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THE STRUGGLE FOR  
NEUTRALITY IN AMERICA:

AN ADDRESS DELIVERED BEFORE THE

NEW YORK HISTORICAL SOCIETY,

AT THEIR

SIXTY-SIXTH ANNIVERSARY,

DECEMBER 13, 1870,

BY

CHARLES FRANCIS ADAMS.

Reviewed by H. B. Dawson

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ABSTRACTS

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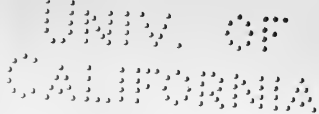
FOR THE

*SIXTY-SIXTH ANNIVERSARY.*

CHARLES P. KIRKLAND,  
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## ADDRESS.



You have honored me with an invitation to occupy a position which has been successively held by many of the most eminent men of your own State, and also of other States. I accept it with distrust, not less of my ability to reach the high standard attained by them, than by reason of my disuse of the habit of public speaking. It is not easy for one long obliged to school himself to the rule of saying as little as possible to be heard out of doors, to make an immediate transition, and expose with freedom all that he may think upon a given subject. Yet I confess I know of no stronger temptation that could have been offered to me to make the effort than this, as well on account of the kind feeling that appears to have prompted the call, as of the legitimate opening it affords to the indulgence of my favorite line of speculation.

I purpose, therefore, without further preface, to enter at once upon my subject—to devote the brief period to which I hope to confine my draught on your attention to the consideration of a single topic in the past history of the country. I refer to the establish-

ment of the great general principle of international law—that a nation has a right to be neutral in times of war, if it so pleases. I think the world owes the practical adoption of this principle mainly to the long and painful struggles of the Government of the United States. It will be my object on the present occasion, by a rapid review of the chief events connected with it, to show how it was brought about.

I think it not unlikely that this statement may at first cause a little surprise. Some of you may at once appeal to the learned work of one of the most eminent writers of your own State—Mr. Henry Wheaton—a work now recognized as of general authority over the civilized world, and of which I feel proud to say that I possess a copy rendered into Chinese, although I cannot read a word of it—and quote a rule laid down by him in the following terms :

“The right of every independent State to remain at peace while other States are engaged in war, is an incontestable attribute of sovereignty.”

To which I reply, that this may indeed be affirmed to be true now, but it was not true prior to the struggle that we as a nation went through to sustain it. It is on all hands conceded that in ancient times what is signified by the term neutrality did not exist, for there is no word known to express the idea. Greece and Rome knew nothing of it. Even down to the beginning of the eighteenth century of our era, though many writers had come forward to contribute their

valuable labors towards framing a system of international law, and had clearly succeeded in making this idea understood, the thing itself, considered as an absolute right in a nation, which belligerents were bound to respect, was by no means generally recognized. The eminent author, Wolff, in treating of it, considers it so doubtful, that he recommends it to nations to obtain greater security by special treaties of guaranty. Thus, from a right, it sinks at once into a privilege. And, in point of fact, European nations have seldom been able to sustain themselves in any other way. The weaker powers, some of them composing geographical barriers between the stronger, are protected by guaranty; or if not, by the fact of their insignificance. But even these, in times of long and heated strife, have rarely succeeded in getting their neutrality respected.

The object, then, that I aim at is to show that, for the first time in history, the Government of the United States, at an early period of its existence, laid down this principle, defined by Mr. Wheaton as a cardinal maxim of its policy. Weak as it was at first on the ocean, and protected on land only by its partial insulation, it deliberately advanced the doctrine that neutrality in all wars was its right as well as its duty. But Mr. Wheaton calls this right "incontestable." To which I can only reply, that for a period of twenty years—quite a fifth of a century in our history—it was not only contestable, but contested, and,

towards the end, established only at the cost of war itself.

We all know how matters stood in America at the time when the Constitution was adopted. The revolutionary struggle had been over six years, but we were neither happy nor quiet. Liberty was fast running into license, and law was yielding to the stern dictation of despairing poverty. It was at this moment that a remedy for these evils was voluntarily devised, and Washington was summoned by acclamation to preside over the new experiment. It was soon perceived to be working like a charm. Aided by eminent counsellors, the marvellous offspring of the grand conflict for our rights, industry revived, and commerce once more spread her white wings over the ocean. Thus passed the greater part of the first term of Washington's Administration. Peace prevailed over the land, and, although grave differences of opinion were developed in regard to many details, they served rather to help perfect than to impair the ultimate working of the machine. It was just at this moment that a great catastrophe took place far away in foreign lands, which shook by its force the oldest sovereignties in Europe, and for a time materially endangered the edifice just raised in America. It is scarcely necessary to say, that this was the great French revolution which began to pull down just at the date when we were engaged in building up.

It soon became obvious, from the complications

fast multiplying with the nations bordering on France, that some policy was to be matured by the executive head in order to provide for contingencies that might involve America at any moment. The people were all alive, awaiting with breathless interest the development of what they fondly hoped would prove a new era of liberty. Their gratitude for the aid so decisively rendered in their own struggle combined with their pride in the success of their own experiment to inspire a zeal not merely of sympathy, but for coöperation. A great many similar events have since happened, both in the same and in other countries, which have been viewed with comparative indifference. Even though the uprising was attended with extraordinary violence, and blood was shed like water, whilst the mild and innocent monarch was made to atone by his head for the sins of three generations before him, these incidents, though shocking to many, did not seem materially to damp the ardor of the general enthusiasm. Civic feasts were the order of the day. Oxen were roasted in the streets; flags of the two nations, entwined together everywhere, were the symbols of what was to be a more perfect union; and from all quarters the acclamations of thousands rose to the skies in admiration of the event which was about to restore paradise on earth.

In the midst of such a formidable demonstration the question was pressing upon the attention of Washington, how this sudden phenomenon was likely to

bear upon the new machinery he had been selected to put in motion. Upon the Executive particularly devolved the establishment of relations with nations abroad. What was he to do in the complications which were already making their appearance all over Europe? The case was a difficult one. He had thus far been called to organize only the customary forms of intercourse. The news of the mission of an envoy from the young Republic raised important questions for which it was proper to be at once prepared.

And here let me for a moment stop the thread of my subject to make one observation upon the peculiar responsibility which rests upon the head of a nation in its relations with external powers. It is of a nature which can never be shared by the people at large. Collectively, a people feel more than they reason, and they are never in a condition to act at once. They are, moreover, particularly prone to be swept by sudden passion towards war, especially if instigated by the cunning devices of plausible leaders. It is far more easy, therefore, for a demagogue to stimulate them to a fatal course, than for a statesman to preserve a power of restraint which will secure a happy result. Hence it follows, that according to the action of a public man, placed in a position of the highest responsibility, is he to be held worthy of honor, if he controls the tendencies which may be fatal to their welfare, or to be condemned if he weakly or wickedly lets them go on to their destruction. There are many



cases in which this responsibility cannot be shared. Let me illustrate my idea by an example or two.

You have still living within the borders of your noble State one citizen to whom I trust I may venture, in passing, to allude. When, in the fearful struggle from which we have happily emerged, a gallant naval officer, zealous to distinguish his loyalty, ventured upon the bold step of seizing a vessel belonging to a proud nation then in a state of peace with all the world, and taking from her by force two men justly odious to the people by their share in the rank treason which conspired to overthrow our Government; and when the authorities of that nation, appealing for the first time to the very doctrines of neutral rights which it had ever before been our duty to maintain against her when she was a belligerent, formally demanded of us reparation for the insult and the restoration of those odious men, from one end of the country to the other the loyal and the patriotic, oblivious of the honorable record of the past, and mindful only of the opportunity for present vengeance, flew to the precedents which belligerent law could furnish to defend the act, called with one voice for the highest honors to the brave officer who did the deed, and insisted above all upon the retention of the traitors at any cost. Such was the passion of the hour, that it invaded even the most elevated stations, and prompted hasty approbation from the head of the Department himself. It seemed as if there were no chance

left of escaping a collision in which the united voice of all civilized nations would have justly pronounced us in the wrong. It was precisely in that critical moment that the statesman to whom I allude, calm in council, sagacious in action, and fearless of censure when an emergency was to be met, was called upon to prepare the response in behalf of the Government. He deliberately assumed the responsibility of adhering to the precedents so honorably established in earlier times, and of recommending a retraction of the error, and a surrender of the men; and his decision was finally adopted by the President. I do not feel that I am exaggerating, when I claim for this courageous resistance to the infatuation of the hour, that it not only was correct in principle, but also that it *saved the unity of the nation*. The two men were surrendered. They forthwith fell into obscurity. Where are they now? Who knows?—and, I will add, Who cares? Yet it was for the possession of two such men unjustly taken that we encountered the most perilous hazard of the war. If the illustrious statesman who saved us from that folly had never done other service to his country in his life, for that alone he earned—though I know not whether he will receive—the undying gratitude of his country.

So much for one mode of redeeming responsibility in high station. Shall I reverse the picture, and point out another? Yes. Look at France, as she lies panting and bloody, enduring the last agony of national

mortification. Who is it that has done this deed, and suddenly plunged her from the pinnacle of fortune into this profound abyss? Behold the man arriving at absolute power by perjury and fraud, yet fully condoned by the general suffrage of a too facile people, instead of fulfilling the main duty of his trust—the preservation of peace to a happy land—plunging headlong into conflict with a neighboring power upon a doubtful issue in the sovereignty of a country over which he held no sway. The pretence for this hazardous step was, that the popular feeling in France was too strong to be resisted. Had that unhappy chief only possessed the courage to seize the single moment of concession which might have saved the national honor, too rashly compromised at first, and thus preserved the peace for his people, they might indeed in their anger have pulled him down from his high estate; but in such a fall, attended by such salvation to them, he might have attained a moral elevation much higher than he ever knew in his days of power. Instead of which, he now stands before our gaze as deserting his post on the first great disaster in the field, and flying for safety to lay his head in the lap of the enemy he had provoked. From his princely prison he has the leisure to comprehend how chance and fate rule exclusively over the distracted counsels of the people he has betrayed, and to observe the wheels of the conqueror steadily rolling over the necks of the multitude whom he has destroyed. Verily, verily,

better had it been for him to have perished on the scaffold a thousandfold, than, by pusillanimity like this, record his everlasting dishonor on the most humiliating page in the history of the nation!

With this illustration of the portentous nature of the responsibility inseparably attached to the Executive agency of a State in its foreign relations, I now return to the consideration of the position of Washington when he was summoned, by the great uprising in France, to decide for the infant Government what position to take in the complications visibly to ensue. It was not merely a single emergency he was to meet, as in the examples I have cited, but his duty extended to the formation of a policy to stretch into the future far beyond the days of the youngest living generation. The strongest evidence of his own sense of the importance of his action is found in the fact that he carefully prepared a series of sixteen questions, which he submitted to the consideration of the four members of his Cabinet, for their advice. To that council he had carefully elected two of the ablest and best-qualified statesmen that the great struggle for liberty had produced, the only drawback to which was the misfortune that they scarcely ever could agree. The one, abounding in capacity, leaned to speculation and theory, to which he sought to accommodate facts; the other, equally gifted, preferred to view the facts first, and from them form his theories afterwards. The first had a synthetic, the other an analytic mind.

The former would have been best fitted to preside over a society of distinguished philosophers; the latter's province would have been to marshal armed squadrons on the battle-field. Yet between these discordant elements it was the peculiar faculty of Washington to be able to educe from each most valuable contributions to the regulation of his policy. They never served him better than in the present emergency. The sixteen questions were submitted on the 18th of April, 1793. On the next day all four of the Cabinet had united in an affirmative answer to the first, which was the essential one. It ran in the following words:

“Shall a proclamation issue for the purpose of preventing interferences of the citizens of the United States in the war between France and Great Britain?”

Another question—whether the Minister known to be on his way out as a representative from the new Republic should be received—was also unanimously agreed to.

And here the President was fain to stop; for the opposing forces, Jefferson and Hamilton, fell into such differences upon the remaining questions, that it was weeks before they got through their expositions. This was of no consequence, as from the one answer he laid the great foundation of his policy. A proclamation was immediately drawn up and issued on the 22d of April, 1793. The substantial part was in these words:

“ *Whereas*, it appears that a state of war exists between Austria, Prussia, Sardinia, Great Britain, and the United Netherlands on the one part, and France on the other; and the duty and interest of the United States require that they should with sincerity and good faith adopt and pursue *a conduct friendly and impartial towards the belligerent powers*: I have therefore thought fit, by these presents, to declare the disposition of the United States to observe *the conduct aforesaid* towards those powers respectively, and to exhort and warn the citizens of the United States carefully to avoid all acts and proceedings whatsoever which may in any manner tend to contravene such disposition.”

It is to be particularly observed, that throughout this paper the true object for which it was issued was not declared. There is no collective generalization, the true word for which is *neutrality*. The cause was this: Mr. Jefferson doubted whether the Constitution had given the President the power to declare neutrality, as it was certain that he had not the power to declare war. But he was in favor of the thing. The consequence was, that the President very quietly directed the word to be stricken out of the first draft, and let it stand in the circumlocution of “conduct friendly and impartial towards the belligerent powers,” and “the conduct aforesaid.” But nobody was deceived as to what this meant from that day to this. The President did proclaim a policy, and Mr. Jeffer-

son knew the fact perfectly well ; at the same time, his scruple of conscience was respected, as it should have been. But it was *neutrality* for all that.

At the subsequent session of Congress, which met on the 2d of December, the President, in his Message, communicated to both Houses the fact of what he had done, and transmitted a copy of his proclamation ; but in that paper too it may be seen that the word "neutrality" nowhere appears. Such juggles in words have not been uncommon in our history !

This important step was not taken a bit too soon ; for now the pinch of a severe struggle in behalf of what had been done was at hand. It was well known that a diplomatic envoy had been commissioned by the new French Republic, and was on his way to America. The President had been advised by his Cabinet to receive him at once on his arrival. But neither he nor they had any idea that the chief object of the new mission would be to break up the very policy just formally proclaimed. The chief directors of that changing era of French politics were looking to this country for aid in their conflict with all Europe, and especially on the ocean, where they were conducting an unequal fight with Great Britain. To that end they had, in appealing to the old alliance of 1778, meditated to propose some form of convention by which, in consideration of an exclusive privilege of trade in the ports of each other, making a practical monopoly of their carrying-trade for us, we might be

tempted to enter into a union which, however it might have been worded, must inevitably have made us, in the end, a party to the war.

This scheme was not altogether ill-contrived. The popular current in favor of France was at the moment running mountain-high all over America, and even in the Cabinet of Washington it had its most earnest sympathizer in the person of Mr. Jefferson. Though honestly in favor of preserving neutrality as long as possible, he held doubts—and not without good reason—of our ability to preserve it against the feebly-disguised ill-will of Great Britain; and, in the event of a rupture, his disposition prompted a close union with France. Neither was Washington himself by any means averse to this policy, in the last resort. A good field was therefore fairly open to the labors of the new envoy at the moment it was announced that he had landed from a French frigate at Charleston, in South Carolina.

And here I ask your pardon for stopping again for the purpose of making a single observation. In the relations between nations it is not quite enough for a Government to devise forms of policy and direct negotiations. However excellent they may be in the abstract, and however likely to insure a favorable result, if the organ of communication be not also well adapted to promote the object, the issue will surely disappoint expectations. This remark, true in a degree even now, was very much more so in former days,



when the telegraph was not at hand to vary instructions, remove sudden obstacles, and rectify casual errors. A signal example of its truth is given in the conduct of Mr. Genest, the new French Minister. He was quite a young man, not more than twenty-seven, had been well trained by his father in the Foreign Office, under the monarchy, and had entered the diplomatic service at St. Petersburg through the influence of his sisters, who were in the household of Queen Marie Antoinette. But he had imbibed such heated Republican sentiments, that, at the breaking out of the Revolution, the Russian Government seized an early opportunity to furnish him with his passports to return to Paris. This event probably recommended him the more to the Republicans, who had now come into power, and particularly pointed him out as a suitable agent to serve their objects in republican America! That it was intended he should act as a fire-brand, there can be little doubt; but that he should run the career which he actually did, was by no means in their contemplation. In the year 1793, to go from Paris to Philadelphia, by the way of Charleston, South Carolina, was certainly not less out of the way than it would be now to go from here to London by way of Rio Janeiro. There could have been but one object in this *détour*; that was, to try the temper of the population before going to the Government. If such was the case, nothing could have been more satisfactory to him. He was received at Charleston

with all the attentions which could have been paid to the greatest benefactor of his race, or military hero; and his progress through the country to Philadelphia was one month's continued ovation. People of all conditions, and officers of State, crowded to cheer him on his way. No similar spectacle has ever been seen in any country before or since. And at last, when he reached his destination, a large part of the population of Philadelphia rushed out to meet him at Gray's Ferry, and from thence to escort him in triumph to the city. Mr. Genest was neither crafty, cool, nor insincere. This incense did for him what it has done for many a better man before and since: it completely turned his head. He thought he had nothing left to do but to dictate what he desired, and every body would obey. He began at once to deal out commissions to the right and left, to fit out privateers, and enlist officers and men; to organize Jacobin clubs, and in every other respect to conduct himself in much the same way that he might have done at Paris. President Washington received him with all proper courtesy, and his Secretary of State for a moment seems to have cherished visions of international amity; but they were both rudely wakened from their repose by the complaints of the British Minister, Mr. Hammond, remonstrating against the capture of British vessels by ships fitted out from our ports under the authority of this new envoy. It was plain that the proclamation of neutrality had been trampled in the dust by

him, and that his insolent assumption of authority was fast implicating the country in a conflict with Great Britain.

But what at first might have seemed an alarming onset, in point of fact turned out the greatest piece of good fortune. So outrageous became the action of Mr. Genest, so offensive his mode of treating the Government, that he began to fall in the popular esteem as fast as he had ever risen. Most especially did it place Mr. Jefferson, his most natural friend, in an attitude in which he had no alternative but to disavow all sympathy whatever with his proceedings. Mortifying as it must have been to give up the policy which he had cherished, he showed no hesitation in his course. On him it necessarily devolved to conduct the official correspondence with Mr. Genest, on behalf of the Administration. The papers, as they stand on the record, tell their own story. Considering the sacrifice he had to make of all his cherished notions, nothing in the long and brilliant career of that gentleman seems to me more honorable than the way he acquitted himself on that occasion. The conclusion of it all was, the utter failure of the whole project of France, the material diminution of the popular sympathy with that Republic, the recall of Mr. Genest in disgrace at the request of the President, and the confirmation of the policy of neutrality which this assault had been intended to overthrow. A different Minister, crafty and imperturbable like Tal-

leyrand, might have made much more mischief. Genest was impulsive, but straightforward in his action. Yet, in candor it must be admitted that this result was quite as much due to his bewildered brain as to the combined sagacity of the three able statesmen who then guided the American policy.

But if this first great danger, springing from the infectious fever of French solicitation, had been evaded, another immediately followed from the icy chill of British repulsion, not less alarming. So far from seeking a more intimate alliance, her Government had, ever since the Treaty of Independence—a period of full ten years—assumed an attitude of supercilious indifference quite as provoking as any active hostility. For a long while she had not thought it worth her while even to send a formal representative; and, after he came, his chief business seemed to be confined to the duty of inditing very long despatches, complaining always, and proposing nothing. Mr. Jefferson, on his side, returned the fire of despatches quite as ponderous and more convincing, the end of which was, no progress to a settlement, and bad feeling growing every day. The truth really was, that both parties were almost equally to blame for failing in their engagements under the treaty; but it was clear that, if one did not show a disposition to begin to act, the other would excuse itself for doing nothing. There are three sorts of diplomatic composition, which are habitually resorted to in meeting particular necessities:

The first is, when hostility is intended. The language is then courteous but short, and every word covering intelligible offence. The second, when dissatisfaction is to be expressed, but no action to follow. Then the notes are apt to be long and full of argument, with abundant citation of authorities, yet terminating with nothing but assurances of the highest consideration, &c. The third and last is resorted to when a sincere desire for harmony prevails. Then the phrases are less studied and the intent more directly signified—the whole sense conveyed in brief notes. The style adopted by Mr. Hammond, the first British Minister, and Mr. Jefferson, was, for the most part, of the second sort. Nothing was done. So the old sores of the war continued to rankle, and events were taking place every day which were opening new ones. The breaking out of the war with France was the signal with Great Britain for the issue of an Order in Council which swept at once a large number of our grain-laden ships into her ports. On the other hand, a British official stationed in Canada, carelessly or intentionally, gave out words sounding fearfully like instigations to the Indian tribes to prepare for a foray on the border. At this rate it became plain that the bitter feeling against the mother-country, never really softened since the war, would soon take some active shape. This spirit showed itself in Congress by successive propositions, rising in their tone, until the last gravely proposed to sequestrate all debts due to British subjects

as a security for satisfaction of our demands. And even this extreme proceeding met with a degree of favor that portended an early and violent collision.

At this critical moment, Washington, who had been closely watching the rise of the tide which threatened an early fate to his cherished policy, at once determined to make a final effort in its behalf. He instituted a special mission to Great Britain, and, in order to be sure of his agent, he nominated an eminent citizen of your own State—John Jay, then Chief-Justice of the Supreme Court, and, perhaps, the man in all the United States who has come out of the fire of party trials with the slightest stain upon his garments.

It was a great stroke of policy, the force of which roused from its apathy even the Ministry of Great Britain. They began to show signs of a conception that it would be better to conciliate a power which, however insignificant in their esteem, it was folly to leave as a cat's-paw in the hands of France. They therefore became as amiable as they had been indifferent. The consequence was natural. When this happens, the third style of correspondence immediately comes in. From being long, acrid, and objectless, it becomes brief, friendly, and to the point. A treaty was soon made, and the policy of neutrality was once more saved.

Of the merits or demerits of this famous treaty I have no intention, upon this occasion, to go into a

general examination. It is open to criticism in some of its details, and, at best, it cannot be ranked among the triumphs of our diplomacy. But in the single view in which I am considering it now, as connected with a new system of international policy, its value cannot be exaggerated. It rescued the country from a slough in which it was sinking, and where, but for that, it might have floundered for the next twenty years.

The treaty was signed. But what a spectacle followed! Poor George Washington! Speaking of rulers, the sagacious Lord Bacon says: "They are like heavenly bodies, which cause good or evil times, and which have much veneration, but no rest." Passing over the dubious astrology, the remark is emphatically true of him. He had had troubles and discouragements manifold, especially at Valley Forge. He had faced many a British array in Long Island, at White Plains, at Monmouth, and at Brandywine, and often with but middling results, but never before had it been his fortune to meet with such a storm as this. Always before he had to meet his enemies and those of his country; now it was to meet his friends and those who "venerated him, but gave him no rest." From one end of the country to the other, on the receipt of the details of the treaty, there rose one general acclaim of indignation and remonstrance. Never was there such eager interest to understand the particulars of a negotiation, and never has there been so elaborate a popular discussion of it in the news-

papers, in pamphlets, and upon every public platform. The literature connected with that treaty now fills volumes in our libraries. Caius, Camillus, Cato, Curtius, and many more old Romans, were called into the field of dispute after the fashion of that day, and each laid down the law after his own fashion. Every body knew all about it better than Mr. Jay or all the Cabinet. No President since Washington could have stood that blast, and even he shook under it. My native city, then relatively of more weight in the Union than now, and strongly attached to him, nevertheless led the way in condemnation. At a solemn town-meeting the people unanimously voted a resolution assigning twenty distinct reasons against it, and embodied the proceedings in a memorial to him. The same course was taken in all the large towns, and almost everywhere else. But it was in reply to Boston that he wrote that letter, which has ever since been celebrated as a pattern of modest yet dignified independence.

“In every act of my administration,” he writes, “I have sought the happiness of my fellow-citizens. My system for the attainment of this object has uniformly been to overlook all personal, local, and partial considerations; to contemplate the United States as one great whole; to confide that sudden impressions, when erroneous, would yield to candid reflection; and to consult only the substantial and permanent interests of our country.



“Nor have I departed from this line of conduct on the occasion which has produced the resolutions contained in your letter.

“Without a predilection for my own judgment, I have weighed with attention every argument which has at any time been brought into view. *But the Constitution is the guide which I never can abandon.* It has assigned to the President the power of making treaties, with the advice and consent of the Senate. It was doubtless supposed that these two branches of the Government would combine, without passion and with the best means of information, those facts and principles upon which the success of our foreign relations will always depend; that they ought not to substitute for their own convictions the opinions of others, or to seek truth through any channel but that of a temperate and well-informed investigation.

“Under this persuasion, I have resolved on the manner of executing the duty before me. To the high responsibility attached to it I freely submit; and you, gentlemen, are at liberty to make these sentiments known as the grounds of my procedure. While I feel the most lively gratitude for the many instances of approbation from my country, I can no otherwise deserve it than by obeying the dictates of my conscience.”

Three quarters of a century have passed away since this letter was written, and now I do not believe one individual exists, feeling an interest in Washing-

ton's memory, who would desire a single word changed in it. Its living force remains for application in all time. Even in the heat of the moment it did much to rally the spirit of many who began to comprehend the value of the object that he had staked so much to secure. That object was, the preservation of peace, and the right to maintain it irrespective of internecine struggles going on in all the world beside. The chief points of difficulty with Great Britain had been disposed of, for some time at least. Washington had triumphed over the belligerent spirit of that portion of the people who were rushing into war, and now he was able to turn his attention more closely to the task of reuniting the broken thread of our relations with France. Great was the responsibility, and nobly did he brace himself to meet it.

And this was no easy matter; for things had been much complicated by the mistakes that had been made on both sides by the respective envoys. How Mr. Genest spoiled his own game, has already been explained. He had ventured to do that which is always fatal to the usefulness of a diplomatic representative—he had mixed himself with the internal politics of the country to which he was sent. Mr. Fauchet, who succeeded him, had done even worse, for he had succeeded in implicating the successor of Jefferson as Secretary of State in transactions the dubious character of which made that officer's resignation inevitable, and his own retreat expedient. On the

other hand, General Washington's selection of Gouverneur Morris to go to Paris had not turned out much better. In ordinary times, when the most that would be required of a Minister is to make himself acceptable to the Government and in society, and to transact routine business with intelligence and despatch, no one would have been more fit than he. Indeed, he was fitted for much more than that. His life is too well known to you, and his relations to your Society have been such as not to need that I should enlarge on his various excellent qualities. The difficulty was not that he had not made himself acceptable at the Court of Louis XVI. It was just the opposite. He had become too acceptable, and the consequence was, that when the internal rupture between the Crown and the people took place, he was found plunged deep in the counsels of the King. Of course it followed that, when the Republic triumphed, he was no longer welcome to the victors, and therefore he, too, was recalled.

It is a singular fact, how often in our diplomatic history this peculiar difficulty has been developed. Even Mr. Jefferson, who had preceded Morris, admirably fitted as he was in all other respects, had made affiliations with the opposition somewhat transcending the proper limits of his place.

And it turned out not much better with the next choice that was made. Washington meant it for the best. His desire was now to select some one against whom no similar charge could be raised—some person

known to be friendly to the revolutionary authorities, and yet trustworthy in acquitting himself of a delicate duty. He looked carefully around among the public men, and his eye rested upon James Monroe, a man distinguished for service in the Revolutionary War, then a Senator from the State of Virginia, of sober mind, but yet understood to be sanguine in the ultimate success of the great movement then in progress. Mr. Monroe accepted the trust, and immediately repaired to France. Unfortunately, one essential quality for success had been overlooked: which is, that he should be thoroughly imbued with the spirit of his instructions, and disposed implicitly to execute the policy of his chief. Of the modes of proceeding a man may be the best judge when he comes on the spot; but as to the substance, he should follow his orders, not as he, but as his principal understands them. Mr. Monroe, being in no sympathy with the Administration, fell into the error of construing his instructions as he wished, and not as they were intended. The policy of Washington before the negotiation of Jay's treaty, and whilst there was danger of a rupture with Great Britain, was to do all he could to cultivate a friendly relation with France. To that end he expected Mr. Monroe to adopt a conciliatory deportment, which might open the way to an ultimate alliance in case war with England should prove inevitable, but in no way to commit the country, or hold out hopes in advance of a departure from the established neu-

trality. But Mr. Monroe, instead of pursuing this cautious line of conduct, opened his career with a public demonstration of his sympathy with the new régime, and went on as if he regarded a breach with Great Britain certain, and he had nothing to do but to prepare the French authorities to seize the first moment to close an alliance such as it had been the object of Mr. Genest's mission to secure. This singular proceeding had the effect of reviving their hopes, then nearly extinguished, and of changing their deportment, which, from cold and haughty, suddenly became extremely cordial to the new envoy. Whether the public manifestation of this change did or did not have an effect in quickening the movement of the British Cabinet, then engaged in negotiation with Mr. Jay, it is not possible to say. But the fact is certain, that the news which followed of the conclusion of that treaty filled Mr. Monroe with consternation and the Directory with disgust. Very naturally they looked to him for explanations which it was utterly out of his power to give. But he succeeded so far as this, that they acquitted him of all blame, and threw the whole responsibility upon his Government. This line of separation was a dangerous one to draw, and the toleration of it by Mr. Monroe implied a state of feeling in him by no means suitable to his place. Whether he went so far as to countenance the distinction, it is not my province to determine. The statement that he did, is substantially advanced in the latest and

most elaborate history of those times, written by the distinguished statesman, M. Thiers. It is needless to say that, on learning what had happened, Mr. Monroe received orders from his Government to return home. He felt so much aggrieved that he resorted to an appeal to the public in his justification, and his book did not scruple to throw the blame of his failure upon Washington himself. Washington in his turn left a series of sarcastic comments in the margin of his copy, which leave no doubt of his opinion of the writer. It served the purpose of a party-pamphlet against the Government at the time, and all those people believed him a martyr, who wished to go into opposition. But impartial posterity will decide that, in rushing into print, he has only furnished perpetual evidence against himself. Mr. Monroe's errors, however, were only in judgment, unduly biased by partisan feeling, which were all fully redeemed afterwards by his long and arduous services, carried up even to the highest position in the gift of the nation.

Not disheartened by this second misfortune, Washington felt the paramount importance of still a third effort to conciliate France. The treaty of Mr. Jay had cut off all remaining chance of shaking the neutral policy as it respected England, so he very naturally hoped that, instead of indulging further indignation, she would see the wisdom on her side of regaining her hold upon American sympathy by an amicable reception of a new manifestation of unimpaired

good-will. So he appointed Charles Cotesworth Pinckney to the task of correcting the mistakes of his predecessors, and replacing the two countries on the ancient basis. But, no. The Directory had taken their bent, and were determined to follow it at all hazards. Indignant at the treaty of Mr. Jay, and fully aware that General Washington's great hold on the affections of America was on the eve of withdrawal, by his voluntary retirement from office, they preferred to try their chances to restore their influence by cultivating the favor of the Opposition, rather than meeting the advances of the Administration. It was in this spirit that they began to act on the arrival of Mr. Pinckney. To Mr. Monroe they continued their studied attentions down to the last moment of his stay, and they honored his departure by a public ceremony, in which the chief Director made a parting address of a most personally laudatory kind. But they as steadily refused to take the smallest notice of Mr. Pinckney. It was in vain that he applied for a recognition of his credentials, both directly and through third persons. The Directory was blind and deaf and dumb. For two whole months was this game kept up. Mr. Pinckney, wholly unprepared for so extraordinary a course to a diplomatic representative, was afraid to act without instructions, until he at last received official notice from the Foreign Secretary that, in accordance with a law lately passed expelling foreigners, he must forthwith quit the territories of France. Meanwhile

the mission of Mr. Adet, the third envoy sent out to the United States since the Revolution, had been suspended. The young Napoleon was just then beginning his career of victory in Italy, and the Directory felt as if they could afford to be arrogant. The only consolation we could have had for this treatment was, that we were in good company. Two Ministers from the smaller powers of Europe were expelled with the same curtness; and even Lord Malmesbury, a special envoy sent by Great Britain to negotiate terms of peace, was banished but a trifle less rudely.

Washington, weary with contention but firm in purpose to the last, had now gone out of power, and the first thing the next Administration was called to meet was this deliberate insult to the dignity of the nation. Under ordinary circumstances the natural course would have been defiance, and, upon the happening of the first overt act of hostility, a declaration of war. But this was precisely what it had been the steady purpose to prevent. So it was deemed best to call Congress together for consultation, and to make still a third effort at reconciliation by the agency of a commission composed of three persons distinguished for character as well as moderation. These three were Charles Cotesworth Pinckney, John Marshall, of Virginia, and Elbridge Gerry, of Massachusetts.

And here I am tempted to interpose a single observation touching this peculiar form of procedure in foreign affairs, because on some accounts it recommends



itself to the peculiar structure of our Government. No single man is likely often to concentrate upon himself the confidence of the various sections of country, or exactly to represent their feelings. Hence it is natural to resort to the selection of several, each of whom may be better suited to convey the sentiments of that region to which he himself belongs. It is on this account that, in the course of our history, we have had at least five commissions of three persons each, and one extending even to five. But the experience thus far rather goes to show that it is always a hazardous agency. The objection to it is, that it breeds differences of opinion often so extreme as to endanger, if not to defeat, the attainment of the object. Of the five commissions to which I have alluded, only one appears to have been carried through with entire harmony among the members. In two of them, involving critical questions of the restoration of peace, the discord was at times so serious as greatly to imperil the negotiation. It is not, therefore, so safe an expedient as the selection of a single person, in whose character and responsibility experience has taught us to rely. Had Mr. Jay been in a commission, I very much doubt if any result would have been reached. In the case immediately before us another difficulty occurred. These eminently respectable and competent men were destined to be subjected to trials of which they had no suspicion in advance. Attempts were made to divide them, and not wholly without success. They

came in their simplicity armed with the best of reasoning to prove the justice of their complaints and the advantages of peace and conciliation. They were met by a whispered inquiry how much they were ready to pay. Think for a moment of John Marshall, who for over thirty years held up the judicial ermine free from the slightest breath of stain, invited to haggle with the emissaries of Talleyrand about the terms in cash upon which they might hope for the privilege of being courteously treated! Nothing of that sort had been set down in the instructions, for the Government was then entirely beyond suspicion of harboring corruption in any form. Washington and Jefferson, Hamilton and Adams, might differ widely in opinion, but their hands were clean. On the other hand, the Directory had passed from its early stage of infatuated sentiment into the hands of sensual and greedy adventurers. The chief, Barras, fond of pleasure, and realizing the description Sallust gives of Catiline, "*alieni appetens, sui profusus,*" considered his post as a fair source of supply to his private gratifications; whilst the Secretary, Talleyrand, an unfrocked priest not behind him in profligacy, far excelled him in the art of playing for great stakes. Of course, the commissioners decided that there was no room for them in such company. The answer soon appeared in the refusal to negotiate. All the long despatches, with their skilful reasoning, availed only to cover the transaction from the gaze of the public. Towards the

last the adroit Talleyrand fixed his attention upon Mr. Gerry, and tried to make him malleable for a separate negotiation. And in one sense he succeeded; for Mr. Gerry rather weakly did consent to stay after his colleagues left Paris. I entertain no doubt that the wily Frenchman then thought the game had gone too far, and wished to evade the possible result of an open rupture. But Mr. Gerry would not lend himself to any compromise, and even this device ended in nothing.

Thus closed this fourth effort to save the neutral policy by establishing a reconciliation with France—no withdrawal of her attempts to plunder us on the ocean, and no moderation in her offensive demands of satisfaction for the negotiation with Great Britain. In this emergency the Administration had no alternative but to submit to the world a complete report of all the proceedings. Hence the exposure of the scandalous operations of three emissaries of Talleyrand, designated by the letters of the alphabet X, Y, Z, which went back to Europe and became notorious in every quarter of it. This was as unexpected by the Directory and their secretary as it was unwelcome. Frenchmen are more alive to the ridicule than to the wickedness of a transaction. On the other hand, the publication had the effect in America of rallying the whole people to the support of the Government. The scheme of changing the Administration with the cooperation of the Opposition was dissipated; for every

body was ashamed of being suspected to favor such doings. The alternative was war, and accordingly for war were all the necessary preparations made. Washington was called back from his retirement to head the army, and the navy found here the source of that efficiency which has since developed itself so nobly on every sea.

Never since the issue of the proclamation was the country so near to shipwreck of its policy of neutrality as at this moment. Great Britain was already on the watch for events; and projects of closer alliance and joint operations were fast breeding in many minds. Had the Directory continued to be stimulated by the honest infatuation of the Jacobin era, it is not unlikely that we might soon have found ourselves deeply complicated with embarrassing adventures on land and at sea. But the patriotic fever had passed away, and Talleyrand, who now guided the foreign policy, was not a man to be carried off his feet by a fit of enthusiasm. He saw at once that he had overshot the mark. By alienating America, he had neither filled his own pockets nor helped the French position in Europe. This skilful diplomatist was too great an adept in intrigue not to understand how to guard against personal responsibility for the overtures of his agents; so he hazarded nothing in disavowing all their acts. Neither can I find that his private negotiations, though flagrant enough, involved any injurious sacrifices for his country. He seems to have

required subsidies from weak powers for doing what would serve them, and at the same time be of no disadvantage to France. So, finding he had missed his aim in this attempt on the United States, and that the result was likely to play into the hands of England, instead of throwing up the cards, he immediately set about a scheme to restore his chances. The President, in his Message to Congress laying the facts before them, had left a single opening which, if promptly used, might bring matters back at least to a possibility of reopening negotiation. Talleyrand quietly took advantage of it at once. He recognized the condition declared to be indispensable, and complied with it. Overtures came in a roundabout way to the Administration, the acceptance or rejection of which imposed a responsibility almost equally onerous. After so much wanton trifling, attended by such intolerable arrogance, it was difficult at once to summon confidence in the sincerity of so sudden a change. It was, moreover, not a little hazardous to check the flow of popular feeling that had set in for war, upon which reliance was to be placed to carry it on if it should prove inevitable. Yet, after anxious consideration, the President, assuming to himself the whole responsibility for his act, determined not to neglect the overture. He put trust in the sincerity of the maker so far as to offer to send out a new mission, conditioned upon the express public recognition of it in advance of its departure. This was all that Talleyrand wanted. The

assurances were given at once. France was relieved from the effects of his error. So were the United States. The disappointment fell to the share of Great Britain alone.

Chief-Justice Ellsworth, William Richardson Davie, and William Vans Murray, were at once appointed to repair to Paris, and this time the gates were left wide open to receive them. Not a word of offence about the British treaty; not a whisper about money; not a single long despatch, terminating in no measure. Napoleon Bonaparte had become the First Consul of the Republic, and the supple Minister understood that conciliation was the policy. The consequence was a treaty, and the American right to be neutral in the wars of Europe was for the third time rescued in a moment of its greatest danger.

This treaty is memorable for another reason: it retrieved the great error which had been committed all the way back in the first treaty of alliance, negotiated before we could be called independent—I mean the treaty with France in 1778. Anxious as our commissioners then were to get the assistance of so great a power in the severe struggle for liberty, it is not surprising that they should have omitted to study the force of every word in it. Hence, when France came forward and proposed to guarantee on her part to the United States their liberty and their possessions, as they should be determined in America by the issue of the war, it did not seem very much on her part to ask

that we should, in our turn, guarantee to her all the possessions she might have in America at the same date. All this might have been well enough but for the slipping in of one little bit of a word, which yet means so much that it does not become us poor, feeble, finite beings to play with it at random. This was the word "forever;" and when put after the word "guarantee," it signified no end of obligation. It was like placing a figure 1 in arithmetic before a few hundreds of valueless ciphers, except that, in this case, there is a limit, and in that there is none. Had the commissioners stopped to think, they might have foreseen that this was not a fair bargain; for, after the recognition of our independence by Great Britain, we were likely every year to grow more secure in the possession of our territories, whilst, on the other hand, the possessions of France were in the West Indies, peculiarly liable to attack in every war, especially with Great Britain. In point of fact they have nearly disappeared. But the commissioners were not seers, neither did they affect philology. The consequence was, an important variation from the principle of neutrality, which came back to plague us after that principle had been solemnly proclaimed as the national policy. In this particular it must be conceded that France had claims upon us which it was difficult to deny, or even to dispute. It formed the most serious obstacle to the settlement of the differences, and it was expunged at last only by consenting to abandon the just claims of

private citizens for the plunder of their property on the high seas, which they had risked upon their confidence that their own Government would protect them from wrongful violence. Thus it turned out that the little word with a big meaning—"forever"—was redeemed at the end of twenty-three years, and at the price of about ten millions of dollars, drawn from the estates of private persons, many of them made poor by the loss of it, not a cent of which has ever been repaid. I think it cannot be denied that this to the Government was a bargain, "cheap as dirt" and about as clean.

If there be at this time any unsettled claims on foreign Governments for depredations on private property at sea, of a similar nature, which under the instigation of political ambition may be made the pretext of a war costing a thousandfold their amount to the country, I take the liberty of respectfully pointing out to the proprietors the dangerous nature of the present example. Let them beware of a peace negotiated on the basis of a cession of territory, North or South, at their expense.

But time wears, and I must hasten to the end of my story. The principle laid down by Washington had now been saved three times, and it might have reasonably been hoped that afterwards the country would be permitted to adhere to it free from further molestation. So far was this from the actual truth, that a new struggle was then impending, which for a



time sank it completely out of sight. As the wars of Europe waxed hotter and hotter, as Napoleon acquired a sway over the Continent which was only balanced by the corresponding growth of British power over the water, all notions of respect for any neutral rights became fainter and fainter. French decrees and British orders in council vied with each other in the ferocity with which they threatened vengeance against all who claimed a right to trade with their enemies. The details of this unparalleled state of things are too familiarly known to need to be dwelt upon at this time. The United States, which had a legitimate right of being the common carrier for the greater part of the civilized world, was suddenly made the victim of the angry passions of each party in its turn. The alternative was a painful one. Either the whole field in which neutral rights were brought into dispute must be abandoned, or war must be waged in their defence against one party or the other, and perhaps against both.

Mr. Jefferson had by this time succeeded to power. His disposition was strong to maintain, in this respect, the same general policy pursued by his predecessor, to which he had given his assent as an adviser of Washington. But the dilemma was a painful one. His love of peace prompted the entire withdrawal of the commerce of the country from the ocean, which was equivalent to a surrender, for the time, of the whole question at issue. To this he had been the

more compelled by necessity created by his neglect of the maintenance and growth of a navy, without the protection of which neutral rights on the high seas were not in that day, perhaps are not in any time of war, likely to secure respect. Yet a secession from the ocean was practically a temporary suspension of the right to use it, and a surrender of the whole question at issue. The embargo which followed was a public confession of weakness, justified only by necessity. The non-intercourse presently substituted was a still more pitiful expedient, of which the injury done was more to ourselves than our opponents. These expedients only served to irritate the British the more, and did not save us from the danger of ultimate collision. The assault of a British naval commander in our waters upon one of the national frigates as she sailed out of the harbor of Norfolk, and the seizure of four of her men by violence, on the assumption that they were British subjects, only proved that timidity was no way to secure respect. I can never read the account of that transaction without a profound conviction that the national spirit which animated that officer could be dealt with properly only by a blow. It is very true that the act was ultimately disavowed, and the offender equivocally censured; but the principle upon which he proceeded was not disavowed, and the general right to take men by force, on the ground that they were subjects, was not only justified, but harshly exercised. Neither was the deportment of the British

Minister of a kind to promote a spirit of reconciliation. George Canning, with all his brilliancy of talent, was the impersonation of the most unpleasant features of the national character. His social wit in grave circumstances too often changed to sarcasm; his indifference to superciliousness, his courtesy to arrogance. It is not, then, to be wondered at that the various efforts at negotiation, and the exchange of successive diplomatic envoys, which at times seemed on the eve of reconciling differences, all successively failed. Sometimes too much had been yielded, and the Minister was disavowed; at others he was so insolent that he was dismissed. The root of the evil was in the heart which failed to be true to the proposed object; and the end was to bring on a war, which, taken from the English point of view, has ever seemed to me a blunder committed from her customary habit of not retracting an error in good season.

The war came. It was deliberately declared by us, and I have never been able to doubt its necessity as a means of bringing Great Britain to reason. An experience of two years, with no decided issue on either side, was found sufficient to effect that object. An offer of friendly mediation made by Russia cleared the way for a direct communication, the issue of which was the assembly of commissioners to treat at Ghent in the Spring of 1814. Three persons appeared on the part of Great Britain, and five on that of the United States. The former were Lord Gambier, Mr.

Goulburn, and Mr. Adams; the latter were Messrs. Gallatin, Adams, Bayard, Clay, and Russell. Of the doings of this body I must dispense with such a narrative as I should like to give. Of the fluctuations of hope and of fear on the American side, of the variations of the struggle with their opponents, and the more earnest and sometimes critical divisions among themselves, I have the fortune to be provided with peculiar materials to judge, as they have been transmitted by one himself actively engaged in the scene. Some time or other I hope to be able to make that contribution to our history. But I cannot resist the present temptation to pay a brief tribute to the usefulness of another of the actors, and the more that he was so well known afterwards in this city, to which he came to spend the last years of a long, a distinguished, and an honorable career. Time, which rolls on in its ceaseless course, rapidly obliterates the traces of the ephemeral reputations raised amid the conflicts of mere partisan politics. Even on the ever-expanding roll of the names of our chief magistrates, nine tenths of them will pass under the eye of a remote generation with as little emotion as we now feel when we run down the columns of those of the rulers of Rome in the Consular Fasti. From such a doom Albert Gallatin merits to be excepted, for few of his generation contributed more to the maintenance and preservation of the country in its most critical conjunctures. This is particularly true of his services in diplomatic stations,

for which he was in every respect eminently fitted; and nowhere were his qualities more usefully developed than while the negotiations for peace were pending. They were, from the necessity of the case, carried on under much disadvantage, the English commissioners having constant opportunities of communication with their Government, whilst the Americans were constrained, by their distance over sea, to take great responsibility in every emergency upon themselves. A sense of this pressure very naturally gave rise to many conflicts of opinion among the five men, according to the nature of their respective temperaments. These differences sometimes developed warmth in just proportion to the estimated importance of the interest affected. It is just here that the intervention of Mr. Gallatin appears to have been of the highest value. Calm in discussion, quick in mastering the points at issue, ready in resources, and adroit in giving shape to acceptable propositions, his influence upon the thread of the negotiation is apparent, not less in the intercourse with the opposite side than in reconciling the jarring interests of his own. It may justly be said of him, that in this most important emergency, when the scales were trembling in the balance, his peculiar qualifications came in to give just the weight adequate to secure the desired result.

Thus it turned out that, on the 24th of December, 1814, the treaty of peace with Great Britain was made which has secured the pacific relations of the

two countries for a period now extending beyond half a century.

Of the character of that treaty there were opposite opinions held at the time, though the peace was hailed with universal joy. It was objected to it that in terms it settled none of the great questions of neutral rights, for the defence of which the war had been declared, and left matters much in the condition in which they were before. Literally speaking, the remark may be true; and yet, in point of fact, it is the very opposite of truth. Great Britain, in terms, yielded nothing of the pretensions she had advanced before the war. It is not her habit, nor the habit of any great nation, to humiliate itself unnecessarily. On the other hand, from the date of that treaty down to this moment not a question has been raised, not a complaint made of the repetition of any such scenes on the ocean as were happening every day before. The barbarous practice of impressment has been voluntarily abandoned. The claim of a right to the services of a subject in despite of naturalization elsewhere has never since been pressed, and has very lately been explicitly surrendered; and, from being a fierce enemy to the extension of neutral rights, Great Britain has gradually been becoming our aptest scholar. Indeed, she has outrun her preceptor; for, in 1856, she gave in her adhesion to the Declaration of Paris, which abandoned the piratical practice of privateering, and recognized the principle she had so long contested, of

free ships; free goods. Nay, even more than that. In the late unhappy conflict between ourselves, it happened to be my particular duty to make many complaints of her alleged violations of neutrality, the favorite mode of replying to which was by appeals to our own construction of neutral doctrines. This being so, I think it may justly be claimed that the treaty of Ghent was our greatest triumph, inasmuch as from that date has commenced the change of policy which has at last placed the most ruthless belligerent known to the world in the ranks of those who recognize the principle upon which Washington started, and which Mr. Wheaton has put into language I now ask leave to repeat as the burden of my song :

“The right of every independent state to remain at peace whilst other states are engaged in war, is an incontestable attribute of sovereignty.”

Happy day of a treaty which witnessed the establishment of so grand a confirmation!—worthy, indeed, of being signed on the eve of that blessed morn, the anniversary of the declaration from on high of the great mission of peace and good-will to all mankind.

This great victory, then, is won : and for the future no question will ever be raised of the right of the United States to remain at peace, no matter what parties may choose the fearful work of mutual destruction. May I not venture to use the words of an oldpoet :

“And now Time’s whiter series is begun,  
Which in soft centuries shall smoothly run ;

Those clouds, that overcast your morn, shall fly,  
 Dispell'd to farthest corners of the sky;  
 Our nation with *united* interest blest,  
 Not now content to poise, shall sway the rest."

Yes, it shall "sway the rest," not by its power, but by its example; not by dictation, but by adhering, in the day of its strength, to the same pure and honorable policy which it proclaimed and defended when relatively weak. Yes, and still more, by developing the system which has been inaugurated, as far as it may be carried, to secure peace to non-combatants everywhere. The Convention of Paris in 1856 made great steps towards it, but it wanted one which Mr. Marcy went too far in making a condition to our signing that instrument. Thus our national testimony has failed to be recorded upon a paper so honorable to the progress of the present age. The time had not arrived for that more magnificent advance in the career of humanity; but brilliant will be the fame of the statesman who may have it to declare that through his agency so great a step shall have been taken. Nay, and still beyond that: his province it may be to make yet other moral conquests—to disclaim the right of neutrals to supply instruments of war to either belligerent—to expand the privileges of the sea, so that no piratical cruiser shall be permitted to stroll over the ocean in search of plunder from the unarmed and defenceless, on the plea that he is a privateer. And even beyond that again: that no innocent, unarmed



private voyager of any country, found on any ocean of the globe, shall take harm to himself or his property merely from the fact that he belongs to a belligerent nation.

These be thy victories, O Peace! before which the roar of the booming cannon, the yell of savage combat, the execrations of the dying, the groans of the wounded, and the shriek of the widow and the orphan, all discords melting into soft harmony of blessings, shall be made to ascend in sweet incense to the skies.



## PROCEEDINGS, ETC.

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AT a meeting of the NEW YORK HISTORICAL SOCIETY, held in the Academy of Music, in the City of New York, on Tuesday, December 13th, 1870, to celebrate the Sixty-sixth Anniversary of the Founding of the Society :

The exercises were opened with prayer by the Rev. HENRY C. POTTER, D.D., Rector of Grace Church.

The President, Rev. THOMAS DE WITT, D.D., on introducing Mr. ADAMS, remarked :

“The Sixty-sixth Anniversary of the New York Historical Society derives special interest from the presence of him who this evening will address us. Among the names inscribed on our historical annals, and commended to us by the valuable services they have rendered to our country, there is none more prominent and distinguished than that of ADAMS. Through three successive generations, reaching from the latter part of the Colonial Government, through the Revolution, and onward from the formation of the Constitution to the present time, the most important civil and diplomatic trusts have been ably and successfully discharged by them. The first President Adams was conspicuous in the discussions and measures preceding and issuing in the Revolution, and resulting in the National Independence, and afterwards occupied the most important offices. His son, the second President Adams, was trained from early youth in his country's service, and continued uninterruptedly in various offices, diplomatic and civil, of the highest rank, till his death at an advanced age. We have now with us *his* son, who most worthily sustains the prestige and honor of the family name. He has recently returned from wisely and faithfully discharging the important diplomatic trust in the mission of United States Minister to the Court of Great Britain. We gratefully acknowledge his kindness in acceding to our request to address us this evening. We greet him in acknowledgment of his personal worth and merit, and in the cordial reminiscence of the debt we owe to his ancestry. We greet him especially in the name and in behalf of the citizens of our common country.”

Upon the conclusion of the address, Mr. WILLIAM M. EVARTS rose, and said :

“ I have the honor to move that the thanks of this Society be presented to Mr. Adams for the learned, eloquent, and instructive address which he has delivered to us this evening, and that he be requested to furnish a copy thereof for publication. In making this motion I am sure I may be permitted to say that, among all the able and useful discourses which, under the auspices of this Society, have been delivered to the various intelligent audiences which have from time to time been assembled, I but express the general opinion of this Society, and the universal applause of this audience shows that they concur in the judgment, that none has ever been of greater merit, or is likely to be of higher public advantage, than that to which we have listened to-night. We have felt that its attraction and its impression were not due alone to the stores of historical knowledge that could present within the brief space of an hour a complete grasp of those great international questions, nor to the delicate and firm touches by which he has drawn the distinctions of character in the eminent public servants to whom he has referred—explaining what helped and what hurt the interests committed to their charge—and in which he shows the skill of the orator ; but what gave an added charm was the feeling that he spoke concerning diplomatic action, being himself a most famous master of the art ; that in that arm of diplomacy, by which a nation, through capable servants, forefends war and controls peace, he himself had been permitted to perform for his country greater services than in the history of the world many men of any age have had an opportunity to perform for their country. You have referred, sir, to the eminent citizens of his name who in their respective generations have served the needs of the State. I will allude to only one particular feature of the duties which have fallen to those statesmen in succession. In the line of diplomacy they have had the singular fortune to represent their country in Great Britain in connection with three important wars, under circumstances of great asperity towards us in the Government to which they were accredited. After the animosities of the Revolutionary war had ended so far as to permit intercourse between this country and Great Britain, Mr. Adams, afterwards President, represented the country in England. And after the second war, when the animosities evolved in that struggle were to take only the form of diplomatic controversy, John Quincy Adams was our representative. And when we come to the condition that we have no enemies but ourselves, divided by civil war, and when there was a very strong disposition on the part of European governments to take part in the contest, and very great bitterness of feeling was evoked, the orator of this evening had the fortune to represent the United States in England. And now, Mr. President, I think we may also derive

this instruction from our efforts and successes in vindicating the rights of a nation to be neutral during the wars of other nations, that we had earned a right, when there came to be a war within our own boundaries, to insist on neutrality. being maintained by foreign nations towards us. I venture to say, also, that, unless this almost unimpeachable record of honest, earnest, persistent neutrality had been our possession, we never should have succeeded against the vast interests and the strong passions that were aroused against us abroad, in holding foreign nations to that measure of neutrality that was essential to the safety of the country."

*Resolved*, That the thanks of the Society be presented to Mr. ADAMS for his able, eloquent, and instructive address delivered this evening, and that he be requested to furnish a copy for publication.

Mr. WILLIAM CULLEN BRYANT rose, and said :

"I have listened with great delight and deep interest to the address of our eminent friend from Boston, and wonder not that he has so perfectly enchained the attention of the audience. I have heard with admiration the wise maxims of public policy which he has so clearly stated, and rendered luminous by so many illustrations from our history, happily chosen, woven into one symmetrical whole, and interfused with his own individual thought. I have listened with a special interest to that part of his address which related to Citizen Genest—who had the contest with Washington, in which he was so ingloriously worsted—because I knew the man, and remember him very vividly. Some forty-five years since he came occasionally to New York, where I saw him. He was a tall man, with a reddish wig and a full round voice, speaking English in a sort of oratorical manner, like a man making a speech, but very well for a Frenchman. He was a dreamer in some respects, and, I remember, had a plan for navigating the air in balloons. A pamphlet of his was published a little before the time I knew him, entitled, 'Aërial Navigation,' illustrated by an engraving of a balloon shaped like a fish, propelled by sails and guided by a rudder, in which he maintained that man could navigate the air as well as he could navigate the ocean in a ship.

"When De Witt Clinton was Governor of this State, a Quaker, who had, as the Scotch say, a bee in his bonnet, called on him, and said that he had a project to submit to him, in behalf of which he wanted his influence. It was, to gather the Jewish people from their dispersion, and build for them two cities in the Highlands of the Hudson, on two mountains. Thither he wanted them all to go and be happy. They might, he added, make frequent visits to each other, passing from mountain to mountain, and so give much of their time to social intercourse.

"Mr. Clinton listened to him patiently, and then suggested that

there was one difficulty in the plan. "Going down one steep mountain and going up another would be hard work, particularly for the women, and be likely to prevent much intercourse between the two cities."

"Ah," said the Quaker—Hanson, I believe, was his name—"I never thought of that. What does thee advise in the matter?"

"There is a gentleman at Troy," answered Clinton, "Mr. Genest, who has a plan by which, perhaps, the difficulty might be obviated. Suppose you consult him."

"The Quaker went and consulted Genest, who explained to him his system of aerial navigation, and assured him that there was nothing to prevent the people of the two cities from passing from one to the other horizontally through the air."

"Afterwards Hanson met with Mr. Clinton, who asked him, 'Well, did you see citizen Genest?'

"I did," answered Hanson; and then, assuming a confidential tone, 'but don't thee think that friend Genest is a little visionary?'

"He was visionary, and one of his visionary projects was his appeal to the American people against the firm resolve of Washington to persevere in the assertion of our neutrality in the war between France and Great Britain."

"I now second the motion just made, and am sure that it will be carried with enthusiasm."

The resolution was adopted unanimously, and, after a Benediction pronounced by Rev. HOWARD CROSBY, D.D., Chancellor of the University of the City of New York, the Society adjourned.

Extract from the Minutes.

ANDREW WARNER,

*Recording Secretary.*



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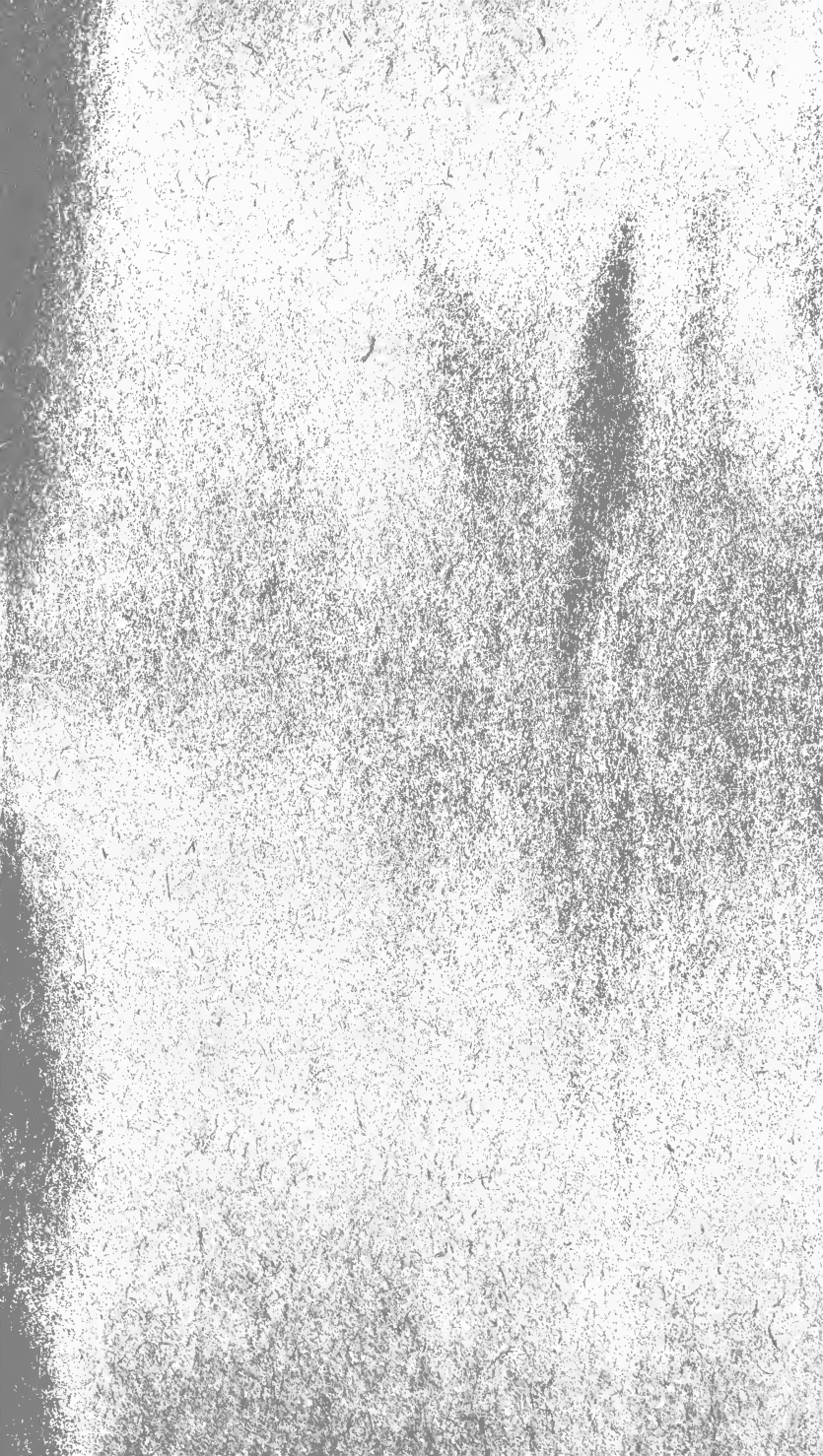
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