

CHAPTER IV.

MR. ADAMS' RETURN TO THE UNITED STATES—ELECTED TO THE MASSACHUSETTS SENATE—APPOINTED U. S. SENATOR—SUPPORTS MR. JEFFERSON—PROFESSOR OF RHETORIC AND BELLES LETTRES—APPOINTED MINISTER TO RUSSIA.

JOHN QUINCY ADAMS returned to the United States from his first foreign embassy, in 1801. During the stormy period of his father's administration, and the ensuing presidential canvass, he was fortunately absent from the country. Had he been at home, his situation would have been one of great delicacy. It can hardly be supposed he would have opposed his father's measures, or his reëlection. Yet to have thrown his influence in their behalf, would have subjected him to the imputation of being moved by filial attachment rather than the convictions of duty. From this painful dilemma, he was saved by his foreign residence. He came home uncommitted to party measures, untrammelled by party tactics or predilections; and thus stood before the people, as he could wish to stand, perfectly unshackled, and ready to act as duty and conscience should direct.

Arriving in the United States with distinguished honors gained by successful foreign diplomacy, Mr.

Adams was not allowed to remain long in inactivity. In 1802, he was elected to the Senate of Massachusetts, from the Boston district. During his services in that body, he gave an indication of that independence, as a politician, which characterized him through life, by his opposition to a powerful combination of banking interests, which was effected among his immediate constituents. Although his opposition was unavailing, yet it clearly showed that the integrity of the man was superior to the policy of the mere politician. But higher honors awaited him.

In 1803, he was elected to the Senate of the United States, by the Legislature of Massachusetts. Thus at the early age of thirty-six years, he had attained to the highest legislative body of the Union. Young in years, but mature in talent and experience, he took his seat amid the conscript fathers of the country, to act a part which soon drew upon him the eyes of the nation, both in admiration and in censure.

The period of Mr. Adams' service in the United States Senate, was one in which the position and the interests of the country were surrounded by embarrassments and perils of the most threatening character. The party which had supported his father had become divided and defeated. Mr. Jefferson, elevated to the Presidency after a heated and angry contest, was an object of the dislike and suspicion of the Federalists. The conflicts of the belligerent nations in Europe, and the measures of foreign policy they severally adopted,

not only affected the interests of the United States, but were added elements to inflame the party contests at home.

In 1804, Bonaparte stepped from the Consul chamber to the throne of the French Empire. All Europe was bending to his giant rule. Great Britain alone, with characteristic and inherent stubbornness, had set itself as a rock against his ambitious aspirations, and prosecuted with unabated vigor its determined hostility to all his measures of trade and of conquest. In November, 1807, the British Government issued the celebrated "Orders in Council," forbidding all trade with France and her allies. This measure was met by Napoleon, in December, with his "Milan Decree," prohibiting every description of commerce with England or her colonies. Between these checks and counter-checks of European nations, the commerce of the United States was in peril of being swept entirely from the ocean.

During most of this perplexed and trying period, Mr. J. Q. Adams retained his seat in the United States Senate. Although sent there by the suffrages of the Federal party, in the Massachusetts Legislature, yet he did not, and would not, act simply as a partisan. This in fact was a prominent characteristic in Mr. Adams throughout his entire life, and is the key which explains many of his acts otherwise inexplicable. His noble and patriotic spirit arose above the shackles of party. He loved the interests of his country, the happiness of

MAN, more than the success of a mere party. So far as the party with which he acted advocated measures which he conceived to be wise and healthful, he yielded his hearty and vigorous co-operation. But whenever it swerved from this line of integrity, his influence was thrown into the opposite scale. This was the rule of his long career. No persuasions or emoluments, no threats, no intimidations, could turn him from it, to the breadth of a hair. It was in consequence of this characteristic, that it has so frequently been said of Mr. Adams, that he was not a *reliable* party man. This was to a degree true. He was not reliable for any policy adopted simply to promote party interests, and secure party ends. But in regard to all measures which in his judgment would advance the welfare of the people, secure the rights of man, and elevate the race, no politician, no statesman the world has produced, could be more perfectly relied upon.

This disposition to act *right*, whether with or against his party, was developed by the first vote he ever gave in a legislative body. While in the Massachusetts Senate, the Federalists were the dominant party. It was the custom in that State, to choose the whole of the Governor's Council from the party which had the majority in the Legislature. In May, 1802, Mr. Adams was desirous that a rule should be adopted more regardful of the rights of the minority. He accordingly proposed that several anti-Federalists should have seats

in the Council of Gov. Strong, and gave his first vote to that measure.

On a certain occasion, Mr. Adams was asked, "What are the recognized principles of politics?" He replied, that there were no *principles* in politics—there were recognized *precepts*, but they were bad ones. But, continued the inquirer, is not this a good one—"To seek the greatest good of the greatest number?" No, said he, that is the worst of all, for it looks specious, while it is ruinous. What shall become of the minority, in that case? This is the only principle to seek—"the greatest good of all."*

A few months after Mr. Adams' entrance into the Senate of the United States, a law was passed by Congress, at the suggestion of Mr. Jefferson, authorizing the purchase of Louisiana. Mr. Adams deemed this measure an encroachment on the Constitution of the United States, and opposed it on the ground of its unconstitutionality. He was one of six senators who voted against it. Yet when the measure had been legally consummated, he yielded it his support. In passing laws for the government of the territory thus obtained, the right of trial by jury was granted only in capital cases. Mr. Adams labored to have it extended to all criminal offences. Before the territory had a representative in Congress, the government proposed to levy a tax on the people for purposes of revenue. This attempt met the decided opposition of Mr. Adams.

* Massachusetts Quarterly, June, 1848.

He insisted it would be an exercise of government, without the consent of the governed, which, to all intents, is a despotism.

In 1805, he labored to have Congress pass a law levying a duty on the importation of slaves. This was the first public indication of his views on the subject of slavery. It was a premonition of the bold, unflinching, noble warfare against that institution, and of the advocacy of human freedom and human rights in the widest sense, which characterized the closing scenes of his remarkable career, and which will perpetuate his fame, when other acts of his life shall have passed from the remembrance of men. Although at that early day but little was said in regard to slavery, yet the young senator saw it was fraught with danger to the Union—conferring political power and influence on slaveholders, on principles false and pernicious, and calculated ultimately to distract the harmony of the country, and endanger the permanency of our free institutions. He labored, therefore, to check the increase of slave power, by the only means which, probably, appeared feasible at that time.

But a crisis in his senatorial career at length arrived. The commerce of the United States had suffered greatly by "Orders in Council," and "Milan Decrees." Our ships were seized, conducted into foreign ports and confiscated, with their cargoes. American seamen were impressed by British cruisers, and compelled to serve in a foreign navy. The American

frigate *Chesapeake*, while near the coast of the United States, on refusing to give up four men claimed to be British subjects, was fired into by the English man-of-war *Leopard*, and several of her crew killed and wounded. These events caused the greatest excitement in the United States. Petitions, memorials, remonstrances, were poured in upon Congress from every part of the Union. Mr. Jefferson endeavored by embassies, negotiations, and the exertion of every influence in his power, to arrest these destructive proceedings, and obtain a redress of grievances. But all was in vain. At length he determined on an *embargo*, as the only means of securing our commerce from the grasp of the unscrupulous mistress of the seas. An act to that effect was passed in Dec., 1807. This effectually prostrated what little foreign commerce had been left to the United States.

In these proceedings Mr. Jefferson was stoutly opposed by the Federal party. Massachusetts, then the chief commercial State in the Union, resisted with its utmost influence the Embargo Act, as pre-eminently destructive to its welfare, and looked to its Senators and Representatives in Congress to urge an opposition to the extreme. What course should Mr. Adams adopt? On the one hand, personal friendship, the party which elected him to the Senate, the immediate interests of his constituents, called upon him to oppose the measures of the administration. On the other hand, more enlarged considerations presented themselves.

The interest, the honor, the ultimate prosperity of the whole country—its reputation and influence in the eyes of the world—demanded that the Government should be supported in its efforts to check the aggressions of foreign nations, and establish the rights of American citizens. In such an alternative John Quincy Adams could not hesitate. Turning from all other considerations but a desire to promote the dignity and welfare of the Union, he threw himself, without reserve, into the ranks of the administration party, and labored zealously to second the measures of Mr. Jefferson.

This act subjected Mr. Adams to the severest censure. He was charged with basely forsaking his party—with the most corrupt venality—with the low motive of seeking to promote ambitious longings and selfish ends. But those who made these charges in sincerity labored under an entire misapprehension of his character and principles of action. At this day, aided by the instructive history of his life, and by a perfect knowledge of his patriotism and devotion to truth and principle, as developed in his long and spotless career, it is clearly seen that in the event under consideration he but acted up to the high rule he had adopted, of making party and sectional considerations secondary to the honor and interest of the nation—an example which no pure and high-minded statesman can hesitate to follow.

The Legislature of Massachusetts disapproved the course of Mr. Adams. By a small majority of Federal

votes, it elected another person to takè his place in the Senate at the expiration of his term, and passed resolutions instructing its Senators in Congress to oppose the measures of Mr. Jefferson. Mr. Adams could not, consistently with his views of duty, obey these instructions; and having no disposition to represent a body whose confidence he did not retain, he resigned his seat in the Senate, in March, 1808.

Although Mr. Adams gave most of his days to the service of his country, yet he was fond of literary pursuits, and acquired, during his hours of relaxation from sterner duties, a vast fund of classic lore and useful learning. At an early day, he had become distinguished as a ripe scholar, and an impressive, dignified, and eloquent public speaker. His reputation for literary and scholastic attainments quite equalled his fame as a politician and statesman.

In 1804, on the death of President Willard, Mr. Adams was urged by several influential individuals, to be a candidate for the presidency of Cambridge University. He declined the proffered honor. During the following year, however, he was appointed Professor of Rhetoric and Belles Lettres, in that institution. He accepted the office, on condition that he should be allowed to discharge its duties at such times as his services in Congress would permit. His inaugural address, on entering the professorship, was delivered on the 12th of June, 1806. His lectures on rhetoric and oratory were very popular. They were attended

by large crowds from Boston and the surrounding towns, in addition to the collegiate classes—a compliment which few of the professors since his day have received.

Mr. Adams continued his connection with the University, delivering lectures and conducting exercises in declamation, until July, 1809. "It was at this time, and as a member of one of the younger classes at college, that I first saw Mr. Adams, and listened to his well-remembered voice from the chair of instruction; little anticipating, that after the lapse of forty years, my own humble voice would be heard, in the performance of this mournful office. Some who now hear me will recollect the deep interest with which these lectures were listened to, not merely by the youthful audience for which they were prepared, but by numerous voluntary hearers from the neighborhood. They formed an era in the University; and were, I believe, the first successful attempt, in this country, at this form of instruction in any department of literature. They were collected and published in two volumes, completing the theoretical part of the subject. I think it may be fairly said, that they will bear a favorable comparison with any treatise on the subject, at that time extant in our language. The standard of excellence, in every branch of critical learning, has greatly advanced in the last forty years, but these lectures may still be read with pleasure and instruction. Considered as a systematic and academical

treatise upon a subject which constituted the chief part of the intellectual education of the Greeks and Romans, these lectures, rapidly composed as they were delivered, and not revised by the author before publication, are not to be regarded in the light of a standard performance. But let any statesman or jurist, even of the present day, in America or Europe—whose life, like Mr. Adams's, has been actively passed in professional and political engagements, at home and abroad—attempt, in the leisure of two or three summers—his mind filled with all the great political topics of the day—to prepare a full course of lectures on any branch of literature, to be delivered to a difficult and scrutinizing, though in part a youthful audience, and then trust them to the ordeal of the press, and he will be prepared to estimate the task which was performed by Mr. Adams.*

Mr. Adams's devotion to literary pursuits was destined to an early termination. On the 4th of March, 1809, Mr. Madison was inducted into the office of President of the United States. It was at that time far from being an enviable position. At home the country was rent into contending factions. Our foreign affairs were in a condition of the utmost perplexity, and evidently approaching a dangerous crisis. The murky clouds of war, which had for years overshadowed Europe, seemed rolling hitherward, filling the most sanguine and hope-

* Edward Everett's Eulogy on the Life and Character of John Quincy Adams.

ful minds with deep apprehension. Russia, under its youthful Emperor Alexander, was rising to a prominent and influential position among the nations of Europe. Mr. Madison deemed it of great importance that the United States should be represented at that court by some individual eminent alike for talents, experience, and influence. John Quincy Adams was selected for the mission. In March, 1809, he was appointed Minister to Russia, and the summer following, sailed for St. Petersburg.

In the meantime, our relations with Great Britain became every day more dubious. While striving, in every honorable manner, to come to terms of reconciliation, President Madison was making rapid preparations for war. The people of the United States, deprived by the non-intercourse act of the cheap productions of England, began to turn their attention and capital to domestic manufactures. At length the American Government demanded peremptorily, that the restrictions of Great Britain and France on our commerce should be abrogated; war being the alternative of a refusal. The French emperor gave satisfactory assurances that the Berlin decree should be withdrawn. The English government hesitated, equivocated, and showed evident disinclination to take any decided step.

“In this doubtful state of connexion between America and England, an accidental collision took place between vessels of the respective countries, tending

much to inflame and widen the existing differences. An English sloop-of-war, the *Little Belt*, commanded by Capt. Bingham, descried a ship off the American coast, and made sail to come up with it; but finding it a frigate, and dubious of its nation, he retired. The other, which proved to be American, the *President*, under Capt. Rogers, pursued in turn. Both captains hailed nearly together; and both, instead of replying, hailed again; and from words, as it were, came to blows, without explanation. Capt. Bingham lost upwards of thirty men, and his ship suffered severely. A Court of Inquiry was ordered on the conduct of Capt. Rogers, which decided that it had been satisfactorily proved to the court, that Capt. Rogers hailed the *Little Belt* first, that his hail was not satisfactorily answered, that the *Little Belt* fired the first gun, and that it was without previous provocation or justifiable cause.*

Several attempts were made after this, to preserve the peace of the two countries, but in vain. England, it is true, withdrew her obnoxious Orders in Council. It was, however, too late. Before intelligence of this repeal reached the shores of the United States, war was declared by Congress, on the 18th of June, 1812.

It was a popular war. Although strenuously opposed by portions of the Eastern States, as destructive to their commerce, yet with the mass of the people throughout the Union, it was deemed justifiable and

* *Lives of the Presidents.*

indispensible. A long series of insults and injuries on the part of Great Britain—the seizure and confiscation of our ships and cargoes; the impressing of our seamen, under circumstances of the most irritating description; and the adoption of numerous measures to the injury of our interests—had fully prepared the public mind in the United States, with the exception of a small minority, to enter upon this war with zeal and enthusiasm.

With occasional reverses, general success attended our arms in every direction. On land and on sea, the American eagle led to victory. The combatants were worthy of each other. Of the same original stock—of the same stern, unyielding material—their contests were bloody and destructive in the extreme. But the younger nation, inspirited by a sense of wrongs endured, and of the justness of its cause, bore away the palm, and plucked from the brow of its more aged competitor many a laurel yet green from the ensanguined fields of Europe. In scores of hotly-contested battles, the British lion, unused as it was to cower before a foe, was compelled to “lick the dust” in defeat. At York, at Chippewa, at Fort Erie, at Lundy’s Lane, at New Orleans, on Lake Champlain, on Lake Erie, on the broad ocean, Great Britain and the world were taught lessons of American valor, skill, and energy, which ages will not obliterate.

This war, though prosecuted at the expense of many valuable lives, and of a vast public debt, was,

unquestionably, highly beneficial to the United States. It convinced all doubters that our government was abundantly able to resent aggressions, and to maintain its rights against the assaults of any nation on earth. This reputation has been of great service in protecting our commerce, and commanding respect for our flag, throughout the world. But the chief benefit of the war was the development of our internal resources, which, after all, form the great fountain of the wealth, strength, and permanence of a nation. Deprived by the embargo, the non-intercourse act, and the ensuing hostilities, of all foreign importation of goods, the American people were compelled to supply themselves by their own industry and ingenuity, with those articles for which they had always before been dependent on their transatlantic neighbors. Thus was laid the foundation of that system of domestic manufactures which is destined to make the United States the greatest productive mart among men, and to bring into its lap the wealth of the world.

CHAPTER V.

MR. ADAMS' ARRIVAL AT ST. PETERSBURG—HIS LETTERS TO HIS SON ON THE BIBLE—HIS RELIGIOUS OPINIONS—RUSSIA OFFERS MEDIATION BETWEEN GREAT BRITAIN AND THE UNITED STATES—PROCEEDS TO GHENT TO NEGOTIATE FOR PEACE—VISITS PARIS—APPOINTED MINISTER AT ST. JAMES—ARRIVES IN LONDON.

MR. ADAMS arrived at St. Petersburg, as Minister Plenipotentiary from the United States, in the autumn of 1809. Twenty-eight years before, while a lad of fourteen, he was at the same place, as private secretary to Mr. Dana, the American Minister. The promising boy returned to the northern capital a mature man, ripe in experience, wisdom, patriotism, and prepared to serve his country in the highest walks of diplomacy. So truly had the far-seeing Washington prophesied in 1795:—"I shall be much mistaken, if, in as short a time as can well be expected, he is not found at the head of the diplomatic corps, be the government administered by whomsoever the people may choose!"

The United States, though but little known in Russia at that period, was still looked upon with favor, as a nation destined, in due time, to exert a