MR. ADAMS'S *Last Crusade*

John Quincy Adams's Extraordinary Post-Presidential Life in Congress

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Contents

	Author's Note	*vii*
	Prologue	*xi*
ONE	Favored Son of the Revolution	1
TWO	The Road to the Presidency	27
THREE	An "Agony of Mind"	37
FOUR	The Freshman Congressman	67
FIVE	A Worthy Cause	91
SIX	Adams, Science, and the Smithsonian Institution	111
SEVEN	Lightning Rod of Congress	129
EIGHT	"True and Honest Hearts Love You"	145
NINE	The *Amistad*	163
TEN	"Old Nestor"	187
ELEVEN	Triumph	205
TWELVE	A New War and Decline	225
	Epilogue	*253*
	Bibliography	*261*
	Notes	*269*
	Index	*293*
	Acknowledgments	*307*
	About the Author	*309*

Prologue

"And so I am launched again upon
the faithless wave of politics."
—Former President John Quincy Adams, upon being nominated for the 12th Congressional District

SEPTEMBER 18, 1830, BOSTON

The unlikely courtship ritual began with an unsigned paragraph in the *Boston Daily Courier* proposing that John Quincy Adams, eighteen months removed from a disappointing single-term presidency, represent Massachusetts's Plymouth District in Congress.

On this mild late-summer day, the stout, severe-looking scholar, poet, amateur scientist, devout Christian, master diplomat, and sixty-three-year-old son of the Revolution, indifferently attired as usual, traveled to the Worcester home of Congressman John B. Davis for the ritual's next phase.

Well versed in the antiquated gentlemen's politics of George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, and his father, John Adams, John Quincy Adams knew what the summons to Davis's home meant and what his answer would necessarily be. The sixth president's hometown, Quincy, had recently been gerrymandered into the 12th Congressional District (also known as the Plymouth District), now represented by the Reverend Joseph Richardson of Hingham. Members of Richardson's Unitarian congregation had grown impatient

with his long absences in Washington over the past three years and were now pressuring him to forego another congressional term so that he could devote more time to church matters.

Richardson's quandary notwithstanding, Adams was certainly not honor-bound to uphold the National Republicans' standard in Congress. No former president had ever returned to elective office, much less Congress. Adams's unhappy tenure as chief executive and the surpassingly vicious 1828 re-election campaign that had supplanted him with the "military chieftain," Andrew Jackson, had surely curdled any vestiges of ambition in him.

At Davis's home, Congressman Richardson, as expected, informed Adams that he had resolved to return to his parish and would not seek a third term. Would Adams consent to run in his place? The office, said Richardson, was not beneath an ex-president; "instead of degrading the individual, [it] would elevate the Representative character."

Adams agreed with Richardson's assessment. "No person can be degraded by serving the people as a Representative of Congress. Nor, in my opinion, would an ex-President of the United States be degraded by serving as a Selectman of his town, if elected thereto by the people." Nevertheless, he was inclined to pass up the invitation because of his advanced age and poor health. "It might depend upon circumstances," he said as he left, leaving the door slightly ajar.

In the parlance of the code observed by Adams, this was tantamount to acceptance. After his defeat by Jackson in 1828, he had been sounded out about serving in the U.S. Senate. His initial reaction had been to decline and "withdraw from all connection with public affairs," but two days' reflection had led him to modify his position to one in which he would "not hold myself at liberty to decline repairing to any station which they [the people] assign me." The people, however, chose someone else.

The old political etiquette that he nearly alone persisted in practicing forbade him to give the slightest indication that he was

seeking office. "To say that I would accept would be so near to asking for a vote, that I did not feel disposed to go so far. I wished the people to act spontaneously, at their own discretion." It was this curiously passive attitude, so out of step with the aggressive new politics being practiced at the time, that had enabled the triumvirate of Jackson, Martin Van Buren, and William Crawford and their many allies to sink Adams's "Liberty with Power" agenda and crush his re-election bid in 1828. Accurately reading Adams's willingness to run for Congress, Davis, Richardson, and their friends worked to build support for his candidacy in the Plymouth District, the "Old Colony" where the Pilgrims had landed and settled in the 1620s. Leading citizens came forward to encourage Adams to accept the nomination. A deacon at Adams's church suggested that many citizens wished to see him elected. Others warned that if he declined, "there was no prospect" that another worthy candidate could be found.

The *Boston Daily Courier* carried an extensive story exploring Adams's candidacy, and a favorable editorial ran in the *Hingham Gazette*. "We think him a good rallying point," Solomon Lincoln Jr. wrote to Congressman Davis, "for those who wish to throw off the incubus of Jacksonism, to send an able man to Congress, and at the same time to compliment an abused patriot."

Adams finally yielded, and on October 13, 1830, the National Republicans nominated Adams for the 12th Congressional District. "And so I am launched again upon the faithless wave of politics," the new candidate observed dryly.

Less than two years earlier, the former president, seared by the savagery of the 1828 election, had professed a longing for "the deepest retirement." Adams had known in his bones as early as 1826 that he, as a minority president whose agenda had been trampled by his many adversaries, had scant chance of winning a second term. During the 1828 campaign, both presidential candidates had been

outrageously slandered: Adams was accused of procuring young women to seduce the Russian czar, and Jackson of stealing another man's wife. While Adams's supporters depicted Jackson as woefully unqualified for the White House, the well-organized Democrats, led by a military hero with a populist touch, accused Adams of aristocratic aspirations. Unfortunately, Adams played to that misconception by avoiding rallies and remaining silent and above the fray, in the tradition of the "old politics." The Jackson Democrats' most effective weapon against Adams, however, was his purportedly "corrupt bargain" with Henry Clay, which had won him the presidency in 1825.

After being decisively defeated, Adams had been so bitter that he boycotted his successor's inauguration, an uncommonly severe rebuke by a former president. The only other president to do so was his father, John Adams, who refused to attend Thomas Jefferson's inauguration in 1801. In his encyclopedic diary, faithfully kept with few lapses since the age of twelve, John Quincy Adams revealed his dark mood: "The sun of my political life sets in the deepest gloom."

In three decades of matrimony, Louisa Catherine Johnson Adams had accompanied her husband to Prussia, returned with him to Massachusetts and then the nation's capitol, and then journeyed to St. Petersburg, crossing war-ravaged Europe in 1814 to join Adams in Ghent, with their young son Charles, amid Napoleon Bonaparte's "100 Days." During this time, she also gave birth to twelve children, only three of whom survived their first two years.

Nothing had been easy for Louisa. Although her father was American, she was British-born and educated in Europe. These circumstances became a recurrent issue in her life with John Quincy Adams, beginning with her mother-in-law Abigail's negative reaction upon learning of her son's engagement: "I would hope

for the love I bear my country that the Siren is at least a *half-blood*." Although Louisa grew to respect her mother-in-law's intelligence and forceful character, they were never close. John Adams, however, was fond of his daughter-in-law.

After her husband won the presidency, the White House years proved to be long and difficult for Louisa. Frequent periods of illness led her to confine herself in her chambers for days at a time. The isolation, lack of exercise, and poor diet made matters worse.

Now, finally out of the Washington pressure cooker, she was dismayed that the respite after thirty years of public life was to be so brief. "There are some silly plans going on here and God only knows in what they will end, but I fear not at all to my taste," she wrote understatedly. If she were going to be "dragged forward" again, "it should be for something respectable and worthy." Evidently, being a congressman's wife was neither. With sarcasm, she observed, "Family is and must ever be a secondary consideration to a zealous patriot."

Their son Charles Francis Adams flatly opposed his father's decision, believing that he had succumbed to the "temporary seductions of popular distinction," against which resistance "is the most solid evidence of greatness." For all that, Charles still regarded his father with admiration, while regretting that he had effectively condemned his family to an exhausting life in the public eye.

John Quincy Adams's eighteen-month hiatus from public life had been a compendium of grief, worry, energetic work on family matters, scholarly indulgence, vengeful composition, and sometimes, boredom. The Adamses had lingered several months in Washington at Meridian House, which they had rented from Commodore David Porter. There, Adams assembled his papers and books in preparation for the trip to the home place in Quincy. He also exhaustively researched and wrote an 84,000-word rebuttal in his ongoing dispute with thirteen prominent New England

"Old Federalists," but he was ultimately persuaded not to publish the scathing diatribe.

Amid the family's transition to private life, shattering news reached them: the death of the oldest of the Adamses' three sons, George Washington Adams, a gentle, high-strung ne'er-do-well with a drinking problem, who, as it turned out, had fathered an illegitimate child by a chambermaid. While en route to Washington to assist in the move to Quincy, the twenty-eight-year-old had become delusional and had vanished from the deck of the steamship *Benjamin Franklin* into Long Island Sound. His body washed up on City Island weeks later. Heartbroken, the Adamses tried to console one another by praying together, but George's death would torment them for years.

Upon reaching Quincy, Adams found the nearly century-old family home of John and Abigail Adams dilapidated and stripped of most of its furniture, as a consequence of the division of John Adams's estate among fourteen heirs after his death in 1826. Aided by his sons John II and Charles, Adams set to work making the mansard-roofed "Big House" habitable again, as it had always been his cherished dream to live there with Louisa. His return to the home place occasioned no welcoming ceremonies or dinner invitations in Boston, whose mayor, Harrison Gray Otis, was the leader of the "13 Confederates" with whom he was feuding. The Boston establishment further signaled its displeasure by dropping Adams as president of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences.

Adams compared the abrupt transition from the busy White House to private life to "an instantaneous flat calm in the midst of a hurricane." He found it disconcerting. "I cannot yet settle my mind to a regular course of future employment," he wrote, but clearly stated his intention "to bury myself in complete retirement, as much so as a nun taking the veil." Oppressed though he was by George's suicide, Adams tackled the daunting job of making the

Big House livable. One satisfying task was unpacking the boxes and trunks that contained his nearly 6,000 books, which he had had shipped from Washington. "No such library exists in the hands of any other individual in the United States, but I have never had the enjoyment of it," he wrote in his diary. He hired tradesmen to build bookshelves throughout the house, to install Franklin stoves for wintertime heating, and to make repairs. Cash-poor, Adams saw his debts climb to $42,000, with $13,000 worth of notes coming due.

From these practical affairs, he turned to organizing his father's papers as a prelude to writing his biography. "I propose to devote henceforth three hours a day to that portion of my business," he vowed. But the writing project was often put aside as Adams occupied himself with his fitness regimen of daily walks and swims and the pleasure that he took in prowling the ancestral Adams acreage that he had cobbled together from his father's heirs.

On the last day of 1829, Adams summarized the year's severe reversals: "The loss of power and of popular favor I could have endured with fortitude, and relief from the slavery of public office . . . But my beloved son! Mysterious heaven! Let me bow in submission to thy will. Let me no longer yield to a desponding or distressful spirit."

No matter how strenuous his efforts—the diary to which he devoted hours every day, the Bible-reading, the poems he wrote, the lengthy correspondence, his public duties—Adams was never satisfied with himself. Although Adams had had a lifetime of extraordinary achievements—serving as minister to the Netherlands, Prussia, Russia, and England; negotiating the Treaty of Ghent, which ended the War of 1812; and serving as a U.S. senator, secretary of state, and U.S. president—he astonishingly observed: "My whole life has been a succession of disappointments. I can scarcely recollect a single instance of success to anything that I ever undertook." Yet he acknowledged, "Fortune, by which I understand Providence, has showered blessings upon me profusely."

NOVEMBER 1830, QUINCY

When his would-be constituents cast their ballots, it was clear that the large majority wanted Adams to represent them in Congress: Adams received 1,817 votes, the Jacksonian Democrat, Arad Thompson, received 373 votes, and William Baylies, the "Old Federalist" candidate, garnered 279 votes. The jubilant Adams acted as though he had just won his first public office. "My election as President of the United States was not half so gratifying to my inmost soul," he gushed. Tempering his joy was the sober realization that his election would force him out of a peaceful retirement and cast him "back again amidst the breakers of the political ocean."

His family's unanimous disapproval of his new public career might have warned him that the path ahead would not be strewn with roses. Louisa announced that she would not accompany him to Washington, where Adams had eagerly proposed to go as soon as possible, though he needn't have returned until March, when he would be sworn in. Louisa had no desire to live again as a Washington politician's wife. She unhappily confessed to their son John II, "My nervous system is too much shaken by long suffering to admit of my again plunging into the very focus of political machination."

Twenty-year-old Charles impertinently suggested to his father that he should have taken up literature instead of politics. When Adams replied, "I must fulfill my destiny," Charles irritably retorted, "I cannot help thinking success would be far more certain, if you rejected the idea of *Destiny* altogether!" Evidently realizing that "destiny" sounded presumptuous, Adams responded more humbly: "I must take blame to myself for all the disasters that befall me."

Adams's five presidential predecessors had all retired from public life after leaving office, but Adams predicted that his example would encourage them to participate in public affairs, even if it meant accepting subordinate offices. It was inconceivable to Adams

that he would decline a summons from the people with the excuse that he had already served. His election was no less than a call to duty. As he wrote in his diary, quoting his hero, Cicero: "'Defendi rempublicam adolescens; non deseram senex.'" (I will not desert in my old age the Republic that I defended in my youth.)

Chapter One

Favored Son of the Revolution

"I shall be much mistaken if, in as short a period as can well be expected, he is not found at the head of the diplomatic corps."

—President George Washington on John Quincy Adams, minister to the Netherlands

JUNE 1791, BOSTON

It had been a discouraging few years for John Quincy Adams, the vice president's oldest son. His life, previously unfolding in a seamless fabric of opportunity and achievement, had lost momentum. His precocious childhood amid the excitement of the Revolution, in Paris by the side of the era's prime movers—Thomas Jefferson, Benjamin Franklin, and his father—and in St. Petersburg as a teenage translator, and his Harvard career and law studies had ended anticlimactically with his semi-employment in a threadbare Boston law practice at age twenty-three. He had lost his first case, and clients were few; his scanty income had compelled him to break off courting his first love. While business was slowly picking up, he often wrote poetry or read Cicero, Tacitus, Burke, and Hume to pass the time during

the long afternoons in his quiet office. Sometimes he dreamed of being a literary man instead of a lawyer.

But the publication of Thomas Paine's incendiary defense of the French Revolution, *The Rights of Man*, with its attack on the Revolution's great English critic, Edmund Burke, inspired Adams to put pen to paper, and he discovered that he had a gift for polemics. His eleven "Publicola" letters in the *Columbian Centinel* were the monumental turning point of his young life, lighting the way to the public life for which his parents' painstaking guidance and his years abroad had been a long preparation.

Born July 11, 1767, in Braintree, Massachusetts, John Quincy Adams was named for his mother's grandfather, Colonel John Quincy, who was dying as his great-grandson was being baptized. As Adams would later write, "It was the name of one passing from earth to immortality" and thus "a perpetual admonition to do nothing unworthy of it."

Adams's father and his mother, Abigail Smith Adams, were both descended from the earliest settlers of the Massachusetts Bay Colony. They were related to *Mayflower* Compact signer John Alden and Priscilla Mullins of Plymouth Colony, and through John Quincy Adams's paternal grandmother, Susanna Boylston, to Zabdial Boylston, who introduced the smallpox inoculation to North America. The ancestry of the family in England dated to the 1215 Magna Carta, which bears the name and seal of Saer de Quincy. Clearly, John Quincy Adams's consciousness of his ancestors' achievements was a lifelong influence that spurred his ambition.

The Adams farm consisted of 140 acres by the sea at the foot of Penn's Hill and was bequeathed to John Adams by his father, "Deacon John" Adams. In one of the property's two clapboard farmhouses was born John Adams in 1735, and in the other, thirty-two years later, John Quincy Adams entered the world. John Adams later bought a house in town—the "Big House"—where he lived after he retired from public life and where his son and his

family lived in the summertime. All three structures survive today as historical sites.

John Quincy, the eldest son, was two years the junior of his sister Abigail, or Nabby. A second sister, Susanna, born in 1769, died a year later. Charles was born in 1770, and Thomas followed Charles in 1772. At age nine, John Quincy routinely rode horseback from Braintree to Boston to post the family's correspondence, sometimes stopping to see his kinsman, Sam Adams. He did not attend the Braintree school, which was closed during the Revolution to save money for the war, but was tutored by his father's law clerk, John Thaxter. By the time he was ten, he had read two volumes of Tobias Smollett's *Complete History of England*, James Thomson's *The Seasons*, and Shakespeare and Alexander Pope. Like his father, he read Lord Henry St. John Bolingbroke, including his popular *Idea of a Patriot King*, making notes in the margin beside his father's. He struggled valiantly with John Milton's *Paradise Lost*, to the point of "the shedding of solitary tears," but did not get through it until he was thirty years old. "I might as well have attempted to read Homer before I had learnt the Greek alphabet," he later observed.

As a young child, Adams had a window seat on the early days of the American Revolution. He strolled with Sam Adams on Boston Commons to look over the British troops there and also saw the Boston militiamen. When a Patriot unit on its way to Lexington briefly camped on the Adams's property, the young John Quincy, tutored by a soldier, learned to perform the manual of arms with a musket. The Adamses also took in Patriot refugees from Boston. On June 17, 1775, John Quincy climbed Penn's Hill with his mother and watched the fighting on Bunker Hill, where more than a half-century later, he would see stonecutters hew granite for the Bunker Hill Memorial. Adams would remember all his life his father's letters from Philadelphia in July 1776 reporting Congress's progress on a resolution for independence.

John and Abigail Adams closely regulated their children's behavior and guided their learning. John Quincy learned early on

that one should never waste time, as evidenced by a June 1777 letter the nine-year-old boy wrote to his father. In the letter, obviously prompted or dictated by his mother, he regretfully observed, "My thoughts are running after birds eggs, play and trifles. . . . I am more satisfied with myself when I have applied part of my time to some useful employment than when I have idled it away about trifles and play." Abigail's zealous supervision of her children's moral development may have been prompted by the troubled life of her alcoholic brother, William Smith Jr., who eventually abandoned his family.

On a raw February day in 1778, the ten-year-old John Quincy Adams and his father stepped into a rowboat at his Uncle Norton Quincy's dock. Their feet were covered with hay to keep them warm as they were rowed to the *Boston*, a new frigate bound for France, where John Adams hoped to obtain financial and military aid for the American Revolution.

During the Atlantic crossing—a first for both of them—British warships shadowed the *Boston* for two days before she shook them off. Then, during a storm, lightning struck the mast, stunning three crewmen into unconsciousness. Later in their journey, the *Boston* captured a British privateer after a battle in which a cannonball sailed over young Adams's head and smashed the spanker yard. A few days later, a signal gun accidentally exploded, shattering the leg of a lieutenant. John Adams held the man down while the leg was taken off, but the lieutenant later died and was buried at sea.

In Paris, John Adams learned that Benjamin Franklin and French diplomats had already signed a treaty of alliance binding the nations commercially and in common cause against Great Britain. Congress decided that John Adams was unneeded, and in the summer of 1779, father and son sailed home. A few weeks later, the Continental government asked Adams to return to Europe as a peace commissioner, in the expectation that peace negotiations with Great Britain would soon begin.

John Quincy Adams initially resisted returning to Paris with his father and younger brother, Charles; instead, he wished to fulfill his family's plan for him to attend Andover Academy. But his mother finally convinced him that he would learn more in Europe than he would at Andover.

On November 12, 1779, twelve-year-old John Quincy Adams took his father's advice and commenced the diary that he would indefatigably maintain for the next sixty-eight years, ultimately filling fifty manuscript volumes. His first entry began: "This morning at about 11 o'clock I took leave of my Mamma, my sister, and Brother Tommy, and went to Boston with Mr. [John Jr.] Thaxter to go on board the Frigate the Sensible of 28 twelve Pounders." Five years would pass before young Adams would again see his mother, brother, and sister.

Abigail continued to lecture her son about his comportment, mental occupations, goals, and duties from afar. While John Adams guided his children's practical education, Abigail shaped their characters. Abigail admonished John Quincy to be on guard against "the odious monster"—vice—and to not disgrace his mother or prove himself unworthy of his father. Her letters often were an admixture of Herodotus expounding on the qualities of a great leader and Marcus Aurelius counseling self-sacrifice. John Quincy, she felt, had a duty to excel. "It will be expected of you, my son . . . that your improvements should bear some proportion to your advantages. Nothing is wanting with you but diligence and application, since nature has not been deficient." Abigail also could be a Spartan mother advising her son to triumph or to die in the breach: "For dear as you are to me, I had much rather you should have found your grave in the ocean you have crossed, or any untimely death crop you in your infant years, rather than see you an immoral profligate or a graceless child."

In the summer of 1780, the Adamses moved from Paris to Amsterdam, where John Adams, the new minister to the Netherlands, borrowed money to buy food, arms, and uniforms for the Continental Army.

Then in 1781, Francis Dana, a family friend and diplomat from Boston, asked fourteen-year-old John Quincy Adams to travel with him to St. Petersburg as his translator and secretary. The fourteen months Adams spent in Russia served as his apprenticeship in American diplomacy. When he was not translating the French spoken in the czarina's court for Dana, Adams was roaming Peter the Great's city on the Gulf of Finland and reading David Hume's and Thomas Macaulay's histories of England, Molière's plays, and Adam Smith's *Wealth of Nations*. He translated Cicero, soaked up Russian culture, and indulged in what would become a lifelong passion for buying and collecting books.

Later, he joined his father in Paris, where the teenager formed friendships with two of the preeminent Founding Fathers, Franklin and Jefferson, as they and his father tried to secure trade agreements with the European nations. Young Adams accompanied his father to glittering receptions and frequented the opera. His diary describes attending merry dinners with Franklin, Jefferson, and other diplomats, going to the theater with Franklin, and discussing "animal magnetism" with the inventor diplomat. His more informal relationship with Jefferson was akin to that of young uncle and favorite nephew, and Adams often made notes on some of his far-ranging conversations with Jefferson. In one, Adams wrote, "the blacks, he tells me, are very well treated" in Virginia, where Jefferson owned one hundred slaves. Reminiscing forty years later about those days in Paris, John Adams wrote to Jefferson that John Quincy "appeared to me to be almost as much your boy as mine."

In 1785, Adams returned to America, where he enrolled at Harvard, his father's alma mater, and embarked on a career in law.

The eighteen-year-old was described as well groomed, "rather short and plump," and prone to cock his head, with one eye half-closed and one hand in a pocket, similar to his father's mannerisms. He also wore a sword, which was customary among European gentlemen. Adams graduated second in his class of fifty-one and delivered a commencement oration that urged patriotic self-sacrifice.

John Quincy Adams joined five other law students in the Newburyport office of Theophilus Parsons, one of New England's best attorneys and a future Massachusetts Supreme Court justice. Try though he did, Adams never learned to love the legal profession. Practically every day, Adams found himself wishing that he had chosen another vocation and that he was anywhere but in Newburyport, a town of 5,000 that seemed even smaller for his having recently lived in St. Petersburg, Paris, and Boston. He decided that he wanted to be a literary man, "who can invent, who can create." For diversion, he read voraciously, cultivated a passion for writing poetry, played the flute, and shot birds.

Seeking relief from his solitude and the tedium of his law books, the Puritan from Braintree began going to parties where he danced with pretty young women until the early hours of the morning. At dinners with male companions, Adams and his friends passed the time "smoking and singing," as well as indulging in the young man's pastime of recreational drinking. His remorseful morning-after diary entries reveal the price that he paid for his bacchanalian excesses.

Like young adults in all times, Adams speculated about his future. On his twenty-first birthday, July 11, 1788, he wrote, "I feel sometimes a strong desire to know what my circumstances will be in seven years from this: but I must acknowledge, I believe my happiness would rather be injured than improved by the information."

Worries about the future likely triggered the episodic depression that sometimes, while he was a lawyer-in-training, kept Adams housebound for days, even weeks. Adams's susceptibility to depression was probably hereditary; his biographer Jack Shepherd writes that John Adams and all three of his sons suffered from some degree of depression, as did several later Adams descendants.

Adams's diary entry of December 6, 1787, was his first written acknowledgment of this problem. "I felt a depression of spirits to which I have hitherto been entirely a stranger," he wrote, conceding that while he had felt downhearted before, "the feelings which I now experienced were different from what I ever knew before and such, as I hope I shall never again experience." Sleepless much of that night, he finally fell into a light slumber in which he had "extravagant dreams." Two months later, he reported having been in "low spirits" for the past ten days. "My nerves have got into a disagreeable trim, and I fear I shall be obliged to pay still less attention to books than I have of late."

During a recurrence in the fall of 1788, his severe anxiety prevented him from sleeping, studying, or reading. He was driven to write in his diary, "God of Heavens! . . . take me from this world before I curse the day of my birth." While taking medicine prescribed by the family doctor, Adams took his mother's advice to adopt a routine of "constant exercise"—long walks and bird hunting—and he began to recover. He eventually completed his apprenticeship in the Parsons law office and in 1790 opened a law practice in Boston in a house owned by his father.

During his final year of reading law under Parsons, Adams fell in love with fifteen-year-old Mary Frazier, the second daughter of Moses Frazier of Newburyport. They met at a party, and romance bloomed. In the fall of 1790, soon after Adams moved to Boston, he broached the subject of an informal engagement, to begin when his law practice began to flourish and he no longer needed his parents' financial support. But her parents objected to an informal en-

gagement, insisting on an immediate, formal engagement, to which Abigail Adams was unalterably opposed. She icily wrote, "Common fame reports that you are attached to a young lady. I am sorry that such a report should prevail. . . . Never form connections until you see a prospect of supporting a family."

The relationship ended when Mary announced that Adams must either agree to a formal engagement or break off his courtship. "Final conversation with M.F.," Adams noted tersely in his diary. With cold formality he informed his mother, "I conjure you, my dear Mamma, not to suffer your anxiety on my account to add to any other evils with which you are afflicted" because of "my attachment." When she did not reply, he wrote, "I am perfectly free, and you may rest assured I shall remain so." Mary Frazier remained single for more than a decade and eventually married Daniel Sargent in 1802. She died of consumption a few years later at the age of thirty. Three decades later, Adams was moved to tears at the mention of her name when he happened to see her daughter's headstone.

As his courtship of Mary Frazier was drifting toward the shoals, Adams lost his first legal case, in the Court of Common Pleas—to Harrison Gray Otis, who in years to come would become one of Adams's "Old Federalist" nemeses. In a letter to his father, Adams admitted that his nerves had gotten the better of him in the courtroom. "I was much too agitated to be possessed of proper presence of mind. You may judge of the figure I made." When he realized that his son was downhearted about losing the case and discouraged about his lack of clients, John Adams tried to be optimistic. "Your case is the lot of every youth of your profession. The world cannot be forced. Time must be taken to become known in any situation."

Adams began to attract clients, but not enough to relieve him of his dependence upon his father's monthly checks. He diverted himself with evening strolls to the Boston Mall, next to the Commons,

where he sometimes met women for random assignations that occasioned "mortifying reflections" afterward. He and some other young professional men and businessmen friends formed the "Crackbrain Club," what was then called an "interest club." Its chief purpose seemed to be camaraderie, and Adams remained a member until leaving Boston in 1794.

As Adams grew increasingly morose over his lack of success, his parents became concerned that he might relapse into depression. When they invited him to join them in Philadelphia, he leaped at the chance to take a vacation from his dreary life in Boston. During the weeks that he visited his parents, he met President George Washington, cabinet members, and congressmen, and in the evenings he attended the theater.

In Philadelphia, Adams felt the gravitational tug of public service on his innate sense of duty. He also observed with intense interest the early manifestations of an American political party system, of Federalists and Republicans. His sympathies lay with the Federalists. In a letter to his father, he mocked the states' resistance to the government's plans to assume state debts and establish public credit: "The partisans of our State governments are continually on the rack of exertion to contrive every paltry expedient to maintain their importance and to check the operations of the government, which they behold with terror." Adams's blossoming as a political writer was nearly at hand.

In *The Rights of Man*, Thomas Paine, the corset maker and journalist renowned for his Revolutionary War–era pamphlets *Common Sense* and *The Crisis*, described government as a social contract for protecting the individual's "natural rights" of liberty, property, security, and freedom from oppression. In Paine's opinion, a republican government best safeguarded those rights, whose abrogation justified revolution. Paine was living in England when he wrote *Rights* in two parts in 1791 and 1792, as a rebuttal to Edmund Burke's negative *Reflections on the French Revolution*. In passing,

Paine also derogated the English constitution, evidently in the hope that the English people would overthrow their government. Recognizing just this possibility, the English government suppressed Paine's pamphlet. Paine fled to France, while in England he was tried for sedition in absentia.

The publication of *The Rights of Man* in the United States was a sensation, no less so because of its unauthorized endorsement by Secretary of State Thomas Jefferson, who had read an advance copy lent to him by his friend James Madison. In a private note, Jefferson, who admired the French Revolution but not its excesses, had praised the pamphlet as a repudiation of "the political heresies that have sprung up among us"—interpreted as a slap at the political philosophy espoused by John Adams in his recent *Discourses on Davila*.

Public men had to be careful with their candid opinions, for they were likely to read them in cold print. Jefferson had penned the lines in an informal note to the indiscreet brother of the man who was going to reprint *Rights of Man*. Jefferson's veiled refutation of Adams's essay and his flattering words in support of Paine's point of view, "I have no doubt our citizens will rally a second time round the standard of Common Sense," promptly became the pamphlet's introduction and appeared in newspapers around the country.

And then in Boston's *Columbian Centinel* from June 8 to July 27, 1791, there appeared a series of eleven literate, closely reasoned, barbed rebuttals to *Rights of Man* and Jefferson's endorsement, signed by "Publicola." The essays, reprinted nearly everywhere, were an instant sensation. Intensive speculation swirled around the mysterious author; many believed it was Vice President Adams, although the *Centinel* editor punctured this conjecture. It was James Madison who astutely surmised in a letter to Jefferson "that Publicola is probably the manufacture of his [John Adams's] son out of materials furnished by himself. . . . There is more of method also in the arguments, and much less of clumsiness and heaviness in style, that characterize his [John Adams's] writings."

Publicola sarcastically reminded Jefferson, without actually naming the "heresy hunter," that Americans have "a full and entire freedom of opinion" and "have not yet established any infallible criterion of orthodoxy, either in church or state." He suggested that before Paine was enshrined as "the holy father of our political faith, and this pamphlet is to be considered as his Papal Bull," that its contents should first be examined. Paine had written that because there was no written English Constitution, Englishmen were free to overthrow their government. If this were so, wrote Publicola, does this mean, too, that when the United States adopted "common law," "did they adopt nothing at all, because that law cannot be produced in a visible form?" A constitution is not a piece of paper, but "the system of fundamental laws by which the people have consented to be governed." Only when the people "feel an actual deprivation of their equal rights, and see an actual impossibility for their restoration in any other manner" can they "have a right to lay their hands on their swords and appeal to Heaven." England's problems were not due to her constitution or government, but to "the universal venality and corruption which pervade all classes of men in that kingdom." Thus, Paine was wrong in advocating the overthrow of England's government.

Publicola was the new pivot on which John Quincy Adams's immediate future would soon turn. No longer was he known only as John Adams's son; by revealing his talent for polemics, he had impressed the era's most gifted men, the nation's founders. Moreover, he had forcefully asserted principles that contradicted those of his childhood friend, Thomas Jefferson, at the very moment when sides were being chosen for the first political party system. Adams's elders—President George Washington chief among them—now saw the "son of the Revolution" in a new light, as a useful young ally for whom great things lay in store.

Flushed by Publicola's success and by the surprising satisfaction that writing gave him, Adams took up his pen again, writing under

the pseudonym "Menander." He challenged Boston's "blue law," which prohibited theatrical performances, after city authorities arrested some actors for violating the puritanical ordinance. Then, writing as "Marcellus," he recommended that America remain neutral in the fighting that had broken out in Europe, because to "advise us to engage voluntarily in the war, is to aim a dagger at the heart of the country." In his pseudonymous clashes with local officials, Adams revealed a slashing, caustic literary style, once writing of Massachusetts Attorney General James Sullivan that "no half-fledged spurless chickling on a dunghill, could strut and crow, and flap her wings, with more insulting exultation." Although Adams was burnishing his reputation as an essayist, he did not want to jeopardize his legal career. "I have sincerely wished rather to remain in the shade than to appear as a politician without any character as a lawyer."

Two years later, Adams's powerful pen played another pivotal role in U.S. history and earned him the gratitude of President George Washington. In 1793, French minister Edmond Charles Genêt arrived in the United States with the mission of winning U.S. support for the French Revolution. Genêt commissioned privateers in Charleston, South Carolina, to attack British vessels, and he attempted to organize U.S. filibusters against Spain's and Britain's North American possessions. When the Washington administration complained about Genêt's actions, the Frenchman threatened to appeal directly to the American people, knowing that many Anti-Federalists, including Secretary of State Jefferson and Virginia Congressman James Madison, supported him. Washington's cabinet demanded that France recall Genêt.

With Treasury Secretary Alexander Hamilton defending Washington's action and Madison defending Genêt—both writing under pseudonyms—John Quincy Adams weighed in on the side of the president. Writing as "Columbus" and then as "Barneveldt," Adams asserted that the president had the authority to dismiss a foreign minister if he were dangerously meddling in U.S. affairs, as was Genêt. "Every public measure of the French Minister, since

the profession of his resolution to appeal [to the American people], may be traced to the policy of arming one part of America against the other. . . . If he cannot corrupt the sacred fountain of legislation, he hopes at least to poison some of the streams which flow from it." It was the first of many assertions by Adams in support of presidential prerogative for nationalistic purposes. In seeking the identity of "Columbus," Washington had only to ask his vice president to learn who he was.

Impressed by John Quincy Adams's intellect, his erudition, and his facility as a writer, and grateful for his loyalty to the Washington administration, the president in May 1794 named Adams minister to the Netherlands. It was a remarkably prestigious appointment for a twenty-seven-year-old. The United States had just five missions, in the Netherlands, England, France, Spain, and Portugal. But Adams had grown up in foreign embassies and had learned poise in the presence of royalty. He could fluently speak several languages, including French, Europe's diplomatic lingua franca, and could read Dutch and a half dozen other languages. Adams was initially dismayed by the appointment, which shattered the quiet equipoise he had come to enjoy in Boston as an essayist and lawyer, but his father quickly soothed his misgivings. In a buttery congratulatory letter, the vice president assured him that the appointment was not due to his influence but "the result of the President's own observations and reflections. . . . It will be a proof that sound principles in morals and government are cherished by the executive of the United States, and that study, science and literature are recommendations which will not be overlooked." In September 1794, Adams embarked for the Netherlands with his brother Thomas, who would be his secretary.

Just as Abigail had acted as the Spartan mother during her son's first trip to Europe, John Adams now played the part of the stern father, serving up some spine-stiffening advice: "If you do not rise to the head not only of your profession, but of your country, it will be owing to your own *Laziness, Slovenliness, and Obstinacy*."

It was established that Adams's chief responsibility in the Netherlands would be to administer, according to a schedule written by Treasury Secretary Hamilton, the repayment of Dutch loans to the United States during the Revolutionary War, but that went out the window the day that Adams reached The Hague. France had invaded the Netherlands.

As all around him Europe boiled with intrigue and armies on the march, Adams settled into his new, unforeseen role—America's front-row observer, an assignment that suited him perfectly. To his surprise, Adams discovered that he liked the diplomatic life very much. He was earning $4,500 a year, and he had time for reading, writing, walking, conversation, and the theater. "I have found here exactly what I wanted, and feel myself to be once more my own man again," he wrote to a friend. To his father, he reported that the posting was "much preferable to that of eternal expectations in a lawyer's office for business which, when it comes, is scarcely sufficient to give bread, and procures one more curses than thanks." He confessed to hoping that he would not have to return to practicing law again.

In August 1795, Adams sailed to London to exchange ratification documents for the new "Treaty of Amity, Commerce and Navigation" with Great Britain, which would be known in the United States as the Jay Treaty. While waiting for instructions from Philadelphia and attempting to avoid scheming British diplomats who may have thought young Adams more pliable than his older and more experienced colleagues, Adams became a frequent visitor to the grandly appointed home of the American consul in London, Joshua Johnson. Johnson had first come to England before the Revolutionary War as the factor of an Annapolis firm. During the war he had served as a U.S. representative in France, returning to London afterward as U.S. consul. His brother, Thomas Johnson, was governor of Maryland. Johnson's friendship,

position, and connections weren't all that brought Adams to his front door; Johnson had seven daughters, three of marriageable age. Adams was especially attracted to the second oldest, Louisa Catherine. Louisa was smart, beautiful, self-confident, and independent, fluent in French, and musically talented. Moreover, like Adams, she enjoyed literature and the theater.

For three months, Adams courted Louisa without revealing his intentions—until Louisa's mother persuaded him to acknowledge his aim of marrying Louisa. Nonetheless, Adams returned to The Hague without setting a wedding date. From America, his mother had been counseling delay, suggesting that Louisa, whom she never mentioned by name, was an insubstantial woman who would plunge him into debt with her feckless spending. "Time will trim the luster of the eye, and wither the bloom of the face," she grimly predicted, advising her son to seek a "more lasting union of friendship," and adding exasperatedly, "I would hope for the love I bear my country that the Siren is at least a *half-blood*." Irritated by his mother's meddling, Adams wrote back that if he waited for a spouse that suited her, "I would certainly be doomed to perpetual celibacy." Abigail quickly backpedaled. "I consider her already as my daughter," she wrote.

On July 26, 1797, thirty-year-old John Quincy Adams and twenty-two-year-old Louisa Catherine Johnson were married in the Johnsons' Anglican church, "All Hallows Berkyngechirche by the Tower of London." By then, Adams knew that his father-in-law's grand living style concealed ruinous debts; there would be no dowry. "I have done my duty—rigorous, inflexible duty," he dourly noted. In fact, his grudging marriage to Louisa would blossom into a deep, enduring relationship.

Pleasant though Adams's life was at The Hague, he had to concede his presence was pointless, with the Netherlands occupied by France. "At present I am liberally paid for no service at all." President George Washington, however, was pleased with Adams's in-

cisive letters on European developments. “Things appear to me exactly as they do to your son,” Washington told John Adams. “Your son must not think of retiring from the walk he is in. . . . I shall be much mistaken if, in as short a period as can well be expected, he is not found at the head of the diplomatic corps.” Washington was especially impressed by the “political insight” of a letter from Adams that included the observation, “Above all I wish that we may never have occasion for political connections in Europe.” Adams’s words influenced the composition of Washington’s 1797 “Farewell Address,” in which he warned against “foreign entanglements.” Washington rewarded Adams by appointing him minister to Portugal at a yearly salary of $9,000, twice what Adams was receiving at The Hague. But before Adams could travel to Lisbon, his father succeeded Washington as president, and he was reassigned to the new Prussian ministry in Berlin.

APRIL 1801, BERLIN

After five miscarriages, Louisa Catherine Adams gave birth on April 12 to their first child, George Washington Adams, although Louisa nearly died from rough handling by the drunken midwife. As a mark of respect toward the U.S. minister’s wife, the Prussians banished all traffic from the street where Louisa and John Quincy lived. And each day, a servant from King Frederick William III’s court made his way to the Adams’s home to inquire about the health of Louisa and the baby. These signs of respect attested to John Quincy Adams’s success during three and a half years at the Prussian court.

In Berlin, Adams fully matured as a diplomat, and he savored his lifestyle even more than he had while at The Hague. More importantly, Adams had achieved his principal goals—renewing the United States’ expiring ten-year treaty with Prussia; avoiding a U.S. commitment to a coalition of European neutrals in the world war between Great Britain and France, a commitment sure to have incurred Britain’s enmity; and filing ruminative dispatches assessing

the European situation—while failing only in signing a new treaty with Sweden. Now fluent in German, Adams became one of the first Americans to praise German letters and later was pronounced "the father of German studies in America" by the noted bibliographer Frederick H. Wilkins. Inspired by his newfound love of German literature, Adams devoted his free time to translating Christopher Martin Wieland's romance, *Oberon,* into English. He never intended for it to be published. "I had made it as a school-exercise in learning German," he told Spanish Minister Calderon de la Barca nearly a half-century later when Calderon, who had read it, inquired about it. (Adams's superior translation remained unpublished until 1940, when it was widely praised by modern scholars; it was probably his greatest literary achievement.)

In his dispatches to Philadelphia, Adams in 1798 urged his president father to open negotiations with France, believing the French were ready to end the so-called Quasi-War. The episodic naval war, fought mainly in the West Indies, stemmed from France's attempts to thwart U.S.-British trade by seizing hundreds of American commercial vessels. President Adams had taken his son's advice, which led to the Convention of Mortefontaine and the end of the Quasi-War, but the issue fractured the Federalist Party and thereby ensured Thomas Jefferson's electoral victory in 1800. John Quincy supported his father's principled position in the teeth of fierce partisan attacks and bestowed upon him a compliment that would later define his own outlook: "The man [is] not of any party, but of the whole nation."

Two weeks after his son George's birth, John Quincy Adams received notification from the outgoing secretary of state, John Marshall, that his father, unwilling to grant Jefferson power over his son's fate, had recalled him as one of the last acts of his presidency. On July 12, 1801, the day after Adams's thirty-fourth birthday, he and his family left Prussia. Seven years after embarking on his first mission to the Netherlands, Adams was returning to Philadelphia with solid diplomatic accomplishments, an English-born wife, and a son. The

Federalist Party was out of power, his father had been out of office exactly six months, and Adams himself was now adrift as well.

After his return to America from Prussia in September, John Quincy Adams confronted a momentous question: Should he risk the uncertainties of a political career, or should he re-embark on a legal career that might make him rich but unhappy? At thirty-four, he no longer was a young prodigy. His financial situation was shaky. His brother Charles, a sad alcoholic who had died in his squalid New York rooms in November 1800, had lost several thousand dollars that Adams had entrusted to him in reckless real estate speculations, recommended by their sister Nabby's rakish husband, Colonel William Stephens Smith.

It was clear that Adams's diplomatic career, as much a product of the goodwill of George Washington and his father as of Adams's considerable diplomatic skills, was at an end, at least for as long as Thomas Jefferson occupied the White House. While accompanying Louisa to Washington to visit her postmaster father and her sisters, he had dined with the president. It was, Adams observed, "a chilling affair." With a wife and young son to support, Adams had to somehow earn a living.

As long as there have been "literary men," their prized objective has been a position that earns adequate income but that grants time to write. Public life, Adams reasoned—and he was thinking of the Massachusetts legislature—would accomplish both ends, with the added benefit of giving him visibility that could aid his literary career. But Adams was torn over whether he could serve the public while remaining independent of partisan politics. He confided his divided mind to his diary: "I feel a strong temptation and have great provocation to plunge into political controversy," while acknowledging that partisanship was a basic element of political life. "A politician in the country must be the man of a party. I would fain be the man of my whole country."

Adams would change his mind about serving in the legislature, but these last words—nearly identical to his father's attitude during the storm over his decision to negotiate with France—would serve as his lodestar throughout his long life. He later called it "the principle by which my whole public life has been governed from that day to this."

Elected to the State Senate in April, Adams served without distinction during the Massachusetts legislative sessions that spring and in January 1803. "I was not able either to effect much good, or to prevent much evil." He did manage to display his independent streak, however, and startled his Federalist Party colleagues two days after taking his seat by proposing that Republicans be given proportional representation on the Governor's Council. Fairness required it, he said, but the Federalists buried the idealistic plan.

Needing money, Adams ran for Congress in the fall of 1802—and lost to the Republican incumbent, Dr. William Eustis, by just fifty-nine votes, 1,899–1,840. Then, in March 1803, he was chosen by the state legislature to fill one of Massachusetts's two vacant U.S. Senate seats; former Secretary of State Timothy Pickering was selected for the other. Pickering, a "High Federalist" who had helped defeat John Adams in 1800, made no effort to cooperate with his son.

The Adamses reached Washington on October 20, 1803, just hours after the Senate approved the Louisiana Purchase by a 24–7 vote. All the New England Federalists, including Pickering, voted against it. Adams, however, wholeheartedly supported the purchase of the 828,000 square miles between the Mississippi River and the Rocky Mountains, believing it was a spectacular bargain at $15 million and would keep Napoleon Bonaparte out of North America. Federalists feared the expansion of national power that they believed would come at New England's expense. Adams an-

gered his colleagues by voting for the bonds to complete the purchase. "The Hon. John Quincy Adams will certainly be denounced and excommunicated by his own party," predicted the Republican Worcester *Aegis*. Yet he confounded critics who said he had gone over to the Jefferson administration by opposing bills extending federal authority over the new territory, invoking the principle that it would amount to taxation without representation. He further baffled Federalists by siding with them against the Jefferson administration's impeachment of Supreme Court Justice Samuel Chase and its attempts to buy West Florida and to shrink the Navy.

But Adams's consonance with Federalists on these questions only masked widening cracks in their relationship; at heart, neither Adams nor the Federalists respected one another. Wrote Boston banker Stephen Higginson: "Like a kite without a Tail, he [Adams] will be violent and constant in his attempts to rise . . . and will pitch to one side and the other, as the popular Currents may happen to strike . . ." For his part, Adams regarded the Federalist Party as "a carcase [*sic*] seven years in its grave."

Even more than her husband, Louisa welcomed the move to Washington. In 1805, Louisa was thirty years old with two sons—George, born in 1800, and John, in 1803—to show for seven pregnancies. She was lively and smart, played the pianoforte and harp, wrote and recited poetry, spoke French fluently, and liked to sing, dance, pun, and tell fortunes. Chilly Boston and its Puritan ways had seemed alien to her, whereas Washington, where her father and sisters lived, was warmer and felt like home. Louisa's brother-in-law, Walter Hellens, a prosperous tobacco speculator, invited the Adamses to stay in his large home near Georgetown. After the death of Louisa's father, the generous Hellens also took in Louisa's mother and her younger children.

Every day Adams walked from the Hellens home near Georgetown to the Capitol and back, a five-mile round trip that he made

in all weather and that gave him time to think. Because Adams was new to the Senate, his official duties at first utterly consumed him. But he and Louisa dined out often—with Secretary of State James Madison, with the French and British ministers, and sometimes at the President's House with Thomas Jefferson, whose initial chill toward the Adamses had dissipated. "He tells large stories," wrote Adams, clearly fascinated by him. At one dinner, the president claimed to have learned Spanish "with the help of a Don Quixote lent him by Mr. Cabot, and a grammar, in the course of a passage to Europe, on which he was but nineteen days at sea." At another dinner, with Vice President Aaron Burr and Navy Secretary Robert Smith in company, Jefferson claimed to have seen "Fahrenheit's thermometer" record readings of twenty below zero in Paris for six weeks straight, although it was never that cold when Jefferson was there. "He knows better than all this; but he loves to excite wonder," observed Adams. Louisa, however, despised the president, who had removed her father from his District of Columbia postmaster job after defeating her father-in-law. "Everything about him was aristocratic except his person, which was ungainly, ugly and common."

Latter-day Puritan that he was, Adams could never measure up to the high standards that he set for himself; he could only strive every hour of every day for moral and intellectual perfection and to fulfill what for him was a grave civic duty. Each generation, he believed, must do its utmost for the next generation, as payment of its debt to the preceding generation. A day when he did not perform a good deed was a wasted day. He passed on this severe philosophy to his sons: "You should each of you consider yourself as placed here *to act a part*—That is to have some single great end or object to accomplish, towards which all the views and the labours of your existence should steadily be directed."

Chronically dissatisfied with his speaking performances in the Senate, he wrote after an acrimonious debate on a minor bill, "I

was, as I always am, *miserably defective* . . . ” Following an hour-long speech, he declared that his “defects of elocution are incurable, and amidst so many better speakers, when the debates are to be reported, I never speak without mortification.” It was thus ironic that Harvard chose Adams in 1805 as its first Boylston Professor of Rhetoric and Oratory, a chair created by a distant relative’s bequest. Yet Adams found one encouraging sign in his otherwise dismal public speaking efforts: “When my feelings are wound up to a high tone, elocution pours itself along with unusual rapidity, and I have passages which would not shame a good speaker. . . .”

In 1805, Adams broke yet again with his fellow New England Federalists, whom he believed were plotting secession. The “Essex Junto,” as these Federalists were called, were alarmed by the Jefferson administration’s purchase of Louisiana from France and by its friendly relations with Napoleon. Encouraged by Nova Scotia’s governor general in their belief—patently wrong—that Jefferson was clandestinely cooperating with Napoleon in a plan to take over Canada and revolutionize America, the “Essex men” became convinced that only England and her navy could stop the purported conspiracy. Many Essex men were the same High Federalists who had turned on Adams’s father in 1799 when he negotiated with France and ended the Quasi-War. Adams became convinced that they, with Massachusetts Senator Timothy Pickering as their ringleader, were prepared, if necessary, to secede and form a Northern Confederacy friendly to England. As the Essex men stood in violent opposition to Adams’s closely held belief that “the whole continent on [*sic*] North America appears to be destined by Divine Providence to be peopled by one nation,” Adams ceased to cooperate politically with them, becoming, as he later described it, “free from the shackles of dependence upon any party.” Yet, he was also well aware by the end of 1805 that he was paying a price for his independence: “My political prospects continue declining.”

The Federalists grumblingly tolerated Adams's uncooperativeness until the summer of 1807, when the British warship HMS *Leopard* attacked the U.S. frigate *Chesapeake* just ten miles off Cape Henry, Virginia. Across the country, the old hatred toward England was rekindled; rallies and town meetings were held everywhere. Making matters worse, British warships anchored inside the Virginia Capes and fired at passing U.S. vessels. President Jefferson closed all U.S. ports to British ships, as war fever raged throughout the nation.

Adams, who was teaching rhetoric at Harvard when the attack occurred, urged Boston Federalists to hold a special town meeting to protest the British action, but they did not. Disgustedly observing that the Federalist inaction was motivated by a reprehensible "private interest" in preserving the lucrative Anglo–New England trade, Adams committed the unpardonable political sin of attending a Republican mass meeting at the Massachusetts State House. He then compounded his transgression by serving as the lone Federalist on a committee formed to write protest resolutions. Although Adams later attended a hastily scheduled Federalist rally at Faneuil Hall—with the Essex men staying away—and chaired its resolutions committee, the damage had been done. "J. Phillips told me I should have my head taken off for apostasy by the federalists," Adams wrote on July 11, his fortieth birthday. "My sense of duty shall never yield to the pleasure of a party."

Adams's affiliation with the Federalists had been hanging by only a slender thread, and it now snapped under the strain of his wholehearted support in December 1807 of Jefferson's Embargo Act, which interdicted all trade with all foreign nations, though it was really aimed at punishing England. The Embargo was fiercely opposed by Federalists and throughout New England, as the region was heavily dependent on European commerce. Adams served with four Republicans on the Senate committee that drafted and pushed through the Embargo. Timothy Pickering, his Massachusetts colleague, voted against it. "This measure will cost

you and me our seats," Adams predicted to a fellow committee member, "but private interest must not be put in opposition to public good."

Adams was now a pariah—despised by Federalists, not altogether trusted by Republicans—and he knew even as he labored to push through legislation implementing the embargo that his political career was doomed. "My situation here at this moment is singular and critical," he wrote to his father. "I find myself charged with the duty of originating and conducting measures of the highest interest. I am made a leader without followers."

John Adams, who had proscribed his own defeat in 1800 by alienating the very Federalists who now condemned his son, was unshakably in his son's corner. "Your situation you think critical. I think it is clear, plain, and obvious. You are supported by no party. You have too honest a heart, too independent a mind and too brilliant talents to be sincerely and confidentially treated by any man who is under the influence of party feelings," he wrote to his son. While his course was "the path of justice," he advised John Quincy to return to his professorship and his law practice. "Devote yourself to your profession, and the education of your children."

John Quincy Adams unmistakably showed where his sympathies lay on January 23, 1808, when he attended the Republican Congressional Caucus in Philadelphia. The caucus chose Secretary of State James Madison to be its presidential candidate in the fall. Adams's presence deepened the Federalists' hostility toward him; a Federalist editor described him as "one of those amphibious politicians who lives on both land and water, and occasionally resorts to each, but who finally settles down in the mud." For the first time, but not the last, hate mail came to Adams's desk. "Lucifer, son of the Morning," read a letter signed by "A Federalist," "how hast thou fallen! . . . Oh, Adams, remember who thou art. . . . Awake, arouse in time." Even Abigail thought her son had gone too far in attending the caucus, which "staggered my belief"—to which her

son tartly replied, "I could wish to please my country, I could wish to please my parents—but my duty I *must* do."

Adams's abrupt departure from the Senate, occurring with lightning speed months before his term was to end, stunned even him. His father had warned him in January, "Your fate is decided. . . . In the next Congress . . . you will be numbered among the dead." After the fall 1808 election, it was a foregone conclusion that the Massachusetts legislature would send another Federalist to the Senate in Adams's place for the congressional session beginning in March 1809. But on June 5, 1808, the legislature decided to further display its displeasure with Adams by prematurely choosing Adams's successor, James Lloyd Jr., a former Harvard classmate, on a close, 269–240 vote, with Republicans supporting Adams. The legislature then instructed Adams and Pickering to introduce in the U.S. Senate several anti-embargo resolutions adopted by the Massachusetts Senate.

In his letter of resignation dated June 8, Adams wrote that he could not support the Massachusetts resolutions because they required "a sort of opposition to the national administration in which I cannot consistently with my principles concur." Republicans immediately urged him to run as a Republican for the House seat in his congressional district, but Adams declined, as it would have meant running against his friend and kinsman Josiah Quincy. A month later, on his forty-first birthday, Adams wrote, "In the course of the last year I have been called by my duties as a citizen and man to act and to suffer more than at any former period of my life."