

CHAPTER XII.

MR. ADAMS TAKES HIS SEAT IN CONGRESS—HIS POSITION AND HABITS AS A MEMBER—HIS INDEPENDENCE OF PARTY—HIS EULOGY ON THE DEATH OF EX-PRESIDENT JAMES MADISON—HIS ADVOCACY OF THE RIGHT OF PETITION, AND OPPOSITION TO SLAVERY—INSURRECTION IN TEXAS—MR. ADAMS MAKES KNOWN ITS ULTERIOR OBJECT.

MR. ADAMS took his seat in the House of Representatives without ostentation, in December, 1831. His appearance there produced a profound sensation. It was the first time an ex-President had ever entered that Hall in the capacity of a member. He was received with the highest marks of respect. It presented a singular spectacle to behold members of Congress who, when Mr. Adams was President, had charged him with every species of political corruption, and loaded his name with the most opprobrious epithets, now vieing with one another in bestowing upon him the highest marks of respect and confidence. That which they denied the President, they freely yielded to the MAN. It was the true homage which virtue and patriotism must ever receive—more honorable, and far more grateful to its object, than all the servility and

flattery which power and patronage can so easily purchase.

The degree of confidence reposed in Mr. Adams was manifested by his being placed at once at the head of the Committee on Manufactures. This is always a responsible station; but it was peculiarly so at that time. The whole Union was highly agitated on the subject of the tariff. The friends of domestic manufactures at the North, insisted upon high protective duties, to sustain the mechanical and manufacturing interests of the country against a ruinous foreign competition. The Southern States resisted these measures as destructive to their interests, and remonstrated with the utmost vehemence against them—in which they were joined by a large portion of the Democratic party throughout the North. Mr. Adams, with enlarged views of national unity and general prosperity, counselled moderation to both parties. As Chairman of the Committee on Manufactures, he strove to produce such a compromise between the conflicting interests, as should yield each section a fair protection, and restore harmony and fraternity among the people.

So important were Mr. Adams' services deemed in the Committee on Manufactures, that, on proposing to resign his post as Chairman, to fulfil other duties which claimed his attention, he was besought by all parties to relinquish his purpose. Mr. Cambreleng, of N. Y., a political opponent of Mr. Adams, said, "It was not a pleasant duty to oppose the request of any member of

the House, particularly one of his character. He did so with infinite regret in the present instance; and he certainly would not take such a course, but for the important consequences that might result from assenting to the wishes of the distinguished gentleman from Massachusetts. He had reached the conclusion, not without infinite pain and reluctance, that the harmony, *if not the existence of our Confederacy*, depends, at this crisis, upon the arduous, prompt, and patriotic efforts of a few eminent men. He believed that much might be done by the gentleman from Massachusetts."

In the same tone of high compliment, Mr. Barbour, of Virginia, said, "that to refuse anything that could be asked by the gentleman from Massachusetts gave him pain, great pain. He said it was with unaffected sincerity he declared, that the member from Massachusetts (with whom he was associated in the committee) had not only fulfilled all his duties with eminent ability, in the committee, but in a spirit and temper that commanded his grateful acknowledgments, and excited his highest admiration. Were it permitted him to make a personal appeal to the gentleman, he would have done so in advance of this motion. He would have appealed to him as a patriot, as a statesman, as a philanthropist, and above all as an American, feeling the full force of all his duties, and touched by all their incentives to lofty action—to forbear this request."

These complimentary appeals were well deserved by Mr. Adams, and show most emphatically the high

position he occupied in the esteem and confidence of the entire House of Representatives, on becoming a member thereof. But, with the modesty of true greatness, it was painful to him to hear these encomiums uttered in his own presence. He arose, and begged the House, in whatever further action it might take upon the subject, to refrain from pursuing this strain. "I have been most deeply affected," he said, "by what has already passed. I have felt, in the strongest manner, the impropriety of my being in the House while such remarks were made; being very conscious that sentiments of an opposite kind might have been uttered with far more propriety, and have probably been withheld in consequence of my presence."

Mr. Adams carried with him into Congress all his previous habits of industry and close application to business. He was emphatically a hard worker. Few men spent more hours in the twenty-four in assiduous labor. He would take no active part in any matter—would engage in the discussion of no topic—and would not commit himself on any question—until he had sounded it to its nether depths, and explored all its ramifications, all its bearings and influences, and had thoroughly become master of the subject. To gain this information no toil was too great, no application too severe. It was in this manner that he was enabled to overwhelm with surprise his cotemporaries in Congress, by the profundity of his knowledge. No subject could be started, no question discussed, on which he

was not perfectly at home. Without hesitation or mistake, he could pour forth a stream of facts, dates, names, places, accompanied with narrations, anecdotes, reflections and arguments, until the matter was thoroughly sifted and laid bare in all its parts and properties, to the understanding of the most casual observer. The tenacity and correctness of his memory was proverbial. Alas, for the man who questioned the correctness of his statements, his facts, or dates. Sure discomfiture awaited him. His mind was a perfect calendar, a store-house, a mine of knowledge, in relation to all past events connected with the history of his country and his age.

In connection with his other exemplary virtues, Mr. Adams was prompt, faithful, unwearied, in the discharge of all his public duties. The oldest member of the House, he was at the same time the most punctual—the first at his post; the last to retire from the labors of the day. His practice in these respects could well put younger members to the blush. While many others might be negligent in their attendance, sauntering in idleness, engaged in frivolous amusements, or even in dissipation, he was always at his post. No call of the House was necessary—no Sergeant-at-arms need be despatched—to bring him within the Hall of Representatives. He was the last to move an adjournment, or to adopt any device to consume time or neglect the public business for personal convenience or gratification. In every respect he was a model legislator. His example can be most profitably im-

itated by those who would arise to eminence in the councils of the nation.

“My seat was, for two years, by his side, and it would have scarcely more surprised me to miss one of the marble columns of the Hall from its pedestal than to see his chair empty. * * * I shall, perhaps, be pardoned for introducing here a slight personal recollection, which serves, in some degree, to illustrate his habits. The sessions of the last two days of (I think) the twenty-third Congress, were prolonged, the one for nineteen, and the other for seventeen hours. At the close of the last day's session, he remained in the hall of the House the last seated member of the body. One after another, the members had gone home; many of them for hours. The hall—brilliantly lighted up, and gaily attended, as was, and perhaps is still, the custom at the beginning the last evening of a session—had become cold, dark, and cheerless. Of the members who remained, to prevent the public business from dying for want of a quorum, most but himself were sinking from exhaustion, although they had probably taken their meals at the usual hours, in the course of the day. After the adjournment, I went up to Mr. Adams' seat, to join company with him, homeward; and as I knew he came to the House at eight o'clock in the morning, and it was then past midnight, I expressed a hope that he had taken some refreshment in the course of the day. He said he had not left his seat; but *holding up a bit of hard bread in his fingers*, gave me to understand in what way he had sustained nature.”*

The following reminiscence will further illustrate Mr. Adams' habits of industry and endurance at a later day, as well as show his views in regard to the famous “Expunging Resolution.”

“On a cold and dreary morning, in the month of January, 1837, I went to the capitol of the United States, at a very early hour, to write out a very long speech I had reported for an honorable gentleman, who wished to look well in print; and on entering the hall

* Edward Everett.

of the House of Representatives, I found Mr. Adams, as early as the hour was, in his seat, busily engaged in writing. He and myself were the only persons present; even the industrious Mr. Follansbee, the then doorkeeper, had not made his appearance, with his assistants and pages, to distribute copies of the journal and the usual documents.

"As I made it a rule never to speak to Mr. Adams, unless he spoke first, I said nothing; but took my seat in the reporters' gallery, and went to work. I had written about half an hour, when the venerable statesman appeared at my desk, and was pleased to say that I was a very industrious man. I thanked him for the compliment, and, in return, remarked, that, as industrious as I might be, I could not keep pace with him, 'for,' said I, 'I found you here, sir, when I came in.'

"I believe I was a little early, sir,' he replied; 'but, as there is to be a closing debate to-day, in the Senate, on the expunging resolution, which I feel inclined to hear, I thought I would come down at an unusual hour, this morning, and dispatch a little writing before the Senate was called to order.'

"Do you think the expunging resolution will be disposed of to-day?' I inquired.

"I understand it will,' he rejoined. 'I hope so, at least,' he added, 'for I think the country has already become weary of it, and is impatient for a decision. It has already absorbed more time than should have been devoted to it.'

"It will pass, I suppose, sir?"

"Oh, certainly; and by a very decided majority. The administration is too strong for the opposition; and the affair will call up a strict party vote. Of course Mr. Clay's resolution will be expunged, and the journal will not be violated.'

"I was somewhat surprised at the remark, and, in return, observed that I had always understood that it was on the constitutional ground, that the expunging process could not be effected without destroying the journal, that the opponents of the measure had based themselves.

"It is true, sir, that that has been the grave and somewhat tenable argument in the Senate; but it is a fallacy, after all,' he replied. 'The constitution, sir, it is true, renders it imperative on both Houses to keep a correct journal of its proceedings; and all this can be done,

and any portion of it may be expunged, without violating that instrument. For instance, sir, a resolution is adopted to-day, is entered on the journal, and to-morrow is expunged—and still the journal remains correct, and the constitution is not violated. For the act by which the expungation is effected is recorded on the journal; the expunged resolution becomes a matter of record, and thus everything stands fair and correct. The constitution is a sacred document, and should not be violated; but how often is it strictly adhered to, to the very letter? There are, sir, some men in the world who make great parade about their devotion to the "*dear constitution*,"—men, sir, who make its sacred character a hobby, and who, nevertheless, are perfectly reckless of its violation, if the ends of party are to be accomplished by its abjuration.'

"There was a degree of sarcasm blended with his enunciation of the '*dear constitution*,' which induced me to think it possible that he intended some personal allusion when he repeated the words. In this I might, and might not, have erred.

"In what way, Mr. Adams,' I inquired, 'is this expunging process to be accomplished? Is the objectionable resolution to be erased from the journal with a pen; or is the leaf that contains it to be cut out?"

"Neither process is to be resorted to, as I understand it,' he replied. 'The resolution will remain in the book; black lines will be drawn around it, and across it from right angles, and the word "*expunged*," will be written on the face of it. It will, to all intents and purposes, still stand on the face of the book. There are precedents in parliamentary journalism for the guidance of the Senate, and I suppose they will be adopted.'

"He then proceeded to give me a very graphic and interesting description of an expunging process that took place in the British Parliament in the reign of James the First, of England, which I would repeat, if time and space allowed. He detained me a long time, in narrating precedents, and commenting on them; and then abruptly bringing the subject to a close, left me to pursue my labors.

"Soon after the House had been called to order, immediately after the chaplain had said his prayers—for that was a ceremonial that Mr. Adams always observed—I saw him leave his seat, and proceed, as I supposed, to the Senate chamber. After an hour or two had elapsed, I went into the Senate, and there found him, standing out-

side of the bar, listening, with all imaginable attention, to Mr. Felix Grundy, who was delivering himself of some brief remarks he had to utter on the subject.

"At nine o'clock in the evening, as I fumbled my way through the badly-lighted rotunda, having just escaped from a caucus that had been holding 'a secret session,' in the room of the committee on public lands, I descried a light issuing from the vestibule of the Senate chamber, which apprized me that 'the most dignified body on earth' was still in session. Impelled by a natural curiosity, I proceeded towards the council chamber of the right reverend signors; and, just as I reached the door, Mr. Adams stepped out. I inquired if the resolution had been disposed of.

"'No, sir,' he replied; 'nor is it probable that it will be to-night! A Senator from North Carolina is yet on the floor; and, as it does not appear likely that he will yield it very soon, and as I am somewhat faint and weary, I think I shall go home.'

"The night was very stormy. Snow was falling fast; the moon, which had

‘—— not yet fill'd her horns,'

had receded beneath the western horizon; and, as the capitol was but sadly lighted, I offered my services to the venerable sage of Quincy, and at the same time asked leave to conduct him to his dwelling.

"'Sir,' said he, 'I am indebted to you for your proffered kindness; but I need not the service of any one. I am somewhat advanced in life, but not yet, by the blessing of God, infirm; or what Doctor Johnson would call "superfluous;" and you may recollect what old Adam says in the play of "As you like it:"

"For in my youth I never did apply
Hot and rebellious liquors in my blood."

"For the first time in my life, I found Mr. Adams a little inclined to be facetious; and I was glad of it—for it was to me a kind of assurance that my presence was not absolutely unwelcome.

"The salutation being over, and Mr. Adams having consented that I should see him down the steps of the capitol, I proceeded onward, and soon found myself, with my revered convoy, in the vicinity of the western gate of the capitol grounds. 'The wind

whistled a dismal tale,' as we trudged onward, looking in vain for a cab; and the snow and sleet, which, early in the day, had mantled the earth, was now some twelve inches deep on Pennsylvania avenue. I insisted on going onward; but Mr. Adams objected, and bidding me good night somewhat unceremoniously, told me, almost in as many words, that my farther attendance was unwelcome.

"As I left him, he drew his 'Boston wrapper' still closer around him, hitched up his mittens, and with elastic step breasted a wintry storm that might have repelled even the more elastic movement of juvenility, and wended up the avenue. Although I cannot irreverently say that he

‘Whistled as he went, for want of thought,'

I fancy that his mind was so deeply imbued with the contemplation of affairs of state, and especially in contemplating the expunging resolution, that he arrived at his home long before he was aware that he had threaded the distance between the capitol and the Presidential square.*

Although elected to the House of Representatives as a Whig, and usually acting with that party, yet Mr. Adams would never acknowledge that fealty to party could justify a departure from the conscientious discharge of duty. He went with his party as far as he believed his party was right and its proceedings calculated to promote the welfare of the country. But no party claims, no smiles nor frowns, could induce him to sanction any measure which he believed prejudicial to the interest of the people. Hence, during his congressional career, the Whigs occasionally found him a decided opposer of their policy and measures, on questions where he deemed they had mistaken the true

* Reminiscences of the late John Quincy Adams, by an Old Colony Man.—*New York Atlas*.

course. In this he was but true to his principles, character, and whole past history. It was not that he loved his political party or friends less, but that he loved what he viewed as conducive to the welfare of the nation, more.

The same principle of action governed him in reference to his political opponents. In general he threw his influence against the administration of Gen. Jackson, under a sincere conviction that its policy was injurious to the welfare of our common country. But to every measure which he could sanction, he did not hesitate to yield the support of all his energies.

An instance of this description occurred in relation to the treaty of indemnity with France. For nearly forty years, negotiations had been pending in vain with the French Government, to procure an indemnity for spoliations of American commerce, during the French Revolution and Republic. On the 4th of July, 1831, Mr. Rives, the American Minister to France, succeeded in concluding a treaty with that country, securing to American merchants an indemnity of five millions of dollars. But although the treaty was duly ratified by both Governments, the French Chamber of Deputies obstinately refused, for several years, to vote an appropriation of money to fulfil its stipulations. In 1835, Gen. Jackson determined on strong measures to bring the French Government to the discharge of its obligations. He accordingly sent a message to Congress, recommending, in the event of further delay on the

part of France, that *letters of marque and reprisal* be issued against the commerce of France, and at the same time instructed Mr. Edward Livingston, our Minister at that day at the Court of St. Cloud, to demand his passports, and retire to London. In all these steps, which resulted in bringing France to a speedy fulfilment of the treaty, Mr. Adams yielded his unreserved support to the administration. He believed Gen. Jackson, in resorting to compulsory measures, was pursuing a course called for alike by the honor and the interest of the country, and he did not hesitate to give him a cordial support, notwithstanding he was a political opponent. In a speech made by Mr. Adams on the subject, in the House of Representatives, he said:—

“Sir, if we do not unite with the President of the United States in an effort to compel the French Chamber of Deputies to carry out the provisions of this treaty, we shall become the scorn, the contempt, the derision and the reproach of all mankind! Sir, this treaty has been ratified on both sides of the ocean; it has received the sign manual of the sovereign of France, through His Imperial Majesty’s principal Minister of State; it has been ratified by the Senate of this Republic; it has been sanctioned by Almighty God; and still we are told, in a voice potential, in the other wing of this capitol, that the arrogance of France,—nay, sir, not of France, but of her Chamber of Deputies—the insolence of the French Chambers, must be submitted to, and we must come down to the *lower* degradation of re-opening negotiations to attain that which has already been acknowledged to be our due! Sir, is this a specimen of your boasted chivalry? Is this an evidence of the existence of that heroic valor which has so often led our arms on to glory and immortality? Re-open negotiation, sir, with France? Do it, and soon you will find your flag insulted, dishonored, and trodden in the dust