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THE
WORKS OF
OF
JOHN ADAMS.

SECOND PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES:

WITH

A LIFE OF THE AUTHOR,

AND ILLUSTRATIONS,

BY

HIS GRANDSON

CHARLES FRANCIS ADAMS.

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pected and intended, when the measure was in agitation. Indeed, I thought, that as our battalions, with their arms, were carried to New York and Canada, in the service of the united colonies, the town of Boston and the province ought to be guarded against danger by the united colonies.

You have been since called upon for six thousand militia for Canada and New York. How you will get the men, I know not. The smallpox, I suppose, will be a great discouragement. But we must maintain our ground in Canada. The regulars, if they get full possession of that province, and the navigation of St. Lawrence river above Deschambault, at least above the mouth of the Sorel, will have nothing to interrupt their communication with Niagara, Detroit, Michilimackinac; they will have the navigation of the five great lakes quite as far as the Mississippi River; they will have a free communication with all the numerous tribes of Indians extended along the frontiers of all the colonies, and, by their trinkets and bribes, will induce them to take up the hatchet, and spread blood and fire among the inhabitants; by which means, all the frontier inhabitants will be driven in upon the middle settlements, at a time when the inhabitants of the seaports and coasts will be driven back by the British navy. Is this picture too high colored? Perhaps it is; but surely we must maintain our power in Canada.

You may depend upon my rendering Mr. Winthrop all the service in my power.

I believe it will not be long before all property belonging to British subjects, whether in Europe, the West India islands, or elsewhere, will be made liable to capture. A few weeks may possibly produce great things.

TO ZABDIEL ADAMS.¹

Philadelphia, 21 June, 1776.

Your letter, Sir, gave me great pleasure, and deserves my most hearty thanks.

I am fully with you in sentiment, that although the authority of the Congress, founded as it has been in reason, honor,

¹ Vol. ii. p. 83, note.

and the love of liberty, has been sufficient to govern the colonies in a tolerable manner, for their defence and protection, yet that it is not prudent to continue very long in the same way; and that a permanent constitution should be formed, and foreign aid obtained. In these points, and thus far, the colonies and their representatives, the Congress, are extremely well united. But concerning a declaration of independency, there is some diversity of sentiment. Two arguments only are urged with any plausibility against such a measure. One is, that it will unite all the inhabitants of Great Britain against us; the other, that it will put us too much in the power of foreign States.

The first has little weight in it, because the people of Great Britain are already as much united against us as they ever are in any thing, and the probability is, that such a declaration would excite still greater divisions and distractions among them.

The second has less weight still; for foreign powers already know that we are as obnoxious to the British court as we can be. They know that parliament have in effect declared us independent, and that we have acted these thirteen months to all intent and purposes as if we were so.

The reports of fifty-five thousand men coming against us, are chiefly ministerial gasconade. However, we have reason to fear that they will send several very powerful armaments against us, and therefore our most strenuous exertions will be necessary as well as our most fervent prayers. America is yet in her infancy, or at least but lately arrived to manhood, and is inexperienced in the perplexing mysteries of policy, as well as the dangerous operations of war.

I assure you, Sir, that your employment in investigating the moral causes of our miseries, and in pointing out the remedies, is devoutly to be wished. There is no station more respectable, nor any so pleasant and agreeable. Those who tread the public stage in characters the most extensively conspicuous, meet with so many embarrassments, perplexities, and disappointments, that they have often reason to wish for the peaceful retreats of the clergy. Who would not wish to exchange the angry contentions of the former for the peaceful contemplations of the closet?

“Where Contemplation prunes her ruffled wings,
And the free soul looks down to pity kings.”

Who would not exchange the discordant scenes of envy, pride, vanity, malice, revenge, for the sweet consolations of philosophy, the serene composure of the passions, the divine enjoyments of Christian charity and benevolence?

Statesmen, my dear Sir, may plan and speculate for liberty, but it is religion and morality alone, which can establish the principles upon which freedom can securely stand. The only foundation of a free constitution is pure virtue; and if this cannot be inspired into our people in a greater measure than they have it now, they may change their rulers and the forms of government, but they will not obtain a lasting liberty. They will only exchange tyrants and tyrannies. You cannot, therefore, be more pleasantly or usefully employed than in the way of your profession, pulling down the strong-holds of Satan. This is not cant, but the real sentiment of my heart. Remember me with much respect to your worthy family and to all friends.

TO BENJAMIN KENT.

Philadelphia, 22 June, 1776.

Your letters of April 24th¹ and May 26th are before me; both dated at Boston; a circumstance which alone would have given pleasure to a man who has such an attachment to that town, and who has suffered so much anxiety for his friends in their exile from it.

We have not many of the fearful, and still less of the unbelieving among us, how slowly soever you may think we proceed. Is it not a want of faith, or a predominance of fear, which makes some of you so impatient for declarations in words, of what is every day manifested in deeds of the most determined nature and unequivocal signification?

That we are divorced *a vinculo*, as well as from bed and board, is to me very clear. The only question is concerning the proper time for making an explicit declaration in words. Some people must have time to look around them; before,

¹ Printed in vol. ii. p. 291, note.