

GEORGE BANCROFT.

BY SAMUEL SWETT GREEN.

GEORGE BANCROFT, the historian of the United States, was chosen a member of the American Antiquarian Society in October, 1838. With that of Hon. Robert C. Winthrop, elected to membership at the same date, his name has for several years stood at the head of our list of living members. From 1877 to 1880, Mr. Bancroft was Secretary of Domestic Correspondence, and, since 1880, has been a Vice-President of the Society. At the time of his death, he was our First Vice-President. It seems fitting that the death of Mr. Bancroft should be commemorated in our Proceedings by a somewhat extended notice.

George Bancroft was a son of Rev. Aaron Bancroft, D.D. (*b.* 1755, *d.* 1839), the first pastor of the Second Parish in the town of Worcester, Massachusetts, a position held by the latter until he died, and for a period of more than fifty years. George Bancroft's mother was Lucretia (Chandler) Bancroft (*b.* 1765, *d.* 1839), a daughter of the last Judge John Chandler, of Worcester. Aaron Bancroft was a man of vigorous mind, excellent scholarship and earnest spirit. He was one of the six persons who joined in a petition for the Act of Incorporation of this Society and became one of its earliest members. He was a Councillor of the Society from the date of its organization in 1812 to 1816, a Vice-President from 1816 to 1831, and a member of its Publication Committee from 1815 to 1831. In 1807 he published a life of Washington, which had a large circulation and was reprinted in England.

George Bancroft was born in Worcester, October 3, 1800, in a house still standing on Salisbury street, which

was the second residence of his parents in Worcester. The house has been occupied for many years by Mr. John B. Pratt.

Very little, naturally, is to be said about Bancroft's life in Worcester as he left the town to go to Phillips Academy, Exeter, N. H., when in his eleventh year and never returned there to live. It may not be beneath the dignity of this occasion, however, to repeat an anecdote which Mr. Bancroft, with modest self-depreciation, told to Hon. C. K. Tuckerman during a call which that gentleman made upon him towards the close of October, 1889. Mr. Tuckerman writes: "Taking it for granted that" Mr. Bancroft "might not after the lapse of so many years distinctly recall my identity, I began by reminding him as to who I was and when we had last met. He interrupted me with a vigorous * * * exclamation, that he not only remembered me perfectly but that he rather thought he knew more of my family and their antecedents than I did myself. Thereupon he went back to the days of his boyhood in the town of Worcester, Massachusetts, and informed me that a certain cousin of mine, now some years deceased—who then dwelt there—had been his schoolmate and playmate. He, Mr. Bancroft, had greatly stood in awe of his schoolmate's mother, my aunt, who was a lady of great dignity, and most precise in her manners and ways of life. 'I was a wild boy,' continued Bancroft, 'and your aunt did not like me. She was always fearful that I would get her son into bad ways, and still more alarmed lest I should some day be the cause of his being brought home dead. There was a river, or piece of water, near Worcester, where I used to beguile young Salisbury, and having constructed a rough sort of raft he and I would pass a good deal of our playtime in aquatic amusements, not by any means unattended with danger. Madam's remonstrances were all in vain, and she was more and more confirmed in the opinion that I was a "wild, bad boy." However, nothing serious, beyond an occasional

wetting, ever occurred, yet I never rose in her estimation, and a "wild boy" I continued to be up to manhood."¹

I presume that it is unnecessary to say that the companion to whom Mr. Bancroft refers is our late President, the father of the gentleman who now presides over this Society.

Young Bancroft was regarded as a promising scholar when he went to the academy at Exeter, where he was a beneficiary pupil. He remained there, without going home to spend his vacations, until he entered Harvard College in 1813. He graduated from the latter institution, with the rank of second in his class, in 1817, when not yet seventeen years old. The late Stephen Salisbury was one of his classmates. Mr. Bancroft, at the time of his death, had been for some time the oldest living graduate of Harvard College.

As a promising scholar, Bancroft was sent abroad to study in 1818. It is said to have been a purpose of the gentlemen who provided the means to enable him to go to Europe, to give him such an education that he would be prepared to occupy the chair of a professor in Harvard College when it might become necessary to seek somebody to fill one. Mr. Bancroft entered the University of Göttingen and received from that institution the degree of Ph.D. at the remarkably early age of less than twenty years. While at Göttingen, he studied German literature under Benecke; French and Italian literature under Artaud and Bunsen; Arabic, Hebrew and Scripture interpretation under Eichhorn; Natural History under Blumenbach; the antiquities and literature of Greece and Rome, and Greek philosophy under Dissen, an enthusiastic admirer of Plato; and history under Planck and Heeren. Soon after receiving his degree at Göttingen, Mr. Bancroft went to Berlin where he was kindly received by Wilhelm von Humboldt, Varnhagen von Ense, Lappenberg and other distinguished scholars. He was a constant visitor at the house of

¹ Magazine of American History, March, 1891, page 230.

Schleiermacher, and was also very kindly received by Savigny, chief of the law department of the university and one of the ablest jurists of Germany. At Berlin, Bancroft attended the lectures of Wolff, Schleiermacher and Hegel. Passing on to Heidelberg in the spring of 1821, Mr. Bancroft spent several hours a day there studying with the historian Schlosser.

Before returning to America, he travelled on the continent of Europe, making the acquaintance of Manzoni at Milan, of Niebuhr at Rome, and of Benjamin Constant, Cousin, Alexander von Humboldt, and Lafayette at Paris. During his stay in Rome, he formed intimate relations with Chevalier Bunsen. These continued until the death of the latter.¹ While a student at Göttingen, Bancroft made the acquaintance of Goethe at Jena, and subsequently met him at Weimar. In May, 1822, he met Byron at Leghorn, and the next day, by invitation, visited him at Monte Nero, the residence of the poet at that time.

Mr. Bancroft must have been very attractive as a young man to have secured the attentions which were shown to him by distinguished scholars and literary men in Europe. Dr. Cogswell, in a letter to Mrs. Prescott, of Boston, dated August 28, 1819, in speaking of his sorrow at parting with him, writes, "He is a most interesting youth and is to make one of our great men."

Mr. Bancroft returned to the United States in 1822. He had prepared himself to enter the Christian ministry, and soon after coming home actually preached in his father's pulpit. The tradition in Worcester is that his manner on that occasion was regarded as somewhat artificial and as so different from that which was usual at the time in the pulpit as to prevent religious services as conducted by him from being wholly acceptable either to his father or his father's

¹ July 20, 1849, Bunsen writes: "For refreshment after this long day's work, I visited, at six o'clock, my truly esteemed colleague, Bancroft."—*Memoirs*, Vol. II., p. 150.

congregation. The sermon given in Worcester is said to have been an essay on love.

In 1822, Mr. Bancroft became tutor of Greek in Harvard College, but withdrew from that position in 1823. Towards the close of the latter year, he joined Dr. Joseph G. Cogswell in establishing a private school for boys, at Round Hill, Northampton. That school was meant to embody ideas which had been awakened by observation of institutions abroad. The aim of its projectors was to found a school in which instruction should be thorough and united with an abundance of exercise and recreation. It was intended, also, to maintain intimate relations between teachers and pupils.¹ The school was for a time very successful. An excellent corps of teachers gave instruction and the boys were healthy and happy. The enterprise proved financially unsuccessful in a few years, however.² Mr. Bancroft withdrew from the school in 1830. Dr. Cogswell continued the undertaking for two years longer and then abandoned it with impaired health and a loss in money of \$20,000.

Before going to Round Hill, Mr. Bancroft published in Cambridge, in September, 1823, a small volume of poems. These were marked by smoothness of versification and felicity of expression rather than by the higher qualities of poetry, and it is understood that later in life the author did what he could to withdraw the volume containing them from circulation. Our venerable and accomplished associate,

¹ "The school may be described as aiming, above all, to make *gentlemen*."
* * "There was great attention paid to modern languages in the school, and of course, under Beck and Bode, * * there was no neglect of the classics. Indeed, there was nothing connected with the culture of the mind, or the care and development of the body, or the elevation of the character, that was not contemplated by the founders of the Round Hill School" * * * * "The scheme of the school was too comprehensive to be thorough in the elementary training."—*Harvard Register*, Vol. III., pp. 3-5.

² For an account of the School at Round Hill, see *Memoir of Joseph G. Cogswell*, by Miss Anna E. Ticknor (privately printed); "A Sheaf of Papers," by Thomas G. Appleton; *The Round Hill School*, by Rev. Henry W. Bellows, D.D., New York, in the *Harvard Register*, Vol. III. (1881), p. 3; and *Recollections of Round Hill School*, by George E. Ellis, in the *Educational Review*, April, 1891.

Rev. Dr. Ellis, was a pupil of Mr. Bancroft at Round Hill, and remembers his teacher as a "somewhat dreamy and absent-minded scholar" and as showing the impulsiveness and effusiveness of manner which he retained throughout his life. He also recalls the fact that he read the manuscript while Mr. Bancroft corrected proof of his translation, published in 1824, of Heeren's *Politics of Ancient Greece*. Mr. Bancroft published in 1825, Jacobs's *Latin Reader*. Several editions of that work appeared. He early became a contributor to the *North American Review*, his first article in that periodical having come out in the number bearing the date of October, 1823. From that time on, for many years, he wrote papers for that *Review*, on literary, historical and financial subjects.

Mr. Bancroft, as early as 1818, while a student at Göttingen, determined to devote himself to historical pursuits. He began his great work on the history of the United States, at Northampton, and while there issued the first volume. The other nine volumes appeared at intervals until the publication of volume 10, in 1874. In 1876, the work was revised and issued as a centenary edition (6 vols., Boston). Volumes 11 and 12 were published first under the title of "History of the Formation of the Constitution of the United States" (New York, 1882). The last revised edition of the whole work appeared in six volumes (New York) in 1883-5. A variety of essays were written by Mr. Bancroft. Some of these were collected in a volume of *Literary and Historical Miscellanies* in 1855.

During most of his life, Mr. Bancroft belonged to the Democratic party. In 1830, he was elected to the legislature of Massachusetts but declined to take his seat, and the next year, although it was certain that he could be elected, declined a nomination to the Senate.

In 1835, Mr. Bancroft moved to Springfield. While living there, he worked on his history and took part in political movements. In 1836, he was the Democratic

candidate for Congress from the Springfield district, but was defeated at the polls. In 1838, he was appointed by President Van Buren, Collector of the Port of Boston, and remained in that position until 1841. The Democratic party in Massachusetts was small during Van Buren's administration, but it had among its adherents such well-known persons as Orestes A. Brownson, "then in the gall of radicalism and the bitterness of general dissatisfaction," Robert Rantoul, Nathaniel Hawthorne and Mr. Bancroft. Brownson, Rantoul and Bancroft were doctrinaires. A Whig contemporary, in writing of the last-named, says:

"I do not think that he much cared to deliver stump speeches; but he had no choice. Every Democratic officeholder who could speak and would not speak, was made to speak. Mr. Hawthorne, who could no more speak than jump over a wide river, was of course excused. Mr. Bancroft brought the rhetoric of his history to the platform. He was ornate, gilded and occasionally flaming. Whatever he might be discussing,—and people did not discuss much save the sub-treasury in those times,—he seldom deigned to descend from his stilts. He had a favorite way of beginning these election harangues. He would look with an expression of astonishment at the audience, and exclaim with the gesture of Hamlet at the first sight of the ghost, 'This vast assemblage might well appall me!' This impressed those who had never heard it more than twice before, and it had the further effect of giving the audience aforesaid a good conceit of its own proportions. I have said that Mr. Bancroft could never get off his stilts, but occasionally he relaxed a little his stately dignity. He was speaking one night of the great Whig procession in Boston in 1840. It undoubtedly did rain while the Whig army was marching to Bunker Hill, and Mr. Bancroft improved the circumstance with a surprising mixture of attitudinousness and familiarity. 'We appeal to Heaven,' he said, 'was written upon the impious banner. Heaven heard the appeal and sent down upon the throng the nastiest shower of the season!' Mr. Bancroft's audience could understand this better than his long dissertations upon the progress of the Democratic principle during the Eighteenth century in Europe

and America; and as he was not averse to applause, he went back to his Custom House contented, as he had good reason to be."¹

Mr. Bancroft performed the duties of Collector satisfactorily. In 1844, he was Democratic candidate for Governor of Massachusetts, but although polling an unusually large vote was defeated by George N. Briggs.

In 1845, Mr. Bancroft became Secretary of the Navy under President Polk. Our venerable associate, Rev. Dr. Peabody, informs me that the late Robert Rantoul told him that Mr. Polk first appointed Bancroft Attorney-General, supposing him to be a lawyer. He had to tell the President that he had been educated for the Church and not for the bar, whereupon he received the appointment of Secretary of the Navy.

Our associate, Rev. Dr. Edward Everett Hale, has kindly put into my hands a record in manuscript of a conversation which he had with Mr. Bancroft, January 14, 1888. An extract will show that Mr. Bancroft believed that he had much to do in securing the nomination of Polk for the presidency. Dr. Hale writes: "He," Mr. Bancroft, "showed me the various details in the Democratic convention. The first day, Van Buren led a little in the ballot. The Massachusetts delegation voted for him; but gradually Van Buren lost and Cass gained. Still it was perfectly clear that Cass could not carry the State of New York," owing to Van Buren's opposition. "At the end of the day, Mr. Bancroft said this privately to the New York delegation. They said it was so,—that the whole thing would be lost before the people if Cass were to be nominated. Mr. Bancroft then went around and made arrangements with the different delegations which resulted in the unanimous nomination of Polk. He prided himself very much on this. He said Polk had by far the greatest executive capacity of any man he had ever known. He showed me

¹ Congdon, Charles T. *Reminiscences of a Journalist*, p. 63.

in typewriter, Polk's diary of the four years of his presidency. He made entries every day."

I make another interesting extract from Dr. Hale's record. Mr. Bancroft "said himself that he always hated slavery, that when he was nominated as the candidate for Secretary of the Navy, Senator Archer wrote to ask if he were an anti-slavery man, and he said he was;—that if he were to go through the Senate he would go erect, and not on his knees. He said that in the discussion, he was consistent in his view that he was a man who disliked slavery, but was honest in his dislike of it."

While Secretary of the Navy, Mr. Bancroft's administration of affairs was marked by rigid economy. It was rendered memorable by the establishment, mainly through his efforts, of the Naval Academy at Annapolis. Mr. Bancroft gave the order to the commander of our squadron off California to take possession of that State in the event of war between the United States and Mexico. The order was executed while he was still Secretary. While acting for a month as Secretary of War, Mr. Bancroft gave the order to General Taylor to march into Texas. In September, 1846, he was transferred from the Cabinet of Mr. Polk to the position of Minister Plenipotentiary to Great Britain. While in London, he negotiated a postal treaty between England and the United States which was duly ratified by both governments. Of his social position in England, our distinguished associate, Hon. Robert C. Winthrop, writes, in speaking of a visit of his own to that country, "Many letters from Webster and Everett had given me access to all that was highest and best in the London life of that period, but I met him" (Bancroft) "everywhere, and witnessed the high estimation in which he was held by literary men like Rogers and Hallam and Alison and Milman and Lord Mahon, and by statesmen like Peel, Palmerston and Russell."¹

¹Proceedings of the Massachusetts Historical Society (meeting held February 12, 1891), p. 302.

Mr. Bancroft availed himself during his stay abroad of the opportunity afforded him to add largely to his collection of manuscripts, by making liberal extracts from the public archives of both England and France, which were freely thrown open to him for that purpose, as were also the private collections of many persons. The fruits of such labors are visible in his library in two hundred handsomely bound folio and quarto volumes of manuscripts. Upon his return to the United States in 1849, Mr. Bancroft took up his residence in New York, thus severing his connection for the rest of his life with his native State of Massachusetts.¹ Dr. Ellis, in an address before the Massachusetts Historical Society made in Boston after Mr. Bancroft's death, says: "The elders here will remember the social and professional alienations and the political animosities which led him to change his residence to New York."²

In considering the severe strictures passed upon Mr. Bancroft during the years of active political life of which we have spoken, it is but fair to presume that a large portion of them at least were merely the expression of strong political feeling on the part of opponents, and of the impatience which is often shown by persons of social position and wealth with views such as those put forth by Mr. Bancroft and his associates in the earlier portion of his political life. One thing is certain, namely, that using the term democrat in a large and not a party sense, Mr. Bancroft was a hearty democrat. The fact that he really believed in the wisdom of the people as opposed to classes was one of his leading qualifications for writing sympathetically the history of the popular movement which led to the foundation of the United States, and which is now at the bottom of the administration of its affairs.

After his return from Great Britain, Mr. Bancroft spent most of his time for many years in working on his history

¹ He died while a resident of the State of Rhode Island.

² Proceedings (February 12, 1891), p. 298.

of the United States. During the Civil War, he was a warm supporter of the cause of the Union and acted with the Republican party. In February, 1866, he was selected by Congress to pronounce a eulogy on President Lincoln. In 1867, he was appointed Minister to Prussia, being afterwards successively accredited to the North-German confederation and the German Empire. While in Berlin, he rendered valuable service in securing for Germans who had become naturalized citizens of the United States a recognition of their right to change their allegiance from their own country to that of their adoption. Indirectly the action obtained by Mr. Bancroft from Prussia and the other German States led to similar action on the part of Great Britain respecting British subjects who had become naturalized citizens of this country. Mr. Bancroft, while in Germany, also rendered very powerful aid in seconding the efforts of our government in the negotiations with Great Britain which ended successfully in the establishment of our position regarding the Northwestern boundary of the United States, which had been defined while he was a member of Mr. Polk's cabinet. Mr. Bancroft's mission to the German Empire ended at his own request in 1874. At that date, he returned home, and has since resided in Washington in winter and in Newport, R. I., in summer.

A few years ago, Mr. Bancroft printed a pamphlet which contained a review and searching criticism of the decision of the Supreme Court of the United States in the celebrated legal-tender case. Still more recently, he published a life of Martin Van Buren, which had been prepared during the life of the subject of the biography, but kept in manuscript. The work is laudatory rather than critical, and has been regarded in the light of a campaign document instead of a serious biography. For a list of the minor works of Mr. Bancroft reference is made to the sketch of his life by the late S. Austin Allibone, in Appleton's Cyclopædia of American Biography.

Mr. Bancroft's health has evidently been failing for several years. He has enjoyed what Mr. Higginson has happily termed an "inexhaustible old age." In May, 1882, when still very vigorous, he wrote to Mr. Allibone "I was trained to look upon life here as a season for labor. Being more than fourscore years old I know the time for my release will soon come. Conscious of being near the shore of eternity, I await without impatience and without dread the beckoning of the hand which will summon me to rest."¹

Four years after writing that letter, Mr. Bancroft presided at the meetings of the American Historical Association in Washington. All the members present were impressed with the belief that at that time, the spring of 1886, he was in full possession of his mental powers, and that his manner and action as President of the Association showed his accustomed vigor and force of character.

During September of the same year, Mr. Bancroft visited Worcester after an absence of forty years. At that time, also, he displayed mental and bodily activity such as usually belong only to a young man. It fell to the lot of the writer of the present notice to act as his guide while in Worcester. During the afternoon, he appeared unexpectedly at the Free Public Library, accompanied by his faithful German man-servant. I recognized him and greeted him heartily. He asked to be shown over the building. Thinking to spare him fatigue I went with him through the lower rooms, but soon finding that he wished to see everything conducted him from attic to basement. There was a meeting of the Council of this Society on the day chosen by Mr. Bancroft for his visit to Worcester. He had selected the day with reference to attending that meeting. Before he had finished examining the library building and its contents, the time had come for the meeting and he invited me to go to it with him in his carriage.

¹ Appletons' Cyclopædia of American Biography, article "Bancroft, George," volume I., p. 154.

As we passed along Main Street I pointed out to him the house in which his father last lived and died, and other old landmarks. He showed great interest. Reaching the hall of this Society he was greeted most cordially by the other members of the Council and remained during the meeting. On coming out I asked his servant where his carriage was. He said that Mr. Bancroft preferred to walk, and so two or three members of the Council and the Librarian walked with him to the Bay State House where he was staying. As soon as he got out of the door of the hall he assumed an attitude, and pointing to a spot on Court Hill directly in front, exclaimed, "I saw a man in the pillory there when I was a boy. He had uttered some blasphemous words and was punished in that way." He was in a cheerful, playful mood and showed much enthusiasm as the houses of Isaiah Thomas and other old residents, and the site of the second church occupied by his father were passed, and recalled reminiscences of his boyhood. He had accepted an invitation of mine to attend in the evening a session of the Worcester County Musical Association which is held in Worcester every autumn. Promptly at the time set for going he was ready and we went to Mechanics Hall together. Seats in the centre of the front row in the west gallery had been assigned to us. The oratorio of the evening was *Arminius*. Mr. Bancroft listened to it with attention and enjoyment. At the close of one of the parts, in accordance with an arrangement previously made, our associate, Hon. Edward L. Davis, went upon the platform and announced to the audience that Mr. Bancroft was in the building. Anxious to do him honor everybody rose and turned around. Mr. Bancroft acknowledged the attention by rising and bowing. It is interesting to note that although he had stayed away from Worcester for forty years, nevertheless he never lost an opportunity to inquire about the place and its old residents, and showed interest in the city by giving to it \$10,000 for the establishment of the Aaron and Lucretia Bancroft

scholarship in the name of his father and mother, for the education in college or elsewhere of some young person,¹ and also by selecting it as the place of burial for his second wife, a child and himself. An incident occurred in Mechanics Hall which does not seem too trivial to mention because it illustrates admirably the manner of Mr. Bancroft. Mr. Davis wished to have his elder daughter introduced to the distinguished guest. I introduced her as Miss Lillie Davis. "Ah," said Mr. Bancroft instantly, "Lilly! So called because straight as a lily, and I have no doubt, because pure as a lily."

Before leaving Mr. Bancroft for the night, I arranged to meet him the next morning at 7 o'clock and act as his guide in a drive about Worcester. Punctually at the hour appointed we started. He was much impressed by the beauty of the city, and expressed himself enthusiastically about it. He was reminded continually of incidents of his life here in childhood. In passing the first building occupied by the religious society to which his father ministered, still standing on Summer street, or Back street as it was formerly called, he spoke of his father's old horse which on coming down Salisbury street after reaching Lincoln square, on week days would invariably turn up Main street, but on Sunday as invariably turn up Back street. He was reminded, too, of a scene in church one Sunday. A boy who was a servant of Dr. Bancroft sat in one of the galleries. There was considerable noise in the gallery on the occasion referred to, and Dr. Bancroft looked up sternly towards the quarter where the disturbance seemed to be, and his servant thought that he was looking reprovingly at him. He was so frightened that oblivious of the proprieties of times of worship he cried out aloud, "It wasn't I, it was another boy." Mr. Bancroft wished to call on Senator Hoar and in going to his house while riding

¹ See Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society for April, 1883, pp. 317 and 318, for the letter of Mr. Bancroft, in which he proposed to establish the scholarship.

along Lincoln street, just as we reached the site of the old Lincoln mansion, I remember that he repeated an anecdote of Levi Lincoln, Senior, who had been Attorney-General of the United States during the presidency of Thomas Jefferson. It must be remembered that Mr. Lincoln became nearly blind in the latter portion of his life. "Riding along Lincoln street one day," said Mr. Bancroft, "Mr. Lincoln met a man driving a large flock of geese. In consequence of the dimness of his sight he mistook the geese for children and threw out of the carriage a handful of small coin, saying, 'Bless you, my children.'" We continued our drive until it was time for Mr. Bancroft to take the cars to return to Newport, and then drove to the railway station. I expressed the hope, in parting, that he would soon re-visit Worcester, but he spoke of his age and gave me to understand that it was unlikely that he should be able to do so.

Soon after his visit to Worcester, Mr. Bancroft began to fail and during the last few years of his life he was able to do but little work. Our honored and loved associate, Mr. Hoar, visited Mr. Bancroft in the evening of the last Sunday in December, 1890. "He was sitting," writes Mr. Hoar, "in his library up-stairs. He received me in his usual emphatic manner, taking both my hands and saying 'My dear friend, how glad I am to see you.' He was alone. He evidently knew me when I went in, and inquired about Worcester, as he commonly did, and expressed his amazement at its remarkable growth. I stayed with him twenty or thirty minutes. The topics of our conversation were, I believe, suggested by me, and the whole conversation was one which gave evidence of full understanding on his part of what he was talking about. It was not merely an old man's memory of the past, but fresh and vigorous thought on new topics which were suggested to him in the course of the conversation. I think he exhibited a quickness and vigor of thought and intelligence, and spoke with a beauty of diction that no man I know could have surpassed. * * *

I told his son about this conversation the day after Mr. Bancroft's death. He said that the presence of a visitor acted in this way as a stimulant, but that he had not lately shown such intelligence in the family, but seemed lost and feeble."

In the course of his conversation with Mr. Hoar he said "that his own inclination towards history, he thought, was due very much to the example of his father. He said his father would have been a very eminent historian, if he had had material at his command, and that he had a remarkably judicial mind." "He spoke of the clergymen, especially of the Unitarian clergymen, so many of whom belonged to Harvard in his time. He said he had little sympathy for the Unitarianism of his day, for its theology no, for its spiritualism yes." "He asked about the Election Bill pending in the Senate." Before the close of the conversation, Mr. Bancroft seemed to lose the control of his faculties which he showed in the beginning, and relapsed into forgetfulness. The remark made by Mr. Bancroft about the Unitarianism of his day, and the curiosity which I had heard expressed by several persons to know what his denominational preferences were, led me to write to Rev. Rush R. Shippen, of Washington, to learn what he knew about the matter. There is of course comparatively little significance to-day in the denominational connections of men, those connections are so commonly determined by social considerations and questions of policy, and so many thinkers, to-day, while retaining a connection with churches have come to believe that little can be found out about the theological and philosophical questions which have caused divisions among men. Still it is proper enough to satisfy curiosity which is natural and not obtrusive. Mr. Shippen writes, "At the dedication of All Souls Church" (a Unitarian Church), "January, 1878, Mrs. Bancroft took a pew. The trustees, by a custom then adopted, placed upon the end arm of the pew, by the aisle, a silvered plate with her

name inscribed on it. Upon seeing this, Mr. Bancroft had it removed and his own name substituted, and it has so remained till the present time. He has held the pew, paying rent, though he rarely occupied it. Mr. Bancroft has been in his pew in our church a few times, but not often. I have not supposed that he went elsewhere. He has always received me graciously, but my calls have not been frequent or intimate. On one occasion he said to me with his quick, emphatic way, 'I am *not* an Episcopalian! I am a Congregationalist!' He repeated it as if to give emphasis, 'I am *not* an Episcopalian.' However, we never talked theology, and my impression is that Mr. Bancroft cared little about it." It has been thought by many persons that twenty or thirty years ago Mr. Bancroft expressed in a public address a belief in the doctrine of the Trinity. Whether this was so or not I judge from what I hear of conversations had with him during the later years of his mental vigor that he probably held what would be regarded generally as very broad and radical views in respect to questions of theology.

Mr. Bancroft died January 17, 1891, and his remains were at once brought to Worcester and buried in his lot in the Rural Cemetery. Mr. Bancroft married in 1827, Miss Sarah H. Dwight. She died June 26, 1837. In the following year, he married Mrs. Elizabeth (Davis) Bliss, who died a few years ago. Two sons by the first marriage survive their father, namely, John Chandler (H. C., 1854), and George (H. C., 1856). The latter has lived for a long time in Europe. Mr. Bancroft was a member of numerous learned societies. It is only necessary to state here that he was a correspondent of the French Institute, and of the Royal Academy of Berlin. Besides receiving other degrees he was made a D.C.L., at Oxford in 1849, and a Doctor Juris by the University of Bonn in 1868. In September, 1870, he celebrated at Berlin the fiftieth anniversary of receiving the degree of Ph.D., at Göttingen.

George Bancroft was a remarkable man and his career

was long, eventful and brilliant. It has fallen to the lot of few men to be so successful. Early in life he began a great work and he lived long enough to finish it and to enjoy the consciousness of large accomplishment and the satisfaction of having his fellow-men regard the work he had done as of great importance. A man of unusual mental powers he made the most of very exceptional opportunities of acquiring knowledge. He chose his life-work when a young man and carried it on almost to the end of life with perfect system and great laboriousness. Seeing early in life the value of exercise and recreation, and being naturally very social, while he worked hard for many hours every day he never allowed anything to interfere with daily exercise and social intercourse. His success in life was largely owing to these practices.

Beginning early in life to make acquaintances we have found him associating in his student days with the principal scholars of Germany, France and Italy, and with such men of literary distinction as Goethe and Byron. From the time that he entered Polk's cabinet to the end of his life, he appears as the companion of the great men of the world. I have quoted the words of Mr. Winthrop to show how he was received by the statesmen and historians of Great Britain when he represented this country at the Court of St. James. We learn, too, that, while in England he used to have long conversations with Albert, the Prince Consort, in the German language, on literary and public questions.¹ Later, in Germany, he enjoyed rare social distinction. He was intimate with Bismarck, who welcomed him (a rare event in his intercourse with men) to familiar conversation in his own home. The emperor Wilhelm I. was strongly drawn towards him. So, too, was Friedrich; and the present emperor had a wreath placed upon the casket which contained his remains at the funeral services in Washington. For many years both in Washing-

¹ Magazine of American History, March, 1891, p. 229.

ton and Newport, he has been the central figure in society. No man, American or foreigner, seemed to feel that he had seen either place if he had not been introduced to Mr. Bancroft, or at least seen him. Surely if the knowledge that he has performed a well-appreciated and great work and the undoubted assurance of being the cynosure of great men and of women of social eminence on both continents can make a man happy, Mr. Bancroft should have been happy. Whether he was so or not, he was one of the most successful of men, judging things from a worldly point of view. He had decided peculiarities in society; was regarded as artificial, and not only as playful but as frivolous. Still, in England, Germany and America his eccentricities were overlooked, for they were overshadowed by the conviction that he was distinguished by intellectuality and great attainments.

Mr. Bancroft was a successful and highly honored diplomatist; he was also a great social success. What shall be said of his monumental work, the *History of the United States*? Our associate, Mr. Robert C. Winthrop, has lately said that "in all its varied editions" it "will always be received and recognized as the leading authority in American History for the period which it includes." As the different volumes of the work appeared, while many of his statements and estimates of men were criticised, often severely, the results of his labors received the highest commendation from many of the best critical journals in this country and abroad, and unstinted praise from such men as Edward Everett, William H. Prescott and George Ripley in this country, and Professor Heeren, Baron Bunsen and Frederick von Raumer in Germany. The methods of writing history have changed somewhat in late years, and while Mr. Bancroft's work seems likely to remain as of standard importance it is open to criticism. I presume that I should not differ much from the estimate of it given by our associate, Mr. Thomas Wentworth Higginson, in the account

which he gave of it in the *New York Evening Post* of January 19, 1891, and in the *Nation* of a few days later. Mr. Higginson speaks with large knowledge of the subject and evidently aims to be fair. The criticism has struck somewhat harshly upon the ears of some of Mr. Bancroft's friends, coming as it did so soon after the great man's death, and following the adoration which had latterly been bestowed upon him. But it has long been known that while the history possesses remarkable excellencies, it has, like most great creations, defects which it is important should receive careful consideration. I wish only to add that in view of the facts that Mr. Bancroft made very large use of manuscript sources and rare books in the preparation of his history, and that his quotations were made freely rather than with verbal exactness and completeness, it is very important that large portions if not the whole of his very valuable private library should become the property of the United States government, or of some public institution in one of our large cities where the great collection of manuscripts and other material used in the composition of his history may be easily consulted for purposes of verification and additional information.

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