memory ought to be enshrined in the grateful hearts of ten million people; he lies buried in an humble graveyard almost in the heart of this city, which, for the last twenty-six years of his



life, was his home, and on the granite over his resting place is this epitaph, prepared by himself:

"I repose in this quaint and secluded spot  
Not from any natural preference for solitude,  
But finding other cemeteries limited as to race,  
By charter rules,  
I have chosen this that I might illustrate  
In my death,  
The principle which I advocated  
Through a long life,  
EQUALITY OF MAN BEFORE HIS CREATOR."

His long last sleep is within the shadow of a high school named in honor of his memory, and not far distant from his grave is the institute founded by his charity, for the shelter and education of poor, homeless orphan boys of every race and creed. These are but his local monuments. One seeking others anywhere in Pennsylvania need only look around to find them everywhere. In all the crowded cities, in every busy town, in the villages, on the hillsides and in the valleys, unnumbered school buildings are his perpetual memorials. What he did, "manet, mansurumque est in animis hominum, in aeternitate temporum; fama rerum," — *25*



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