

CHAPTER XI.

MR. ADAMS' MULTIPLIED ATTAINMENTS—VISITED BY SOUTHERN GENTLEMEN—HIS REPORT ON WEIGHTS AND MEASURES—HIS POETRY—ERECTS A MONUMENT TO THE MEMORY OF HIS PARENTS—ELECTED MEMBER OF CONGRESS—LETTER TO THE BIBLE SOCIETY—DELIVERS EULOGY ON DEATH OF EX-PRESIDENT MONROE.

Few public men in any country have possessed attainments more varied than were those of Mr. Adams. Every department of literature and science received more or less of his attention—every path of human improvement seems to have been explored by him. As a statesman, he was unrivalled in the profundity of his knowledge. His state papers—given to the world while Minister, Secretary of State, President, and Member of Congress—his numerous addresses, orations, and speeches, are astonishing in number, and in the learning they display.* No man was more

* Aside from his state papers, official correspondence, and speeches, which would make many volumes, the *Literary World* gives the following list of the published writings of Mr. Adams:—

“1. Oration at Boston, 1793; 2. Answer to Paine's *Rights of Man*, 1793; 3. Address to the Members of the Massachusetts Charitable Fire Society; 4. Letters on Silesia; 5. Letters on Silesia, 1804; 6. Inaugural Oration at Harvard College, 1806; 7. Letters to H. G. Otis, in reply to Timothy Pickering, 1808; 8. Review of the Works of Fisher Ames, 1809; 9. Lectures on Rhetoric and Oratory, two volumes, 1810;

familiar with modern history, with diplomacy and international law, and the politics of America and Europe for the last two or three centuries.

In other departments he appeared equally at home. His acquaintance was familiar with the classics, and several modern languages. In oratory, rhetoric, and the various departments of belles lettres, his attainments were of more than an ordinary character. His commentaries on Desdemona, and others of Shakspeare's characters, show that he was no mean critic, in the highest walks of literature, and in all that pertains to human character.

The following interesting account of an interview with ex-President Adams, by a southern gentleman, in

10. Report on Weights and Measures, 1821; 11. Oration at Washington, 1821; 12. Duplicate Letters; the Fisheries and the Mississippi, 1822; 13. Oration to the citizens of Quincy, 1831; 14. Oration on the Death of James Monroe, 1831; 15. Dermot McMorrogh, or the Conquest of Ireland, 1832; 16. Letters to Edward Livingston, on Free Masonry, 1833; 17. Letters to William L. Stone, on the entered apprentice's oath, 1833; 18. Oration on the Life and Character of Lafayette, 1835; 19. Oration on the Life and Character of James Madison, 1836; 20. The Characters of Shakspeare, 1837; 21. Oration delivered at Newburyport, 1837; 22. Letters to his Constituents of the Twelfth Congressional District of Massachusetts, 1837; 23. The Jubilee of the Constitution, 1839; 24. A Discourse on Education, delivered at Braintree, 1840; 25. An Address at the Observatory, Cincinnati, 1843.

Among the unpublished works of Mr. Adams, besides his Diary, which extends over half a century, and would probably make some two dozen stout octavos, are *Memoirs of the earlier Public and Private Life of John Adams, second President of the United States*, in three volumes; *Reports and Speeches on Public Affairs*; *Poems*, including two new cantos of Dermot McMorrogh, a Translation of *Oberon*, and numerous *Essays and Discourses*.”

1834, affords some just conceptions of the versatility of his genius, and the profoundness of his erudition:—

“Yesterday, accompanied by my friend T., I paid a visit to the venerable ex-President, at his residence in Quincy. A violent rain setting in as soon as we arrived, gave us from five to nine o'clock to listen to the learning of this man of books. His residence is a plain, very plain one: the room into which we were ushered, (the drawing-room, I suppose,) was furnished in true republican style. It is probably of ancient construction, as I perceived two beams projecting from the low ceiling, in the manner of the beams in a ship's cabin. Prints commemorative of political events, and the old family portraits, hung about the room; common straw matting covered the floor, and two candlesticks, bearing sperm candles, ornamented the mantle-piece. The personal appearance of the ex-President himself corresponds with the simplicity of his furniture. He resembles rather a substantial, well-fed farmer, than one who has wielded the destinies of this mighty Confederation, and been bred in the ceremony and etiquette of an European Court. In fact, he appears to possess none of that sternness of character which you would suppose to belong to one a large part of whose life has been spent in political warfare, or, at any rate, amidst scenes requiring a vast deal of nerve and inflexibility.

“Mrs. Adams is described in a word—a lady. She has all the warmth of heart and ease of manner that mark the character of the southern ladies, and from which it would be no easy matter to distinguish her.

“The ex-President was the chief talker. He spoke with infinite ease, drawing upon his vast resources with the certainty of one who has his lecture before him ready written. The whole of his conversation, which steadily he maintained for nearly four hours, was a continued stream of light. Well contented was I to be a listener. His subjects were the architecture of the middle ages; the stained glass of that period; sculpture, embracing monuments particularly. On this subject his opinion of Mrs. Nightingale's monument in Westminster Abbey, differs from all others that I have seen or heard. He places it above every other in the Abbey, and observed in relation to it, that the spectator ‘saw nothing else.’ Milton, Shakspeare, Shenstone, Pope, Byron, and Southey were in

turn remarked upon. He gave Pope a wonderfully high character, and remarked that one of his chief beauties was the skill exhibited in varying the cesural pause—quoting from various parts of his author, to illustrate his remarks more fully. He said very little on the politics of the country. He spoke at considerable length of Sheridan and Burke, both of whom he had heard, and could describe with the most graphic effect. He also spoke of Junius; and it is remarkable that he should place him so far above the best of his contemporaries. He spoke of him as a bad man; but maintained, as a writer, that he had never been equalled.

“The conversation never flagged for a moment; and on the whole, I shall remember my visit to Quincy, as amongst the most instructive and pleasant I ever passed.”

As a theologian, Mr. Adams was familiar with the tenets of the various denominations which compose the great Christian family, and acquainted with the principal arguments by which they support their peculiar views. While entertaining decided opinions of his own, which he did not hesitate to avow on all proper occasions, he was tolerant of the sentiments of all who differed from him. He deemed it one of the most sacred rights of every American citizen, and of every human being, to worship God according to the dictates of his own conscience, without let or hindrance, our laws equally tolerating, and equally protecting every sect.

In the most abstruse sciences he was equally at home. His report to Congress, while Secretary of State, on Weights and Measures was very elaborate, and evinced a deep and careful research into this important but most difficult subject. That report was

of the utmost value. Adopting the philosophical and unchangeable basis of the modern French system of mensuration, an arc of the meridian, it laid the foundation for the accurate manipulations and scientific calculations of the late Professor Hassler, which have furnished an unerring standard of Weights and Measures to the people of this country. In a very learned notice of "Measures, Weights, and Money," by Col. Pasley, Royal Engineer, F. R. S., published in London, in 1834, he pays the following well-merited compliment to Mr. Adams:—

"I cannot pass over the labors of former writers, without acknowledging in particular, the benefit which I have derived, whilst investigating the historical part of my subject, from a book printed at Washington, in 1821, as an official Report on Weights and Measures, made by a distinguished American statesman, Mr. John Quincy Adams, to the Senate of the United States, of which he was afterwards President. This author has thrown more light into the history of our old English weights and measures, than all former writers on the same subject. His views of historical facts, even where occasionally in opposition to the reports of our own Parliamentary Committees, appear to me to be the most correct. For my own part, I confess that I do not think I could have seen my way into the history of English weights and measures, in the feudal ages, without his guidance."

To his other accomplishments Mr. Adams added that of a poet. His pretensions in this department were humble, yet many of his productions, thrown off hastily, no doubt, during brief respites from severer labors, possess no little merit. A few specimens will not be uninteresting to the reader.

The following stanzas are from a hymn by Mr. Adams for the celebration of the 4th of July, 1831, at Quincy, Mass. :—

"Sing to the Lord a song of praise ;
Assemble, ye who love his name ;
Let congregated millions raise
Triumphant glory's loud acclaim.
From earth's remotest regions come ;
Come, greet your Maker, and your King ;
With harp, with timbrel, and with drum,
His praise let hill and valley sing.

* * * * *

"Go forth in arms ; Jehovah reigns ;
Their graves let foul oppressors find ;
Bind all their sceptred kings in chains ;
Their peers with iron fetters bind.
Then to the Lord shall praise ascend ;
Then all mankind, with one accord,
And freedom's voice, till time shall end,
In pealing anthems, praise the Lord."

The lines which follow were inscribed to the sundial under the window of the hall of the House of Representatives, at Washington :—

"Thou silent herald of Time's silent flight !
Say, couldst thou speak, what warning voice were thine ?
Shade, who canst only show how others shine !
Dark, sullen witness of resplendent light
In day's broad glare, and when the noontide bright
Of laughing fortune sheds the ray divine,
Thy ready favors cheer us—but decline
The clouds of morning and the gloom of night.
Yet are thy counsels faithful, just and wise ;
They bid us sieze the moments as they pass—

Snatch the retrieveless sunbeam as it flies,
 Nor lose one sand of life's revolving glass—
 Aspiring still, with energy sublime,
 By virtuous deeds to give eternity to Time."

It is seldom that lines more pure and beautiful can be found, than the following on the death of children:—

"Sure, to the mansions of the blest
 When infant innocence ascends,
 Some angel brighter than the rest
 The spotless spirit's flight attends.

"On wings of ecstasy they rise,
 Beyond where worlds material roll,
 Till some fair sister of the skies
 Receives the unpolluted soul.

"There at the Almighty Father's hand,
 Nearest the throne of living light,
 The choirs of infant seraphs stand,
 And dazzling shine, where all are bright.

"The inextinguishable beam,
 With dust united at our birth,
 Sheds a more dim, discolored gleam,
 The more it lingers upon earth:

"Closed is the dark abode of clay,
 The stream of glory faintly burns,
 Nor unobscured the lucid ray
 To its own native fount returns:

"But when the Lord of mortal breath
 Decrees his bounty to resume,
 And points the silent shaft of death,
 Which speeds an infant to the tomb,

"No passion fierce, no low desire,
 Has quenched the radiance of the flame;
 Back to its God the living fire
 Returns, unsullied, as it came."

The heart which could turn aside from the stern conflicts of the political world, and utter sentiments so chaste and tender, must have been the residence of the sweetest and noblest emotions of man.

Having taken final leave, as he believed, of the duties of public life, and retired to the beloved shades of Quincy, it was the desire and intention of Mr. Adams to devote the remainder of his days to the peaceful pursuits of literature. It had long been his purpose, whenever opportunity should offer, to write a history of the life and times of his venerated father, "the elder Adams." His heart was fixed on this design, and some introductory labors had been commenced. But an overruling Providence had a widely different work in preparation for him.

If Mr. Adams had been permitted to follow the bent of his own feelings at that time—if he had continued in the retirement he had so anxiously sought as a rest from the toils of half a century—the brightest page of his wonderful history would have remained forever unwritten. He would have been remembered as a discreet and trusty diplomatist, an able statesman, a successful politician, a capable President, and an honest and honorable man! This would, indeed, have been

a measure of renown with which most men would have been content, and which few of the most fortunate sons of earth can ever attain. He was abundantly satisfied with it. He asked for nothing more—he expected nothing more this side the grave. But it was not enough! Fame was wreathing brighter garlands, a more worthy chaplet, for his brow. A higher, nobler task was before him, than any enterprize which had claimed his attention. His long and distinguished career—his varied and invaluable experience—had been but a preparation to enable him to enter upon the real work of life for which he was raised up.

The world did not yet know John Quincy Adams. Long as he had been before the public, the mass had thus far failed to read him aright. Hitherto circumstances had placed him in collision with aspiring men. He stood in their way to station and power. There was a motive to conceal his virtues and magnify his faults. He had never received from his opposers the smallest share of credit really due to him for patriotism, self-devotion, and purity of purpose. Even his most devoted friends did not fully appreciate these qualities in him. During his long public service, he had ever been an object of hatred and vituperation to a class of minds utterly incapable of estimating his talents or comprehending his high principles of action. In the heat of political struggles, no abuse, no defamation, were too great to heap upon him. Misrepresentation, duplicity, malignity, did their worst. Did he

utter a patriotic sentiment, it was charged to hypocrisy and political cunning. Did he do a noble deed, worthy to be recorded in letters of gold—sacrificing party predilections and friendship to support the interest of his country, and uphold the reputation and dignity of its Government—it was attributed to a wretched pandering for the emoluments of office. Did he endeavor to exercise the powers entrusted to him as President in such a manner as to preserve peace at home and abroad, develop the internal resources of the nation, improve facilities for transportation and travel, protect and encourage the industry of the country, and in every department promote the permanent prosperity and welfare of the people—it was allowed to be nothing more than the arts of an intriguer, seeking a reelection to the Presidency. Yea, it was declared in advance, that, “if his administration should be as pure as the angels in heaven,” it should be overthrown. Did he exhibit the plain simplicity of a true republican in his dress and manners, and economy in all his expenditures, it was attributed to parsimony and meanness! A majority of his countrymen had been deceived as to his principles and character, and sacrificed him politically on the altar of prejudice and party spirit.

Throughout his life he had ever been a lover of man and of human freedom—the best friend of his country—the most faithful among the defenders of its institutions—a sincere republican, and a true man. But blinded by political prejudice, a large portion of his