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LIFE AND CHARACTER

OF THE

Late Rev. Thomas G. Lowe,

Delivered at Haywood's Church, Halifax County, on June 24th, 1882,

—BY—

THEODORE BRYANT KINGSBURY, A. M.



Published at the solicitation of the Methodists of Halifax.

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When the letter was received inviting me to be amongst you to-day to participate in its solemn exercises, it found me in uncertain health and with the editorial cares of a daily newspaper resting upon me. Declining other invitations I could not decline this. How could I refuse to contribute all I was able in saving from decay the precious memory of a dear personal friend with whom I had held sweet communion almost daily through several years, with whom I had walked and talked in all of the freedom and frankness that true friendship and sympathy allow, and whose pure and simple character grew brighter and more attractive with time? How could I refuse, however pressed with duty, and feeble in body to lay my offering upon the altar of friendship, and to do my utmost in enabling others to understand better the intellectual character of a man whose life was simple, who lived honestly and frugally before all men, and whose genius was genuine, but who has most unfortunately left no memorial, no line even, to attest to generations unborn the splendor and grace of his superb mind?

I am here, my friends, to place a stone—would it were of purest marble from Carrara and finished with true Phidian art—in that monument which pure friendship and men's unfailing recollections must raise to the memory of the greatest man yet born in a county by no means barren of men of mark. I came here also from a more selfish consideration. I came to mingle for a few hours among old acquaintances, and to take by the hand in cordial grasp those I have long known and for whom I bear always in my heart of hearts a very sincere attachment, praying always to the Great Ruler and Beneficent Dispenser of the Universe for each and all for every possible blessing which He can vouchsafe and a true friendship can invoke. Why, I am half a Halifax man myself. In this historic county—a few miles from Clarksville—the dwelling still standing in the grove on the road to Palmyra—the mother who died when I was so

young and whose memory I cherish with so much of filial devotion and affection, was born. She had kindred and many friends in this goodly county sixty years since, and when I think of Halifax I think of the county of my maternal ancestors, where their bones rest, where my father lived for a decade, where I have lived, and beneath whose hospitable soil two of my own children sleep awaiting for Jesus, their friend and mine, to awaken them, and where I rejoice this day to know that I have found many of the truest and dearest friends of my own somewhat protracted manhood. How could I then afford to remain away when such a call was sent me?

Whether, as is affirmed by some very intelligent writers, eloquence be in a condition of decline or no in the South, I will not now undertake to determine; but as far as North Carolina is concerned this much I will be bold enough to declare: that in both Church and State there are but few if any such orators now as formerly. I find no men moving me now as I was moved thirty years ago, and I do not believe this is attributable to any loss of sensitiveness or impressibleness on my part. I could make this appear, I think, but it would lead me too far from the theme of the hour.

North Carolina has produced several pulpit orators who ranked high in their respective denominations. In that section of the State lying west of Raleigh there have been at least two superior native orators. John Kerr, the elder, the father of the late Judge Kerr, was no doubt the greatest pulpit orator the very numerous Baptist denomination in the South has had. The late Rev. Dr. Jeter, of Richmond, Va., a prince in Israel, and a capital judge of preaching, having heard the leaders of two continents, gave it as his deliberate opinion that Mr. Kerr was the greatest of all sacred orators to whom he had listened. Gen. T. L. Clingman said he was a most wonderful preacher. He heard him once for nearly three hours and he would have gladly heard him three hours longer. The late Dr. Numa F. Reid was an exceptionally fine preacher—analytical, logical, and at times really eloquent. But the East has been the most productive section in men of powerful or fascinating eloquence. Perhaps the most eloquent living Baptist preacher in the State is a native of Bertie. I refer to the venerable William Hill Jordan, of Granville. His half-brother, the late Rev. Dr. Poin-dexter, born in the same county, was the most influential Bap-

tist minister in Virginia, where he spent most of his ministerial life, and where he died. He was one of the greatest platform speakers in the Christian Church of America. When a few years ago Rev. Dr. Cornelius B. Riddick, a native of Hertford county, moved to California, he left no peer in North Carolina for true eloquence among the ministry. He has established a complete supremacy as a preacher in the Conference of California, as I have seen mentioned in the Methodist organ of that State. He is a capital preacher or I am not worthy to judge. Incomparably the first Episcopal orator of North Carolina thus far was the late eminent Rev. Dr. Francis L. Hawks, a native of New-Berne and an eastern man. At the time of his death he was generally regarded as the great orator of American Episcopacy. Another eminent preacher was the late Rev. Dr. Lovick Pierce, of Georgia, and he was a native of Halifax. He was a very able man and a prodigious preacher of the Gospel. Twenty years or more ago I asked Rev. Dr. Deems who was the greatest preacher he ever heard. I well remember his answer. Said he, "When Lovick Pierce is at his best I never heard a better." In point of mental power, I have but little doubt, he was the equal at least of any I have mentioned. But he was not as great an orator as Kerr, and not the equal of two others of whom I now turn to speak, and they were both Eastern men. I refer to Hezekiah G. Leigh, a native of Perquimans, and THOMAS G. LOWE, a native of Halifax. They were both Methodists, and no two men were more unlike in the structure of their minds, and in the characteristics of their masterly eloquence. As there are no two leaves in the forests that are precisely alike; as there are no two flowers that bloom that are in hue, perfume and even formation exactly the same; as there are no two mountains that loom heavenward that in outline and detail are alike, so there are no two men who are precisely similar in mental and physical organization. There is always a manifest contrast to the discerning eye or the observant critic. Each has his own individuality, clear cut and easily defined. God in his own good time raises up men and qualifies them specially to do His chosen work and to fulfil His grand purposes. He requires men of various mental qualities and distinctive powers of eloquence, and at the right time they step upon the platform of the world and answer to the roll-call of Deity.

He causes Moses and Aaron to appear together—the man of stammering speech and the man of ready eloquence. And then on through the ages as the persecuted and struggling and yet conquering Church needs the help of courageous hearts and high intellects—of men of rare but dissimilar powers, at God's fiat the right men appear. At one time it may be the logical, powerful, eloquent, exalted Paul, so full of holy zeal and grand conceptions of conquests, or of the gifted, persuasive, enticing Apollos. At another time it is the golden-mouthed Chrysostom or the acute, eloquent and constructive Augustine. Then again it may be the robust, ardent, bold, able, organ-voiced Luther, or the subtile, learned, vigorous, original, penetrating Calvin. Or coming down the centuries it is the tireless, lucid, evangelical, administrative Wesley, surpassing all men in the quality and quantity of his work since Paul completed the last of his great missionary journeys, or it is his gifted co-laborer, George Whitfield, who compassed land and sea in his stupendous efforts to preach the blessed Gospel of the Son of God and to bring men to the foot of the cross, and whose eloquence was of a most extraordinary kind—vehement, dramatic, pathetic, abounding in simple narrative, delivered with a voice of unexampled richness, melody and variety. Sir James Stephens, in his masterly article upon him, says, "he was a great and holy man, and as a preacher without a superior or a rival!" God always has his "men of consolation" as well as "the sons of thunder."

The Almighty had a positive use for two such preachers and orators as Leigh and LOWE. There was work for them to do in that part of the moral vineyard in which their destinies were cast. I will not detain you with an imperfect analysis of the elder orator. I never heard Mr. Leigh but once. He had been broken by disease, and Death had already thrown his shadow upon him. But he was still an imposing figure in the pulpit, majestic, serene, noble, and although more than thirty years have passed, I remember distinctly that his subject was Moses the Lawgiver, and I remember the impression upon my youthful mind was that never before had I heard such thorough analysis of motive and character and such a grand presentation of a grand human life. I heard many years ago the Rev. Robt. O. Burton say that once in Norfolk, Va., such was the overwhelming power of Mr. Leigh's preaching that when he uttered his last word the whole congregation were standing. Before I con-

clude I will show you that MR. LOWE sometimes produced extraordinary impressions and on some occasions extraordinary results. These two sons of Methodism were wonderful sons of eloquence. They knew each other here in this life and they know each other in the bright beautiful world beyond. "The pure in heart shall meet again."

From what I have said it is apparent that North Carolina has had her share of preachers who were gifted with a very genuine eloquence, and who possessed a combination of endowments that entitle them to rank with the most imposing and attractive pulpit orators of the nineteenth century. But not only in the pulpit has our State been blessed with orators. At the bar and in the Congress or on the hustings she has had men of high abilities and often of a noble eloquence. A State that has produced a Davie, a Benton, a Gaston, a Badger, an Archibald Henderson, a Wiley P. Mangum, an Iredell, a Vance can not be said to have been barren of great and gifted sons. But I am altogether persuaded that the highest, the purest eloquence of North Carolina has been among the ministers of the Gospel. And why not? With the lofty, ennobling, heart-moving themes that preachers of righteousness have at their command, why should they not achieve the most conspicuous results and wear such quarterings in the escutcheon of fame that shall out rival all the bravery and blazonry of other intellectual achievements? The immortality and eternal salvation of the soul of man comes home directly to each hearer and lends a higher inspiration than it is possible for any earthly themes to furnish. It is a subject that melts the heart of the simple and the great, and all alike are wrapped in the garments of an enchantment that both delights and warms. The greatest of these sacred orators I have named—KERR, LEIGH and LOWE—spoke face to face with men from full minds, and with a ready, copious eloquence, without notes or manuscript. They spoke as the great orators of the world have always spoken when with intense emotion, feeling every sentiment they uttered, they poured forth in rapid succession their

"Thoughts that breathed and words that burned."

Let us consider for a moment what eloquence is. We can do this briefly and more satisfactorily by a reference to examples.

Mr. Webster said: "True eloquence does not consist in

speech. Words and phrases may be marshalled in every way, but they cannot compass it. It must *exist in the man*, and in the occasion." And Mr. Webster was right. An orator is born, just as much as a poet. True eloquence "must *exist in the man*." The schools cannot impart it; neither study nor practice can bring it "from afar."

Mr. Everett was a highly accomplished gentleman. His speeches *read* very charmingly. He was a delightful rhetorician, and he recited his fine productions with a certain pleasing stateliness that I well remember. But surely he was no great orator. His statues were very graceful, were very deftly wrought out of pure white marble, but then they were *lifeless*. He lacked the divine *afflatus*—"the glorious burst of *winged words*"—that sent his thoughts to the heart like the unerring and bounding shaft from the archer's bow. Patrick Henry, on the other hand, knew but little of rhetorical tropes and figures, was neither learned nor extensively read, was ignorant of acknowledged elocutionary rules, was unskilled in the usages of courts and coteries, but was a living battery—a powerful magnetic organism, possessed a soul full of passion, and commanded at will the language of Nature. His eloquence was a part of himself; it "existed in the man." It is no wonder that he could control an audience as a skilled rider the horse. No one could sit under the inspirations of his voice and criticise the speaker. The intense *magnetism* of the orator swept away all resistance, and held one in leash. When Mr. Everett spoke you could watch curiously his mannerisms, his posturings, his pronunciation, even the felicities of his diction and the graceful flow of his periods, and be always self contained, never for a moment yielding to the influence of his artificial and entertaining elocution. Mr. Everett did not seem *to feel himself*, and hence, could not make others feel. There was too much of *art* and not enough of *nature* in what he did—*his passions seemed asleep*.

I come now to fulfil as far as I am able a promise I once made to my departed friend in a spirit of pleasantry and in a happy moment when enjoying the delightful companionship of a *sweeter* and *more entrancing* orator than any I have named—than any I have known. In the delicacy, refinement and grace of his intellect THOMAS G. LOWE, was incomparably beyond all men I have known. He was not the equal of some I have named in the

dramatic qualities of his genius; he was not their equal in sinewy and masculine vigor of intellect; he was not their equal in that grand, sonorous, commanding, awing eloquence of which they were masters. But in eloquence of another kind he was supreme as far as I know. I told this silver throated, simple hearted, unspoiled son of nature one day that I thought I understood his gifts and graces better probably than any other person did, and that if I survived him I would prepare a sketch of his life. I have sought in vain for many years to obtain the material necessary for the writing of such a monograph as friendship would dictate. I must, therefore, content myself now with the most meagre of all sketches, and without those minute personal touches which constitute the real charm of biography. I have not one line from others with which to enrich this oration. I have no biographical material, no reminiscences, no memorabilia, no letters upon which to draw.

If THOMAS G. LOWE had been born in Rome in the days of the Antonines, poets and philosophers, as they listened to the sweet and tender eloquence that flowed from his tongue, would have insisted that at his birth were gathered those Muses and Graces who were presumed to be most concerned in the gifts of eloquence and song, that they might shed upon the unconscious infant their selectest influences. In our day few men have lived whose beauty of mind was reflected in a more charming eloquence than his, or of whom it could be more truly affirmed, to use the fine words of Milton, "his tongue dropped manna."

His birth place is a few hundred yards from this newly erected church. Yonder, in sight of us, stands the old homestead where his eyes first saw the light. Under those trees still remaining he played in childhood. There he received those maternal lessons the influence of which he never lost. There amid wide stretching sands, in a secluded home was reared as genuine a child of *natural eloquence*, I must believe, as belongs to our time and country. Born of plain, honest, virtuous parents, fairly intelligent and worthy, this gifted boy had but limited opportunities for acquiring a sound education or of laying up stores of knowledge upon which to draw in after years. His education, in fact, was limited and was only such as could be obtained in the "old field schools" of sixty years ago. His birthday was August 10th, 1815. The old Haywood's Methodist Church, on the site of which this new edifice stands,

was a very humble structure of the primitive sort. Here in his early boyhood, when full of life and joyousness, he often heard the self-sacrificing itinerants tell of Jesus and eternal life beyond the skies. I do not know how soon he found the truth, but whilst yet a small lad he would mount the rail fence and deliver a little sermon to the attentive negro children who, "ranged around," constituted his sole auditory. Before he was twenty-one he became a local minister in the Methodist Episcopal Church, and soon gave promise of that very exceptional and seraphic eloquence for which he was afterwards so distinguished.

In August 1842, he was married to Miss Maria J. Wade, of New Berne, a young lady of good family and education. By her he had two daughters, one of whom, Kate, married Mr. Robert J. Boyd, Jr., of Halifax, and is now dead; the younger, Lizzie, married Mr. James Ousby, of the same county, and still survives.

Mr. Lowe was not a great reader of books, but he was fond of good books. He had read with a genuine relish some of the best poets, and enjoyed the sermons of the masters, specially of those whose imaginative powers were of a high order. He thought Richard Watson's vigorous and eloquent sermons the finest he had read, but he was not acquainted with the works of the great continental and English preachers, outside of his own denomination. He regarded Bishop George F. Pierce the greatest preacher he had ever heard.

Mr. Lowe never entered the conference of his Church, but to the close of his useful and comparatively unchequered life, frequently preached not only in many portions of his own county, but in many of the neighboring towns, where he had sometimes stated appointments. He was very much sought after, and was called upon continually to deliver funeral discourses and Masonic addresses, in both of which he very greatly excelled. Indeed, his funeral sermons, when the subject possessed him, were of transcendent eloquence and beauty. In many sections of North Carolina, from Goldsboro and New Berne to Halifax, and from Murfreesboro to Raleigh and Oxford, and in some portions of Virginia, he was sure to attract large and delighted congregations whenever it was known that he was to occupy the sacred desk, or the platform of the lecturer. Men of intelligence would ride twenty or thirty miles to listen to this sweet and fascinating orator.

His health was infirm for many years, and towards the end of his days it was painfully manifest to his anxious friends, and he had very many, that he was gradually sinking under the ravages of pulmonary disease. A little more than thirteen years ago—on February 13th, 1869—in his humble home in the town of Halifax, this admirable gentleman—this “poet among preachers,” as has been said of Jeremy Taylor, passed away in peace and hope, wept over by his own dear household and the friends who gathered about his dying bed, and lamented by thousands who had been so greatly favored as to have heard one of those grand discourses of his—so sweet, so musical, so enthralling, so forever memorable. During his long illness no murmurings escaped his lips, but he bore the heavy chastisement with that fortitude and resignation which were in keeping with his simple, manly life. The tongue of eloquence was dumb forever, for “the silver cord” had been “loosed,” and “the golden bowl” had been “broken.” Then the “dust” of this good and noble man was “returned to the earth as it was; and the spirit returned unto God who gave it.”

Only a few months ago the papers brought to me the sad intelligence that Mrs. Lowe was dead. I knew her well and have cause to be grateful to her for many kindnesses to me and my family when we were living near her. She was always a true friend, and when God took two of my children to himself she proved her sympathy and devotion. God bless her forever! Peace to her soul! I must hope that she has joined her husband in the land of glory and of rest.

I knew Mr. LOWE very intimately for several years. There was never the slightest flaw in our friendship. From first to last it was smooth, warm, sincere. Long before we parted last I had learned to love him.

I heard him preach very many times, under various circumstances. I heard him after matured preparation and I heard him when speaking strictly *impromptu*, and I feel assured that he was by nature the most eloquent being I ever knew or heard. This may appear excessive to those who never heard him in one of his inspired efforts, or who never heard him but once and when he did not approach his own standard. I have heard him many times when he did not rise above mediocrity. But then I have heard him talk in a strain of enraptured and unearthly eloquence that but few men could approach much less excel. He

was always neat in speech however ordinary the discourse. He was a man of singular excellence of character. Amiable, sincere, candid, modest, true, and just, his indeed was a fine and lovely nature. Although praised and flattered beyond any man I have known, it had no injurious effects upon his unobtrusive and sterling character. He always remained simple-hearted, unpretending, thoroughly frank and good-natured. He neither envied others, nor prided himself upon any of his achievements. He used his splendid gifts in proclaiming the unsearchable riches of Jesus, and died, when his work was done, in the full assurance of an immortality of bliss through the atonement of his crucified and ascended Lord and Saviour.

This really great orator—great *when judged at his best*—lies in his unmarked, weed grown resting-place (for he is not dead but sleepeth) about two miles South of the old historic town of Halifax in a burial ground where there were but few graves (probably but one or two.) before his body was there deposited. He had chosen himself that quiet, secluded spot where he wished to repose after “life’s fitful fever was ended,” there to await that summons when the graves shall give up their dead, and the redeemed shall be glorified. In a few fleeting years—in a few swiftly passing decades at farthest, his memory will have faded away forever, for he has left no bright and original memorials, as I have said, to perpetuate his name among the children of men.

Standing over his grave we might well recall those well known stanzas in Gray’s “Elegy” in which is described neglected genius. Surely THOMAS G. LOWE’S “heart” was “once pregnant with celestial fire,” if we can say so much of any man of our state. In his grave were interred both genius and virtue. He richly deserves a monument, and upon it should be graven deep by the sculptor’s art, that it was erected to the

FOREMOST NATURAL ORATOR OF NORTH CAROLINA.

His name should be added to that roll of illustrious American preachers who were eminent for a rich, glowing, and inspiring eloquence.

Addressing so many who knew him personally, it is almost unnecessary that I should attempt to describe him as he appeared in this life. He was probably five feet, ten inches in height, and his weight was about 145 pounds. He was not fastidious in dress, but recognized fully the saying of John

Wesley "that cleanliness was next to godliness." It would not have struck a stranger that in yonder plain, quiet, gentle, unobtrusive man there was a master of eloquence who sometimes made a tremendous impression. His forehead was not remarkable. There was a marked development just above the eyes, but the remainder of the head was neither broad nor high. His eye was grey, and when fired by emotion gleamed with that exquisite light that was "never seen on land or sea." His nose was straight and well formed. His mouth was expressive of gentleness and amiability. His chin was decidedly good and shapely. His face was somewhat pale, deepened by rather delicate health when I knew him, and when he was excited by an unusual passion in his public address, it grew paler and more impressive somehow. In some of his more ecstatic moments, as he has been described to me, the whole expression was strangely changed—transfigured as it were, and he really seemed as if transported to another sphere—in the body or out of it—and he was for the time unconscious of his earthly surroundings. This is no fancy picture. In a free conversation once in which I had to lead him by questions, he said only twice in his life had this strange, anomalous condition fallen upon him.

When the younger Pitt was asked what was the great *desideratum* in English literature, he replied: "A speech from Bolingbroke." A sermon, just as it was delivered by this gifted man, would be a genuine contribution to the literature of the pulpit. His reputation, even among his countrymen in many parts of North Carolina, is a matter of tradition. In the Wilmington country I have never found a half dozen scarcely who had so much as heard of him. And yet a long time ago he preached a sermon in our largest town. One Wilmingtonian told me that he had always regarded it as the most eloquent and splendid pulpit effort he had heard.

MR. LOWE never wrote his sermons, or made a skeleton of a discourse or even the slightest notes. I knew him to be applied to for a sermon to appear in a volume that was to be published. He told me that he had never prepared a sermon or an address in the *ordinary way* in his life. He said that he lost all inspiration or mental fervor the moment he undertook to use the pen—that the mental excitement and glow and expansion

only came to him when wrapped in meditation or when standing upon his feet in the very act of delivery. As I have said, he never resorted to the pen, but on occasions of great importance when he was to address an immense audience and expectation was at fever heat, hesitating to trust his generally ready powers of thought and expression, he would not only think out all he should say, but would arrange in his mind the *precise language* to be used. He would do this whilst walking, or, as was often the case, whilst sitting in a boat fishing. He would be able to repeat several days afterwards, sometimes even for two or three weeks, *verbatim*, an entire sermon or address that he had delivered, every word of which he had excogitated during a quiet day spent on the mill pond. But his finest oratory—his noblest exhibition of a high and commanding eloquence—was on occasions when the inspiration was upon him, and he spake without previous preparation. Then, indeed, he was magnificent. No *Vates* or Rhetor of the ancient world was ever more happy in diction, or more beautiful, or more sublime, in thought. When all his powers were fully employed and his voice rang out with a melody as sweet as rarest minstrelsy, and he became enthralled by the subject he was discussing, he would for thirty or forty minutes engage in a strain of oratory that was as enravishing and pleasing as ever charmed earthly ears.

His voice was very musical. In its higher key, it was an instrument capable of the rarest effect. His *tear-tones* were absolutely subduing and more pathetic than those of any speaker to whom I have ever listened. When in his loftiest mood, when his sermon was almost "of imagination all compact," and his eye, "in fine phrensy rolling," was lifted heavenward, his voice had the clear ring of the bugle, as it sets "the wild echoes flying."

Indeed, so sweet, so melodious was his voice, so exquisite his intonation, so distinct his articulation and emphasis, that I have thought that no little of the fascination he threw over his hearers was attributable to these very marked gifts. We all know how subduing and melting is the power of music—how it recreates the mind and composes the soul. When Mr. LOWE was in one of his happy moments of inspiration and passion, his voice had unwonted power and sweetness, and then it was he seemed to have complete dominion over his auditors, and they became tender and yielding under the magic influences wrought by this master of melody and tears. The most potent of all instruments

is the human voice. Said that graceful Kentucky poet Mrs. Welby:

"There is a charm in delivery,
A wonderful art,
That thrills like a kiss
From the lip to the heart."

He had the taste and sensibilities of a poet, and although he wrote but little if any verse, he constantly exhibited in his public addresses the imagination of an inspired singer, and he often awakened notes of such exquisite sweetness, as he passed along the avenues of thought, clad in the robes of the sacred minstrel, as to remind you of the matchless numbers that flow from the lyre as its strings are touched by the cunning hand of some Keats or Shelley. He literally, at times, spoke fine poetry, although presented in the garb of prose. In his greatest efforts of the imagination he gave rein to his coursers as they went careering through the heaven of invention.

His descriptive powers surpassed those of any speaker I have known, with perhaps one exception. He delighted in describing the rest of heaven, and the beatitudes of the redeemed in glory. He sometimes presented a fearful picture of the lost soul, but his heart was too tender and kindly, and his imagination too refined and gentle, to delight in such harrowing scenes. He loved the sun-light and the flowers, and his eye was ever having previsions of the heavenly home, with its jasper pavements and crystal streams.

When my good friend, the late Rev. William E. Pell, was approaching the close of his useful life, he asked me one day—"Does brother LOWE preach of heaven as he used to preach?" I replied—"I do not know how that was, but he preaches charmingly and wonderfully now." Said that wise and good Christian—"I never heard any one to approach him on such a theme, and I could never hear him without getting so full I had to weep and laugh."

His English was quite marvellous—pure, simple, correct, flexible, graceful, elegant.

Without the benefits of a higher education, and with only a moderate familiarity with a few good writers of his language, he spoke perhaps the best English of any man of his day. Said an eminent New York minister once to the speaker: "Do you know who is master of the best English I have known on two

continents?" A negative being given, Dr. Deems continued: "It is THOMAS G. LOWE, the only man I have ever known who never blundered in the pulpit, nor even in the carelessness of familiar talk. In his oratory there was no "ravelled sleeve" of sentences, but all was flowing, graceful, and melodious. If he dipped his pencil in the brightest, richest hues sometimes he never lost sight of simplicity and purity.

His taste was very fine. He rarely offended the severest taste by either the grandeur of his descriptions, or the affluence of his diction when his theme required the boldest treatment. Nobly gifted, he devoted the stores of his rich and brilliant imagination to the service of the Redeemer, "lending all the charms of beauty to set forth the sanctity of truth;" but without the Asiatic opulence of ornament and the excessive "flower-gardens of quotation," that often mar the otherwise exquisite productions of the English Chrysostom—Jeremy Taylor. Possibly an austere judgment might pronounce that sometimes there was an excess of ornament—too many sweet metaphors—even too much splendor of language; that the garment had too much fringing of gold, and was too bright with excess of light. And yet I could defy you to point out a misapplied word, to find an adjective too many, or to detect a figure not admirably wrought out. Doubtless you would be swept on, as you were never before, upon the very flood of his description; doubtless you would hear metaphors as striking as those of poets presented in the most winsome garniture of words; doubtless you would drink in such strains of heavenly eloquence as you never heard before, compelling forgetfulness of self and the world around, being only conscious that you were under the control of a mighty orator, whose incantations charmed and fascinated you, bringing to your ears the allelujabs and triumphant choruses of heaven as they were accompanied by sounding harps of gold.

There was nothing, however, stormy or volcanic about him; there was no barbaric splendor or false glitter. Your ears caught the chime of the silver stream of speech and you felt the thrill and flush of the heart.

All great orators are judged by their highest efforts. It is so with poets. When we think of Shakespeare we think of Hamlet and Lear, of Macbeth and Othello. The impressions which orators have left upon the world's memory have been made by

their most extraordinary exertions of the mind. We estimate Edmund Burke by his "Nabob of Arcots' Debts" speech, and by his four or five other most splendid orations, which are the study and admiration of every student of human eloquence as they are the despair of all statesmen. It is so with Sheridan and Fox, with Pitt and Chatham, with Erskine and Grattan, with Webster and Preston, and, indeed, with all of the most famous orators of ancient and modern times. When we recall the great name of Demosthenes his magnificent *Philippics* at once come before us; when the splendor and fervor of Cicero are presented to our view we at once recur to his vigorous and terrible denunciations of *Cataline* and *Antony*. I have estimated THOMAS G. LOWE *when at his best*—have judged him, not by his every day efforts, or by those sermons and addresses that were pronounced exceptionally fine by his auditors; but I have judged him when he rose with an easy grace upon the wings of an aspiring and bold imagination, and when he "drew audience still as night" and men listened as they never listened before.

The distinguishing characteristic of his mind was *beauty* as the greatest faculty of his mind was *imagination*. It is hard to over value this attribute of greatness. The *imagination*—what a wonderful instrument, what a glorious endowment! Just as Shakespeare and Homer, Dante and Milton, with their superlative imaginations, are greater than dry reasoners and cold metaphysicians of the Hume, Locke and Sir William Hamilton type, so is the high imaginative being, governed by reason, greater always than the man without the heaven-born bestowment. It is because of this that the greatest poet is confessedly the greatest of all men, and without this transforming and illumining imagination he would fall often below the dull men who delve constantly and who plod through life. The truth is that the man who lives under the influence of a high and disciplined imagination is a great man even though he should never perform deeds or write books commensurate with his noble gifts. Coleridge—one of the two or three greatest men of the last two hundred years—never did half of what he was capable. His life explains this remark. The sensuous man is confined to the earth. The imaginative man soars heavenward, and dwells on promontories of thought beyond the vision or the conception of the other. The golden hues of imagination falling upon any object gives it a peculiar glory. Her draperies can clothe the

nakedness of earth and add a new beauty and grace to things common. When *imagination* is sanctified; when it lends its powers to the pure religion of Jesus; when it throws its radiance over topics that otherwise may seem threadbare and dreary, it becomes a tremendous factor in the world and a most potential ally of holiness. The imagination can vivify the dry bones of theology and give attractiveness to themes that otherwise would repel. It can so present the doctrines of eternal life as to allure by sweetness and love, so that the stoutest heart shall melt and the most barren mind shall glow under the fervent heat. Yes, believe me friends, a rich and fruitful and chastened imagination like Mr. Lowe possessed, is indeed a marvellous organ. The sanctified imagination is the noblest thing in the universe. Isaiah and Ezekiel, Job and Daniel had it. In their hands what an engine it was. All the great poets and orators of earth have possessed it. There can be no such things as a sweet, abundant, moving eloquence without imagination. The freshest garlands ever offered to God by the children of men, have been woven of fancy and imagination and were bound with the golden bands of love and faith. It was this great faculty that enabled the sublimest of all poets' John Milton, to lay before God the great works of his creative genius.

One of the great living writers of England, Dr. James Martineau, says finely: "In virtue of the close affinity, perhaps ultimate identity, of *religion and poetry*, preaching is essentially a *lyric expression* of the soul, an utterance of meditation in sorrow, hope, love, and joy from a representative of the human heart in its divine relations."

Let me quote from the President of Davidson College. In his excellent work on Rhetoric, Dr. Hepburn says:

"No one can be insensible to the rare beauty of some sermons of this meditative, *poetical* cast, or dispute their high rank as literary productions. But those only are capable of such compositions in whom are united a *genuine poetical nature* and a *profound religious experience*."

MR. LOWE had both of these; he was truly poetical in his temperament, and he was a converted man. Hence, his preaching delighted whilst both stimulating the intellect and warming the soul.

Just in proportion as a man has imagination, and taste with

it, is he a poet. Without it man must always walk; he can never soar. It has been described as "being the eye of the soul." But better still, an American writer, Dr. Hudson, the very able critic in Shakespeare, says of it that it "is the organ through which the soul within us recognizes a soul without us; the spiritual eye by which the mind perceives and converses with the spiritualities of nature under her material forms." The Scotch philosopher, Dugald Stewart, said of imagination, that it "is the great spring of human activity and the principal source of human improvement * * Destroy this faculty, and the condition of man will become as stationary as that of brutes."

I have dwelt on this greatest of faculties of the mind because it is misunderstood, often underrated, especially by those to whom it is denied save only in very stunted measure, and because it is the fulcrum of the world. Napoleon said the world "is governed by imagination," and it is a profound truth. THOMAS G. LOWE was the *most purely imaginative being* I have ever known personally, and yet there are dozens here to-day who will bear witness to his having been one of the most practical of men, full of common sense, a man of solid judgment, a man utterly free from Quixotic notions and crazy fancies. He had a splendid imagination but under the control of reason and taste and allied to wisdom and discretion. He was a very sound piece of American timber.

I have said that THOMAS G. LOWE was the greatest *natural* orator, I believe, yet born in North Carolina. It seems to me if ever there was "a forest born Demosthenes," it was the plain, simple-natured, pure, unambitious North Carolina Methodist preacher whose life I have briefly sketched, and whose mental qualities I have attempted to present. I would dwell particularly upon his *natural* gifts. He had no training whatever in the schools of eloquence. He had learned nothing from elocutionists or professional actors. He knew scarcely anything of grammatical rules, as he once told me, and yet he spoke the purest and most correct English possible. He had no knowledge whatever of works of rhetoric, and yet he constructed his sentences with a regularity, precision, clearness and an art that would have excited the envy of the professed rhetorician. I have referred to his emphasis and intonation. In saying "Our Father," when leading in prayer, he always gave me a sense of

the *nearness* of God, of standing actually in the Divine Presence, such as I never felt before or since when any other man offered up prayer and supplication. I know not how to describe his manner; I only knew the effect. I have heard a great histrionic performer utter a word that haunted me for days. It was so with Mr Lowe's elocution. When overwhelmed with one of his baptisms—that impartation of the *divine afflatus*, he spake as I never heard any other man speak. I just now referred to his prayers. I know not how he affected others. At times he impressed me most singularly. He was not boisterous or vehement. He did not have the attitude of speech making. He did not address Deity as if conveying information. He did not aim at popular effect as is the manner of some. He was not trying to be eloquent. He was not so far forgetful of the proprieties of the place or the sanctity of the office as to strain after the applause of hearers. But with pathos, with pleading voice, with reverential attitude, with persuasive solemnity he approached the throne of grace, and talking as if very near to Almighty Father, even looking up into the very face of Love itself, so full of benignancy and pity, he poured out adoration and supplication in words of such real sweetness as to quite enravish the soul. He touched the hearts of the earthly hearers and he must have touched the Great Heart of the Lord of the Universe. I have thought once or twice when I have listened that his prayer was a *poem*—a beautiful creation, simple, earnest, not excessive, exquisite in finish and very beautiful and tender. I have thought about his prayers as I have thought about certain passages in his sermons; that there were such fine strokes—such felicitous words—such beautiful thoughts—such choice selection of language, that to appreciate them fully one should have something of that culture and taste necessary to enjoy fully the music, the perfect workmanship, and the exquisite rhythmical effects of Milton's *Lycidas*, the most perfect poem in our language, or of Tennyson, one of the greatest poets God ever made. It is true all might enjoy the general burden of the prayer and enter gladly into its petitions, but it required the attuned ear, the improved taste, the receptive mind to relish fully those graceful, *poetic* touches, that adorned the whole.

A few miles from where we now are and on the road to Halifax, I visited with him a good Christian woman who was slowly descending to the grave. In her sick room MR. LOWE read to her all or a part of that wonderful, most comforting fourteenth chapter of the Gospel according to John. He read

it in those clear, mellow, simple tones which so moved me, and then he knelt by her side and held sweet audience with God in her behalf. It was all done with the utmost simplicity and sympathy. And yet, after nearly twenty years the whole scene is before me. I remember it to-day with more distinctness than any religious exercises that have occurred since. I cannot reproduce the *manner* and without that you would not appreciate the *matter* properly if I could command it at will. I can say, and truthfully, that his prayers were sometimes to me more striking than the elaborate efforts of some men of talents I have heard.

Whilst he was not a technical logician, he was by no means deficient in ability as a thinker and reasoner. In his sermons there were no obscurities. If he did not impress you by great cumulative power, he would give you at least lucid statement and clear tracts of thought. I never heard him preach a sermon that was not well arranged and thoroughly coherent. But, as I have said, he was most distinguished for his sweet and abundant eloquence, that flowed as from an inexhaustible fountain, and for a rich and chastened imagination that delighted to lay fresh garlands of poetry upon the altar of his Redeemer and God.

I have referred to his being enthralled with his subject, when he would speak with wondrous force and eloquence. At a camp-meeting held near Henderson, Granville county, N. C., (now Vance,) about 1857 or 1858, he preached on Saturday. It was a failure for him. On Sunday morning he was selected to preach again. He ascended the pulpit in the presence of more than two thousand people. He was very pale. His text was: "How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation." He spoke calmly, deliberately, unimpassionedly for a few minutes. Presently his eye began to brighten, his voice to swell out and to play upon that key that never failed to move and thrill. His imagination put on her singing robes, and then for over twenty minutes such a strain of supra-mortal eloquence issued from his lips as none in that immense congregation had ever heard before. He seemed utterly unconscious of the presence of his hearers. He leaned, as was sometimes his wont, upon the pulpit, his eyes lifted to heaven, where they continued fastened. His voice was sweet as lute or harp, and his grand periods rolled forth in glori-

ous harmony. His descriptions were simply wonderful. The immense congregation sat spell-bound: a death-like stillness prevailed, to be broken but once by the sudden swooning of a lady who sat watching the inspired orator. The tension was tremendous. It appeared, if the speaker continued in his unearthly strain that the very heart-strings of his auditors would break. It became almost unbearable when the great magician closed. Never before had any of that congregation heard such music, such magnificent description, such pathetic pleading, such entrancing and prolonged eloquence. I once mentioned this great effort to Mr. LOWE, and the remarkable effect it had upon the congregation. His reply was, "I remember but little of the sermon. I had but little preparation. I only recollect that I had no mental or physical pain—that I spoke without any conscious effort."

I did not hear this masterpiece of pulpit eloquence, but it created much talk in my own county, in which it was delivered. I have heard it often spoken of, and it was described to me by a truthful and intelligent minister of the Gospel, the late Rev. Junius P. Moore. He told me it was incomparably grander and more entrancing in its eloquence than any other effort to which he had listened. Indeed, he said it so far surpassed all other efforts that he could compare none with it. Mr Moore was a man of solid parts. A well balanced mind not to be carried away easily by any ordinary display of oratory. He said that if LOWE had continued that he believed he himself would have broken down in some way. He had heard Bishops Pierce, Kavanaugh, and many other famous orators, but none ever approached this particular effort of imagination and passion. There was but one opinion of the transcendent beauty and power of the discourse.

I must mention the most remarkable sermon I ever heard him preach. Ten or eleven miles from the town of Halifax there is a Methodist church, in which worship a large congregation, but few of whom are moderately educated, and none are scholarly or well informed. I mention this to show that there was nothing peculiar or extraordinary to arouse the imagination of Mr. LOWE on the occasion I have in mind, or to cause him to make a very uncommon effort. But nevertheless, on a quiet Sabbath morning, in 1864, I heard him preach in that church very decidedly the most beautiful, delightful, bewitching discourse to

which I ever listened. I shall never forget it as long as memory lasts. It is to me to this hour "a thing of beauty," and it will remain "a joy forever." I have heard no such captivating eloquence in my time. A Presbyterian gentleman of Granville, then teaching a classical school in Halifax county, but now a teacher in the ministry, Rev. Isaac Osborn, of Alabama, heard MR. LOWE on that day for the first time. He said to me: "If I had not heard him thus speak, I would not have believed it possible for any uninspired mortal to indulge such a strain of exalted and charming eloquence. To me it is marvellous, it is a revelation of the most wonderful gifts." And yet MR. LOWE was evidently speaking under the inspiration of the occasion. I doubt if he had reflected for an hour upon his theme, or that he ever preached the sermon again. The probability is that his only preparation was such as he obtained during his solitary ride of two hours that morning from his home at Halifax to the church.

I had often heard a tradition concerning a certain trip he made to New York before he had attained to his thirtieth year. At last I obtained the facts from the gentleman who accompanied him. Col H. B. Short, of Columbus county, but formerly of Beaufort county, persuaded Mr LOWE to go with him to New York. He introduced him to some of the members of Old John's street Methodist Church. LOWE was asked to preach at night. His success was pronounced. He was urged to preach again. He did so and stirred the hearers most profoundly. That simple hearted, gentle, plain looking "piney-field" North Carolinian awoke such echoes in the hearts of his hearers as reminded them of Summerfield when he poured out from his cornucopia his rich treasures of sacred eloquence. The result was a committee of gentleman waited upon him and offered Mr. LOWE \$12,000 a year to preach to them. The unambitious and sweet-mannered North Carolinian declined, saying he did not preach the Gospel for money, however much he appreciated their kind and unexpected offer.

After preaching for thirty years in Eastern North Carolina, he could draw five times the crowd that any other man could attract. In the summer of 1864 he preached a funeral sermon within five miles of his birthplace, over a plain, uninfluential citizen. Some two thousand people were present, and extra

trains, north and south of Enfield, even as far as Goldsboro, were run, bringing six hundred people. His sermon was one of great beauty and eloquence. Days after, at my solicitation, he repeated a long passage from it that equaled any passage I have ever met with for splendor of thought and felicity of expression. He recited it immediately after I had read a very grand passage from Edward Everett's St. Louis oration, and I thought then that Mr. Lowe's surpassed it in those qualities that gave it such excellence.

The last sermon he preached was a few months before the closing scene in the quiet drama of his life. He had gone to the mountains in Western North Carolina in search of health. His fame had gone before him, and he was importuned to preach. He was very feeble, and his fine voice was broken and weak. A very large assembly had gathered to hear him—all strangers to him. His theme was "The song of the Angels;" and if ever the music of the angelic choristers was heard on earth, it was when this dying man stood up to preach his last sermon on earth, his face pale and worn, his form emaciated, his voice, at first indistinct and cracked, but presently clear and resonant and melodious as of yore. His theme suited his condition, his surroundings, and his peculiar genius. He spoke of heaven and the companionship of the redeemed; of redemption and everlasting life through Jesus Christ. It was indeed as sweet a "song" as "angel" ever sung. It was a seraphic picture that filled the soul with ecstasy, and gave the believer Pisgah views of the promised inheritance. It was an echo of celestial harmony—"a sevenfold chorus of hallelujahs and harping symphonies."

The dying swan thus sung his last and sweetest notes. In a short while he returned home to die, and in a few months all was over, and THOMAS G. LOWE stood in the presence of the Master who had said to him, "Come up higher!"

Mr. Lowe, as I have said, was frank, manly and sincere. He doubtless enjoyed, as all good men enjoy, the good opinion of his fellows. But of all men I have associated with he was the least tainted with personal vanity. In his vocabulary there was no everlasting I. In his conversation, however free and familiar, there was no offensive *Ego*. I tell the truth when I declare that I never heard him remotely allude to any thing he had done or said, save only in response to a direct inquiry. You must learn from others and not from him, a history of his per-

formances. In simplicity of character, in guilelessness, in consistent friendship, that was always the same, I have known scarcely his equal.

Freinds, brethren beloved, I have thus at much length and under difficulties of which you know nothing, attempted to discharge a most grateful duty. I have essayed to present to you *the religious and intellectual character* of a former county man—a neighbor, a friend and brother of many of you. I have spoken warmly, enthusiastically it may be, but only after mature deliberation and from a full conviction. I do not believe that in any particular I have used the colors too freely or that I have exaggerated the purity, the fascinating grace, and the splendid imagination of THOMAS G. LOWE. As I said at the outset, I have judged *him when in his happiest vien*, when under the fullest effusion of the Enlightening and Sanctifying Spirit, when his eye kindled under the Divine baptism, and his heart was filled with holy ardors and a burning love for souls. I have simply judged him as the great of earth are always judged—*by the highest exhibition of his powers*. Thus judged, I feel sure that my departed friend was all I have depicted him.

Whilst preparing this oration I received a most kindly letter from a dear friend at Oxford. The writer is a gentleman of fine taste in letters, of true culture, of sincere piety, and a lawyer of high standing. He, like Mr. LOWE, is a native of Halifax, but he left it when a little boy. He writes as follows:

“I well remember 40 years ago, attending the *old church* at (Haywoods) in company with Mr. Warren Branch's family, to hear Rev. T. S. Campbell preach. If I had the money to spare I should certainly be present to hear you speak of *that wonderful man*, that simple hearted, sweet spirited christian disciple, whose faculties seemed endowed of heaven to clothe the profoundest thought in the richest drapery of expression, and who combined in his eloquence the skill of the artist with the highest inspiration of genius. So far as I have known, Tom. Lowe has left nothing in writing, and when the last of the generation who heard him shall have passed away his name will live only in tradition and your writings of him.”

No lawyer in North Carolina by reason of cultivation, taste and skill with the pen is better qualified to render judgment upon the gifts of an orator like LOWE than John W. Hays, *sans peur, sans reproche*.

Whilst we gather here to pay fitting homage to the name and good deeds of a rarely endowed servant of Jesus who went in and went out before you; whilst you erect this house of worship in view of his natal birth-spot and upon the site so long occupied by the old church in which THOMAS G. LOWE first found Christ and united with His people, we must believe that if the saints in glory are ever occupied with the things of earth that our dear absent friend now regards from the celestial heights this scene and these memorial services. Although he has passed into the eternal heavens he is not forgotten here. Though rejoicing in the beatitudes of the redeemed and glorified his name and memory are kept green on earth, and we trust may be preserved for generations yet unborn. When our life here, like his, is ended forever, looking only to the same Jesus he preached with so much of unction and power and eloquence, and who bought him with His own precious blood, may we meet our friend who has gone before, who *was* dead but *is* alive again, in those mansions of perpetual rest and perpetual bliss prepared by God for his people.



