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The birthplace of James Madison was a locality called Port Conway on the Rappahannock River, about twenty-miles from Fredericksburg. He was born on the 16th. March, 1751. This place was not the home of Madison's parents. It happened that Mrs. Madison, his mother, was there paying a visit to her father, who had a plantation at that place, and, while here, James Madison was born. James was the first child, the oldest of seven children; and his parents early sent him to school, knowing the importance of such, though the father himself had had little opportunity to gain scholastic training. The school to which he was first sent was such as was suited to prepare him to enter college. Afterwards this preparatory course was finished at home under the care of the clergyman of the parish, who was a member of the Madison family, the Rev. Thos. Martin from New Jersey. By the advice of this gentleman, the young Madison was sent to Princeton instead of to William and Mary College in his native State Virginia. Here he entered at the age of eighteen, in 1769. He shortened his stay here by taking in one year both the junior and senior years, & remained another twelve-months at the college for the sake of studying the Hebrew language. This suggests that the clergy was his choice of profession in life, and no doubt he had such an intention as other events indicate. He afterwards became a staunch advocate to the Baptists. When he returned home from College, he undertook the instruction of his younger brothers & sisters, for, as said before, he was the oldest child, at the same time pursuing his own studies in the higher course, perhaps the Law or Theology. During all this time his health was very delicate, and he seemed to have ill forebodings that his days on earth were numbered.

written for Society
by Prof Robt Clinton Cole Historian of Society,
Oct 25" 95

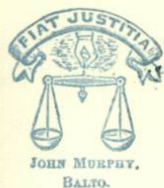
When, in 1774, the whole country was greatly disturbed and excited and all preparations for a long struggle for liberty and freedom were being made as expediently as the surrounding circumstances would permit, James Madison turned his attention in another direction and entered in the field and engagement of politics. His services in this line, especially at such a critical moment, were beyond doubt of great moment to the country in general, and especially to his native state, Virginia, which he so often represented with such honor and praise both in Legislatorial and Congressional bodies. To enumerate the various and multifarious achievements and triumphs which accrued to him would be to step beyond our ground and cross that limit which length and space necessarily prohibit us from doing. So to make mention of some of the chief points of his political career with dwelling perhaps longer on the more particular events of his life will be all that this pen will attempt. And when this is done it will fairly consider itself to have fully achieved its object and not to have attempted more than was necessary.

In 1776 James was elected a delegate to the Virginia Convention; and this is called his first entrance into public life. The object of this convention was to draw up a series of resolutions instructing the Virginia delegates in the Continental Congress, in session at Philadelphia, to urge an immediate declaration of war. Another object of this convention was to frame a Constitution of government for the province, and a Bill of Rights. Madison was particularly interested in the latter object, and especially in one part, — that of religious freedom. By his influence, the clause relating to religious freedom was reduced to a much

freer and more appropriate form, and as it now stands in the Bill of Rights of Virginia, which all the other states subsequently adopted, it is as follows: "That religion, or the duty we owe to our Creator, and the manner of discharging it, can be directed only by reason and conviction, not by force and violence; and, therefore, all men are equally entitled to the free exercise of religion according to the dictates of conscience." This was an important work at the hands of Madison, and shows his ability for such work. His career for the next forty years was that of a public man. He was elected a member of the first assemby under the new constitution. His aid during the period of 1780-81, which was the darkest period of the war, was a great help to the cause. The paper currency had depreciated so in value as to become almost worthless; and it was by his exertion that a means for raising new funds was found. We cannot too fully estimate the importance of such a work as this, for the most severe difficulties that the struggling patriots met with were caused by lack of funds for providing provisions etc. for the army. Conspicious with him in this work were Hamilton, Ellsworth, and Wilson. These men were contemporaneous with him in Congress. During his last year in Congress Madison became engaged to a Miss Catherine Floyd, a daughter of Wm. Floyd of Long Island, a signer of the declaration of independence; but the engagement was afterwards broken off greatly to the disapprobation of the father, and probably owing to the influence on the daughter of an outside disinterested female party prompted, no doubt, by jealousy, and the young beauty of sixteen, as she was called, chose another love and became the wife of a clergyman instead of the wife of one who was destined to hold the highest position

his country could bestow upon one of its patriots and benefactors. That this affair affected Madison keenly is shown by the following letter written to him by Jefferson referring to the matter in hand: "I sincerely lament the misadventure which has happened, from whatever cause it may have happened. Should it be final, however, the world presents the same and many other resources of happiness, and you possess many within yourself. Firmness of mind and unintermitting occupation will not long leave you in pain. No event has been more contrary to my expectations, and these were founded on what I thought a good knowlege of the ground. But of all machines ours is the most complicated and inexplicable." Quoting Solomon his (Madison's) biographer says: "There be three things which are too wonderful for me, yea four which I know not." The fourth was, "The way of a man with a maid." He might have added a fifth - the way of a maid with a man - which, evidently is what Jefferson meant.

In the Spring of 1784, Madison was chosen to represent his county in the Virginia Assembly. He continually endeavored to increase the powers of the Federal Government, for want of which it was fast sinking into weakness and contempt. During his stay in the State Assembly, a national convention was held at Annapolis on the second Monday of Sept., 1786, to discuss questions concerning the trade and commerce of the United States. Madison was appointed one of the five commissioners to treat with the various representatives of the states at the convention. Another convention was to meet at Philadelphia in the next spring, 1787. for the same purpose, and each state was to chose its delegates. Virginia was the first to chose her delegates; and



conspicious among them was James Madison, with Washington at their head. After this, Madison became a member of the Virginia Legislature. This was undoubted-ly the happiest period of his public career. He had no disappointments or anxieties, but much satisfation, as he could clearly see he was gaining a high place in the estimation of his countrymen, and especially of the people of his native state, for his devotion to her best interests. He had much leisure during the recesses of the legislature, which he could devote to study, in which he was so much contented. He devoted some of his time to travelling, which is of so much advantage to a person of whatever occupation he may be in life, as thereby we become acquainted with characters and resources other than those surrounding us at home, and often form valuable acquaintances. This was the case with Madison. He became acquainted with the leading men of the day. Jefferson advised him to spend a Summer with him in Paris; and some diplomatic service was offered to him, but, although he desired to accept it, he, at the same time, preferred to know more of his own native country while he had an opportunity and the time.

Madison again took his seat in Congress in 1787. He worked during this time with one object particularly in view. It was to bring about, if possible, the cancelling of Mr. Jay's project for shutting the Mississippi. Madison is called "The Father of the Constitution;" and it was during this period also that he devoted so much of his energetic nature to the work pertaining to this great institution, which, with the Declaration of Independence, are called the two greatest institutions the world has yet seen, and more than probable ever will

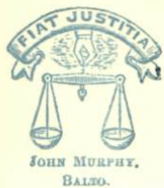
see. The most important question of the day, after the Mississippi question, which had been settled and agreed upon by the House of Delegates, was the "Slavery Question," and in the discussion of this, as in the other, Madison took an important part. Some hoped that slavery was likely to disappear ere long at the South as it was disappearing at the North. Slavery was then as it continued to be until the time it ceased to be at all, the paramount interest of the South. This difference of opinion and belief between the North and South gave rise to compromises between them. The North was not willing to yield and the South was equally unwilling to surrender her ground of rights and privileges. Hamilton proposed in the convention that "the rights of Suffrage in the national legislature ought to be proportional to the number of free inhabitants." Madison was willing to concede this in one branch of legislature, provided that in the representation in the other House the slaves were counted as free inhabitants. The constitution of the Senate subsequently disposed of the proposition. Thus the discussion went on between the different parties. Never, probably, in the history of legislation was there a more serious question debated. There was a singular confusion in the minds of the illustrious men of the day on this subject. Madison on foreign slave-trade had little to say, but he was opposed to it. "Twenty years," he said, "will produce all the mischief that can be apprehended from the liberty of import slaves;" that, "a period of twenty may terminate forever within these States a traffic which so long and so loudly upbraided the barbarism of modern policy." When the committee appointed for the purpose made a report on the subject of slave trade, they reported in favor of it.

Then it was proposed that a limitation should be extended from 1800 to 1808. The motion was seconded and carried. It took some time to make a settlement of all the various divisions of this question, but when this was done, those who made them, seemed to think they were, that is, these compromises were a complete and final settlement of the question. On all the other questions involving political principals, the framers of the Constitution brought to bear the profoundest wisdom. There were doubts how far the Constitution would stand the test of time, yet to this day it remains pratically unchanged. But where the framers thought themselves wisest they were, indeed, weakest. That weak point was the one relating to slavery. This they thought to have settled; but it was entirely unsettled. It took a later generation to see this weak point and the settling of it required something more. But yet the workers on the Constitution displayed an energy and ability far surpassing that of general occurrence. Madison's labors on the Constitution did not cease when the convention adjourned, although he was not at that moment in a happy frame of mind in regard to it. He studied its different parts and sounded their depths.

When the election of delegates to the Constitutional Convention of Virginia was about to take place, Madison returned home. He had been nominated as representative of his county, and his friends had urged him to return before the election, for there was reason to fear that the majority was on the wrong side. Although the Constitution had been so admirably framed it was not yet adopted. Probably when the Convention, on the subject, assembled, the majority were opposed to the Constitution; but its

adoptation was carried at least by a vote of eighty-nine to seventy-nine. Thenceforth opposition elsewhere was hopeless. Under the new form of government, Madison was elected to the House of Representatives.

The House of Representatives met daily from March 4, 1789, to April 1 without there being present enough members to make a quorum. The first important business brought before the House was introduced by Madison a short time after the inauguration. It was a proposition to raise a revenue on imports, and the tonnage of all vessels. This he maintained to be a necessary step so that support might be provided for the government. But yet there was some risk in doing it. Should the tax on molasses be too high, it would shut up the distilleries, and a great industry be destroyed in its infancy. The fisheries too would be ruined. The goods from these were put mostly for the West Indies and could find a market no place else; and a market existed at the West Indies only because molasses was taken in exchange. And if this commerce was destroyed it was evident what would become of the fisheries, and the nursery of American seamen, and ship-building. There was no want of serious and alarmed expostulation, and some less tranquil talk, from the members of Congress. The South depended entirely on foreign vessels to come for her products and bring in return all she needed for her consumption. The gentleman from Virginia Mr. Parker made a proposition to impose a duty upon the importation of slaves, and he regretted that the Constitution had failed to prohibit the importation of slaves. When the discussion was at its heigth, Mr. Madison came to the help of his colleague, Mr Parker. "It is to be hoped," said Mr. Madison, "that by expressing a national disapprobation of the trade we may destroy it,



and save ourselves from reproaches, and our posterity the imbecility ever attendant on a country filled with slaves. If there is any one point in which it is clearly the policy of this nation, so far as we constititionally can, to vary the practice obtaining under some of the state governments, it is this. It is as much the interest of Georgia and South Carolina as of any in the Union. Every addition they receive to their number of slaves tends to weaken them and render them less capable of self-defence. It is a necessary duty of the general government to protect every part of the empire against danger, as well internal as external. Everything, therefore, which tends to increase this danger, though it may be local affair, yet, if it involves national expense or safety, becomes a concern of every part of the Union, and is a proper subject for the consideration of those charged with the general administration of the government." Such was Madison's opinion of the subject; and no Northern man, except Elbridge Gerry of Mass. supported his measure. And after six weeks of debate an arrangement was made to impose a moderate duty on nearly everything imported except slaves from Africa. And hence the trade continued at an equal rate as before. There was a provision in the Constitution that limited it to 1808, but it probably never ceased altogether till the beginning of the Civil War of 1860.

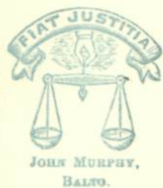
The next question that seemed to absorb the attention of Congress was the selection of a place for a permanent seat of government. There was much talk about it, and many sites were proposed as being most suitable and proper. Madison labored earnestly for the site on the Potomac; but there was much opposition to this place as it was not central in regard to the population of the country. But Madison did not work in vain,

this country having no close treaty, war meant destruction to the country and ruin to the inhabitants thereof. The policy displayed by Washington, which policy Madison supported, was to stave off a rupture with England, and if possible to bring that power into specific and rational relations with the United States. The government's aim was he maintained to keep itself clear of entanglement with all foreign politics; to maintain that perfect neutrality which would violate no treaties, offend no national friendship, provoke no jealousies, and leave England and France to fight their own battles, content that the United States should be an impartial spectator. This was afterwards announced as the true American policy, and was thenceforth known as "The Monroe Doctrine." Madison's latest years in Congress, were not as brilliant as his previous career. His Congressional service ended at the close of Washington's second administration. Doubtless he was moved to this step by feelings that the leadership of the opposition had devolved upon him almost from the beginning, by natural selection of the fittiest for that position though the position was not an easy one to take either by ones own choice or by the support of others; for at the head of the administration to be opposed stood a man most revered by a grateful country, surrounded by men among those who were best known for their past services, and most esteemed for their ability of character; and more difficult it was for one whose relations with the President were those of the warmest friendship, to whom the President was accustomed to turn for counsel and even for guidance. Nevertheless he played his difficult part with dignity; and his zeal was invariably tempered with a wise moderation and a courtesy towards his

ing, the fire would only become hotter and the devastation more vast. In all his career there is nowhere stronger proof of his strong will, self-reliance, and passionate impartiality, than that he could stand between two such furnaces as Hamilton on the one side and Jefferson and Madison on the other, both glowing at the intensest white heat, while he remained usually as calm and as unmoved as if breathing the softest, balmiest, and gentlest airs of a day in June. Truly such a noble character is deserving of a nation's greatest admiration and love; and his name to be made immortal: and were his people like the ancient Greeks, they would, upon his death, have named him with the immortal "Gods" and perpetuated his name and exploits with eulogies abounding in narratives like those of the crafty Ulyses and Achilles in the Iliad. But let us return to our subject, and, though we may not there find so many pearls and diamonds, yet let us remember that variety is the spice of life, and that that which often seems unattractive to a superficial observer, becomes upon closer observation peculiarly interesting in itself. Some historians who venture to believe that nature admits of imperfections in a native of Virginia, declare their conviction that Mr. Madison either wanted the strength and courage to resist the influence of those about him, or that the ambition of the politician was strong enough to overcome any consideration of principals that might stand in his way.

When the war between the French and English broke out, the United States was placed in a very bad condition and position, since her gratitude to France for her aid in the Revolutionary War to our country some thought should be made manifest, although by such an action incurring the hostility of England, with whom

this country having no close treaty, war meant destruction to the country and ruin to the inhabitants thereof. The policy displayed by Washington, which policy Madison supported, was to stave off a rupture with England, and if possible to bring that power into specific and rational relations with the United States. The government's aim was he maintained to keep itself clear of entanglement with all foreign politics; to maintain that perfect neutrality which would violate no treaties, offend no national friendship, provoke no jealousies, and leave England and France to fight their own battles, content that the United States should be an impartial spectator. This was afterwards announced as the true American policy, and was thenceforth known as "The Monroe Doctrine." Madison's latest years in Congress, were not as brilliant as his previous career. His Congressional service ended at the close of Washington's second administration. Doubtless he was moved to this step by feelings that the leadership of the opposition had devolved upon him almost from the beginning, by natural selection of the fittiest for that position though the position was not an easy one to take either by ones own choice or by the support of others; for at the head of the administration to be opposed stood a man most revered by a grateful country, surrounded by men among those who were best known for their past services, and most esteemed for their ability of character; and more difficult it was for one whose relations with the President were those of the warmest friendship, to whom the President was accustomed to turn for counsel and even for guidance. Nevertheless he played his difficult part with dignity, and his zeal was invariably tempered with a wise moderation and a courtesy towards his



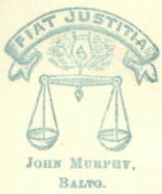
opponents, which made him at all times respected by all, and sometimes feared for reserved force. Another thing which probably influenced him to this determination was, that about a year before he did retire from Congress he had married a widow lady named Mrs. Todd, the widow of John Todd, a lawyer of Phila. She was twenty-six and quite beautiful; and figured in the society of Washington even within a few years of her death, which occured thirteen years after that of her husband Mr. Madison who died in 1836. When Madison retired from public service, he did not lose his interest in public affairs. He had a genius for politics and like all true politicians the subject was never out of his mind. Even as a writer he showed his talent for his profession and all his articles are of value not only as great writings themselves because they have almost a perfect style, but also because they display a part of the history of his times, and many facts obtainable from no other source. He wrote for the "Federalist" a paper contributed to by Jefferson, Jay, Madison, Monroe, Washington, and other illustrious men of the day. Madison upon retiring from Congress spent his leisure at Montpellier where he was about to build a house for his own enjoyment. The house was finished early in 1798; and he immediately took active part in politics again. He attended the State Assembly at Richmond for that year, to which he consented the next year to be returned as a member. On March 4, 1801, Mr. Jefferson was inaugurated President of the United States. Mr. Madison had been appointed Secretary of State for the same term, but was not present at the inauguration, as the death of his aged father detained him at

home. He, nevertheless, soon assumed the duties of the Station to which Mr. Jefferson had called him; and he remained there till he became President eight years afterwards. The state of affairs in Europe were at this time quite perilous. War between France and England was in progress, and would likely remain so as long as Napoleon Bonepart could command an army. But our country was quite calm. It had a treaty, and friendly relations between France and England having ceased to exist, the English aggressions on American Commerce had for a time at least been stopped, though they were soon to be committed again and then finally to be rested altogether, but not without the war of 1812. The most important event that fell out in this administration of Jefferson, was his Louisiana purchase. This was brought about and achieved entirely by Mr. Jefferson alone and on his own responsibility without accepting or even waiting advice from any quarter. And although he did not dream of the magnanimous and beneficent consequences the possession of that district would bring to his country, yet he felt himself justified in taking advantage of, and at the right moment, the offer of Napoleon and France, and make the purchase. It was well that he did so when he did for it was only circumstances that made Napoleon let go of the prize to seize in his eagerness what he supposed a greater one; but afterwards lost both. There was no provision in the Constitution of the acquisition of territory by purchase and the opponents of Jefferson were not backward in saying so and condemning his action. But the battle was carried on successfully by his party, and to the great advantage to the country in general. It does not detract from

the merit of this act of Jefferson, that he by no means saw all its importance nor even dreamed of its consequences. The region beyond the Mississippi he thought might be made useful as the refuge for Indian tribes of the East; but he neither saw, nor could see, then that the purchase of Louisiana was the essential though only the preliminary step toward the occupation of the Pacific by the English race. This was a great responsibility for one man to take upon himself and yet just such actions characterize him throughout his administration, always boldly taking the responsibility. For this reason it is not surprising that Madison's part during the eight years of Jefferson's presidency, is found to be a more secondary one than is usual with the Secretary of State or than was usual with him. He was in perfect accord with his chief who held his knowledge in the highest esteem and no doubt sought his sound and moderate advice when he thought he needed advice from any body. The next event of this administration of paramount importance was the the outgrowth of the trouble between France and England, both of which nations had again commenced depredations upon American commerce and tonnage. It was the Embargo act instituted by Jefferson and recommended by him in a special message to the Senate and immediately passed. This act compelled all American vessels to stay at home. It was quietly submitted to at first but after a time much opposition was aroused against it, and it was thought and talked about as disastrous to the country. Congress proposed to make it more stringent by an enforcement act or to substitute for it non-intercourse with England and France, re-

storing trade with the rest of the world, and leaving the decrees and orders in council open to future consideration. The President did not longer hold his party under control. The measure was repealed in Feb., 1809, or at least a measure was passed to that effect although it was not repealed till some time after. It repealed the act in so far that intercourse was restored with all countries except France and England; and the prohibition of importation from France and England was continued until the repeal of the decrees of both these countries authorizing seizure of American vessels.

We now come to the most exalted period in the life of James Madison. One may, with safety, have anticipated his road and destination by noticing the course of events. Madison was steadily rising, not like the Ocean tide to fall as slowly yet as surely as it rose, but step by step, by a path that had neither backward tracks nor ill-considered portions, until now he had reached the zenith of honor and glory by becoming the chief of his country. Out of the one hundred and seventy five electoral votes he received one hundred and twenty two. On June 10, 1809, Mr. Madison, President, issued a proclamation repealing the acts of embargo and non-intercourse as against Great Britain and her colonies. This brought Madison great credit from the public. He had known something of popularity during all his career; but he had never felt before the exultation of riding upon the very crest of a mighty wave of popular applause. But this wave suddenly collapsed and fell to flatness. England recalled he minister and repudiated all he had done. Thus commerce was again restricted, and the President was accused of acting treacherously. But



it was all owing to the fact that Erskin, the English minister in this country misrepresented his government. Another proclamation had to be issued by the President, recalling the previous one which had allowed the American ships to leave port. There was now entered upon a long dispute between England and the United States on the one hand, and United States and France on the other. The whole negotiation was a trial of what is called diplomatic fence, in which England would not yield an inch to the United States or France. Madison and his party were willing to aid Napoleon and France; and Napoleon hoped to defeat both his antagonists by turning their swords against each other. And after the assult of the British sloop-of-war, Little Belt, upon the American ship President, the public sentiment of America was for war with England. Congress, too, was furious with England; and Clay and Calhoun were continually urging war, and Clay laughed in scorn at the doubt that he could not, at a blow, subdue the Canadas with a few regiments of Kentucky militia. On June 3, the committee on Foreign relations, of which Calhoun was chairman, reported in favor of an immediate appeal to arms. The next day war was declared by a vote of seventy-nine to forty-nine in the House, and by a majority of six in the Senate. The war lasted two years. At the end of that time the United States accepted a treaty of peace in which impressment, the very thing that caused the war, was not even alluded to. Great Britain did not relinquish by a syllable her assumed right to board American ships in search of British seamen;

and the Administration instructed its peace Commissioners not even to ask that she should.

It is alleged that Madison is entirely to be blamed for this war and its disastrous result to America, although both countries were equally glad to make a treaty at the expiration of two years. But more damage was sustained by America, and especially in some parts, as in the taking of the capital on the Potomac by the British under Gens. Ross and Cockburn, which they resigned to the flames of destruction. Madison is accused of neglecting to provide suitable defence for the capital by land and water; in fact, he said on one occasion, he did not apprehend a land attack. And contrary to the advice of Webster in the Senate, he refused to support and increase the Navy where the Americans were gaining such signal victories. It is clearly seen that Madison was not suited to carry on a war; he was not a war-President. His position was not in accordance with his facilities. He did vastly more in his other field of political occupation, and had he never became President, he would have risen to a higher place of renown, and would have done more for his country, though he would not have been so exalted; and his ambition would not have been satisfied, nor his virtue and beneficence been rewarded as it seemed was becoming him. By a person who had not probed into the matter, he is looked upon with admiration and respect as being one of the Presidents of the early and young republic, but in truth this is the very point at which his fame is small. It is as a laborer on the Constitution and its various relations that he stands preeminent; and for this he will be upheld as long as the United States exist.