

# James Monroe as a Patriot

By JAMES A. EDGERTON.  
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Of the three presidents who died on the 4th of July Monroe was the only one who had not signed the Declaration. The other two, Jefferson and John Adams, were on the committee that drafted the document. Monroe was then a boy of only eighteen and that very year ran away from college to become a Revolutionary soldier.

In view of his conspicuous services for liberty, not only in the United States, but in all North and South America, the memory of James Monroe has been much neglected by his countrymen. He played the chief part in negotiating the Louisiana purchase and in obtaining Florida; he was instrumental in bringing about the war of 1812 and was the most conspicuous single factor, not excepting Madison, in prosecuting it to a successful conclusion. He brought about the re-



JAMES MONROE, PRESIDENT AND PATRIOT.

lease of Mme. Lafayette and Thomas Paine from French prisons. He protected the freedom of the South American republics from threatened attack by a European alliance and shielded the independence of these countries permanently by the famous Monroe doctrine. He so allayed party spirit that his administration was known as the "era of good feeling." He was an ardent patriot who stood for the rule of the people and the rights of man. His character was so pure that Jefferson said it "could be turned wrong side out without showing a blemish to the world."

Perhaps one reason Monroe has never received due credit is that he had no especial brilliancy either as writer or speaker. Mere fluency of words, however, does not constitute greatness. Monroe was great in the purity of his character, in his unerring instincts for siding with public good against private interest and in his intuitive perception of things that would grow to future importance. In their influence on posterity what events were more momentous than the Louisiana purchase and the promulgation of the Monroe doctrine?

The claim made by some shallow and ill-informed students that John Quincy Adams wrote the Monroe doctrine is the most arrant nonsense. This is on a par with the idea that Alexander Hamilton wrote Washington's farewell address. Neither claim is true. Both documents were inspired and probably were actually written by the men whose names they bear. President Monroe had long held the views expressed in the Monroe doctrine. They were essentially in keeping with his policy and his other acts. Those were too broad and far-reaching for John Quincy Adams. As a matter of fact, Adams is a much overrated man, while Monroe has been underrated.

How long mankind requires to appreciate its true benefactors! It took centuries for any great portion of the world to accept the Prince of Peace. It was many years before Greece had even a faint realization of the greatness of Socrates and Plato. Galileo waited for a later age to know his worth.

The day is coming and is not far distant when the group of early patriots who favored a people's government, including such men as Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Paine, Thomas Jefferson, James Madison, James Monroe, Patrick Henry, Samuel Adams and George Mason, will become the patron saints of a new school of liberty. Their concepts of a true republic are as vital today as they were a century ago. They are the ones who remained loyal to the spirit of the Declaration of Independence. The future, which is to be rededicated to the liberty for which they stood, will do justice to these men, just as society finally has done justice to its other benefactors, even though it was centuries after their death.

Monroe was one of the whitest and truest souls in the group. He never swerved in his fealty to the cause of the people. Whether in France or America, he stood unflinchingly for his principles. He opposed what he con-

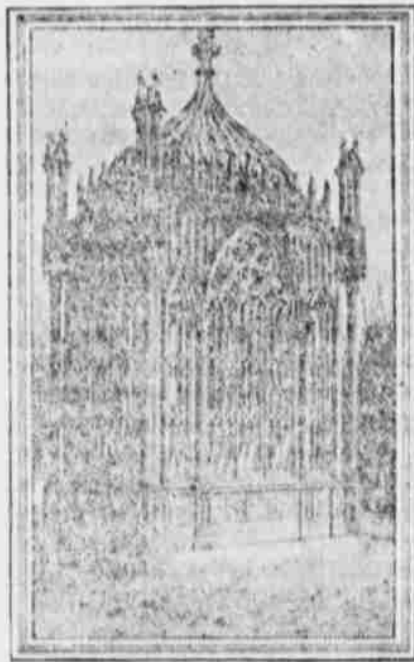
sidered Washington's reactionary and monarchial tendencies and even went against his best friend, Madison, when he thought Madison was being led too much in the direction of centralized government. Monroe joined Patrick Henry and George Mason in fighting the adoption of the constitution because he thought it opposed to the rights of the people. Though Virginia accepted the constitution, it turned down Madison, the champion of that instrument, and elected Monroe to the senate.

James Monroe was born in Westmoreland county, Va., April 28, 1758. He studied for a time in the College of William and Mary, but in 1776 became a lieutenant in a Virginia regiment in the Revolutionary war. He was in the battles of Harlem Heights and White Plains and especially distinguished himself in the battle of Trenton, where he was wounded. He then became a major on the staff of Lord Stirling, serving in the battles of Brandywine, Germantown and Monmouth. Because of the fact that he had acted as staff officer he was shut off from further promotion, and after failing to raise a regiment in Virginia he left the army. Thomas Jefferson was then governor of Virginia, and under him Monroe took up the study of law. During the invasion of Virginia, however, he had an active part in raising the militia and gained the title of lieutenant colonel. In 1782 he was elected to the Virginia legislature and was also appointed a member of the executive council.

In 1783 Monroe entered congress, where he advocated an extension of the powers of the body, which proved a first step toward the formation of the constitution. In 1785 he retired from congress and again was elected a member of the Virginia legislature, in which capacity in 1788 he opposed the constitution that was finally adopted on the ground that it was undemocratic and gave too much power to the courts, which were removed too far from the people. In 1790 he was elected to the United States senate and served till 1794, when he was made minister to France.

Monroe reached France while the French revolution was still in progress and was enthusiastic in his expressions of approval of the friends of liberty. This gave offense to Washington, and Monroe was recalled after two years. When he returned to this country he wrote a defense of his conduct, which received the enthusiastic approval of the people of Virginia, who in 1799 elected him governor of the state.

In 1803 President Jefferson sent Monroe to France to negotiate the Louisiana purchase, and after that was carried to a successful conclusion the president commissioned him minister to England. A short time later he went on a diplomatic errand to Spain, after which he returned to England and negotiated a treaty which was the occasion of another controversy and resulted in Monroe's recall. Again he defended his conduct in a pamphlet, and again Virginia showed her approval by electing him governor. He served in this office but a short time, however, when President Madison appointed him secretary of state. In this position he did much to precipitate the war with England, which he was largely instrumental in bring-



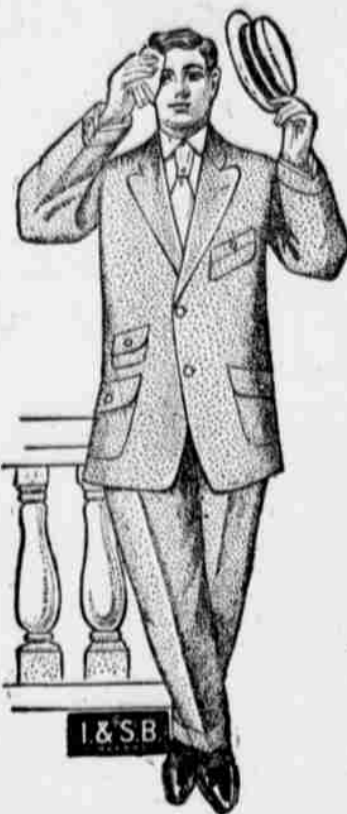
TOMB OF PRESIDENT JAMES MONROE AT RICHMOND, VA.

ing to a successful conclusion. In the darkest days he acted not only as secretary of state, but also as secretary of war, and in 1814 and 1815 the conduct of the campaigns rested largely on his shoulders.

Monroe's first overwhelming election to the presidency occurred in 1816, and in 1820 he was re-elected by practically a unanimous vote, receiving every vote in the electoral college but one. The chief events of his administration were the passage of the Missouri compromise, the promulgation of the Monroe doctrine and the visit of Lafayette to the United States.

In the happier days that are to come, when the bitterness of party prejudice gives way to the common sense and intelligence of independent voting, the death of partyism under President Monroe will be regarded as a forerunner of that better age. If human beings ever learn enough to enthrone permanent peace in the world then Monroe's "era of good feeling" will appear to have been a prophecy of what man can be when he recovers from his obsessions and insanities.

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