

**LINCOLN AND SEWARD;
REMARKS UPON THE MEMORIAL
ADDRESS OF CHAS. FRANCIS
ADAMS, ON THE LATE WM. H.
SEWARD**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649636303

Lincoln and Seward; Remarks Upon the Memorial Address of Chas. Francis Adams, on the
Late Wm. H. Seward by Gideon Welles

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Cover @ 2017

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GIDEON WELLES

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LINCOLN AND SEWARD.

REMARKS UPON THE MEMORIAL ADDRESS OF CHAS.
FRANCIS ADAMS, ON THE LATE WM. H.
SEWARD,

WITH

INCIDENTS AND COMMENTS ILLUSTRATIVE OF THE
MEASURES AND POLICY OF THE ADMINISTRA-
TION OF ABRAHAM LINCOLN.
AND VIEWS AS TO THE RELATIVE POSITIONS OF THE
LATE PRESIDENT AND SECRETARY
OF STATE.

BY

GIDEON WELLES,

Ex-Secretary of the Navy.

NEW YORK:
SHELDON & COMPANY.

1874.

Entered according to Act of Congress in the year 1874, by
SHELDON & COMPANY,
In the Office of the Librarian of Congress at Washington.



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P R E F A C E .

IN submitting the following pages, it is proper that the circumstances which led to, and attended their preparation, should go out with them. The "Memorial Address on the life, character and services of William H. Seward," which Mr. Adams delivered at Albany in April 1873, by invitation of the legislature of the State of New York, attracted general attention, and is a document which, if permitted to pass uncorrected, would be likely to contribute to, and strengthen false history. For a third of a century, Mr. Seward occupied prominent positions in his native state, and no inconsiderable space in the service of his country. It was appropriate that the state which had honored him with its confidence while living, should commemorate his death by an official observance such as the legislature ordered, and Mr. Adams was invited to fulfil. From a variety of considerations, the selection of the orator seemed proper; for there was much in his association with the deceased to commend it, and it opened a field of historic interest worthy of his pen. The extreme of panegyric, if the eulogist chose to indulge the partiality of friendship in that direction, was allowable and probably expected; but it was not anticipated that the occasion would be used to elevate the reputation of the deceased statesman at the expense of others, and certainly not by deprecia-

ting or underrating the abilities of the President under whom he served. The opportunity might have been improved to say a word in vindication of an administration which he had represented abroad, and of which Mr. Seward was a conspicuous member, for it had in the embittered contests of the period been greatly maligned, misrepresented, and misunderstood. No small disappointment was experienced to find the Address pregnant with error, and in some respects an indorsement of aspersions derogatory to President Lincoln and his capacity for the place he had filled, by representing that the merits and success of his administration were due, not to him, but to the superior intellectual power of the Secretary of State.

My first impression on reading the Address was, that the surviving members of Mr. Lincoln's Cabinet should unite in a general statement correcting the misrepresentations semi-officially put forth at Albany. Such a statement from them, brief and decisive, without details, would probably have been sufficient to counteract the misrepresentations and erroneous assertions of Mr. Adams, as to the relative merits, executive ability and individual services of the President and Secretary of State during Mr. Lincoln's administration. Some correspondence in regard to such a proceeding took place between Messrs. Chase, Blair, and myself, which was interrupted by the sudden death of the Chief Justice within less than one month after the Address was delivered. This event rendered it advisable that something more should be done than a mere contradictory assertion, or naked statement that Mr. Adams was mistaken in his estimate of the two men and their relative positions to each other, and to their associates

in the administration, as well as to the whole conduct of the affairs of the government.

Of the eight persons who constituted the Executive Council, and administered the government during the dark days of our country's December, four, besides the two eminent characters adverted to in the Memorial Address, had closed their earthly pilgrimage. Only two members of the Cabinet who first met around that council-board, and conferred together through most of the years of President Lincoln's Administration, survived to speak from personal knowledge of the acts, qualifications and services of their chief, and those with whom they had been associated in that trying period.

By special request of Mr. Blair, the duty of stating the facts and vindicating Mr. Lincoln and his administration from the errors or inadvertencies of Mr. Adams devolved on me. To discharge that duty with fidelity was a delicate and embarrassing task, lest in developing the facts in regard to the conduct and measures of the administration, and repelling the remarks derogatory to President Lincoln, it might seem that injustice was done to Secretary Seward, to whom credit as a superior to the President in native intellectual power, and in the force of moral discipline, and as directing affairs in the President's name, had been awarded. But while maintaining for Mr. Lincoln greater executive ability, I would withhold no just fame from Mr. Seward, whose versatile and prolific mind, if less persistent and reliable, less capable of establishing and enforcing a policy, less capable of grasping great questions and successfully wielding the highest functions of government, was nevertheless in his position, active, industrious and useful. If disclosures of the truth dispel prevailing error,

let it not be supposed that wrong is thereby done to a colleague for whom I had great personal regard.

Undoubtedly both Mr. Adams and Mr. Seward believed in 1860, that Mr. Lincoln possessed neither the abilities nor qualifications to perform the duties of Chief Magistrate, and that he would consequently be governed by some leading member of his Cabinet. It was assumed by them, and indeed by others, that the Secretary of State would be that leading member and President, *de facto*. Mr. Seward after a brief experience, learned his mistake. Mr. Adams never did—not does it appear that Mr. Seward, in their intimate personal and official correspondence undeceived or enlightened the Minister during his absence from the country, covering the entire presidency of Mr. Lincoln. Besides, a class of partisans in all that time busied themselves in affirming and inculcating the false impression that Mr. Seward was the actual Executive. John Wilkes Booth, like Mr. Adams was deceived by it, and hence in his scheme to overturn and destroy the government, he deemed it essential to make Mr. Seward, as well as the President a victim. The murderous attempt of a crazy fanatic, gave strength to the delusion which partisans had promulgated. Sympathy for the survivor of that terrible catastrophe, who, wounded and mangled, escaped the knife of the assassin, seemed to identify him more closely with his chief who had been slain, and, temporarily at least, added to the delusion which finds endorsement and is embodied in the Memorial Address.

In the following pages I have confined my remarks as far as possible, to the acts, views and transactions of the President and Secretary of State and measures of administration during the presidency of Mr. Lincoln. Allusions to other periods, or to the private life or

peculiar characteristics of either, except as preliminary or essential to a correct understanding of their official career, and political principles have been avoided. In stating the views and policy of Mr. Lincoln, it has been no part of my purpose to discuss the labors or services of Mr. Seward, other than those which relate to the administration of which he was a member, not the chief. Whatever estimate may be put upon his abilities—whatever resemblance there may have been between him and the renowned men of antiquity, or the distinguished statesmen of our own country of a past generation, or whatever may have been his experience in other years, and in different fields of public, professional, or social life, are proper matters of eulogy, but foreign to the purpose of these remarks.

Incidents and measures which occurred, better than statements or assertions, will disabuse the public mind and more truly than mere declarations develop the characteristics of the men and the workings of the administration. I have therefore selected certain cases on different topics, which denote the ideas, executive ability and principles of government of the President and Secretary of State on questions of public policy. They also indicate the actual relation in which they stood to each other, and their associates in the Cabinet. The cases mentioned relate to by-gone measures which have been adjusted or disposed of, and are parts of the recorded, though to some extent, unpublished history of the country and times.

The remarks on the Address as originally prepared were too voluminous for a Magazine. I therefore condensed and reduced them to three papers which appeared in the *Galaxy* for October, November and December 1873. The reception of those papers by the