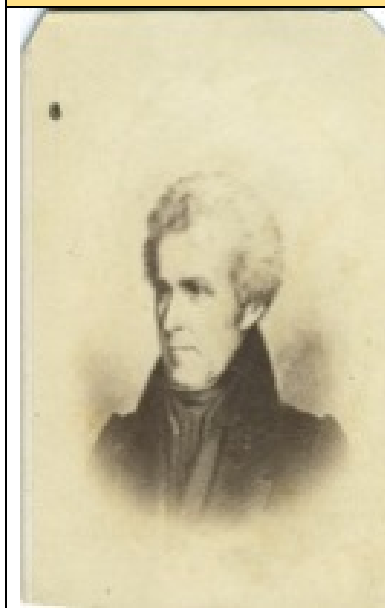


Chapter 77-- Open Hostility Greets Adams And Clay At Every Turn



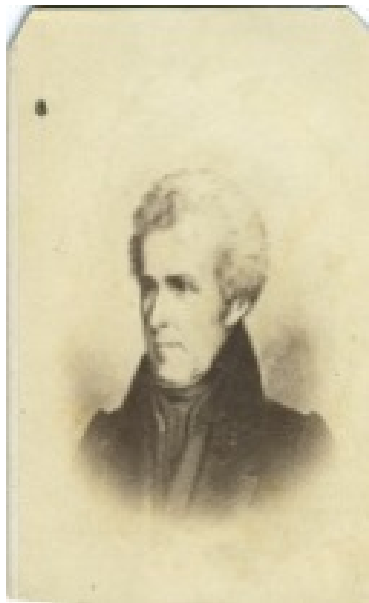
Dates:
1825-1826

Sections:

- Clay Fights Another Duel To Defend The Administration
- Jackson Accuses Adams Of Despotism

Time: April 25, 1825

Clay Fights Another Duel To Defend The Administration



Despite Adams's attempts to move past the fractious election, many Jackson supporters are in no mood to either forgive or forget. This soon leads to another episode of violence involving high government officials.

The impetus in this case is a speech made by the ever volatile Senator, John Randolph of Roanoke. In a six hour harangue on the floor, he accuses the administration of violating America's long-standing policy of "avoiding foreign entanglements" by wishing to participate in Bolivar's upcoming Panama conference

As his rhetoric becomes increasingly inflammatory, John C. Calhoun, serving as pro-tem of the Senate, allows him to rail on – a fact which Adams properly interprets as treachery from his own Vice-President.

Randolph ends with a personal attack on both Adams and Clay, whom he refers to as...

The Puritan and the Blackleg.

Andrew Jackson (1767-1845)

The Puritan, of course, is Adams, the stern Massachusetts man, and the Blackleg – a vicious disease which kills livestock, not to mention slang for a card-cheat – is Clay.

Randolph is well known to Clay. He is Thomas Jefferson's cousin, and his career in congress dates back to 1799. Along with Clay, he is a co-founder of the American Colonization Society in 1816, who will, if fact, free all of his slaves in his final will.

His political values are those of the extreme "states-rights" wing of the party, including a belief that federal laws can be "nullified" by a vote of local legislators. His fame rests on his general flamboyance, his powerful oratory, his capacity for consuming alcohol, and his shooting prowess.

The latter is no deterrent to Clay, who challenges him to a duel for his remarks on the floor. Attempts by the Secretary's friends to avoid the obvious risks are met with characteristic resistance.

No public station, no, not even life, is worth holding, if coupled with dishonor.

Randolph is astonished to receive the challenge, saying that it violates a senator's right to protected speech within the chamber. He informs his aides, but not Clay, that he has no intention of firing to harm should the duel actually take place.

Clay, however, plunges ahead, much as he had back in 1809 when called a "liar" in the Kentucky State House by Representative Humphrey Marshall. This affair ended with a total of four shots exchanged and both men wounded, Clay to the extent that further rounds were called off.

On April 25, 1825, rowboats carry the two combatants across the Potomac to their native Virginia, and the two men – a 51 year old United States Senator and the 49 year old Secretary of State – square off with pistols.

Randolph appears in a vast morning gown, which makes the outline of his body difficult to discern.

Tensions are high, and the hair-trigger on the Senator's gun causes a misfire, which Clay forgives.

Both men then let off their first shots, with neither hit. On the second round, Clay's shot nicks Randolph's outer garment, while Randolph fires aimlessly in the air – signaling the Secretary that the event is over.

In accord with tradition, the two men shake hands and exchange cards. Clay purportedly says that he is thankful not to have injured Randolph, and Randolph retorts that Clay now owes him a new coat. With that the two sail back across the river, with at least courteous relations restored.

Time: 1825-1826

Jackson Accuses Adams Of Despotism

Adams chooses his December 1825 message to Congress to announce the details of his agenda. It calls for the federal government to take a series of steps, both domestically and in foreign policy, to insure America's place as a first-rate power.

His internal plan includes upgrades in infrastructure (roads, bridges, canals), basic knowledge (a national university, naval academy, observatory), science (standardized weights and measures) and exploration (a new Department of the Interior). A protective tariff will help finance these along with any needed measures taken by a strong U.S. Bank.

Diplomatic proposals center on participation in a Pan-American conference hosted by Simon Bolivar (a “good neighbors” gesture) and continued efforts aimed at expanding the borders across the entire continent.

Accomplishing these goals will require an active federal government, which Adams announces in no uncertain terms.

The spirit of improvement is abroad upon the earth...Let us not be unmindful that liberty is power. While foreign nations...are advancing with gigantic strides...were we to slumber in indolence or...proclaim to the world that we are palsied by the will of our constituents, would it not doom ourselves to inferiority?

The President’s cabinet warns him in advance that his proposals will be met with resistance, and they are quickly proven right.

Traditional Democratic-Republicans, in the Jefferson mold, accuse Adams of abandoning the core principles of the party in favor of a return to Federalism -- grabbing power for the national government that has been reserved to the states in the 10th Amendment.

In their eyes, Clay’s “American Systems” is no more than a warmed over version of what Alexander Hamilton proposed a quarter century earlier.

Andrew Jackson weighs in, latching onto one unfortunate phrase in the speech, which seems to call upon the congress to override the will of their constituents.

When I view...the government, embraced in the recommendation of the late message, with the powers enumerated...together with the declaration that it would be criminal for the agents...to be palsied by the will of their constituents, I shudder for the consequence – if not checked by the voice of the people, it must end in consolidation & then in despotism.

From this moment forward, congressional resistance to both Adams and Clay gains momentum. The effect will be a three year stymie of the President’s proposed programs.