

REFLECTIONS

OF THE

CHARACTER AND PUBLIC SERVICES

OF

ANDREW JACKSON,

WITH REFERENCE TO HIS

QUALIFICATIONS FOR THE PRESIDENCY.

WITH

GENERAL REMARKS.

—
“I am no flatterer.”....“I speak the words of truth and soberness.”
—

BY A NATIVE AMERICAN.

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TO THE READER.

I OFFER you some reflections on a subject which greatly concerns us all. The sentiments are clothed in plain, but I trust in sufficiently clear language. Refinement in style on such an occasion would be as improper as it would be useless and unnecessary. I address myself to plain men of plain sense. I hope my observations will be received in a spirit of candor, and that defects of style will be palliated through an honest zeal to aid a great cause. My motives are of the purest kind; and in the opinions advanced, I have endeavored to adhere to a scrupulous regard to truth.

A NATIVE AMERICAN.

REFLECTIONS.

CHAPTER I.

In tracing the various springs of human action, we are sometimes charmed with displays of the noblest qualities, and very cheerfully tender to the author of them the homage of our sincere respect and devotion. It is nevertheless true, and it seems not an easy matter to account for it, that we are exceedingly prone to requite those who have conferred upon us rewards and favors, with neglect, contumely, and reproach. Illustrious services are known to have been exhibited in the light of derision; and slight defects, growing out of unavoidable circumstances, and where the purest intentions were manifest, magnified into acts of outrage, cruelty, and oppression. The people of every age and country have at times, in this respect, been characterized by deeds of ingratitude and severity which admit of no extenuation. Whether they spring from malignant and licentious passions, or from a want of that correct and timely information so important to the right understanding of things, is hard to say. Charity indeed would willingly ascribe it to the latter, and gladly throw a veil

over transactions which would otherwise appear inexcusable. But how are we to reconcile this with those bountiful means of intelligence so easily accessible and so thoroughly within the reach of every member of this community? How are we to account for that absence of honorable sentiment, and that strange perversion of intellect, so painfully conspicuous in a period distinguished for the rapid and unrestricted dissemination of moral and political truth? However humiliating the concession, I am free to avow my conviction that they have their origin in a polluted fountain, and are coeval with our nature.

Such reflections very naturally force themselves upon the mind in contemplating the present state of political parties. That General JACKSON, who has rendered his name immortal as the successful defender of his country's rights—whose rare qualifications and enterprising spirit were the means of preserving a valuable city and a most important portion of territory from subjugation, rapine, and ruin—whose valor and prowess, with utterly disproportioned means, enabled him to overwhelm a daring and powerful foe with dismay and destruction—whose victory was as signal as the consequences were invaluable and glorious, and whose subsequent meekness and magnanimity will redound to his everlasting fame—that after such a splendid exhibition of talents and usefulness, prompted by no feelings or motives but those which spring from patriotism and a thirst for honorable distinction—that such a man, whom his country ought to be

proud to invest with her highest and fairest honors, should nevertheless be made a theme of constant and virulent abuse and outrage, must excite emotions of deep distress in every ingenuous mind. He has been every where traduced as a blood-thirsty tyrant, a murderer, and a dangerous political aspirant. Such are the multiplied proofs of ungenerous feelings towards him which daily meet our eye, that the mind is shocked at beholding the distorted picture.

Not content however with conduct so base and dishonorable in their treatment of this great public benefactor, but in order to heighten the colorings of atrocious falsehoods, his adversaries have openly invaded his private sanctuary, and the innocent partner of his bed has been dragged forth with unblushing effrontery, to be made the subject of jest, suspicion, and slander. Their private history has been shamefully and wickedly perverted, and trumpeted through the medium of obscene gazettes, and bandied about in the pestiferous breath of hollow-hearted and treacherous demagogues. But from all this scene of black ingratitude and foul abomination; from this terrible furnace of affliction and trial, the friends of truth and justice have beheld the victims walk forth pure and unharmed; nor has the smell of fire even adhered to their garments.

That a mere self-taught military commander, placed in exigencies of the most alarming difficulties and embarrassment, and yet effecting such mighty plans; infusing into his army his own firm and dauntless spirit; risking life and character in a

conflict which seemed hopeless from the fearful odds arrayed against him ; pledging his private fortune to raise funds for the maintenance of his suffering troops, mostly made up of untrained militia, and manfully meeting a host of ruthless invaders at the very threshold, and overpowering and consuming them as it were with a tempest of fire ; then, at the proper moment, (after patiently submitting to a penalty of 1000 dollars for the honor of achieving his unexampled exploits,) resigning his command and retiring to his farm, with no other compensation than the bare thanks of his country, is, I undertake to say, a case unparalleled in the history of warfare either ancient or modern.

In the unceasing attempts to villify and traduce this high-minded and gallant veteran, the evidences of impolicy are not less manifest than those of wickedness. If men who thus defend the republic and confer upon it the noblest benefactions, are to be requited in this manner, who does not see that it is aiming a death-blow at those honorable impulses which move them to the performance of the most heroic actions? What motive can any man, under similar circumstances, hereafter have to urge him to the post of danger and responsibility, when brilliant victories and countless privations and dangers are not only viewed as dust in the balance, but every minor adverse occurrence consequent on the fortune of war, always fruitful in calamity, is industriously brought to light, in order to brand it with the harsh and repulsive epithet of tyranny, cruelty, or murder? I call upon any man living to search the

annals of former wars, and show where a "military chieftain," (as his enemies are pleased to denominate him,) under such a complication of evils and disadvantages, ever accomplished more or made greater sacrifices for the good of his country. Nor did any one, I am bold to affirm, ever retire from the field with fewer and less justifiable grounds of censure, than are attached to the career of General JACKSON. If more purity of purpose, more rectitude of heart, more disinterested devotion to the public welfare, can any where be shown, then without farther scruple will his friends withdraw all pretensions he may have to the presidency, and yield the reins of government to others more worthy and more competent, if such are to be found within the limits of our confederacy.

CHAPTER II.

THE cry against General JACKSON as being a *Military Chieftain*, has been so incessantly rung in our ears, and so many references have been made to former periods for analogous and dangerous precedents, (but which in truth have no analogy to our case nor to the condition of this country,) that many people, from whom better things might have been expected, are inclined to surrender their judgment to groundless fears and a foolish credulity. Since no one can question his eminent talents as a commander, that point is on all hands conceded; but his qualifications for the administration of civil affairs are represented as altogether deficient. On this head some free and I trust candid remarks will be offered for consideration.

It is well known to the people of the United States, that General JACKSON has successively filled many civil offices, some of them of high importance, requiring solid powers of mind with respectable legal attainments, and that in every instance the duties were performed with distinguished honor and usefulness. No one has ever presumed to impeach either his understanding or his integrity; on the contrary, they have been universally admitted to be free from the slightest reproach or censure. Where then do his enemies find their charge of a want of capacity or fitness for a more exalted station? His

rectitude, his discernment, his purity of design, are wholly above suspicion; nor were his motives, with any color of justice, ever impugned. No man, GEORGE WASHINGTON not excepted, was ever possessed of a nobler independence of spirit. We have before us a striking illustration of this fact in the memorable transactions in Congress, which resulted in the elevation of Mr. ADAMS to the presidency. Can any one for a moment doubt, that had General JACKSON yielded to the suggestions of some of his friends, and instead of maintaining that stern inflexibility which so pre-eminently marks his character, he had shown a more pliant disposition, he would forthwith have stepped into the presidential chair? This is a matter which admits of no controversy, for it is too well understood to admit of any. The man who is governed by such exalted notions of honor, who disdained to stoop to any plan, or to practise any artifice, that should even remotely savor of questionable or improper views, and who thereby renounced the highest and most enviable station to which ambition can aspire, furnishes not only an illustrious proof of self-denial and patriotism, but in the act itself gives indubitable evidence of his rare fitness for that very station. Independence of spirit and integrity of heart are as inseparable as light and heat; and wherever they predominate in the character of an individual, that individual will be found worthy of unlimited respect and confidence. The remark is applicable both to public and to private life.

It is well remembered by many persons who yet

survive the ravages of time, that when WASHINGTON accepted the office of commander in chief in our revolutionary struggle, he was hunted as an outlaw, denounced as a traitor, as a military adventurer, as an enemy of liberty, with every other opprobrious epithet that malicious slanderers could invent. But WASHINGTON, like JACKSON, was no time-server; and least of all was he a sycophant. Neither of these men was ever known to degrade himself by condescending, like some political hypocrites, to court popularity; nor were they ever awed by the combined threats of traitors and apostates. Their actions are so intimately interwoven with the great events of our country, that their glory will be as imperishable as time, and will for ever embellish the fairest pages in our history. Too independent and upright to be moved by temptations of any kind, and too wise to be seduced from the paths of virtue, their respective careers are characterized by so much grandeur of purpose, that the patriotic mind dwells with rapture on the mighty themes. Between the characters of the two men, therefore, I hesitate not to say there is a striking similitude.

It is still fresh in the recollection of us all, how greatly the public mind was agitated in consequence of the execution, by order of General JACKSON, of those two murderous incendiaries, *Arbutnot* and *Ambrister*, and what a current of angry and misguided passions and prejudices he had to encounter by means of it. The ferment which grew out of it was not allayed until the publication of Mr. ADAMS's celebrated diplomatic letter, which happily silenced

every complaint and murmur, and covered his enemies with confusion and shame.

So far was General JACKSON from acting precipitately or wrongfully in this business, that Mr. ADAMS, speaking the decisive language of the President and the other officers of the administration, not only exculpates him from all blame, but maintains with a zeal and force which will not admit of cavil, that in conformity with the laws of nations and the usages of mankind, he would have been justified in the immediate execution of those abandoned wretches without the form of a trial. Of such hideous enormity were their offences, that a mere ignominious death was inadequate to their deserts. The occasion called for summary vengeance. They merited death in chains, where vultures might have stripped their bones, which ought to have been left to whiten in the elements.

It is painful to mark the thoughtless simplicity and monstrous inconsistency of mankind. Astonishing as it may appear, a general sympathy and indignation burst forth on the execution of two of the vilest and most bloody culprits that ever disgraced their species. The author of the proceeding, however, was not to be diverted from the fulfilment of his duty; and being familiarly acquainted with the black catalogue of their crimes, very properly ordered their speedy punishment: but surprising as it may be thought, the deed brought upon him the imputation of a foul murderer. The unprovoked and wanton massacres and scalpings of a multitude of unoffending people on our southern fron-

tier, most of whom were helpless women and children, perpetrated at the instigation of those monsters, were, to our shame be it spoken, regarded as of little moment; and it seemed to be a matter of small concern, that scores of scalps, many of them fresh and yet reeking with blood, were found arranged as the trophies of the savages, around which resounded the chilling yell and horrid war dance. In failing to condemn to utter infamy the authors of these outrages, and in withholding from the friends and relatives of our murdered brethren our spontaneous regrets and sympathies, we have in this instance fastened a stigma upon our national character.

In relation to the execution of the six militia-men, who were endeavoring to excite a revolt and mutiny in the army, General JACKSON stands acquitted of all blame; for it is evident none can attach to him. The conduct of these men, as I am informed, was of a nature so extremely flagrant and reprehensible as absolutely to forbid the exercise of mercy.

The General was at this time absent; but according to the established usages of war, they had forfeited their lives. Having had a fair trial, and been found guilty of the heinous charges alleged against them, General JACKSON, as commander-in-chief, was bound to confirm the sentence, however thankless and unpleasant the task. In all military establishments in every country under heaven, it is judged expedient and necessary to punish in a most exemplary manner every mutinous attempt, since nothing is attended with more dangerous or more alarming

consequences, than a want of due subordination. The example set by General WASHINGTON may be safely cited in its justification. It is a measure dictated by supreme necessity, and can in no case be dispensed with.

I have already said that WASHINGTON himself was not governed by loftier notions of independence than General JACKSON. I now repeat the remark; nay, I go farther and say, that WASHINGTON, the boast and ornament of our country, was not actuated by a purer love of freedom; nor by more generous or magnanimous impulses; nor by more self-denial; nor by greater or more disinterested devotion to the public welfare; nor by a more scrupulous regard to justice, than are shown in the character of General JACKSON. It is moreover well known, that General JACKSON'S experience in civil matters, is incomparably superior to that of General WASHINGTON'S previous to his being made President. Among other distinguished qualities, it is undeniably true, that General JACKSON possesses an intimate knowledge of mankind and of the human character; a much more than ordinary portion of sagacity; extraordinary quickness of perception; a clear and discriminating judgment; an energy and decision rarely equalled; together with a frankness, candor, and urbanity of deportment no where surpassed, and which qualify him in an eminent degree to fill the most dignified station in the human family.

CHAPTER III.

It cannot fail to excite the special wonder of every man of sense and reflection, when he perceives how much the mere epithet of *Military Chieftain* has awakened feelings of dread among many discreet people. This chord, however, has been so often struck, that at length it almost ceases to vibrate. As the light of truth breaks in upon the public mind, prejudices subside, and credulity refuses to listen to the arts and deceptions of cunning and deceitful partisans.

Nothing can be more ridiculous or preposterous than the apprehensions entertained, that in case General JACKSON should be elected President, he would intrench himself in that situation by means of an armed force; and that the final consequence would be, the establishment of a military despotism. To say nothing of the extravagant folly of the supposition,—since our military strength is so reduced as scarcely to form the skeleton of an army,—I would ask how, in the name of truth and common sense, could any man, or combination of men, accomplish such a scheme? Even admitting they were so lost to all regard for their own standing and character as to suggest the experiment,—by what possible means could they insure its success? Could Congress be blindfolded and led unresistingly to sanction it, without even a colorable

pretext? Could any arguments, however plausible, lull into listless security the keen jealousy of the state sovereignties, and the ever watchful vigilance of the great body of the people? No man, whatever might be his secret wishes, while acting as executive magistrate, would dare to hint at the project of raising an army, unless it were to repel an invasion or suppress an insurrection. That duty would then devolve upon him; and until then, our timid countrymen may with great safety hush their idle fears to rest.

Many considerations unite to show the extreme absurdity of the pretended evils that would be realized from the elevation of General JACKSON to the presidency. The fame of this distinguished hero and civilian, purchased under circumstances of the most imminent peril and hazard, and resting on a basis of splendid achievements and unsullied honor, must be dear to his heart. It is the precious reward which a noble mind always values most highly. It therefore would be a safe pledge that he would watch the great concerns of the nation with strictness and fidelity, and that he would never overleap the prescribed limits of a cautious policy, nor disregard the admonitory voice of discretion.—What motives then could General JACKSON have to resort to plans which would be as impracticable and foolish, as they would be fatal to his own reputation and happiness? With every incentive to listen to the mild dictates of wisdom, and to pursue a course that would redound to his own glory and to the aggrandizement of his country, how can any rational

man imagine he would propose measures that would be a wanton destruction of both ! The very suggestions evince the wildest stretches of ignorance, weakness, or knavery.

But since so much has been said of the danger of investing military men with the ensigns of civil power, let us advert to the characters of some of those illustrious veterans, who were chiefly instrumental in securing to us our freedom, and in laying the foundations of our greatness. Without making invidious selections, a great many prominent names will readily occur to the reader. Among these have been presidents, governors, judges, secretaries, foreign ministers, and a numerous list of civil officers of inferior grades, distributed in every state in the Union ; under whose prudent management and kind auspices, the people found the highest portion of liberty, and prospered beyond example. With an experienced, incorruptible, high-toned military chief at the head of the public concerns, and with subordinate officers, his companions in arms, of tried worth and great abilities, we soon exhibited such an animating picture of rising glory and of confirmed national strength and character, as to astonish the powers of Europe. The very knowledge that we had such men to guide our destinies and guard our growing energies, struck an awe into the hearts of haughty and unprincipled monarchs and their profligate ministers. Not only did it insure to us forbearance and fair treatment, but it led to unnumbered and inestimable benefits. We held a respect abroad, and enjoyed a happy tranquillity at home,

to a degree so unprecedented, that it became the proud theme of brilliant historians and poets. No nation; in any age of the world, could lay claim to a body of officers who were equally remarkable for integrity of heart; for refinement of manners, and for all the qualities which dignify the human character and render it estimable. There is scarcely to be found on record an instance where one of those military worthies was wanting in fidelity to the public, or in profound respect for the laws and institutions which reflect honor on our land.

We review with pride and pleasure the characters and services of those honorable chieftains, who not only performed the noblest exploits in the field, and who were inured to the toils, sufferings, and vicissitudes of a long and bloody war, but who afterwards, and some of them for a series of years, graced the most important and responsible civil stations. With a comparatively small knowledge gathered exclusively from books, which is too much the boast of conceited pedants, they had learned from other sources practical lessons of far greater value.

There are numberless instances which abundantly show how futile, in an executive officer, especially in difficult emergencies, are those high pretensions and advantages obtained only by study. The man who has not been taught lessons of wisdom in a different way; who has not been drilled in the universal school of mankind, by mingling in their society and studying their character under all circumstances and in almost every situation of life,—who has not, in short, been disciplined by that great

teacher, *experience*, the wisest of all teachers,—is seldom fitted to be a useful public ruler. Our own unhappy history during the larger period of time since the organization of our present government, sufficiently demonstrates the correctness of this opinion.

I will endeavor in other chapters to make such references to past events and transactions as will, I think, conclusively establish my position; and if I should bear with severity on some statesmen who have filled a large space in the public eye, and made splendid figures *on paper*, but who can hardly be said to have possessed a single practical qualification for good government, I trust I shall be borne out in my allegations, by pointing to privations, hardships, and losses, which made so deep an impression, that the present generation must pass away before their traces are obliterated, and their melancholy effects forgotten.

Mankind are universally led away by mere sounds, without the disposition to analyze their sense. Accordingly we find them ever ready to advert, with indications of peculiar terror, to the career of those military despots who have successively scourged the ignorant and enslaved nations of the earth. In almost every instance, the dark side of the picture alone is examined, without making allowances for at least some useful consequences which follow in the train of war; forgetting, at the same time, the ruined and debased condition under which, generally speaking, those nations had existed. The advantages however are seldom balanced by the

distresses which they entail ; they are therefore held in deserved abhorrence.

It is nevertheless fair to ask, if we are to consider warlike rulers alone as the authors of national calamities ? Are they exclusively to be held up to execration ? Have not mere civil governors of nations, in all ages of the world, been among the most odious and hateful persecutors and destroyers of their species,—men guilty of the vilest passions and the blackest treachery ! History furnishes so many instances of cowardly baseness and bloody-mindedness among those born to hereditary distinctions, and among others, who from fortuitous causes have held the reins of empire, but in most cases with such a circumscribed knowledge and such inadequate conceptions of what constituted the salutary regulations of a wise and well balanced government, that their names are loaded with irretrievable disgrace. So often were they without a redeeming quality, that the generous and enlightened mind turns from them with loathing and disgust. Few indeed have left behind them memorials of excellence or usefulness. Trained to habits of insolence, imbecility, and sloth, and sunk in scenes of luxury and debauchery, their subjects were consigned over to inactivity and ignorance, and from inevitable necessity, became reconciled to a mean, vindictive, and relentless tyranny.

To illustrate still farther the blighting effects brought upon a nation by *men nursed in the lap of prodigality and ease*, I would point the attention of the reader to the present wretched condition of Spain. Borne down by a government completely

lost to every noble sentiment and feeling, and having sacrificed all claims to respect and all pretensions to her former *martial spirit*, she finds herself subjected to the pity and scorn of every other nation. Preyed upon and devoured by an odious, debasing, monkish superstition,—rent by factions,—and experiencing all the evils of poverty and misery, she seems to be struggling for existence with imperious and unyielding adversity, and is reduced to a condition so alarmingly portentous, that a warlike prince alone can preserve her from total degradation.

Who is so blind as not to perceive, that under the military sway of Charles Fifth, with all his ambitious projects and desolating wars, the condition of that kingdom was infinitely more enviable, respectable, and happy, than it has been at any period since, and particularly under the withering management of its present feeble and bigotted dynasty? Such is the baleful and destructive influence of a corrupt and degenerate monarch, who has so far become the willing instrument of a foul system of hypocrisy, and so effectually aided in enslaving the minds of his persecuted and ruined subjects, that his authority and example are every where regarded with an unconquerable aversion and hatred. As he is the enemy of all reformation and improvement, so he is the fountain from which flows every misfortune.

In the succeeding chapters it will be seen, whether the analogy which I propose to exhibit will be just in its application and true to my purpose.

CHAPTER IV.

THE imposing features and the benign and invigorating effects of the WASHINGTON administration are well known, for history has recorded them with a glowing pen. Wisdom was his guide and virtue his pole-star. All his measures partook of the grandeur of his own character, and bore the distinctive marks of prudence, forecast, deep deliberation, and immutable decision. There was nothing temporising, nothing wavering, nothing doubtful or chimerical; every thing rested on a solid basis; because sage experience, careful investigation, and profound thought, had assisted in laying the sure foundations. Accordingly the whole was characterized by strength, security, and consistency. The national interests were established and defended; the rights of the citizen were defined and protected; and the most desirable of all earthly things, *a free and stable government*, was universally felt and acknowledged. When that great man therefore withdrew from the concerns of the republic, we held an elevated rank; we had become rich and powerful, and were in the full fruition of every blessing and every reasonable desire that can fall to the lot of a free people. But unhappily for us, the reins of government were afterwards transferred to the hands of men of far inferior qualifications, and of very different views; of men whose leading aim was their

own personal or family aggrandizement, and the public welfare altogether a secondary consideration.

It is unfortunately too true, that very few men who have devoted most of their days to the learned professions and to the discharge of ministerial or judicial duties only, are fitted for the faithful performance of those of an executive nature. They are almost always deficient in that kind of active energy and promptness of decision often so essential in the numerous difficult emergencies which spring up in public affairs, and which sometimes involve the peace and even the destiny of a nation. Such men nevertheless, are always proud of their attainments, ever aspiring after the first stations, and generally affect scorn for those who are inferior to them in these respects, although they may be greatly their superiors in acquirements that are more useful.

Mr. ADAMS, a man of moderate endowments, but of considerable research and study, had some pretensions to a knowledge of the correct principles of government. But wrapped up in conceit and self-sufficiency; addicted to ungovernable passions; envious and jealous of every competitor; and very much wanting in the ordinary characteristics of a gentleman, he became generally obnoxious. On several unexpected and trying occasions, his simply acquired knowledge availed him little. What was supposed to be independence of spirit, was found to be pride and stubbornness. He fell short in those

valuable traits of character, self-denial, stability of purpose, and nobleness of mind. He was indecisive, wavering, and avaricious; and although through want of discretion and a becoming condescension of manner he had repulsed many of the wise and good men who merited his confidence, the effect was not such as materially to disturb the great machine of government, which was left in full and successful operation by his illustrious predecessor. His habitually uncourteous and forbidding demeanor, and in some instances his rudeness towards gentlemen of the first political distinction, with other prominent defects, were the causes of his ruin. All these faults in his character opened the door to an ever watchful and cunning adversary, who had sought his removal, if not his destruction, by every insidious art that could be devised; and at length, by expelling the object of his hatred, reached the goal of his ambitious hopes.

Mr. JEFFERSON succeeded to the presidency; and found the government, as he said, "*in the full tide of successful experiment.*" But alas for the country! how soon, under his auspices, was that full tide seen to recede, leaving the national vessel among shoals and quicksands, and on the point of being stranded.

Before I proceed any farther, however, with this distinguished personage, I must advert once more to his predecessor. Mr. ADAMS was undoubtedly the honest advocate of an energetic government; and in this respect he showed that, *theoretically,*

he might take rank with sound statesmen. In one of his replies to numerous addresses, shortly after the commencement of the war with France, which grew out of insufferable outrages, he makes this memorable remark—“ *The finger of Heaven points to war on the ocean.*” This was among the few well-timed observations of that unfortunate ruler. The sentiment was worthy of being remembered as a text by his successors; and had it been adhered to in a subsequent crisis, the consequence, I am fully persuaded, would have been such as to have built up and fortified the strength and resources of this country to a vast extent, and would have led to our high exaltation, and secured to us nameless privileges and advantages.

Very shortly after Mr. JEFFERSON found himself seated in the chair of state, he gave unequivocal indications of the policy he intended to pursue. He commenced with the most *subtle and seducing flattery*, which the people greedily swallowed, but which was quickly followed by a vindictive spirit of persecution against his political adversaries. The very sluice-gates of party animosity and revenge were opened; and the consequences were appalling and lamentable. A detestable war upon opinion was proclaimed; and almost every man of adverse politics was thrust out of office, without regarding claims of any kind; and in numerous instances their places were supplied by clamorous brawlers and base calumniators, not a few of whom were afterwards guilty of the vilest defalcations and frauds upon the public, and to an incredible amount.

Whether it arose from a settled malignity against his predecessors and their associates, or from a desire to introduce speculative and visionary projects in the mode of administering the government, is not known; but certain it is, he soon introduced such important changes in its management, that many of its original features were no longer recognised. The dread of its founders and early friends was with good reason awakened at these bold innovations; for the issue of his career showed how well founded were their apprehensions. No inconsiderable portion of those plans so wisely and successfully introduced by WASHINGTON and his compatriots, were either prostrated, or modified in such a way as to suit the occasion. But the most extravagantly foolish of all his projects, was the annihilation of the navy,—that cheap but efficient arm of protection and safety, which he ought to have been proud to cherish and encourage by all his address and influence.

After gathering into the treasury the rich harvest arising from the sale of vessels and other property, and from the prudent economy and superior financial skill of those who went before him, and finding the public coffers overflowing, Mr. JEFFERSON announced to Congress a sensitive solicitude for its provident and judicious application, affecting ignorance of the purposes to which so large a sum might be most beneficially devoted. At this very time our whole maritime frontier was open to the unmolested incursions of any enterprising enemy; there were indeed but few good roads and substan-

tial bridges in the Union; and the members of Congress travelled to and from Washington frequently at the risk of their lives, but more particularly in their near approach to and departure from that city. There were no evidences of internal improvement or of defence, of much magnitude, by order of the government, any where to be found, notwithstanding our exposed condition, and the want of those facilities of speedy and easy intercourse among the states, so important to them as well as to the government itself, and so imperiously demanded by every sentiment of regard for the public convenience and welfare. At the same time, also, and to our utter shame it must be confessed, the larger portion of those revolutionary veterans who had survived the dangers of the field, and who were then living, with every claim upon the justice and gratitude of the nation, were experiencing the utmost penury, and numbers of them nearly dying of want. Yet neither their deserts nor their necessities were made known, nor were they even referred to. Will the avenging arm of Heaven for ever sleep over this disgraceful scene of iniquity? Have we not good reason to look for some awfully retributive justice at the hand of Omnipotence, for the wrongs and the apathy shown to those brave men, whose blood, and sufferings, and hardships, and privations, were the price of our liberty? Was this treatment befitting the character of a christian community?—I hesitate not to say, it will remain a stain upon the nation through all succeeding ages.

Among numberless other striking proofs of unfit-

ness and incapacity in *mere cabinet men* for a more elevated station, we have in the case before us one particularly impressive. If I am correct in my recollection, neither of the three men who come exclusively under this denomination, had the magnanimity or the heart ever to hint at this reprehensible and unpardonable neglect. But the spirit of divination is not required to name the cause. It is sufficiently plain. These men had been *nursed in the lap of ease*—they had never stood in the front of the battle, nor faced death under the most terrific circumstances, nor felt unsheltered the rude storms of winter, nor stained the earth with the blood of their naked feet—they had never experienced privations or sufferings of any kind—they had fattened on their country's bounty, and were enabled to lead a life of indulgence and exemption from care, enjoying without interruption all the comforts incident to wealth and distinction. What regard have such men to the equitable claims of the war-worn soldier, however pressing? What sympathies have they to impart under such circumstances? Not only were their feelings from habit steeled against such things, but were the subject drawn into discussion, and the public debt somewhat farther increased, their darling *popularity* might by that means be impaired. Yes, their POPULARITY! "*that weed of the dung-hill.*"* To this absorbing passion every thing was made to yield; and so liberal were the sacrifices at this corrupt shrine, that all dignity, prosperity, har-

* AMES.

mony, and finally the peace of the country, were completely swallowed up by it.

Before I advert to Mr. JEFFERSON'S successor, it is proper to analyze his character still more closely, and to point the attention of the reader to other pernicious and calamitous consequences naturally and necessarily springing out of his mischievous and ill-digested schemes. If instead of beguiling and deceiving the people as he did with incessant and poisonous flattery; tampering with their integrity; amusing them with accounts of salt mountains and golden dreams of ideal felicity, while he was systematically undermining some of the most useful and valuable institutions in our land; prostrating our strength, and thereby openly inviting insult, robbery, and outrage; if in place of the embargo, "*that distinguished curse of our country,*"* he had called the attention of Congress to a plan of vigorous defensive measures, to the augmentation of the navy, and to the encouragement of that spirit of naval adventure and warfare to which we were notoriously addicted, and had resisted with firmness and decision the infamous tricks to cheat and plunder our merchants, who were engaged in their rightful and lawful pursuits, we should then have presented an attitude worthy of a free and enlightened nation. Our rights would have been respected; our commerce would have been preserved; our character for independence and bravery maintained; and the sore evils which afterwards

* Pickering.

swept over our land, at once blasting and withering our fairest hopes, would have been seasonably checked. If in place of squandering millions on insignificant and useless gunboats, calculated to degrade or drive from the service every valuable officer, and which were every where the objects of contempt and ridicule, there had been half our present naval force equipped, our chivalric heroes of the ocean, the just pride of the country, would have inflicted summary chastisement on insolent freebooters and pirates, and would speedily have enforced a proper observance of the laws of nations, and a becoming respect for individual rights. And here, reader, permit me to remind you of an observation made by one of our statesmen,* who for political prescience and purity of intention was second to none that ever lived, and you will see how literally it was verified. His words are—“*a nation despicable by its weakness, forfeits all claims to neutrality.*” Had Mr. MONROE, or General JACKSON, or Mr. CLINTON, or any other man of similar fitness and character, been at the head of affairs, would he have patiently submitted to such unnumbered and flagrant wrongs? And to sum up the catalogue of evils in few words, would he afterwards have recommended national suicide? A timely show of resistance, and a suitable self-respect, would have corrected those scandalous atrocities which had their origin in audacious and impoverished foreign governments, who despised our weak-

* Hamilton.

ness and sneered at our mercenary and cowardly spirit. This would have prevented the general appeal to arms that followed, and would have saved to the country *some hundreds of millions of property and of debt, and many thousands of valuable lives*, the loss of which was the inevitable result of a paltry, baseless, time-serving system, misnamed *economy*—THE VERY FOUNTAIN OF DEGRADATION AND RUIN!

I cannot dismiss this subject without adverting to that numerous, highly respectable, and useful class of men, the merchants. I asse.^t without fear of contradiction, that no nation, at any period of time, could boast of a similar class of men who were more respectable, or better informed, or possessed of higher sentiments of moral rectitude. Their character stood fair among all the commercial nations of the earth; and their ships were seen in almost every port, and spreading their sails over every sea of the globe. The benefits conferred upon us by this body of men can never be duly estimated, and ought never to be forgotten. But—a black and portentous cloud arose—a fearful tempest burst upon them—they were swept by the besom of destruction—the greater portion of them were driven almost to desperation; and, with their interesting but helpless families, reduced to humiliation and poverty.

CHAPTER V.

MR. MADISON succeeded Mr. JEFFERSON in the presidency; and in the transition succeeded also to the complicated and vexatious difficulties which were the legitimate offspring of the inefficient and ill concerted measures of that political visionary. Having been Mr. JEFFERSON'S principal constitutional adviser, and understanding well his views and his policy, he felt himself under the necessity of pursuing a corresponding course, and therefore stands fairly chargeable with a good share of the dreadful mischiefs and the merited obloquy which ensued. It was impossible, without the most glaring inconsistency, to change the system, even if there had been a disposition to do so.

All the leading plans of the new administration had their origin in *party motives* and *feelings*, having neither stability nor strength, and very little reputation, attached to them. All appointments to office partook of the same complexion, being selections from men well disciplined in the ranks of intrigue and deception: many received signal marks of favor who were without the smallest claims on the bounty of the country, and some of them had scarcely abilities sufficient to execute properly the humble duties of constable. These things were at the time notorious; and they furnish incontestable evidence of Mr. MADISON'S egregious ignorance of mankind, and of his manifest deficiency in the virtues of discrimination and prudence.

It must be conceded to Mr. MADISON that he possesses respectable intellectual powers, and that his *literary* attainments are highly creditable to him. He has made a conspicuous figure among the *learned* statesmen of his time, and with that class of men will always maintain a dignified rank. But if we analyze his merits as a *practical* statesman, he not only sinks immeasurably in our estimation, but becomes the mere shadow of such a character. Of his alleged apostacy from his early political persuasion I shall say nothing : his motives were well understood, and correctly appreciated. The angel of justice will pass upon him a righteous and merited decree.

Were it not that he was the prime counsellor of Mr. JEFFERSON, and therefore largely answerable for those schemes which proved to be pregnant with such destructive consequences, something like a plausible excuse might be offered for the dilemma in which he found himself. But such were the groundworks of his plans, and so indicative were they of exclusive devotion to *party*, that he seemed to be wholly devoid of the attributes of manly independence and nobleness of soul.

It is well understood that Mr. MADISON was decidedly opposed to a declaration of war. But his election was approaching ; and the charge has been repeatedly made, and is generally believed, that such intimations and threats were thrown out to him by some of his leading partisans in relation to that matter, that he yielded his scruples for the sake of preserving himself in power. No wonder that many of his warm political adherents, and some of

them men of influence too, stood aghast when apprized of the measure. And well might they ; for we had provoked the vengeance of the most powerful and warlike nation in Europe, and were not prepared for the event in a single particular. No one will deny that there was abundant cause for war, and so there had long been ; but the total want of all the efficient means to sustain it, formed the great and perhaps the only objection to the step.

Much has been said of the fruits of this *glorious war* ! Its termination, happily for us, was indeed glorious. But little did the men who proclaimed that war anticipate the quarter from which that glory was to come. Little did they imagine that the small remnant of a navy, which had long been the object of their contempt and persecution, was to be the parent of that glory. It has even been thought, that one motive in declaring that war, was the complete destruction of what remained of it, and of every plan and all the principles connected with it. Truth warrants me in averring, that the utmost contumely was heaped upon it ; and unless a crisis had occurred by which its force and utility could be shown, it would probably have sunk into total insignificance, under the influence of that blind and wretched policy, improperly called *economy*, by which it was so effectually borne down. But a point was here settled which was of infinite importance in that conflict, and will for ever remain so while we continue a maritime power. It showed what was well understood by the honest framers and early administrators of the government, that our means of defence and annoyance must be *on*

the ocean; and that a commercial nation can never, under any circumstances, dispense with *naval protection*.

Our disasters on land, balanced with but few successes, had greatly multiplied, and were a source of the utmost disquietude; and the current of misfortune was not arrested until the famous battle of New-Orleans. The calamities and sufferings on our northern frontier, and without obtaining the smallest equivalent, were inconceivably great and distressing. To these succeeded the most humiliating and painful of the whole, *the destruction of Washington*. This was an occurrence so unlooked for, and it produced such feelings of shame and indignation, that the national pulse beat high for vengeance. The disgrace brought upon the government by this event can never be effaced: nor was it less disgraceful to the Vandals who were the authors of it. It betrayed such a total want of seasonable precaution, such miserable imbecility, and such a destitution of military skill and provident means of defence, that language is inadequate to its description.

To add to the dark colorings of the picture, the credit of the nation was utterly prostrated: all resources had failed, for all confidence had fled. The Bank of the United States,—that well-organized, safe, and discreetly managed institution, so useful to the government, and so inestimably beneficial in all commercial transactions,—had been wantonly destroyed, and under circumstances too which brought upon the government the imputation of a *scandalous breach of faith*. On the whole, we were

fast approaching a crisis that could not be contemplated without horror. Our only solace was the proud naval exploits, which followed in such rapid succession that the public feeling was completely absorbed by them. Finally came General JACKSON'S splendid but unexpected victory at New-Orleans. This was the acme of our hopes and desires; it was indeed a most animating and cheering triumph. It was the more gratifying, as the forebodings from that quarter were of a very discouraging and alarming nature. The circumstances attending the fearful and doubtful conflict, are familiar to every reader. The citizens of the United States will never cease to extol the mighty achievement; nor will they omit to decree everlasting honors to the immortal chief, whose daring spirit, consummate skill, and gallant conduct were so eminently instrumental in producing it.

Long before Mr. MADISON'S election to the presidency, the strongest marks of dissatisfaction were every where expressed by men of reflection at Mr. JEFFERSON'S mode of administering the government. With honest politicians, therefore, who stood aloof from party, it became a matter of serious deliberation and concern, to bring forward a candidate who possessed the requisite talents to administer the government in conformity to the dictates of wisdom, integrity, and common sense. Mr. CLINTON was accordingly named: but to contend with southern influence and management at that time, was like buffeting the winds. Not only did the attempt fail, but Mr. CLINTON was rudely insulted and vilely traduced, for presuming to interfere with the *regular*

Virginia succession. Time has unfolded to the people of these states, that here was a *fatal error*. Mr. CLINTON was known to possess distinguished abilities, and of that cast which peculiarly fitted him for the office. Comprehension, forecast, decision, discrimination, firmness, with a thorough knowledge of mankind, are admitted to be the prominent traits of his character: to these might be added such fixed views and purposes, as would have imparted to an administration under his guidance the highest degree of tone, and strength, and dignity. Mr. CLINTON'S policy would beyond all doubt have been directly the reverse of Mr. MADISON'S: and it needs no extraordinary discernment to convince any one, that he would have been the happy instrument to save countless millions to the country: nor does it require much reflection to insure the conviction, that the pre-eminence now proudly held by the state of New-York, would have been transferred to the national head.

Those splendid improvements in our own flourishing commonwealth, which owe their accomplishment principally to Mr. CLINTON, have placed us on such high and commanding ground, that we are not less the admiration of some European nations than of the other members of the confederacy. The master spirit that is capable of conceiving and executing such vast designs, and whose subordinate measures are illustrative of similar views, would *confer* honor, if placed at the head of the greatest empire on earth.

CHAPTER VI.

HAVING in a hasty manner sketched some of the prominent features of the administrations subject to the injudicious control of *cabinet Presidents*, of men whose chief recommendations rested on their mere *literary* attainments; and having shown some of the pernicious consequences of their feeble, temporizing, short-sighted policy; of their visionary experiments and wild theories; of the illusions made use of in order to play upon the credulity of the people, and lull them into a belief that their happiness would be consummated by schemes predicated on the perfectability of man, and that they were no longer to be annoyed by debts or taxes, or wars or rumors of wars,—I now retreat from those exhibitions of transcendent folly and hypocrisy, and with pleasure bring up to the contemplation of the reader the character and qualifications of a man formed for much nobler purposes; one who practically illustrated those rational and sublime views of government which spring from solid reflection and a sound intellect, fortified and improved by an intimate knowledge of the motives of human action.

Fortunately for the country, Mr. MONROE was elected its chief magistrate. By pursuing measures closely assimilated to those of the illustrious foun-

der of our empire, and bearing with them all the evidences of a familiar acquaintance with the science of political economy, we soon witnessed a demonstration of their interesting effects in the restoration of harmony, of confidence, of the revival of trade and of the growth of the arts; of a policy in short every way enlivening and invigorating. The odious party distinctions, so disgustingly conspicuous and so infamously base, which had long and fatally poisoned the fountains of society and the channels of social intercourse, were in a great degree discountenanced and removed. We seemed to enter upon a new era; and with the restoration of good feelings, a current of vigorous enterprise and prosperous pursuits, to an extent almost unrivalled, spread its auspicious influence through the land.

Mr. MONROE entered upon the duties of his office as *President of the United States*. He did not "*stalk forth the champion of faction*." And as the drift of his views was soon perceived to be directed to the grand object of promoting those impulses of kindness and good will which so essentially aid in the general prosperity and amenity of a people, the effect was the immediate conciliation of discerning and good men, and the unqualified support and approbation of every class of citizens throughout the Union. Something indeed must be allowed for the part which he bore in the revolution, and for those sentiments of partiality which were every where felt for a distinguished veteran, who had gallantly faced the enemies of liberty, and shed his blood in the field of battle.

As Mr. MONROE is one of that number who had been well disciplined in the *school of mankind*, he was consequently not a proselyte to those absurd doctrines which rest on empty speculations and idle vagaries. His knowledge was infinitely the more valuable from that circumstance; and hence he was fitted to fill an active and useful sphere. Accordingly he became the undisguised advocate of a system calculated to resuscitate our strength and restore our character. In many of his leading plans he went far beyond WASHINGTON himself; but the state of the country authorized and called for it.

The example and counsels of that great chief were prudently and very properly followed; and the scale projected for general protection, by the establishment of strong defences in all the vulnerable parts of the Union, and for the augmentation of the navy in such a way as to defend our own shores, to suppress piracies, and command some tokens of respect from other powers, was in strict unison with those counsels. What with long services in the field, and several important embassies abroad, Mr. MONROE had opportunities of studying the human character in all its aspects, and in every condition of life; and he understood too well the fallacy of depending on the justice of nations or individuals, when our weakness was so manifest as to hold out the strongest temptations to aggression and insult. In strict accordance with this opinion, he uniformly recommended energetic and decisive plans, embracing also the most valuable public institutions; and as far as it was practicable, they were carried

into effect. To insure their greater efficacy and certainty, he made extensive tours, examined with the eye of a *military chieftain* and a sagacious statesman, those points which were easily assailable, and which the public safety required should be either strengthened or made formidable. This was the obvious dictate of patriotism and discretion, and plainly evinced that he was consulting the best interests of the republic. Here was noble minded independence: here was a due regard to those injunctions which his office imposed upon him: here was a determination that the nation should neither be abused nor robbed with impunity: here were fixed and stable purposes, such as the people had a right to expect from him, and such as a chief magistrate is bound to exhibit. In all this we perceive the judicious and prudent management of a wise and well informed ruler; it shows a timely caution, a steady object of pursuit, a knowledge of his duty, and furnishes at the same time those proofs of a *martial spirit*, without which, I honestly believe, no man, whatever might be his pretensions in other respects, ought ever to be trusted with the reins of government, unless his reputation for the exercise of executive functions is well established. Imbecility forms no part of his character; and no statesman ever yielded to it who was not either degraded or ruined by it: certainly there were not the slightest traces of it in his administration; the whole, like WASHINGTON'S, was upheld by firmness, regularity, and no little share of grandeur. The best argument that can be offered in commendation of

it, is the unexampled prosperity and tranquillity which the nation felt under it, and the dignified stand it then took and has since maintained.

With small pretensions to those scintillations of genius so highly prized by a belle lettre writer, and which formed the chief claims to distinction in Mr. JEFFERSON and Mr. MADISON, Mr. MONROE possessed attributes of a much more exalted and useful nature. In his public transactions, with only a few exceptions, he has shown,—what was so striking a feature in the character of the great WASHINGTON,—a sound, clear, discriminating judgment. This was particularly exemplified in the choice of his ministers; for it admits of no dispute, that his cabinet was the most able one since that of WASHINGTON's. And it was not with a view simply to show or pomp, that he called such men to his confidence; his object was to have the benefit of their sage counsel. He differed too from his mere *literary* predecessors in another important point: he was without that silly presumption and egotism which led some of them to suppose that all talents, all knowledge, and all experience were concentrated within themselves. To the wisdom of this course we must mainly ascribe the stately policy which was so honorable to him and so beneficial to the nation; and which rendered his administration the theme of high and merited eulogium. Of four administrations which succeeded WASHINGTON's, his alone will be held up to the view of posterity as bearing any resemblance to it. Under his auspices there was a complete renovation of those august

features which were so strikingly conspicuous in the first one, and which begot such unbounded admiration and homage among the friends of rational liberty throughout the world. Perhaps the only indefensible ground assumed by Mr. MONROE, was that in which he expressed a willingness to yield up to the state sovereignties some of the just prerogatives appertaining to the general government. This was indeed a weakness; and its effect was certainly not without injury. To the honor of the country, however, Congress have conclusively settled those points which appeared to him ambiguous and doubtful, and have sanctioned those interpretations given to them by enlightened jurists and intelligent statesmen. There was, nevertheless, in all the leading measures of Mr. MONROE's administration, such nobleness of design, such obvious utility, and so much to commend, that we are called upon to overlook small matters, which might be considered blemishes, and to extol the wisdom and glory which formed so bright an inheritance.

I must not omit to call the reader's attention to the troublesome and difficult task which devolved on Mr. MONROE, of suppressing the most numerous and abandoned horde of pirates that ever before were known to infest the American seas. Their sole object was plunder; and its acquisition was attended with scenes of cruelty and murder too shocking to relate. They were probably not surpassed in barbarous atrocity and daring hardihood by any similar combination of outlaws at any former period of time. The most poignant afflictions were

produced by these wretches; more particularly from their horrid and wanton destruction of helpless women and children, some of them allied to families of great respectability. Vessels and other property to the amount of millions fell into their hands or were destroyed by them. And although the national arm was put forth to check these enormities, they continued a prolific source of danger, anxiety, and distressing injuries, for several years, and led to a number of desperate conflicts. They did not terminate until we found our sensibilities awakened by the loss of several distinguished officers and many valuable seamen, as well as numbers of private citizens, who were determined to defend themselves and preserve their valuable effects.

Will any candid man pretend, that these heart-chilling outrages and heavy losses did not originate in the pitiful and senseless scheme of proclaiming our weakness by destroying the navy! Can any thing like an excuse be found for such matchless stupidity and folly!

Of the many pirates who were taken prisoners and condemned, a number who appeared to be less criminal than others, received the clemency of the executive. In a few cases it was found that this clemency was misapplied. But if there was error, it was on the side of mercy,—always the safest side on which to err.

In partaking of the dangers of the field, and in witnessing the bravery and patriotic sacrifices of the revolutionary army, Mr. Monroe became intimately acquainted with their merits and sufferings,

and was therefore well qualified to judge of the fair claims they had on their country's justice and bounty. In the true spirit of magnanimity and with the warm feelings of a soldier, he espoused their cause. Among other seasonable propositions to Congress, was an urgent one to make provision for the survivors of that army. A successful issue crowned the generous effort; and the result is well known. If Mr. MONROE could lay claim to no other noble deed, this alone would give him an enviable distinction, and would deck his manly brow with the emblems of immortality. Not only did it minister to the speedy relief of those afflictions which had become a standing reproach, and in part assuage those feelings of anguish which must have arisen from *hope so long deferred*, but it was a partial extinction of a debt that must for ever remain uncanceled, and was attaching to the government and country the strongest marks of infamy.

When some future HUME or ROBERTSON shall arise to trace in characters of fire the mighty revolutions and events which have ennobled our land, if he is pained in recording occasional instances of flagrant iniquity, he will find relief from the contemplation of those substantial proofs of excellence which will reflect durable honor upon the American name, and which must remain an everlasting monument to the bright fame of their authors. The fairest page in the history of Mr. MONROE's administration, will be that in which it will be made to appear that he endeavored to wipe out that stain upon republics, that they are always ungrateful.

And if justice, as we must believe, is the great attribute of Deity, then may we with humble confidence appeal to him for at least a partial remission of those sins which would otherwise, at a future day, have risen up in awful judgment against us.

I now appeal to every man of fairness and reflection, who has been at the trouble to read these sketches, to say, if I have in the least exaggerated those faults and failings in our rulers which form so large a part of my strictures. Nay, I ask, if in strict conformity to the eternal principles of truth and justice, I should not have been fully warranted in going much further, and in dealing with much greater severity! I trust enough is said to convince every considerate man, that it is the height of inconsistency and folly to confide the reins of government to the hands of philosophical projectors and experimenters, or to those who may be distinguished as cabinet ministers merely, but who are destitute of the indispensable qualifications which fit men for command, and who through lust of power would invoke the heaviest calamities. The history and experience of other nations admonish us in the most serious manner, that feebleness unbars the gates of safety, and opens the door to destruction—that no nation can be secure where the government is without stability and strength—that contempt, and perfidy, and robbery, follow in the train of imbecility—that to preserve her rights, a nation must be at *all times* prepared to enforce and protect them; and to insure respect, she must be able to *com-*

mand it. It therefore becomes the undisputed province of men who are placed at the head of the national concerns, to provide the necessary means of defence and annoyance, in order that whenever sufficient provocation is given, merited chastisement may forthwith follow: and let them remember, that a manly attitude of defiance, with a firm determination to resist aggression and wrong, can alone insure our peace and security, and exalt us among the powerful nations of the earth.

I shall close my remarks by a single invocation:—From all conceited, self-sufficient egotists and narrow-minded pedants—from all philosophical projectors and visionary speculators, as well as flatterers and deceivers—from all hollow-hearted apostates and time-servers, who prefer partisans and sycophants to honest and faithful men, and who show themselves wanting in independence, integrity, and firmness of spirit, and who seem indeed to think no sacrifice too great to promote their ambitious schemes and their idol popularity—from all such, *may “angels and ministers of grace” preserve us.*

THE END.