III

1814—1824

Promoted Inspector of Cavalry—Marriage with Miss Bronson—Cessation of hostilities with Great Britain—Journey to England (1815)—Inauguration of President Munroe at Washington (1817)—Promoted Colonel of 14th Regt. N.Y. State Artillery—Committee of Inquiry into War Accounts.

ON my return to New York I found that the company of artillery in which I held a Lieutenant's commission had been organised into a battalion, and that I had been promoted to a Captaincy. In June following I was appointed Inspector of Cavalry of the State of New York, with the rank of Lieutenant-Colonel, and my commission was enclosed in a very flattering letter from Governor Tompkins, which I have preserved. During the summer we were kept on the alert by a report of an expedition being on foot in England with a view to attack the City of New York. Measures were, of course, taken to be prepared for such an event.

Our forts in the harbour were already fully garrisoned and armed, and we commenced the construction of a line of redoubts on Long Island extending from Gowan's Bay to the Wallabout. General Joseph G. Swift, of the United States Engineers, had charge of the work, and volunteer detachments of citizens performed the laborious portion at the rate of about 1,000 men a day. Religious and other associations turned out *en masse*, and I had frequent charge of working parties both on Long Island and in the construction of work at McGowan's Pass, near Yorkville. Commodore Decatur was assigned to the command of a body of about 2,000 Sea Fencibles, composed of masters, mates, and seamen, who were to have charge of the batteries on Long Island. The British troops did cross the Atlantic, under charge of General Rose and others; but, whatever might have been the original plan, they bent their course towards Baltimore and fought at Bladensburgh, sacked the city of Washington, and were finally repulsed at Fort McHenry.

In the month of September, 1814, we were again summoned into the field, and I, having in the meantime raised a company of 84 men, went into garrison duty at the West Battery in New York Harbour, under the chief command of General Armstrong, U.S.A.

Our term of service expired in December follow-

ing, and on its expiration I was united in marriage (December 27th) to my former schoolmate, Maria Bronson, with whom I passed a life of uninterrupted happiness for thirty-seven years.[1] Our wedding was solemnised at the house of my father-in-law, Isaac Bronson, No. 12, Park Place, and the only invited guests were Commodore and Mrs. Decatur, Colonel and Mrs. Loomis, the Rev. John M. Mason and his wife, and the Rev. Dr. John B. Romeyn (by whom the ceremony was performed) and his wife. The next day we left for Philadelphia and remained a fortnight at Mr. Benson's boarding-house in Chestnut Street, where, among others, we had as our fellow-boarders the celebrated John Randolph of Roanoke, and the Abbé Covrea de Serna, a savant of high repute and Minister from Portugal.

In the month of February following, the British sloop of war *Favorite* (Captain Maude) arrived with the news of a Treaty of Peace having been concluded at Ghent by the Commissioners from Great Britain and the United States. Both nations had become heartily tired of the contest and closed it without accomplishing any of the objects for which it was begun; and there is reason to believe that if

[1] The Family Bible of Isaac Bronson shows this marriage was on December 27, 1814, and that Maria Bronson was born August 18, 1793, consequently at her marriage she was twenty-one years and four months old.

the news of General Jackson's remarkable victory of January 8, 1815, had occurred in time to have been known in Europe, the English Commissioners would have hardly been willing to have closed the war under so crushing a defeat.

The effect of the termination of hostilities was to produce a great revolution in commerce and cause the failure of many houses on both sides of the Atlantic. We had, at that time, a large sum in the hands of our correspondents in London, Thomas Mullett & Co. (who had failed)—so large as to render it expedient to send a special agent to look after it, and I was deemed the most suitable person. Accordingly, I left my newly married wife and embarked in May, 1815, on board the ship *Mexico* (Captain Weeks), bound for Liverpool with an exceedingly agreeable set of passengers, numbering about twenty. Among them were our distinguished countrymen, Washington Irving, Mr. and Mrs. Thomas Otis and their two daughters, who afterwards married the two Jacobs Le Roy, Mr. and Mrs. William Porter, of New Orleans, and several British officers who had been serving against us during the war, including Captain Hickey, who commanded the *Atalanta* sloop of war in Long Island Sound, Colonel Sir William Williams of the 60th, covered with Peninsular scars and honours, Major Hancock, who repulsed our troops under General Wilkinson in their attack on La Cole Mill in

Canada, &c., and also a retired New York grocer, though an Englishman by birth, David N. Smith. Smith was the butt of Irving and the English officers, who played innumerable practical jokes upon their credulous countryman, too numerous indeed to mention. On our passage we fell in with the wreck of a ship on the banks of Newfoundland, which furnished the material for Irving's "Story of the Voyage" in the "Sketch Book."

We established a literary journal on board, of which I was appointed editor, or rather collator, and to which many of the passengers contributed, but especially Mr. Irving. I retained some of the articles, but gave them, on my return, to my old friend Johnny Lang, and I think some of them appeared in that ancient journal the *New York Gazette*, long since extinct.

After a very agreeable passage of some thirty days we arrived at Liverpool, and I took up my quarters at my ancient inn, the "Star and Garter," in Viaduct Street. I was detained in Liverpool several days to dispose of a considerable amount in gold, placed under my charge in New York, to provide for the payment of the bills protested by the bankrupt house in London. While engaged in this business we received intelligence of the Battle of Waterloo and the overthrow of Napoleon, an event which produced an important decline in the bullion market, and rendered my plan of selling

in Liverpool a fortunate one. Mr. Otis took his gold up to London and disposed of it at a much lower rate.

Having finished my business in Liverpool, I proceeded to London, where I was detained about three months in arranging for a new correspondent, during which time I made some considerable shipments on speculation to New York, which resulted very advantageously. In this I was greatly assisted by the late Samuel Williams, who was then an eminent merchant but subsequently became a bankrupt.

I embarked in September, 1815, at Liverpool on board the ship *London Trader* (Captain Butler), bound to Philadelphia. My principal inducement was to enjoy the society of my friend James McMurtree, of Philadelphia, the husband of my wife's dearest friend, who still lives to share the warm affection of my children. We had with us as fellow-passengers Mr. Peredsen, the Danish Minister to the United States; George Blight, just returning after an absence of many years in China, where he had accumulated a princely fortune; Mr. and Mrs. Joshua Gilpin, of Philadelphia (the parents of the eminent lawyer Henry D. Gilpin), with six of their children.

Our passage was long and boisterous, extending over sixty-three days, during which we encountered in the channel the Equinoctial gale which caused

so much devastation on both sides of the Atlantic in September, 1815. My anxiety about my beloved wife induced me to leave the ship while slowly ascending the Delaware; and, having landed at Chester by means of a row-boat, I proceeded by a private conveyance to Philadelphia, where I went to our old lodging at Mrs. Benson's, in Chestnut Street, and there heard that I had, about a month previously, become the happy father of my dear Maria, and that she and her mother were in good health. In a few hours I was able to take the mail coach for New York, and was again made happy in the society of my wife and child.

We spent that winter in the family of my father-in-law, but started housekeeping in the month of April in a cottage belonging to Mr. Nathaniel Prime at Hell Gate, where we had as near neighbours the families of Mr. Prime, Mr. John Jacob Astor, Mr. Gracie, and at a little distance those of Colonel Lewis Morris, General Ebenezer Stevens, and Colonel George Gibbs, with all of whom we maintained very cordial relations.

While we were residing there the dwelling-house of Mr. Astor took fire on a Sunday, when a large party had been invited to dinner, and before their arrival the house was a heap of ruins. The neighbours, aided by a detachment of United States troops from Fort Stevens, under Lieutenant De Russey, used every effort to save the furniture, and

succeeded in rescuing the dinner, then in process of cooking, and transferred it to my kitchen. In our parlour a table was spread for twenty-four guests, who soon began to arrive, and, of course, were surprised and alarmed at the accident. Among them was Charles Cotesworth Pinkney of South Carolina, Mr. and Mrs. George Hay of Virginia, General Winfield Scott, Colonel George Croghan, and, last but not least, Mr. Astor himself, who bore the loss with perfect good-humour, and who continued to cultivate our friendship during the rest of his life.

Our summer passed delightfully. We had frequent picnics on the various islands, as Colonel Gibbs owned a fine sail-boat, the *Laura*, and all our neighbours were ready to join in the expeditions. Colonel and Mrs. Morris, with their daughter Mary, afterwards Mrs. Wayne, joined in a visit to Newport, Boston, Northampton, &c., with my wife and myself. Colonel Morris had been *aide-de-camp* to General Sullivan during the Revolutionary War, and was stationed in the Eastern Division, so that we found many of his old friends living, and were a good deal *fêted*, meeting John Adams, Timothy Bigelow, Jonathan Mason, Joseph Cooledge, Commodore Hare, &c., all of whom showed us every civility and made a visit of some three weeks most agreeable. At Newport we met the venerable William Ellery, one of the signers of the Declaration of Independence.

On returning to the city for the winter I took possession of a new house, No. 45, Barclay Street, which my father had just arranged for his own residence, having given his house in Chambers Street to his sister, Mrs. Gallagher. Here our second child, Bronson, was born. In the spring (1816) I hired a house No. 39, Pearl Street, then and for some time afterwards a fashionable quarter for private residences. My son John was born in this house. During the following year (1817) I built my house, No. 54, Warren Street, where we resided many years.

In the month of March, 1817, I accompanied Governor D. D. Tompkins as his *aide* to Washington, where he was inaugurated as Vice-President, with James Monroe as President of the United States. On the evening previous to the inauguration I was invited to supper by Mr. Madison. The party consisted of Mr. and Mrs. Madison, Mr. and Mrs. Monroe, Commodore and Mrs. Decatur, Governor Tompkins, and myself, and many of the minutiæ of the inaugural ceremonies were then arranged.

These ceremonies took place on a platform erected in the open air on the east side of the square on Capitol Hill. In consequence of the destruction of the public building by the British troops in 1814, Congress at that time met in a brick building in the vicinity; and here I may

mention that twenty-five years after the perpetration of that act of vandalism it was my fortune to make the acquaintance in London of Sir Duncan McDougal, who had commanded the party which fired the President's house. He told me that he had been the guest of General Jackson at a dinner-party in the very room where twenty years previously that fire was kindled, an act which he did not pretend to justify, nor his own participation in it, except as acting in obedience to the orders of his superior officer.

I spent some time in Washington in the society of men of mark who have long since ceased to live and left no equals behind. Among them were Henry Clay, Daniel Webster, James Lloyd, William H. Crawford, Richard Rush, Major-General Brown (Commander-in-Chief), and General Macomb.

In 1817 I was promoted to the command of the 14th Regiment, New York State Artillery, as full Colonel, and afterwards, in 1819, accompanied Governor Tompkins, Commodore O. H. Perry (the hero of Lake Erie), and Colonel George Gibbs on the revenue cutter *Alert* (Captain Cahoone) to examine the different points which had claimed preference as sites for a national navy yard. Our first visit was to New London, where we made a little tour to Fort Griswold at Groton, the scene of the massacre of Colonel Ledyard and his little garrison in the Revolutionary struggle, and were

there introduced to the old lady whose patriotism induced her to doff her only flannel petticoat in order to supply cartridges to the exhausted garrison.

Thence we proceeded to Newport, where we were most hospitably received as guests by General William C. Gibbs, brother of the Colonel. From Newport we went to Bristol, and were very hospitably received by the Honourable James De Wolf, then a United States Senator from Rhode Island. At Providence the Vice-President was received by a Committee of the Legislature, then in session, and we were entertained at a public dinner.

From Providence we proceeded to Boston and took lodgings at the Exchange Hotel, kept by Mr. Barnum, afterwards of Baltimore, and were waited on by many of the most distinguished citizens of the place. Commodore Hull gave us a dinner at the navy yard at Charlestown and escorted us in an examination of the forts and harbour. We went to Quincy to pay our respects to the venerable John Adams, who was passing the evening of a well-spent life in that retired spot.

In the month of July I was appointed to receive the remains of General Montgomery, which were about to be removed from their place of interment at Quebec to the city of New York, and proceeded with a squadron of cavalry to Kingsbridge, where we met the party who had them in charge. They were that night placed in the care of my

regiment at the City Hall, and on the following day were deposited with great military pomp in the vault of St. Paul's Church.

During the same year I acted on an auditing committee with Thomas Morris (Marshal of the district) and John Q. Leake, cashier of the Bank of Niagara, to examine the account of Daniel D. Tompkins, Vice-President of the United States, who had been reported by Peter Hagner, Auditor of the Treasury, as a defaulter to the Government. The duty was a very laborious one, as we were obliged to wade through all his disbursements while commanding the Fifth Military Division in the war with England, and as he had been exceedingly negligent in the preservation of vouchers, we were obliged to look to collateral evidence to supply the deficiency. We arrived, however, at a perfect conviction of his innocence, and that so far from being a defaulter, he was really entitled to a balance of about $125,000. Our finding was disputed by the Government, and the case was tried before the United States District Judge, William P. Van Ness, when the verdict of a jury fully established our report, and the sum was eventually paid by the Government. The amount thus paid was placed under the direction of General Joseph G. Swift and myself as a committee to examine the private claims on Governor Tompkins, which we fully paid, principal and interest.

I spent a large portion of that winter at Albany in attending to some law business for my father, and there was associated with many distinguished men of the legal profession, such as Ambrose Spencer, Jonas Platt, Joseph C. Yates, John Woodworth, Judge James Kent, Chancellor Samuel Jones, Thomas Addis Emmet, Abraham Van Vechten, John V. Henry, John Wells, Elisha Williams, Martin Van Buren, Erastus Root, Josiah Ogden Hoffman, and many others of the same eminent rank in that profession.

From that period, for several successive years, I passed a quiet business life, interrupted only in 1820 and 1822 by the recurrence of yellow fever, which forced the commercial houses to seek refuge in Greenwich, a district of the city lying between Sixth Street and Sixteenth Street and between Broadway and the Hudson River. Our own counting-house was removed to a two-storey frame-house in Broadway, just below Houston Street, adjoining the present Metropolitan Hotel. However, in neither year did the disease extend much above the park, and in fact the city authorities adopted the plan of fencing it in, and it is remarkable that but few cases originated outside of the enclosure.

IV

1824—1843

Retirement from command of regiment—Reorganisation of Peru Iron Works—Elected Alderman of City of New York—Visitation of Asiatic Cholera (1832)—Elected President of the Morris Canal Company—Investment in Western farm lands—Journeys to Europe (1839 and 1841) on behalf of the North American Trust Company.

IN 1824 I retired from the command of the Fourteenth Regiment, receiving as a testimonial from my officers a banquet at Washington Hall and a pair of silver pitchers. I parted with my fellow-soldiers with sincere regret, having enjoyed their confidence and respect during a period of thirteen years as a commissioned officer and sixteen as a soldier, in which I had filled every grade, but I had claims of business and domestic duty seriously interfering with the charge of a regiment.

In the following year (1825) came the cotton panic, which brought so many commercial houses to the ground, and the consequences of which were felt to a greater or less extent throughout the country.

During this year my father withdrew from the firm and left the business with me, which was by no means my desire, as I had little taste for the hazards of commercial life. This and the succeeding summer were passed at a cottage hired from Colonel Gibbs, near Hurlgate, in the vicinity of our old neighbours.

In 1826 I was induced, from having taken, at the solicitation of my brother-in-law, Arthur Bronson, a large interest in the Peru Iron Works, of which he was president, and which were very badly managed by the Superintendent, Joshua Aiken, to consent to pass the winter there as resident director, and accordingly removed there with my wife and infant child,[1] leaving my four other children at school in the vicinity.

I soon dismissed the Superintendent and assumed the entire charge of the works, which were very successful while I remained there, but subsequently took a less favourable turn, which induced me and others to withdraw. I nevertheless continued altogether a year at Clintonville, in Clinton county, near Lake Champlain, and besides attending to the duties there, took an interest in the general prosperity of that region. I was several times a delegate to conventions, especially to the great convention in Albany early in 1827 (from which sprang the Harrisburg Convention), and in which I was asso-

[1] Agnes.

ciated with Ambrose Spencer, Samuel Young, Benjamin Knower, Jesse Buel, Peter Townsend, John Townsend, &c.

I declined, however, to act as a delegate to the Harrisburg Convention, as I had no political aspirations, and my domestic and business duties imperatively demanded the devotion of all my time. I therefore resumed my residence in the city of New York in the spring of 1828, and during that year relinquished the prosecution of any regular commercial business and turned my attention to real estate. My life was marked by no special event except the death of my father (which occurred in October, 1828), until 1831, when I was induced to enter the political field as candidate for the office of Assistant Alderman in the Ninth Ward, principally with the view of assisting my friend Henry Meigs, who had been ousted from the office of Justice of our City Courts for having decided that an act of the Common Council was unconstitutional. We were both elected and I was chosen by the Board of Assistants as the President, this being the first election under the new City Charter of 1830. The duties were, of course, onerous, as they consisted in organising the various departments created by that charter, the appointment of officers under it, &c., and not only were our days, but many nights, spent in these labours without any other compensation than a desire to promote the public welfare.

During that year the Fifteenth Ward was created out of the Ninth, and I was elected Alderman in the spring of 1832. The year 1832 brought great benefits to the City of New York, and that Common Council is entitled to a larger share of public gratitude than it ever received. By its acts the Croton water was introduced into the city, additional gas works authorised, street railways inaugurated, a uniform system of sewers perfected, lamps extended to Harlem, a systematic grade of the whole island planned and adopted under the examination of our eminent Street Commissioner, Benjamin Wright, and his able assistant, George B. Smith; while Union Square, Tompkins Square, and Stuyvesant Square, as well as other minor plots, were opened for ventilation and use; the so-called Stuyvesant meadows, embracing the whole eastern section of the city north of Third Street, east of First Avenue, were graded and regulated, and numerous other measures were projected and many completed, the benefits of which are reaped by the present generation. The Common Council of that day were men of intelligence, old citizens having no other object but the public interest in view. Would that selections for these offices were as carefully made in the present time of increased responsibility and necessity!

The Asiatic cholera made its first appearance in the City of New York in the month of July, 1832,

having crossed the Atlantic from Europe into Canada, and thence, following the lakes and canals, reached the city, to the great consternation of the inhabitants, and most of those having the means fled to places of greater security. As the aldermen of the city were *ex-officio* members of the Board of Health, our duties became onerous and dangerous in the extreme, although by the blessing of Providence we were all preserved, with the exception of one member, Alderman George E. Smith, of the Fourth Ward. He was one of fourteen victims (out of twenty-two persons) who died within four days after assisting at coroners' inquests, which I also attended.

It became necessary to remove a large number of persons from the infected districts, and wooden buildings were erected and others hired in the vicinity of Washington Square, which was then but sparsely settled. Hospitals were established, schoolhouses provided, and other duties assumed by the several members of the Board, not the least of which was to furnish support to the families of labourers and others thrown out of employment.

In the spring of 1833 I ceased to be a member of the Common Council, and shortly afterwards, on the death of the Hon. Cadwallader D. Colden, I was chosen to fill the office of President of the Morris Canal and Banking Company, whose affairs

were in a very embarrassed condition. This office I filled for two years, during which period I succeeded, with the aid of a most respectable Board of Directors, including Archibald McIntyre, Henry Yates, Thomas J. Oakley, Thomas E. Davis, and others, in extricating it from its difficulties, furnishing an ample supply of boats and extending the canal from Newark to Jersey City. In 1835 I retired from the presidency to give place to the Hon. Louis McLane, who had resigned the Treasury Department in General Jackson's Cabinet, and to whom this office was more of an object than to myself.

In the summer of that year (1835) I was induced by several of my co-directors to visit the then new States of Illinois, Michigan, and Wisconsin, to invest a considerable sum of money in the location of farming lands, which I succeeded in doing to their satisfaction and profit, and a portion of mine became subsequently the residence of my eldest son. For several years afterwards my time was occupied in attending to my landed interest in the City of New York and in the West.

In the year 1838 I became a director in the North American Trust and Banking Company, an institute founded on the General Banking Law, and which, had it been honestly and intelligently managed, would have proved a profitable and respectable concern. At its outset, however, the

officers induced the Board to take an enormous load of Western and Southern State stocks on speculation at high prices, and these, becoming depressed in consequence of the political difficulties with England, fell greatly in price and became difficult of sale. In this state of things it became necessary to depute a confidential agent to proceed to Europe to attend to the arrangements of the Company which had centred in London and was in a critical state.

I was solicited to assume this duty, and although by no means anxious to take charge of a complicated business; yet having, as well as my friends, a large pecuniary stake in the Company, I consented to go out, and in the month of April, 1839, accompanied by my wife and daughter, embarked in the steamer *Great Western* (Captain Hoskins) for Bristol. I proceeded immediately to London, which I made my headquarters for the next eighteen months, occasionally visiting Paris and other continental cities in the discharge of my duties as agent and attorney of the Company.

In the course of my residence it was my fortune to make the acquaintance of several remarkable persons, among whom I can enumerate in England Mr. Horsley Palmer, Joseph Hume, Daniel O'Connell, and others; in Paris, the Count d'Argout, President or Governor of the Bank of France; Aguado the celebrated banker; Achille

Fould, afterwards Minister of Finance under Napoleon III., with many others.

During this period I placed my daughter Agnes at school in Paris, while my daughter Caroline, who had preceded us in company with her Uncle Frederic on a trip to Europe, visited the Continent generally and as far north as Moscow. After her return to London in 1839, I went to Brussels with her mother and herself, on a visit to my friend Virgil Marcy, *Chargé d'Affaires* to Belgium, and from thence to Paris, where my wife and daughter joined Mr. M. Van Schaick and family, and made a trip of several months' duration into Italy and Germany, whence they returned in May, 1840, to Paris, and we all returned to London.

Mrs. Murray's health being indifferent, we went to Leamington, where she passed some time under the care of Dr. Jephson, celebrated for his success in cases of dyspepsia. While in that region we made excursions to Birmingham, Coventry, Warwick, Stratford-on-Avon, Kenilworth, &c., and thence to our old quarters in London. We left Liverpool on October 7, 1840, in the steamship *President* (afterwards lost at sea), Captain Keene, and reached New York on the 18th, finding our little flock all in good health.

It was not long, however, before the affairs of the North American Trust Company became so entangled as to require the attention of some per-

son in England, where they had an immense stake, and I yielded to the requests of the directors and took my passage in the sailing ship *Sheridan* (Captain De Peyster) for Liverpool, on January 29, 1841, accompanied by my wife and two sons, John and Washington. Among our fellow-passengers were William B. Astor, Professor Mersch of Germany, William Mun, British Consul at New Orleans, and others, all of whom proved agreeable company. We had a rough but speedy passage, and made the coast of Ireland in fourteen days, although three more were consumed in beating up the Channel.

On our passage, while in the longitude of the Western Islands, we witnessed one of those meteoric explosions that are occasionally observed in high and stormy latitudes. It burst with the noise of a small cannon over our mast head, and the lava or liquid fire descended the rigging and played along the deck. The men were nearly blinded by the blaze of light, and our second mate was stunned and struck to the deck, but whether by the meteor or his own fears I cannot say. Much anxiety was felt by many of the passengers lest a fatal shock might have been given to the vessel, but no harm followed.

I proceeded direct to London to attend to business, while my wife and sons made a circuit to Chatsworth and other places of note on their

way to the City. I passed several months in England and on the Continent, during which time, after much examination of the subject, I placed my son Washington at an Academy in Paris and my son John with the Liverpool branch of the eminent mercantile house of Frederic Huth & Co., of London.

I returned to New York in the month of August, accompanied by my wife, and renewed a more quiet life in our own house, finding the country, however, in a state of general financial embarrassment—State credit shaken, and every indication of a fresh commercial crisis—which lasted for several years. During this and the two following winters I passed much time at Washington, attending to several important measures in which I was interested both in Congress and before the Supreme Court, and with partial success.