

## CHAPTER XIV.

MR. ADAMS' FIRMNESS IN DISCHARGE OF DUTY—HIS EXERTIONS IN BEHALF OF THE AMISTAD SLAVES—HIS CONNEXION WITH THE SMITHSONIAN BEQUEST—TOUR THROUGH CANADA AND NEW YORK—HIS RECEPTION AT BUFFALO—VISITS NIAGARA FALLS—ATTENDS WORSHIP WITH THE TUSCARORA INDIANS—HIS RECEPTION AT ROCHESTER—AT AUBURN—AT ALBANY—AT PITTSFIELD—VISITS CINCINNATI—ASSISTS IN LAYING THE CORNER STONE OF AN OBSERVATORY.

It would be impossible, in the limit prescribed to these pages, to detail the numerous scenes and occurrences of a momentous nature, in which Mr. Adams took a prominent part during his services in the House of Representatives. The path he marked out for himself at the commencement of his congressional career, was pursued with unflinching fidelity to the close of life. His was the rare honor of devoting himself, unreservedly, to his legitimate duties as a Representative of the people while in Congress, and to nothing else. He believed the halls of the Capitol were no place for political intrigue; and that a member of Congress, instead of studying to shape his course to make political capital or to subserve party ends, should devote himself rigidly and solely to the interests of his constitu-

ents. His practice corresponded with his theory. His speeches, his votes, his entire labors in Congress, were confined strictly to practical subjects, vitally connected with the great interests of our common country, and had no political or party bearing, other than such as truth and public good might possess.

His hostility to slavery and the assumptions and usurpations of slave power in the councils of the nation, continued to the day of his death. At the commencement of each session of Congress, he demanded that the infamous "gag rule," which forbid the presentation of petitions on the subject of slavery, should be abolished. But despite its continuance, he persisted in handing in petitions from the people of every class, complexion and condition. He did not hesitate to lay before the House of Representatives a petition from Haverhill, Mass., for *the dissolution of the Union!* Although opposed in his whole soul to the prayer of the petitioners, yet he believed himself sacredly bound to listen with due respect to every request of the people, when couched in respectful terms.

In vain did the supporters of slavery endeavor to arrest his course, and to seal his lips in silence. In vain did they threaten assassination—expulsion from the House—indictment before the grand jury of the District of Columbia. In vain did they declare that he should "be made amenable to *another tribunal*, [mob-law] and as an incendiary, be brought to condign punishment." "My life on it," said a southern member.



"if he presents that petition from slaves, we shall yet see him within the walls of the penitentiary." All these attempts at brow-beating moved him not a tittle. Firm he stood to his duty, despite the storms of angry passion which howled around him, and with withering rebukes repelled the assaults of hot-blooded opponents, as the proud old headland, jutting far into ocean's bosom, tosses high, in worthless spray, the dark mountain billows which in wrath beat upon it.

"Do the gentlemen from the South," said he, "think they can frighten me by their threats? If that be their object, let me tell them, sir, *they have mistaken their man*. I am not to be frightened from the discharge of a sacred duty, by their indignation, by their violence, nor, sir, by all the grand juries in the universe. I have done only my duty; and I shall do it again under the same circumstances, even though they recur to-morrow."

"Though aged, he was so iron of limb,  
None of the youth could cope with him;  
And the foes whom he singly kept at bay,  
Outnumbered his thin hairs of silver grey."

Nor was Mr. Adams without encouragement in his trying position. His immediate constituents, at their primary meetings, repeatedly sent up a cheering voice in strong and earnest resolutions, approving heartily his course, and urging him to perseverance therein. The Legislatures of Massachusetts and Vermont, rallied to his support. In solemn convocation they protested against the virtual annihilation of the right of petition—against slavery and the slave trade in the District of Columbia—gave their entire sanction to the principles advocated by Mr. Adams, and pledged their

countenance to all measures calculated to sustain them.

Large bodies of people in the Eastern, Northern, and Middle States, sympathized with him in his support of the most sacred of privileges bestowed on man. Representative after Representative were sent to Congress, who gathered around him, and co-operated with him in his holy warfare against the iron rule which slavery had been enabled to establish in the national Legislature. With renewed energy he resisted the mighty current which was undermining the foundations of the Republic, and bearing away upon its turbid waters the liberties of the people. And he resisted not in vain.

The brave old man lived to see his labors, in this department of duty, crowned with abundant success. One after another the cohorts of slavery gave way before the incessant assaults, the unwearied perseverance, of Mr. Adams, and the faithful compeers who were sent by the people to his support. At length, in 1845, the obnoxious "gag rule" was rescinded, and Congress consented to receive, and treat respectfully, all petitions on the subject of slavery. This was a moral triumph which amply compensated Mr. Adams for all the labors he had put forth, and for all the trials he had endured to achieve it.

Yes; he "lived to hear that subject which of all others had been forbidden an entrance into the Halls of Congress, fairly broached. He lived to listen, with a delight all his own, to a high-souled, whole-



hearted speech on the slave question, from his colleague, Mr. Palfrey—a speech, of which it is not too high praise to say, that it would not have disparaged the exalted reputation of Mr. Adams, had he made it himself. Aye, more, he lived to see the whole House of Representatives—the members from the South, not less than those from the North, attentive and respectful listeners to that speech of an hour's length, on the political as well as moral aspect of slavery in this Republic. What a triumph! At the close of it, the moral conqueror exclaimed, 'God be praised; the seals are broken, the door is open.'”\*

If anything were wanting to crown the fame of Mr. Adams, in the last days of life, with imperishable honor, or to add, if possible, new brilliancy to the beams of his setting sun, it is found in his advocacy of the freedom of the *Amistad* slaves.

A ship-load of negroes had been stolen from Africa, contrary to the law of nations, of humanity and of God, and surreptitiously smuggled, in the night, into the Island of Cuba. This act was piracy, according to the law of Spain, and of all Governments in Christendom, and the perpetrators thereof, had they been detected, would have been punished with death. Immediately after the landing of these unfortunate Africans, about thirty-six of them were purchased of the slave-pirates, by two Spaniards named Don Jose Ruiz and Don Pedro Montes, who shipped them for Guanaja, Cuba, in the schooner "*Amistad*." When three days out from Havana, the Africans rose, killed the captain and crew, and took possession of the vessel—sparing the lives of their purchasers, Ruiz and Montes. This

\* Rev. S. J. May.

transaction was unquestionably justifiable on the part of the negroes. They had been stolen from their native land—had fallen into the hands of pirates and robbers, and reduced to abject slavery. According to the first law of nature—the law of self-defence—implanted in the bosom of every human being by the Creator, they were justified in taking any measures necessary to restore them to the enjoyment of that freedom which was theirs by birthright.

The negroes being unable to manage the schooner, compelled Ruiz and Montes to navigate her, and directed them to shape her course for Africa; for it was their design to return to their native land. But they were deceived by the two Spaniards, who brought the schooner to the coast of the United States, where she was taken possession of by Lieut. Gedney, of the U. S. surveying brig *Washington*, a few miles off Montauk Point, and brought into New London, Conn. The two Spaniards claimed the Africans as their property; and the Spanish Minister demanded of the President of the United States, that they be delivered up to the proper authorities, and taken back to Havana, to be tried for piracy and murder. The matter was brought before the District Court of Connecticut.

In the mean time President Van Buren ordered the U. S. schooner *Grampus*, Lieut. John S. Paine, to repair to New Haven, to be in readiness to convey the Africans to Havana, should such be the decision of the Court. But the Court decided that the Govern-



ment of the United States had no authority to return them into slavery; and directed that they be conveyed in one of our public ships to the shores of Africa, from whence they had but recently been torn away. From this decision the U. S. District Attorney appealed to the Supreme Court of the United States.

These transactions attracted the attention of the whole people of the Union, and naturally excited the sympathy of the masses, *pro* and *con*, as they were favorable or unfavorable to the institution of slavery. Who should defend, in the Supreme Court, these poor outcasts—ignorant, degraded, wretched—who, fired with a noble energy, had burst the shackles of slavery, and by a wave of fortune had been thrown into the midst of a people professing freedom, yet keeping their feet on the necks of millions of slaves? The eyes of all the friends of human rights turned instinctively to JOHN QUINCY ADAMS. Nor were their expectations disappointed. Without hesitation he espoused the cause of the Amistad negroes. At the age of seventy-four, he appeared in the Supreme Court of the United States to advocate their cause. He entered upon this labor with the enthusiasm of a youthful barrister, and displayed forensic talents, a critical knowledge of law, and of the inalienable rights of man, which would have added to the renown of the most eminent jurists of the day.

“When he went to the Supreme Court, after an absence of thirty years, and arose to defend a body of

friendless negroes, torn from their home and most unjustly held in thrall—when he asked the Judges to excuse him at once both for the trembling faults of age and the inexperience of youth, having labored so long elsewhere that he had forgotten the rules of court—when he summed up the conclusion of the whole matter, and brought before those judicial but yet moistening eyes, the great men whom he had once met there—Chase, Cushing, Martin, Livingston, and Marshal himself; and while he remembered that they were ‘gone, gone, all gone,’ remembered also the eternal Justice that is never gone—the sight was sublime. It was not an old patrician of Rome, who had been Consul, Dictator, coming out of his honored retirement at the Senate’s call, to stand in the Forum to levy new armies, marshal them to victory afresh, and gain thereby new laurels for his brow; but it was a plain citizen of America, who had held an office far greater than that of Consul, King, or Dictator, his hand reddened by no man’s blood, expecting no honors, but coming in the name of justice, to plead for the slave, for the poor barbarian negro of Africa, for Cinque and Grabbo, for their deeds comparing them to Harmodius and Aristogeiton, whose classic memory made each bosom thrill. That was worth all his honors—it was worth while to live fourscore years for that.”\*

This effort of Mr. Adams was crowned with complete success. The Supreme Court decided that the

\* Theodore Parker.



Africans were entitled to their freedom, and ordered them to be liberated. In due time they were enabled, by the assistance of the charitable, to sail for Africa, and take with them many of the implements of civilized life. They arrived in safety at Sierre Leone, and were allowed once more to mingle with their friends, and enjoy God's gift of freedom, in a *Pagan* land—having fortunately *escaped* from a cruel and life-long bondage, in the midst of a *Christian* people.

In reply to a letter requesting Mr. Adams to write out his argument in this case, he concludes as follows: "I shall endeavor, as you desire, to write out, in full extent, my argument before the Court, in which all this was noticed and commented upon. If it has no other effect, I hope it will at least have that of admonishing the free people of this Union to keep perpetually watchful eyes upon every act of their executive administration, having any relation to the subject of slavery."

In availing the country of the benefit of the "Smithsonian Bequest," and in founding the "Smithsonian Institute" at Washington, Mr. Adams took an active part. He repeatedly called the attention of Congress to the subject, until he succeeded in causing a bill to be passed providing for the establishment of the Institute. He was appointed one of the Regents of the Institute, which office he held until his death.

In the summer of 1843, Mr. Adams visited Lebanon Springs, N. Y., for the benefit of his health, which had become somewhat impaired, and also the health of a cherished member of his family. He designed to devote only four or five days to this journey; but he was so highly pleased with the small portion of the State of New York he saw at Lebanon Springs, that he was induced to proceed further. He visited Saratoga, Lake George, Lower Canada, Montreal and Quebec. Returning, he ascended the St. Lawrence and the Lakes as far as Niagara Falls and Buffalo, and by the way of Rochester, Auburn, Utica and Albany, sought his home in Quincy with health greatly improved.

Although Mr. Adams had many bitter enemies—made so by his fearless independence, and the stern integrity with which he discharged the public duties entrusted to him—yet in the hearts of the people he ever occupied the highest position. They not only respected and admired the politician, the statesman, but they venerated the *MAN!* they loved him for his purity, his philanthropy, his disinterested patriotism, his devotion to freedom and human rights. All this was manifested during his tour through New York. It was marked in its whole extent by demonstrations of the highest attention and respect from people of all parties. Public greetings, processions, celebrations, met him and accompanied him at every step of his journey. Never since the visit of La Fayette, had



such an anxious desire to honor a great and good man been manifested by the entire mass of the people. His progress was one continued triumphal procession. "I may say," exclaimed Mr. Adams, near the close of his tour, "without being charged with pride or vanity, I have come not alone, for the whole people of the State of New York have been my companions!"

At Buffalo he was received with every possible demonstration of respect. The national ensign was streaming from an hundred masts, and the wharves, and the decks and rigging of the vessels, were crowded by thousands anxious to catch a glimpse of the renowned statesman and patriot, who was greeted by repeated cheers. Hon. Millard Fillmore addressed him with great eloquence. The following is the conclusion of his speech:—

"You see around you, sir, no political partisans seeking to promote some sinister purpose; but you see here assembled the people of our infant city, without distinction of party, sex, age, or condition—all, all anxiously vying with each other to show their respect and esteem for your public services and private worth. Here are gathered, in this vast multitude of what must appear to you strange faces, thousands whose hearts have vibrated to the chord of sympathy which your written speeches have touched. Here is reflecting age, and ardent youth, and lisping childhood, to all of whom your venerated name is as dear as household words—all anxious to feast their eyes by a sight of that extraordinary and venerable man, of whom they have heard, and read, and thought so much—all anxious to hear the voice of that '*old man eloquent*,' on whose lips wisdom has distilled her choicest nectar. Here, sir, you see them all, and read in their eager and joy-gladdened countenances, and brightly-beaming eyes, a welcome—a thrice-told, heart-felt, soul-stirring welcome to 'the man whom they delight to honor.'"

Mr. Adams responded to this speech in a strain of most interesting remarks. He commenced as follows:—

"I must request your indulgence for a moment's pause to take breath. If you inquire why I ask this indulgence, it is because I am so overpowered by the eloquence of my friend, the chairman of the Committee of Ways and Means, (whom I have been so long accustomed to refer to in that capacity, that, with your permission, I will continue so to denominate him now,) that I have no words left to answer him. For so liberal has he been in bestowing that eloquence upon me which he himself possesses in so eminent a degree, that while he was ascribing to me talents so far above my own consciousness in that regard, I was all the time imploring the god of eloquence to give me, at least at this moment, a few words to justify him before you in making that splendid panegyric which he has been pleased to bestow upon me; and that the flattering picture which he has presented to you, may not immediately be defaced before your eyes by what you should hear from me. \* \* \* \* \*

In concluding his remarks he said:—"Of your attachment to moral principle I have this day had another and pleasing proof in the dinner of which I have partaken in the steamer, in which, by your kindness, I have been conveyed to this place. It was a sumptuous dinner, but at which *temperance* was the presiding power. I congratulate you on the evidence there exhibited of your attachment to moral principle, in your co-operation in that great movement which is promoting the happiness and elevation of man in every quarter of the globe.

"And here you will permit me to allude to an incident which has occurred in my recent visit to Canada, in which I perceived the co-operation of the people of that Province in the same great moral reformation. While at Quebec, I visited the falls of Montmorenci, a cataract which, but for yours, would be among the greatest wonders of nature. In going to it, I passed through the parish of Beauport, and there, by the side of the way, I saw a column with an inscription upon its pedestal, which I had the curiosity to stop and read. It was erected by the people of Beauport in gratitude to the Virgin, for her goodness in promoting the cause of temperance in