

# \*AMERICAN STATESMEN

*Edited by*

**JOHN T. MORSE, JR.**

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# American Statesmen

EDITED BY

JOHN T. MORSE, JR.

**American Statesmen**

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**JOHN JAY**

BY

**GEORGE PELLEW**



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## PREFACE.

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THE public life of John Jay was so active and varied that it is almost impossible to compress the essential facts into small compass without losing much of their interest and suggestiveness. Moreover, he was by disposition so reticent and unimpulsive, so completely self-controlled, that there is scarcely any material for constructing a history of his inner private life. He was singularly free from those faults which, trivial or serious, attract men's love by exciting their sympathy or pity. Conscientious, upright, just, and wise, John Jay, like Washington, survives in the popular imagination as an abstract type of propriety; and his fair fame has been a conspicuous mark for all who are offended by hearing an Aristides always called the Just, or who, from an *a priori* notion of history, believe that statesmen have always been as corrupt, civic

virtue as tainted, and politics as demoralizing as they are in our time. In this belief there is undoubtedly much truth,—but there are exceptions to most rules, or rather what is true of a generation in the average is never true of every individual comprised in it,—and a careful study confirms the contemporary opinion that the character of Jay was, unfortunately for mankind, exceptional.

Any life of John Jay must, of course, be based on the two volumes of his *Life and Letters* by his son, Judge William Jay; but an undue sense of the sanctity of domestic life prevented then the publication of anything not clearly of a public, almost of an official, nature. Subsequently, as the *Works and Letters* appeared of Washington, John Adams, Madison, Jefferson, Fisher Ames, and the other Revolutionary patriots, and the gleanings of Sparks and others from the government papers, more light was thrown on the motives and movements of the time, and Jay's life was rewritten by Flanders, who dispelled, almost for the first time, the odium, begotten by partisanship of ignorance,

that so long assailed the memory of the early Federalists. Certain popular prejudices still survived from the days when blind devotion to France, a veritable "love frenzy," was a test of party fealty, and these prejudices obscured any clear view of the peace negotiations of 1782. Sparks, editing official documents, interjected with misleading positiveness a note that Jay's suspicions of France were unfounded, — and this suggestion, itself unfounded, has until recently been followed implicitly by historians, even by Mr. Bancroft. A hundred years after the event, papers from the French archives published by De Circourt, the correspondence between Vergennes and Luzerne, Fitzherbert and Fox, Oswald and Shelburne, in the "Stevens MSS." and the revelations in Fitzmaurice's "Life of Shelburne," enabled the Honorable John Jay to prove the absolute correctness of his grandfather's convictions, and the consequent necessity of the course of action he adopted. This new information has not yet been incorporated into any life of Jay.

Within the last year the third volume has



been published of Doniol's "La participation de la France dans l'établissement de l'indépendance des Etats-Unis," which contains the official documents relating to the treaty of Aranjuez, elucidating with extreme fullness the relations between the courts of Paris and Madrid in the critical years of 1778, 1779. The "Jay MSS.," from which a selection is now preparing for publication, and an elaborate digest, with quotations, of the "Stevens MSS.," have also been studied with minute care; and to these sources, and to the constant valuable suggestions and criticisms of my uncle, the Honorable John Jay, is due whatever of new or original may be found here.

GEORGE PELLEW.

NEW YORK, *March 1*, 1890.

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