

*Prof Demison
with the kindest regards
T. C. Pitkin*

March 28, 1886.

MEMOIR
OF
TIMOTHY PITKIN:

BY
REV. THOMAS C. PITKIN.



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TIMOTHY PITKIN

TIMOTHY PITKIN, born at Farmington, Connecticut, on the 21st of January, 1766, was the son of the Rev. Timothy Pitkin, Pastor of the Congregational Church in that town, and grandson of the Hon. William Pitkin, who was Governor of the Colony from 1766 to 1769. His mother, Temperance Clap, was daughter of the Rev. Thomas Clap, President, or, as then styled, Rector of Yale College. He was in direct descent from William Pitkin, founder of the family in this country, who came from London, England, and settled in Hartford, Connecticut, in 1657.

The family, in the first three generations, held many offices of trust. The first William Pitkin, made King's Attorney for the Colony in 1664, represented Hartford from 1675 to 1690, except during the period of Major Andros's usurpation; was member of the Colonial Council from 1690 till his death; became Treasurer of the Colony in 1676, and the same year was appointed, with Major Talcott, to negotiate a peace with the Narragansetts, and other Indian tribes. On the arrival of Governor Dongan at New York, in 1683, he was one of the deputies to settle the boundaries between the two Colonies; again, in 1693, when the Governor of New York claimed command of the militia of New England, and Governor Winthrop was despatched to England to lay the case before the King, Mr. Pitkin was selected to make terms with the Governor (Fletcher) respecting the militia till the King's pleasure

should be further ascertained. For many years he represented Connecticut at the meeting of Commissioners of the Colonies to devise means against their common enemies.

The second William Pitkin, son of the foregoing, born 1664, was for twenty-six consecutive years one of the Council of the Colony; was one of the Commission to receive the Earl of Bellomont on his arrival in New York; was one of the Council of War in 1707; was Judge of the County Court, and also Probate Judge, from 1702 to 1711; was made Judge of the Court of Assistants in 1703, and upon the establishment of the Superior Court in 1711 was appointed Judge, and in 1713 Chief-Justice of this Court. His son, William Pitkin, born April 30, 1694, represented the town of Hartford in the General Assembly from 1728 to 1734, was Speaker of the House of Representatives from 1732 to 1734, when he was chosen Assistant. He presided as Judge of the County Court from 1735 to 1752, was made Judge of the Superior Court in 1741, and Chief-Justice, and also Deputy-Governor, in 1754. In this year, while Lieutenant-Governor, he was appointed to meet Commissioners from other Colonies at Albany, to form a plan of union among the Colonies, and was one of a committee of six, Benjamin Franklin being chairman, to prepare such a plan. The plan of this committee, though not adopted, was the germ of the old Articles of Confederation, and of the Constitution of the United States. He was chosen Governor in 1766, in the discharge of which office he died October 1, 1769.

Timothy Pitkin, son of the foregoing, born in 1727, after graduating at Yale College, studied theology, and became pastor of the Congregational Society in Farmington, which office he held till his death in 1812. He was one of the members of the Corporation of Yale College from 1777 to 1804. His son, the subject of this memoir, received the rudiments of his education in his native town. The only

books then in use in the district schools were the Bible, Dilworth's Spelling-Book, and the New England Primer, but his teacher, who was in advance of his time, introduced Lowth's English Grammar. He prepared for Yale College under his father and his brother-in-law, the Rev. Nathan Perkins, of West Hartford, was admitted in 1781, and was graduated with the highest honors of his class. President Stiles, in a letter of introduction addressed to "Governor Jefferson, Secretary of State, Philadelphia," thus describes him in 1792: "There are some young characters so ingenious and inquisitive, and promising to rise into future figure in the political world, as to become worthy of the favor and patronage of those who have already arrived at the summit of human greatness in society, and who take pleasure in cherishing those who may in time, like themselves, ascend to the superior improvements in political life. Of this number is Timothy Pitkin, Esq., a son of one of the Fellows of this College, and grandson of the late President Clap, whose genius and literary abilities he inherits. Educated at this College, he became one of its most excellent scholars in the classics and the sciences, especially mathematics and natural philosophy and astronomy. Impelled by an ardent thirst for literature and by assiduous application, he has added to these a good knowledge of the belles lettres and history. He is a most promising, worthy young character, designed for the career of civil and political life. He is continually imbibing wisdom from observing human life and manners, and the spirit and genius of government. Should you condescend to honor him with a little literary notice, you would cherish an ingenious mind which in time may do honor to his patrons and to his country." During his college course Mr. Pitkin calculated and projected all the eclipses for each year up to 1800, and among these was the famous annular eclipse of the sun in 1790. He had afterwards the satisfaction of learning from actual observation that it had been calcu-

lated with entire accuracy. He determined at an early period upon the profession of law, and after spending one year as an instructor of Latin and Greek at the academy at Plainfield, Connecticut, he put himself under the instruction of Oliver Ellsworth, Esq., of Windsor, in the winter of 1786-87, and afterwards under that of Major Judd, of Farmington. He was admitted to the bar in Hartford County in 1788. Mr. Ellsworth was distinguished as a statesman as well as a jurist; he had been a member of Congress during the great struggle for Independence, and from him Mr. Pitkin received that bias towards political action which influenced him through life. From him, also, he learned some of the secret political movements of that time, and particularly that in the early period of this struggle the Court of France encouraged the Americans to persevere, by furnishing them with military stores and money through its secret agent Beaumarchais, under the fictitious name of Hortales & Co. He availed himself of this information afterwards, when he was in Congress, in resisting what is known as the Beaumarchais claim. In 1790 he was chosen a representative from Farmington to the General Assembly of Connecticut, and from this time, being then twenty-four years old, he was fairly launched upon political life, representing, with few intermissions, his native town till the year 1805. During the latter part of this period he was several times Speaker of the House.

In 1805 he was elected one of the representatives in Congress, and continued in that capacity every year until 1819, when, in consequence of a change in the politics of the State, he and his colleagues were superseded. He was in Washington during the last four years of Jefferson's administration, the eight years of Madison's, and two years of that of Monroe. During this period he made himself conversant with the political transactions of the American government in relation to the non-importation

law, the embargo, and non-intercourse systems, and the war against Great Britain which followed. He made it his business to collect public documents and state papers, and, with pen in hand, he made constant memoranda of passing events, especially of the confidential communications made to the House of Representatives by the Executive. As war was declared with closed doors, the opponents of the measure, of whom Mr. Pitkin was one, had no opportunity in debate of presenting to their constituents the reasons for their opposition, and they resolved, therefore, to address them directly on the subject. The Hon. Josiah Quincy prepared the draft of this address, but at his request Mr. Pitkin furnished that part of it which treated of the commerce which was allowed us by the French government, and whether it was worth a war in order to secure it, and whether it could be secured by war. This part was accordingly inserted in the address.

During the years 1816 and 1817 Mr. Pitkin published the first and second edition of the "Commercial Statistics of the United States." Of the second edition two hundred and fifty copies were taken by Congress for the use of the Government. After leaving Congress Mr. Pitkin was engaged in his professional pursuits, and in preparing a Political and Civil History of the United States from 1763 to 1797, or the close of the administration of Washington. This history was published in two volumes in 1828. In 1835 he published a third and enlarged edition of his Statistics, including some account of the banks and manufactures of the country. From the time of his leaving Congress he was annually chosen to the Connecticut Legislature from Farmington until 1830, when he was elected a Senator from District No. 3, established under an amendment of the Constitution. He was a member of the Convention which framed the new Constitution of the State. From 1830 he declined all public business, and soon after relinquishing his professional pursuits he devoted his time

to a careful revision of his private papers and public documents, and in reviewing the writings and correspondence of Washington, Jefferson, Jay, and others, together with the diplomatic correspondence of the United States. In addition to this he prepared sketches of some of the political transactions during the administrations of the elder Adams, of Jefferson, and Madison. These sketches, which are in the form of letters to his sons, and are in fact a continuation of his Political and Civil History of the United States, have not been published.

Though retired from active life, he retained his interest in passing political events, and wrote occasional articles for the North American and American Quarterly Reviews. He was much excited by a statement that appeared in the "American Gallery of Portraits," reflecting on the life and character of his grandfather. The writer of a sketch of Jonathan Trumbull in the above-mentioned work had ventured the assertion that Trumbull had superseded Pitkin because the latter had grown old and timid, and had failed to meet the requirements of the times in resisting the Stamp Act. It is a sufficient answer to the statement that Governor Pitkin died in office; but Mr. Pitkin, entering with zeal into the defence of his grandfather, showed that Governor Pitkin owed his office as governor to his resistance of the Stamp Act. The act was passed in 1765, when Fitch was governor, Pitkin lieutenant-governor, and Trumbull a member of the Council of the State. Fitch and certain of the Council thought it their duty to take the oath required; but Pitkin, with certain others, including Trumbull, refused, and actually left the Council Chamber when the oath was taken by Fitch and those who agreed with him. At the next election, in 1766, Pitkin was chosen governor in place of Fitch, and Trumbull lieutenant-governor. At the death of Governor Pitkin in 1769, Trumbull succeeded him as Governor of Connecticut.

Mr. Thurlow Weed, in a letter published in the "New York Tribune," August 31, 1878, writes as follows: "In 1835, sitting on the after deck of a New Haven steamboat, I found myself near an old gentleman with whom I entered into conversation. It required but a few minutes to show that I had made the acquaintance of a gentleman of more than ordinary acquirements and experience. Our conversation was interesting and protracted. When the subject of slavery was introduced, the gentleman said that, regarding it as a most important and embarrassing as well as a most alarming question, he had devoted much time and thought to its consideration; adding that he had a plan, which, if it could be fairly presented by the President or through Congress to the people, would accomplish the gradual extinction of slavery. 'We have,' the gentleman proceeded, 'extinguished the national debt with the surplus proceeds of the public domain. That surplus, for which we have no further use, is rapidly increasing, so rapidly as to occasion uneasiness in Washington. The public domain will prove an enduring and inexhaustible source of national wealth; it belongs to the whole people, and seems to have been providentially reserved to effect a great and beneficial purpose. My plan is to ask the legislatures of border slave States to pass laws authorizing the purchase of one day's freedom in each week of all slaves, their value to have been appraised by a disinterested tribunal; that, two years after, another day's freedom should be purchased in like manner; and that each following two years the purchase should be repeated, until their full freedom should have been effected. Congress, meanwhile, should pass a law appropriating so much of the surplus of the public domain as the emancipation thus effected called for.' The gentleman believed that Delaware, Maryland, and probably Kentucky would promptly and cheerfully consent to sell their slaves at a fair valuation, and that Tennessee, Virginia, and North Carolina



would, ere long, follow ; and that, ultimately, the Government would be able to offer compensation liberal enough to tempt even the cotton States. While this process was going on, he proposed that the Federal government should further assist emancipation by establishing commercial relations with Hayti and St. Domingo, and in planting colonies in Africa, for the development of her gold dust, ivory, and other resources, offering aid and facilities to such freedmen as might choose to accept it. Another and most important advantage of this scheme was, that in its progress partially ransomed slaves would gradually learn the value and uses of freedom, so that after twelve years of training they would be better qualified to enter on their new life. . . . The gentleman who conceived this idea was Timothy Pitkin, one of the many distinguished sons of Connecticut, who rendered important service to the country during the first half of the present century. . . . His plan for emancipation was broadly statesmanlike. It was alike just, wise, and practical. I first mentioned it to Mr. Seward, whose warm approval confirmed my own impressions. In the course of my conversation with Mr. Pitkin, he suggested Mr. Clay as not only the best man to introduce the subject to Congress, but the one who, from his known sentiments and sympathies, would be most likely to think favorably of it. I availed myself of an early opportunity to submit Mr. Pitkin's plan to Mr. Clay, who expressed his regret that it had not been suggested before the idea of distributing the surplus fund among the States had taken such a strong hold of the public mind. I conversed with Mr. Webster, Senator Mangum of North Carolina, Governor Clark of Kentucky, and John M. Clayton of Delaware, each of whom, but for the reason assigned by Mr. Clay, would have given his earnest support to Mr. Pitkin's project. Governor Seward was so strongly impressed, that, but for the circumstance that he was drawn into an exciting conflict with the Governor of Virginia

upon the Fugitive Slave question, he would have made it the leading feature in his message to the Legislature of New York. The distribution of the surplus proceeds of the public domain, after a four years' struggle, was carried, in 1831, through Congress over General Jackson's veto. It took the form of a deposit to be repaid to the General Government, but no demand has ever been made for it. New York's quota alone would have purchased all the slaves in the State of Delaware and the District of Columbia. I assume, therefore, that if Timothy Pitkin had remained in Congress a few years longer, there would have been a peaceable solution of the slavery problem."

In 1801 Mr. Pitkin was married to Elizabeth Hubbard, daughter of the Rev. Bela Hubbard, D. D., who for more than forty years was Rector of Trinity Church, New Haven, Connecticut. He resided in his native town till the year 1840, when, giving up the cares of housekeeping, he divided his time between his daughter in Utica, New York, who was married to the Hon. Hiram Denio, for many years Judge of the Court of Appeals in the State of New York, and his son, the Rev. Thomas Clap Pitkin, D. D., at New Haven, who was associate-rector with the Rev. Harry Croswell, D. D., of the same church over which Dr. Hubbard had presided for so many years. He died at New Haven at his son's residence, December 18, 1847, and was buried from Trinity Church in that city, of which church he had been for some years a devout communicant. His religious opinions were pronounced and definite, but were held in a spirit of charity. Not long before his death he wrote as follows: "For several years past I have spent no inconsiderable portion of my time in the study of theology; and the more I have studied the Bible and the various commentaries upon it, the more am I convinced that it can be none other than the word of God, and that it is the only sure guide to happiness both here and hereafter."

In 1837 Mr. Pitkin, at a general meeting of the "Société Française de Statistique Universelle," held at the Hôtel de Ville in Paris, was awarded a medal of honor, with a letter from the President, Le Duc de Montmorenci, acknowledging his valuable contributions to Statistical Science, and soon after received from Le Comte de Bussy, the Secretary, a diploma, making him a corresponding member of the same. On the 25th of May, 1847, he was admitted an honorary member of the New England Historic Genealogical Society.

