

# THE TARBOROUGH PRESS.

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## The Tarborough Press.

BY GEORGE HOWARD, JR.

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FOR THE TARBORO' PRESS.

## Eulogy on Ex-President Polk.

### CORRESPONDENCE.

Tarboro', July 26th, 1849.

WM. F. DANCY, Esq.

Dear Sir: Our community were highly gratified at the just and eloquent tribute to the memory of Mr. POLK, delivered by you on the 24th inst., and at the instance of many of our fellow citizens, we respectfully ask of you a copy for publication.

Very respectfully yours,

Henry T. Clark,  
R. E. Maenair,  
John Norfleet,  
John R. Speight,  
Harman Ward,

Committee.

Tarborough, July 26, 1849.

GENTLEMEN: It would be the merest affectation in me to deny, that your note gave me pleasure.

Accepting, most reluctantly, the duty assigned me, to know that it has been discharged in a manner satisfactory to you, has amply repaid me for whatever trouble I was at.

To trace the career of such a man, was a labor of love, and the only regret I felt was, that my powers were not equal to the task of conveying a more just appreciation of his great character.

The Eulogy is placed at your disposal.

Truly yours,

W. F. DANCY.

Messrs. H. T. Clark, R. E. Maenair and others; Committee.

### EULOGY,

On the life and character of James K. Polk, pronounced by William F. Dancy, at the Old Church in Tarborough, July 24th, 1849.

Solemn indeed, my audience, is the service we have assembled to perform. JAMES K. POLK, towards whose dying couch a million American eyes were but yesterday turned with painful anxiety, has gone down to the grave. The Providence which bestowed him upon his country, has called him away. His great soul, freed from its prison-house of clay, has ascended to the God who gave it—his body mingles with its kindred dust. He who but yesterday stood upon the heights of power, clothed with all the insignia of authority, and watching with eagle-eye the vast interests of this great Republic, has passed forever from our midst. That eye is extinguished in the darkness of death—the trappings of office have given place to the habiliments of mourning—the laurel is entwined with the cypress—the sceptre has been exchanged for the shroud. While the nation bows its head in mourning, and like a stricken mother weeps in anguish over her child, we, the humblest of his friends and admirers, have gathered around his grave to-day, to pay the last tribute of affection to his memory, and to bedew his ashes with our tears. And it is meet that we should do so. It is meet that we pay honors to the memory of those who have been distinguished in life by good and great deeds, or who have won for themselves a name among men—for while it hurts not the dead, who are insensible to the offering, it exercises a hallowed influence on the heart. It chastens the affections, purifies them of the dross of time and sense, and assimilates our natures to that spirit which rules beyond the sky. Now, for the ninth time, is the nation called upon to assemble around the grave of one of those whom it has honored with the highest office in its gift. Washington, Jefferson, Madison and Monroe, sleep beneath the sacred soil of Virginia. Massachusetts guards with pious care, the remains of the illustrious representatives of the Adams family. Harrison lies quietly entombed upon the banks of his own beautiful Ohio—and Tennessee, daughter of our own modest mother,

claims the honored ashes of Jackson and Polk.

Were the subject of my remarks one who had simply ruled the Republic and then descended to the grave, a decent observance of his death would be becoming and proper. But James K. Polk had far higher claims upon our gratitude and admiration. He was in every sense of the term, a great man—great in word, thought and deed—and greater still in the goodness of an unsullied heart—great in the vastness and comprehensiveness of his plans—great in the glory and success of their accomplishment. Called suddenly by the people from that retirement he had voluntarily sought, and clothed with the highest powers in their gift, we find him equal to every emergency in which he was placed. He at once took his position in the front rank of American statesmen. The youngest in years of those who had preceded him in the pathway to power, he guided the ship of State with the skill and ability of a veteran. Falling, as his administration did, upon the most eventful era which has yet marked the career of the Republic—with delicate questions of foreign and domestic policy distracting our councils, he never, for a moment, faltered or hesitated in his course. His great mind rose with the crisis and adapted itself to the circumstances by which it was surrounded. He was indeed “the very age and body of his time, its form and pressure”—the living image and representative of the great American heart. Such men may die, but their deeds are immortal! His great measures are stamped in ineffaceable characters upon his country's history, and though his noble heart has ceased to beat, and his manly form has faded from the sight of men, his name is linked with the most distant future; and posterity, looking back through the dim mists of the past, will wonder—then learn and love!

To North Carolina belongs the proud honor of giving birth to James K. Polk. On her remote frontier, in the county of Mecklenburg, amid the verdant hills of the South, and on the very birth-spot of American independence, his infant eye first saw the light. Her hills witness his childish sports and pastimes—her valleys rung out with the merry peal of his boyish laugh—and here too at the very fountain of freedom, he imbibed his first lessons of patriotic duty and devotion, as he hung with boyish rapture upon the eloquent lips of the living actors in those scenes.

The family was Irish and came to America in the early part of the 18th century. America owes an imperishable debt of gratitude to Ireland. Her re-vivified spirit pervades the whole Republic. Irish genius and eloquence flash up from every hamlet and hill side in the land. Many of the most distinguished names of our country are proud to trace their origin to the “Emerald Isle.” Calhoun, Jackson, Polk, and Gaston of our own State are familiar illustrations of the fact. It would seem that Providence had chosen this free Republic for the reproduction on a new theatre of that Irish energy and talent kept down by organized oppression at home.

The year 1806 finds the stripling boy of eleven threading the forest wilds of the boundless West, whither his father had gone, one of the earliest pioneers of civilization, in that portion of the young and growing State of Tennessee. Here, in the bosom of a sequestered valley, far up one of the tributaries of the tortuous Tennessee, and amid the privations of the wilderness, the budding boy expands into the full blossom of young manhood; and here too were developed those hardy virtues of his character, which distinguished him on the stormy theatre upon which he afterwards played his part.

Time will not permit the delay of a minute detail of his early history. His father, we are told, designed him for a merchant; and with that view, placed him in a mercantile establishment. What strange destinies control our lives! And how often are our best appointed aims thwarted by the decrees of fickle fortune! “There is a divinity which shapes our ends—rough-hew them as we may.” The genius of young Polk chafed like a caged tiger, beneath an employ-

\*See Appendix—note a.

ment so uncongenial to his feelings, and incompatible with his tastes. His great spirit panted for a more ample and enlarged theatre for the exercise of its powers. The predilections of the parent finally gave way before the ardent wishes of the son, and he enters a classical school preparatory to a college course.

The fall of 1815 finds him a student of our University. His career here was brilliant. Each semi-annual examination witnessed the triumph of his genius, and the close of his college course crowns him with the highest honors of his class. In the field of intellectual conflict he trod the undisputed victor! 'Twas here too he laid the foundation of those habits of industry, perseverance and indomitable energy, which distinguished him throughout his subsequent career; habits which in the absence of more brilliant qualities, often enable their possessor to attain the highest posts of honor and preferment, while the man of genius is left far behind in the race.

Returning again to Tennessee, with his constitution greatly impaired by excessive application at the University, he commenced the study of law in the office of the late Felix Grundy. At the bar he rose rapidly to distinction.

In 1823 he entered upon the stormy career of politics, being elected to represent his county in the State Legislature. He was again elected a second time, and by his talent and devotion to his duties, gave unerring promise of those great abilities he was destined to display on a higher theatre.

In 1825, being in the 30th year of his age, in the full and rich maturity of all his powers, both physical and mental, he was elected to represent his district in the Congress of the United States. He brought with him into public life those fundamental principles of political action to which he adhered through good and evil port, and through every mutation of party. From his early youth he was a renouncer of the “strait sect.” He regarded an instrument of specific and strictly delegated powers, and this formed the groundwork of his political faith. In a word, he was opposed to the assumption and exercise of all doubtful powers, or a loose and latitudinous construction of that instrument.

Mr. Polk was elected to Congress for seven consecutive terms, and served uninterruptedly for fourteen years.

It was Mr. Polk's fortune to be in public life at a most stormy period of our history. The tides were well calculated to develop the powers and quicken the energies of the politician. The very atmosphere was rife with great events. The younger Adams had fallen back before the displeasure of the popular power, and the lion-hearted Jackson had risen triumphantly upon the shoulders of the people. Mr. Polk was the warm, ardent, and enthusiastic admirer of Jackson, and never did man manifest his faith by more able or devoted service. Nor was that service unappreciated. The man of “iron-will” reposed confidence in his friend, and leaned his great arm trustingly upon him. His ability in debate, energy and great business capacity, soon attracted the attention of the House; and he was, by the common consent of his party, assigned to the position of Chairman of the Committee of Ways and Means—the most important committee of that body. From the nature of its duties, this committee is always the organ of the Administration in the House. Under its supervision have to pass all estimates for the public service comprehending every question of finance. To attack it then, is to attack and embarrass the Administration through it.

At no period of his course does Mr. Polk occupy a more commanding attitude. The Premier of England holds not a position more proud than this. At the head of the Committee of Ways and Means, in the full and vigorous maturity of all his faculties, the acknowledged organ and leader of the Administration, and possessing its fullest confidence—the friend and admirer from principle of the illustrious Jackson, and loved and trusted by him in return, he stands before us as the master spirit and embodiment of his party; and like Saul among his brethren, looms “a head and shoulders above them all.” 'Twas at this period too, and in

the bitter school of scandal and personal vituperation which marked the hour, that Mr. Polk learned those lessons of calm, firm, and determined self-possession and reliance under the most trying circumstances, which made him impregnable as a leader, and prepared him for the stirring scenes of his own after and eventful Administration.

Genl. Jackson came into power the bold, decided, and unequivocal enemy of the United States Bank. In his first annual message to Congress, he announced it to the assembled representatives of the people, and declared that under no circumstances, could a bill for its re-charter receive his constitutional sanction. The charter had five years yet to run. In September 1833, indignant at the unblushing corruptions practised by the Bank, he determined upon the salutary measure of removing the public money from its custody. A measure so summary and so bold, produced the most profound sensation throughout the country; and then commenced a scene of turbulence and political violence without a parallel in our previous history, and which has been fitly styled in the political parlance of the day, the Panic Period. The Bank boldly took the field, strove to wring a charter and the restoration of its deposits from the agonizing cries of a suffering people. But little did it dream of what stern stuff he was made, who stood at the helm of State. The man who had faced the conquerors of Napoleon on the plains of New Orleans, and “showed himself in a sheet of fire” in the thickest of the fray, was not to be turned aside from his purpose by the senseless ravings of political gamblers and stockjobbers.

In anticipation of the dread sentence that had been pronounced against it, the Bank had stretched its accommodations to the utmost tension. The country was flooded with fictitious wealth in the shape of bank promises to pay. Now the opposite policy was pursued. The marble mother at the centre gives the order, and forthwith its numerous branches, stretching like the arms of the fabled *Brigantes* into every State, are severed from the trunk. A rapid contraction of the circulating medium commences. From a period of great apparent prosperity, distress and dismay overshadow the land. Property fell enormously in value, and man lost confidence in his fellow man. Nearer and still nearer did the Bank approach its intended victim. Steadily and yet more steadily did it contract the coil of its circulation, when by one spasmodic effort it strove like a huge serpent to crush the commerce of the country in its sinuous folds. A universal cry of wailing went up from the land. Man stared at his fellow man with wild affright, and universal bankruptcy seemed inevitable. It was the struggle of death—the last effort of expiring vitality. Deputation after deputation waited upon Genl. Jackson, and besought him to restore the deposits. The stoutest hearts gave way—the sternest resolutions were shaken. Consternation seized upon the Republican ranks, and the timid of his own party friends faltered and fell back. But calmly and serenely the old man stood amid the raging elements around him.

“Like some tall cliff that lifts its awful form,  
Swells thro' the vale & midway cleaves the storm;  
Tho' round its base the lowering clouds are spread,  
Eternal sunshine settles on its head.”

Nor prayer nor entreaty could shake his purpose or change his determination. His word was the fiat of destiny. His band of faithful friends, like the Old Guard of Napoleon, closed in firm and stern array around him, and shielded him from the raging storm without.

Amidst this scene of universal panic and alarm, there was one who quivered not in the blast—who stood unmoved amid the storms of political adversity. That man was James K. Polk. Nobly and faithfully did he redeem the confidence reposed in him—ably and eloquently did he stand up and battle for the right. While friends were falling round him and treason lurked in every bush, his manly form—like the tall plume of Murat at the battle of Eylau—was every where seen in the thickest of the fight, encouraging his followers to stand firm and stemming with his giant arm the reversed tide of battle.

“Among the faithless—faithful;  
Among the innumerable false—unmoved, unshaken, unseduced, unterrified;

Nor number, nor example with him wrought to swerve from truth,  
Or change his constant mind—the single.”

As Chairman of the Committee of Ways and Means, and the acknowledged organ and leader of his party, upon him devolved the duty of meeting the powerful array of talent and ability united in the opposition. Solitary and almost single-handed, and with an eloquence and power rarely equalled, did the young statesman of the West roll back the tide of panic and alarm which threatened to overwhelm the administration. The timid took courage by his bold example—the hesitating flung their doubts to the winds. The republican party, panic-stricken by the novel and exciting scenes around them, now gathered up its scattered forces, closed up its column in firm array, and the result was a triumphant vote against the Bank.

From the position of Chairman of the Committee of Ways and Means, Mr. Polk was, at the session of 1835, elevated to that of Speaker of the House, the third station in point of dignity in the Union. To a native dignity and suavity of manners, he added a profound knowledge of parliamentary law, and that readiness and promptitude in the decision of points of order, indispensable in a presiding officer. The duties of Speaker were discharged by him for five sessions with rare ability, and at a time when party excitement rose higher than at any former period of the government.

After a service of fourteen years in Congress, Mr. Polk in 1839, declined a reelection from a district which had so long sustained him. Retiring from the turmoil and strife of an eventful public career, he sought repose in the bosom of his family—happy in the society of troops of warm and devoted friends, and thrice happy in the proud consciousness of an honest and faithful discharge of duty. But that repose so desirable, was destined to be of short duration. He was again called from retirement and placed in the attitude of a candidate for Governor of his adopted State, and after an animated canvass was him. He filled the office of Governor for two years, with distinguished credit and ability.

We have now traced Mr. Polk through a period of fifteen years of laborious public service—a period pregnant with great events and marked by greater acerbity of political feeling than any that had previously existed. First, the delicate and thoughtful school boy at Chapel Hill—studious, sober and discreet—punctual in the discharge of every duty, surpassing all in the race for distinction, and winning the highest honors in his class; then the trusted representative of his county in the State Legislature, winning the regard of all by the suavity of his manners and deep devotion to his duties; then the honored representative of his district in Congress, and by his ability in debate and great business capacity, placing himself in the front rank of its leading members—Chairman of the most important committee of the House, and the chief prop and support of his party at a most trying period; then Speaker of the House itself, and finally Governor of his adopted State. In all these positions he was the same sleepless sentinel upon the watch-tower, the same tireless watcher of the public interests, the same faithful guardian of the public trusts committed to his care. Nor is this all, to the execution of these duties he brought an ability rarely equalled, an energy never flagging, and a sincerity of conviction and honesty of purpose never questioned. Office he regarded as a sacred trust to be exercised for the benefit of those conferring it, and not bestowed for the mere gratification of empty pride, or vain and ostentatious display.

We have hitherto considered Mr. Polk in a sphere comparatively narrow and contracted, yet exhibiting abundant evidence of capacity for the highest. We come now to regard him as the Chief Magistrate of the only free Republic on earth. “Faithful over a few things,” the public voice decided that he should be “ruler over many.” No President has entered upon the duties of the office under circumstances less auspicious—none with a greater number of complex questions of solemn public import meeting him at the

†See Appendix—note b.