



HON. WILLIAM B. ALLISON.

HOWLAND ESTABLISHMENT & PRINTING

ANNALS OF IOWA.

VOL. XI, No. 5.

DES MOINES, IA., APRIL, 1914.

3D SERIES

WILLIAM B. ALLISON.¹

By HENRY CABOT LODGE.²

Advancing years impose their penalties upon every man. In their silent action there is a terrible certainty and an un-sparing equality of distribution, but among all their warnings, among all the milestones which they place to mark the passage of time, none is more mournful than the task of reading the letters and biographies of those whom we have known and loved, or the sad duty which compels us to give utterance to our words of praise and affection for the friends, the companions, the long-trusted leaders who have gone. Yet all these trials must be faced as we look into the eyes of Fate or listen to its knocking at the door. All that we can do is to meet them seriously and solemnly, yet in the right spirit, without empty and helpless lamentations.

I recall with great vividness my first meeting with Senator Allison at dinner in 1874, at the house of Mr. Samuel Hooper, a distinguished Member of Congress representing one of the Boston districts. The party was a small one, consisting only of our host, his nephew, myself, Senator Conkling, and Senator Allison. I was a boy just out of college and Mr. Allison appeared to me a person of great age and dignity. As a matter of fact, he was only forty-five, which seems to me now quite young, and he had but just begun that career in the Senate which was destined to prove so long and so memorable. Mr. Hooper's nephew, a classmate and lifelong friend of

¹Revised and adapted from a memorial address in the United States Senate, February 6, 1909.

²Henry Cabot Lodge was born in Boston, Massachusetts, May 12, 1850. He was graduated from Harvard College in 1871 and from the Law School of Harvard University in 1875. He was editor of the *North American Review* from 1873 to 1876 and of the *International Review* from 1879 to 1881. He has served in the Massachusetts Legislature, as delegate to the Republican National Conventions of 1880 and 1884, as member of the National House of Representatives and as United States Senator, since 1893.

mine, and I sat by and listened to all that was said that evening with deep and silent interest. The talk was very good and well worth listening to. To those who remember the men it is needless to say that Mr. Conkling took the unquestioned lead in the conversation, and that when he criticised, as he frequently did, he spared no one.

My remembrance of Mr. Conkling and of the character of his talk is very sharp and clear-cut, and that is all. My recollection of Senator Allison is equally distinct, but it brings with it a gentle memory of the kindness of a distinguished and much older man to a young fellow whom he never expected to see again, of a sense of humor as kindly as it was keen, of a good nature which took even Mr. Conkling's gibes with a quiet dignity and easy patience, very pleasant to witness and very pleasant still to recall.

The qualities which I then saw, as I thought, in Mr. Allison were really among his most conspicuous attributes. He did not wear his heart upon his sleeve, but his gentleness, his humor, his innate kindliness were as apparent to the casual and humble stranger as to those who knew him best. He did not cover them with austerity, solemnity, or pomposity and reserve them only for the benefit of the leading actors upon the great stage where his life was passed, but he gave them freely to all the world, and made the world thereby, so far as his influence went, a happier place to live in.

After I went to Washington it was my good fortune to know Senator Allison better while I was still in the House, and for fifteen years in the Senate I saw him constantly and intimately every day of each session. The nearer view changed in no respect, although it enhanced, what my first brief glance of him had revealed. But years of a common service disclosed to me what I had only dimly perceived before, his qualities as a public man and as a statesman, for he was universally admitted to deserve the latter title long before the fulfillment of the last hard condition which turns a successful politician into a statesman. It is of Mr. Allison in this capacity that I desire particularly to speak. His life will be told by his biographers in the time to come with adequate

most part unobserved and largely unappreciated by the American people, who profited so greatly by its results. Senator Hale from Maine had a favorite phrase of description in regard to some of those who served in the Senate. When he would praise highly, he said such a man was "a good Senator." This has nothing to do with character or disposition, or with virtue, public or private, but means that a Senator does the work of the Senate well—the work of carrying on the Government, of advancing good measures and arresting bad ones, the obscure work, the essential work, in which there is much labor and little glory and which demands constant attendance and unflagging attention. Tried by this exacting test, who would hesitate to say that for many years Mr. Allison was our best Senator?

He was a party leader, a wise adviser and framer of policies, but he was also, and above all, one of the men who carry on the Government. They are not many at any time and they are absolutely essential at all times. In the midst of political strife, in the tumult which attends the rise and fall of parties, to use the English phrase, "The King's Government must be carried on." Whatever storm may rage, however bitter and loud may be the strife of contending factions, the public debts must be paid, national credit maintained, the army and navy kept on a proper footing, the mails must be delivered, and the revenue collected. No matter what happens, some one must be at work "*ohne hast, ohne rast*" to see that these things are done in due season.

Macaulay has said that Attila did not conduct his campaigns on exchequer bills, but we do; and what is more important, we maintain the orderly movement of our Government in that way from day to day. It is a heavy burden and the country owes much to those who bear it. This was Mr. Allison's task during more than the lifetime of a generation. Beyond any one in our time, perhaps beyond any one in our history, did he bear this great responsibility, and he never failed in his duty. For thirty-six years a member of the Committee on Appropriations, for twenty-five years its chairman, he became a sort of permanent chancellor of the exchequer. In

the long list of eminent men who have filled that great office in England there is not one who has surpassed him in knowledge, in the dexterity and skill with which he drafted laws and reconciled conflicting views, in financial ability or in the strength of capacity with which he gauged the sources of revenue and adjusted expenditures to income. No one ever applied to him the cheap title of "watchdog of the Treasury," whose glory comes merely from barking so as to split the ears of the groundlings and whose niggard and unenlightened resistance to every expenditure, no matter how meritorious, usually causes enormous and increased outlay in the end. Mr. Allison was too great as well as too experienced a man to think parsimony was statesmanship, and not to know that a wise liberality was as a rule the truest economy of the public money.

Very few persons realize what labor, what knowledge, what experience he brought to his work. We saw a great bill reported, we watched him handle it with a tact and skill which I have never seen equaled, we noted that he was familiar with every item and could answer every question, and we were satisfied with the result and did not pause to consider what it all meant. To achieve this result implied a minute knowledge of every branch of the Government and every detail of expenditure which had cost days and nights of labor and years of experience. Scrupulous honesty, of course, was his, but that would have gone but a short distance without the trained intelligence, the unswerving diligence, the disciplined mind which controlled the disposition of the millions upon millions that passed unscathed through his strong, clean hands.

The standing joke about his caution and his avoidance of unqualified statement, which no one enjoyed more than he, grew out of certain temperamental attributes. But it is well to remember that, however guarded he was in speech, he never failed to vote, which is the real and final index of political courage and of constancy of opinion and conviction. He may have put clauses of limitation into what he said, but he never shrank from, never evaded, a vote.

Presidents and cabinets, Speakers and House chairmen came and went, but he remained at his post until he was regarded in the field of finance and appropriation almost, as was said of Webster, like an institution of the country. Six times did the legislature of Iowa elect him to the Senate. Pride in the State, pride in him, and personal affection counted for much in their action; but I can not but think that they realized also their responsibility to the country which prized so highly the services of their Senator. It is the fashion, just now, to decry legislatures, but we shall wait long before we find any form of election which will represent as truly the real will, not only of the people of a State, but of the people of all the States, as did the legislature of Iowa during those thirty-six years. It will be a sorry day for Government and people alike when we lose that permanence and continuity, that directing and guiding force, which such careers and such service as Mr. Allison's have given to the Senate.

Where, then, shall we rank him? To put him out of or above the class to which he rightfully belongs would not be the part of love and affection, but of vain eulogy, which perishes with the breath which utters it. He did not stand in the class with Lincoln, savior of the state, greatest, as an English historian has said, of all the figures of the nineteenth century. He did not reach that lonely height. Nor was he one of the class of men like Bismarck and Cavour, builders of nations, relentless wielders of armies, masters of all the subtle arts of diplomacy. Mr. Allison belongs to that class of statesmen of which the history of the English-speaking race furnishes, happily, many examples. They are the men who carry on the Government and who have made possible the practical success of free representative institutions. Wise, farseeing, prudent, devoted to their country, and abounding in good sense, they command by their absolute honesty and capacity the entire confidence of senates and parliaments. Among the chief statesmen of this class Mr. Allison holds his high place.

If Mr. Allison had done the work and held the place in England that he did and held in America, his memoirs would appear in fit and stately volumes like those which recount

the life of the late Lord Granville, whom Mr. Allison resembled in service and character, although the fields of their activity were different. Had he been a great English statesman, as he was a great American statesman, his statue would have its place in the Capitol, the scene of his labors, as at Westminster we find the statues of English prime ministers and parliamentary leaders, many of whom Mr. Allison surpassed in all that goes to make a statesman. I trust that this may yet be done.

I say all this of Mr. Allison, not in the beaten way of eulogy or tribute, but because I wish, by historical standards and, so far as possible, with the coolness of history, to vindicate the place of a man who was a great public servant, a statesman as eminent as he was modest, and to whom this country owes a large debt, not merely for his lifelong labors, but for the example he set to us all and the dignity he gave to the Government of the United States.

And yet, when everything has been said, strive as hard as we may to govern ourselves by the tests of history and to award to Mr. Allison the place which was rightfully his, and which all men should acknowledge, at the end it is the man of whom we think and not the Senator. His death meant a personal loss to all his friends. His abilities, his honesty, his unstinted devotion to the country, his fine character, his keen sense of humor, we do well to tell them over. He fully deserves it all. But what history or posterity can not feel or know is the one thing we feel most and know best. He inspired love and affection. He was beloved by all who knew him. Great powers were his, but the greatest of all his attributes was that kind, warm heart, that goodness to others which cast a spell over everyone who came within his influence.

His life was gentle, and the elements
So mix'd in him that Nature might stand up
And say to all the world, "This was a man."

Copyright of Annals of Iowa is the property of State of Iowa, by & through the State Historical Society of Iowa and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.