The Thirteenth Congress

Mathew Carey

This sketch of Mathew Carey is reprinted from the first volume of Appletons’ Cyclopaedia of American Biography (1888). We found his poem in the Gabriel Duval Papers at the Library of Congress, Manuscript Division. Carey was one of those self-made European misfits who fit in just fine in post-colonial American society, or at least some parts of it. In addition, he was perhaps unique among Founding-era journalistic publishers in his ability to maintain reasonably good relations with both Federalists and Republicans during the politically contentious years at the close of the 18th century and the opening of the 19th. Although that does not mean that he was always a polite person, as his poem reproduced here shows.

— The Editors

Carey, Mathew, publisher, b. in Ireland, 28 Jan., 1760; d. in Philadelphia, Pa., 16 Sept., 1839. He received a liberal education, and when he was fifteen years old his father gave him a list of twenty-five trades from which to make the choice of his life-work. He selected the business of printer and bookseller, and two years afterward brought out his first pamphlet, a treatise on duelling, followed by an address to Irish Catholics, so inflammatory that young Carey was obliged to avoid prosecution by flight to Paris. During his stay there he became acquainted with Benjamin Franklin, then representing the United States at the court of Versailles, who gave him employment.

Returning to Ireland after a year’s stay, he established a new paper called the “Volunteer’s Journal,” which, by its bold and able opposition to the government, became a power in politics, and eventually brought about the legislative independence of Ireland. A too violent attack upon parliament and the ministry led to his arraignment before the house of commons for libel in 1784, and he was imprisoned until the dissolution of parliament.

After his liberation he sailed for America, reaching Philadelphia, 15 Nov., 1784, and
two months afterward began to publish "The Pennsylvania Herald," the first newspaper in the United States that furnished accurate reports of legislative debates, Carey acting as his own reporter. He fought a duel with Col. Oswald, editor of a rival journal, and received a wound that confined him to his house for more than sixteen months. Soon after this he began the publication of "The American Museum," which he conducted for six years.

In 1791 he married, and opened a small book-selling shop.

During the yellow-fever epidemic two years later he was a member of the committee of health, and tireless in his efforts for the relief of sufferers. The results of his extensive observation were collected and published in his "History of the Yellow Fever of 1793." In the same year he founded the Hibernian society. In 1796 he was one of a few citizens who, under the direction of Bishop White, formed the first American Sunday-school society.

With characteristic vigor he engaged in the discussions concerning the United States bank, writing articles for newspapers and publishing pamphlets, which he distributed at his own expense. In 1814 appeared his "Olive Branch, or Faults on Both Sides, Federal and Democratic," designed to harmonize the antagonistic parties of the country pending the war with Great Britain. It passed through ten editions, and is still a recognized authority in regard to the political history of the period.

In 1819 he published his "Vindici Hiberniae," an examination and refutation of the charges against his countrymen in reference to the butcheries alleged to have been committed by them in the rebellion of 1641. From this time he devoted himself almost exclusively to politico-commercial pursuits, publishing in 1820 the "New Olive Branch," in which he endeavored to show how harmonious were the real interests of the various classes of society, and in 1822 "Essays on Political Economy." This was followed by a series of tracts extending to more than 2,000 pages.

The object of all these was to demonstrate the necessity of the protective system as the only means of advancing the real interests of all classes in the community.

He was active in the promotion of all the public works of the city and state, and advocated the system of internal improvements that led to the construction of the Pennsylvania canals. He interested himself in forwarding education and in establishing the charitable institutions for which Philadelphia is now famous. In 1833-'4 he contributed his autobiography to the "New England Magazine."
Philadelphia, 16th February 1815
Anticipation
March 14th, 1815

Last night决定了 this life,
Amongst the glooms are evolutions of the good,
and the lusty pleasures of the wicked.
The doctrine was detectable.

Thirteenth Congress of the United States,
one of the
Most execrable public bodies
ever intruded on
The destinies of a mighty nation.

The solemn melancholy madness, one folly,
of the
Contemplated majority
here the
Sublime vileness, the pernicious
Desperate and factious minority,
Defeated the hopes and expectations
of their

Injured, Initiated, Raffled and
Betrayed Country.
Which placed reliance upon the broken seal
of this wicked Congress
for protection.
Not all its foul hopes were blasted.

While the nation exclaim'd for deliverance,
was threatened with all the horrors
that an insurate and powerful foe could inflict.
They spent that precious time
which ought to be employed in providing
for the Subsistence
of our fathers and our mother— our wives and
our children, our brothers and our sisters;
for saving our houses from the flames;
our men from Slaughter;
our women from the lust of a brutal
and conquering soldier;
in idle debates, involving amendments, and
watched safely.

Had they not known of their devoted country.
A Republican Government,
An of human happiness.
Rear them for our destruction.
They could hardly have performed the service better.

We waited solemnly to deliberate. They debated every attempt to raise them.

The government

By fraud, corruption, and treachery

Was reduced to bankruptcy and unable to pay for our defence.

Then, in vain, the lane through the want of a circulating medium.

A suitable, moderate, would have restored credit and confidence.

spread hitherto over the country

and enabled the administration to raise armies for the general defence.

But they rendered involuntary every effort to establish one adequate to their great purpose.

The annals of legislation

never honor so vile, so profligate a refuse

as the last of their miserable body,

the loathing, the scorn, the abomination of all good men.

To the end of time,

whenever the historian shall be desirous

of exciting abhorrence at the

tyranny of any base legislative body.

He will simply state, that it was

as vile, as odious, as abominable, as ignoble as the thirteenth Congress,

which will completely stamper it with infamy.

The power of language ends: go no further.

Matthew Carey is the author.

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