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Title: “The Angel of Assassination,” by Richard G. Chaney

Format: Commencement Oration

Date: July 12, 1849

Location: Orations-1849-C456a

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The Angel of Assassination.

A Speech Delivered

July 12th 1849.

Richard Cassaway Chaney.

Dickinson College,

Carlisle.

Printed by J. P. ...

The Angel of Assassination

The sky was of an Eastern purity. The sun shone on the tall trees of the Tuilleries, on the high walls of the city Paris with as much clearness and brilliancy, as on the splendid temples of ancient Athens. But within that city a fearful revolution had commenced; the Girondists were actively employed, and hundreds had already listened to, and admired the eloquence of Danton and Robespierre, of Vergniaud and Mirabeau. While things were thus in the city Paris, the shadow of a grand idea was flitting through the mind of a youthful maiden, sitting alone, in the distant Capitol of Normandy.

Louis the sixteenth and Marie Antoinette sat dejected in their Palace; it was night; a heavy gloom, a sad foreboding, pass o'er their spirits; the future threatening death! Gaudet enters the apartment alone, they both rise to greet him welcome, and the queen bears in her own hands a waxen taper and shows to him the Dauphin; he is sleeping, calmly, sweetly sleeping.

Gaudet pushes back the curling ringlets from his fair brow, and while a tear rolls down his own cheeks, kisses him, but it is the kiss of Judas! "Educate him inde, for liberty" he says, and in a few months conspires to render that child an orphan, and from the same scaffold, the King and Queen of France pass away into Eternity! But from their restless ashes, there springs up a being of exquisite beauty, of superhuman form, with half angelic splendor, emerging from her secluded stillness suddenly, like a star, to gleam for a moment, and in a moment to be extinguished!

Like Judith of the Apocrypha she went forth from the city, adorn

ed with a Marvellous beauty which the Lord bestowed upon her, to deliver her Country".!

Fifty six years ago this very morning she had entered Paris, and passing down the street was heard inquiring the way to the Palais Royal; she enters the public gardens unobserved, and seeks under the galleries an instrument of death, and having purchased and concealed it, she sits near the arcade unnoticed, and meditates an awful deed!

Her snow-white robe was partly concealed by a silk scarf thrown over her shoulders; her black hair hung in jetty ringlets down her marble neck; no paleness of complexion, no wildness of gaze, no faltering of the voice revealed her deadly purpose. The shades of evening were falling around her as she knocks at the door, and gains admission into the Chamber of her enemy. The room was faintly lighted; and now with downcast eye and half-averted face, and arms hanging motionless by her side, she stands close by the bath; and then, quickly drawing the Spargnard from her bosom, with superhuman force, she plunges it to the hilt in Marat's heart; and now, as if petrified at her crime, she stands for a moment motionless, but the next moment she was seized and borne away to Prison

There she thought of happier days gone by
And wept the tear of memory."

The report of Marat's death spread through Paris like an electric shock. Men ran about the streets full of excitement. Quickly was she summoned to trial, and hasty was that trial! she ascended the deep-dark stairway of the Palais de Justice and stood before the Revolutionary Tribunal. Never before

had crime presented such features to the eyes of men; never before had beauty so melted rage into admiration and interest; "for as the rose-bud opens to the morning, as the dewdrop on the lily, so was her passing loveliness". She listened to her sentence of death unaffected, and was conducted back again to her dark cell, she enters there, and now is left alone, - then indeed -

"She felt what the breaking heart must know
And wept the tear of bitter woe"!

On the evening of the next day she appeared again, but it was upon a scaffold erected high! all Paris was there to witness this cruel tragedy, a shower of rain bathed her flowing ringlets, and cooled her heated brow, and the last rays of the setting sun fell one by one upon her and silently withdrew. Her complexion now assumed an unearthly brilliancy. "She resembled Celestial Venus appeared and transfigured" - "It was the Angel of Assassination!" And now -

"With countenance as mild
As mercy looking on repentance tears,
Her dark-blue eyes now darted up
To God's Eternal Throne & now humbly bent
Upon herself - And weeping down her cheek
A tear, as pure as the dew that falls in heaven".

Then seeing her shroud flowing loosely around her, she said, "This is the toilette of death, and though arranged with rude hands, yet it leads me to immortality" - And then, methinks, I hear her, in the language of the dying Mirabreau, exclaim; "Oh sprinkle me with perfumes and crown me with flowers that I may thus enter upon an eternal sleep" - but the heavy axe falls, and she is gone - Yes -
Like a falling star -

Like the ravinon's lovely form,
Vanishing amid the storm,
Like the snow-drop on the river,
A moment there - then gone forever! - so she
disappeared! Dawn would not follow her into Eternity,
But, as drops of water fall into some dark well,
And from below comes a scarce audible sound,
So fall our thoughts into the dark hereafter,
And their mysterious echo reaches us!

And now,
as the modern ministers pass by the spot that marks her rest-
ing place they stop, and looking on that spot they weep,
and weeping they, "whose tomb is this? - King the Foot Klop-
stock - it is the tomb of Charlotte Corday - Let us gather flow-
ers and scatter them o'er her ashes, for she is dead for her
country. No, no, gather nothing. Then let us seek a weep-
ing willow and plant it o'er her grave - for she is dead
for her country. No, no, plant nothing; but weep, and
let your tears be blood for she is dead in vain for her
country!"

Dickinson College
July 12th 1849.
" " "

R. H. Chaney
" " "

Commencement Oration of Richard Gassaway Chaney, Class of 1849
Transcribed by Sarah-Hazel Jennings, May 2008
Edited by Chris Altieri, June 2008

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