

THE WORKS

OF

J O H N A D A M S .



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THE
WORKS

OF

JOHN ADAMS,

SECOND PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES:

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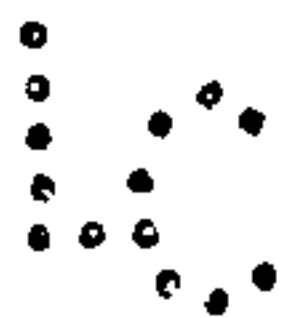
NOTES AND ILLUSTRATIONS,

BY

HIS GRANDSON

CHARLES FRANCIS ADAMS.

VOL. X.



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17

CONTENTS OF VOLUME X.

		PAGE
1811.		
October	15. TO BENJAMIN STODDERT	3
	27. BENJAMIN STODDERT TO JOHN ADAMS	4
November	25. TO SAMUEL SMITH	7
	30. ROBERT SMITH TO JOHN ADAMS	8
December	1. SAMUEL SMITH TO JOHN ADAMS	8
	6. TO ROBERT SMITH	9
	13. TO SAMUEL SMITH	9
	25. TO BENJAMIN RUSH	10
1812.		
June	2. TO THOMAS MCKEAN	12
	13. THOMAS MCKEAN TO JOHN ADAMS	14
	21. TO THOMAS MCKEAN	15
	28. TO THOMAS JEFFERSON	17
August	6. TO SAMUEL B. MALCOM	20
November	25. TO WILLIAM KETeltas	22
1813.		
January	5. TO J. B. VARNUM	24
	24. TO JOHN LANGDON	27
	27. JOHN LANGDON TO JOHN ADAMS	28
	28. TO ELBRIDGE GERRY	29
February	11. TO ELBRIDGE GERRY	30
	23. TO JAMES MONROE	32
March	22. TO JOHN LATHROP	38
	28. TO WILLIAM PLUMER	35
April	14. TO ELBRIDGE GERRY	36

		PAGE.
1813.		
June	5. TO BENJAMIN WATERHOUSE	38
	10. TO THOMAS JEFFERSON	40
	14. TO THOMAS JEFFERSON	42
	28. TO THOMAS JEFFERSON	43
	30. TO THOMAS JEFFERSON	46
July	9. TO THOMAS JEFFERSON	49
	13. TO THOMAS JEFFERSON	52
	17. TO THOMAS JEFFERSON	54
	18. TO THOMAS JEFFERSON	56
August	16. TO THOMAS JEFFERSON	58
	20. THOMAS MCKEAN TO JOHN ADAMS	60
	31. TO THOMAS MCKEAN	62
September	2. TO THOMAS JEFFERSON	64
	14. TO THOMAS JEFFERSON	66
	15. TO THOMAS JEFFERSON	69
	22. TO THOMAS JEFFERSON	71
	28. THOMAS MCKEAN TO JOHN ADAMS	73
October	4. TO THOMAS JEFFERSON	75
November	12. TO THOMAS JEFFERSON	78
	THOMAS MCKEAN TO JOHN ADAMS	80
December	25. TO THOMAS JEFFERSON	82
1814.		
January	THOMAS MCKEAN TO JOHN ADAMS	87
March	14. TO THOMAS JEFFERSON	89
April	9. TO JOHN TAYLOR	94
May	30. TO RICHARD RUSH	96
July	15. TO MRS. MERCY WARREN	98
	16. TO THOMAS JEFFERSON	100
November	28. TO JAMES MADISON	105
December	2. TO RUFUS KING	106
	17. JAMES MADISON TO JOHN ADAMS	107
1815.		
January	TO JAMES LLOYD	108

CONTENTS.

vii

1815.	PAGE
February	6. TO JAMES LLOYD 114
	11. TO JAMES LLOYD 116
	14. TO JAMES LLOYD 120
	7. TO JAMES LLOYD 123
	21. TO JAMES LLOYD 126
March	3. TO WILLIAM CRANCH 131
	4. TO DR. J. MORSE 133
	6. TO JAMES LLOYD 134
	12. TO JAMES LLOYD 136
	26. TO JAMES LLOYD 139
	27. TO JAMES LLOYD 143
	29. TO JAMES LLOYD 146
	30. TO JAMES LLOYD 149
	31. TO JAMES LLOYD 152
April	5. TO JAMES LLOYD 155
	5. TO RICHARD RUSH 159
	24. TO JAMES LLOYD 162
July	6. TO THOMAS MCKEAN 166
	13. TO F. A. VANDERKEMP 168
	30. TO THOMAS MCKEAN 171
August	24. TO THOMAS JEFFERSON 172
November	13. TO THOMAS JEFFERSON 174
	20. THOMAS MCKEAN TO JOHN ADAMS 176
	20. TO DR. J. MORSE 178
	26. TO THOMAS MCKEAN 180
	29. TO DR. J. MORSE 182
December	2. TO DR. J. MORSE 185
	5. TO DR. J. MORSE 188
	22. TO DR. J. MORSE 192
1816.	
January	1. TO DR. J. MORSE 197
	5. TO DR. J. MORSE 201

		PAGE
1816.		
January	20. To Dr. J. MORSE	204
March	2. To THOMAS JEFFERSON	210
May	3. To THOMAS JEFFERSON	213
	6. To THOMAS JEFFERSON	216
	26. To F. A. VANDERKEMP	219
August	1. THOMAS JEFFERSON TO JOHN ADAMS	222
	9. To THOMAS JEFFERSON	224
September	9. To WILLIAM TUDOR	226
	30. To THOMAS JEFFERSON	227
November	4. To THOMAS JEFFERSON	228
	16. To WILLIAM TUDOR	230
December	12. To THOMAS JEFFERSON	232
	18. To WILLIAM TUDOR	232
	27. To F. A. VANDERKEMP	234
1817.		
January	24. To WILLIAM TUDOR	236
February	4. To WILLIAM TUDOR	241
March	29. To WILLIAM TUDOR	244
April	15. To WILLIAM TUDOR	249
	19. To THOMAS JEFFERSON	253
	22. To JAMES MADISON	256
June	1. To WILLIAM TUDOR	258
	5. To WILLIAM TUDOR	262
	13. To HENRY COLMAN	266
	17. To JAMES MADISON	267
December	30. To JOHN M. JACKSON	269
1818.		
January	5. To WILLIAM WIRT	271
	9. To JOHN JAY	272
	14. To H. NILES	274
	23. To WILLIAM WIRT	277
	30. To BENJAMIN WATERHOUSE	279
February	6. To BENJAMIN WATERHOUSE	280

In my next, I may give you more proofs of his "good judicial character," in the trial of Michael Corbet and his three mess-mates, for killing Lieutenant Panton, the commander of a press-gang from the *Rose* frigate.¹ When courts of justice dare not speak in open air, nor see the daylight, where is life, liberty, or property?

Were I writing history, I should not write in this style. I should study a language of more philosophical moderation and dignity. But I now express to you the feelings of my friends and myself at those times, and our opinions too.

TO F. A. VANDERKEMP.

Quincy, 27 December, 1816.

I do declare that I can write Greek better than you do, though I cannot say, so well as you can if you will. I can make nothing but pothooks and trammels of the frontispiece of your amiable letter of the 15th. If you had quoted your authority, I might have found it.

Jesus is benevolence personified, an example for all men. Dupuis has made no alteration in my opinions of the Christian religion, in its primitive purity and simplicity, which I have entertained for more than sixty years. It is the religion of reason, equity, and love; it is the religion of the head and of the heart.

It would be idle for me to write observations upon Dupuis. I must fill thirteen volumes. If I was twenty-five years old, and had the necessary books and leisure, I would write an answer to Dupuis; but when, or where, or how should I get it printed? Dupuis can be answered, to the honor and advantage of the Christian religion as I understand it. To this end I must study astrology as well as astronomy, Hebrew, Greek, Latin, Arabic, Persian, and Sanscrit.

But to leave Dupuis to be answered or reviewed in Edinburgh or London, I must inquire into the attributes given by

¹ This letter is printed in vol. ii. p. 224, note.

the ancient nations to their divinities; gods with stars and new moons in their foreheads or on their shoulders; gods with heads of dogs, horns of oxen, bulls, cows, calves, rams, sheep, or lambs; gods with the bodies of horses; gods with the tails of fishes; gods with the tails of dragons and serpents; gods with the feet of goats. The bull of Mithra; the dog of Anubis; the serpent of Esculapius!!!!

Is man the most irrational beast of the forest? Never did bullock, or sheep, or snake imagine himself a god. What, then, can all this wild theory mean? Can it be any thing but allegory founded in astrology? Your Manilius would inform you as well as Dupuis.

The Hebrew unity of Jehovah, the prohibition of all similitudes, appears to me the greatest wonder of antiquity. How could that nation preserve its creed among the monstrous theologies of all the other nations of the earth? Revelation, you will say, and especial Providence; and I will not contradict you, for I cannot say with Dupuis that a revelation is impossible or improbable.

Christianity, you will say, was a fresh revelation. I will not deny this. As I understand the Christian religion, it was, and is, a revelation. But how has it happened that millions of fables, tales, legends, have been blended with both Jewish and Christian revelation that have made them the most bloody religion that ever existed? How has it happened that all the fine arts, architecture, painting, sculpture, statuary, music, poetry, and oratory, have been prostituted, from the creation of the world, to the sordid and detestable purposes of superstition and fraud?

The eighteenth century had the honor to discover that Ocellus of Lucania, Timæus of Locris, Aristotle, Tacitus, Quintilian, and Pliny, were in the right. The philosophy of Frederic, Catharine, Buffon, De la Lande, Diderot, d'Alembert, Condorcet, d'Holbach, and Dupuis, appears to me to be no more nor less than the philosophy of those ancient men of science and letters, whose speculations came principally from India, Egypt, Chaldea, and Phœnicia. A consolatory discovery, to be sure! Let it once be revealed or demonstrated that there is no future state, and my advice to every man, woman, and child would be, as our existence would be in our own power, to take opium.

For, I am certain, there is nothing in this world worth living for but hope, and every hope will fail us, if the last hope, that of a future state, is extinguished.

I know how to sympathize with a wounded leg, having been laid up with one for two or three months, and I have felt the delightful attentions of a daughter. May you have the felicity to celebrate as many more lustres of Madam Vanderkemp as human nature can bear.

TO WILLIAM TUDOR.

Quincy, 24 January, 1817.

Bernard, Hutchinson, Oliver, the commissioners of the customs, and their satellites, had an espionage as inquisitive as zealous, and as faithful as that in France, before, during, or since the revolution, by which the Tories were better informed of the anecdote which I am about to relate to you, than the Whigs themselves were in general. That the Tory histories may not hereafter misrepresent it without detection, I will now state the facts in writing, that they may remain in your archives and mine, to be used as an antidote to the poison that may hereafter appear.¹

The public had been long alarmed with rumors and predictions that the king, that is the ministry, would take into their own hands the payment of the salaries of the Judges of the Supreme Court. The people would not believe it; the most thinking men dreaded it. They said, "With an executive authority in a Governor possessed of an absolute negative on all the acts of the legislature, and with Judges dependent only on the Crown for salaries as well as their commissions, what protection have we? We may as well abolish all limitations, and resign our lives and liberties at once to the will of a prime minister at St. James's." You remember the controversy that General Brattle excited concerning the tenor of the Judges' commissions, and the universal anxiety that then prevailed on this subject. The des-

¹ The substance of this letter appears in another form in this work, but as there is an interval of fifteen years in the date of the two compositions, it may be interesting to the curious to compare them. See vol. ii. pp. 328-332.