



Amos Kendall

AUTOBIOGRAPHY

OF

AMOS KENDALL.

EDITED BY HIS SON-IN-LAW,

WILLIAM STICKNEY.

NEW YORK
PETER SMITH
1949

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INTRODUCTION.

THE present work has been prepared in compliance with the wish of him whose career it undertakes to describe. In his life Mr. Kendall shunned personal notoriety, with a sensitiveness remarkable in one so accustomed to public station and contact with the world. He was widely known, as much so perhaps as any American of his time; but it was in his public capacity as an editor, as a government official, as a politician, as the promoter of a great material enterprise. Of his private life the outside world knew but little. What a husband he was, what a father, friend, and Christian, the thousands who honored his great powers and admired his achievements were almost wholly ignorant.

It is not the object of the present work to expose to public scrutiny his inner private life. Its purpose is simply to set forth the leading facts in his career, to exhibit his intense patriotism, which was indeed his ruling passion, and to make such revelations of his purely personal history as are essential to the completeness and symmetry of the narrative. The means to that end, the materials for the work, have been almost wholly furnished by his own hand, and this memoir, though edited by another, is, in fact as in name, an autobiography.

It is often said that the history of every human life, even the humblest, furnishes some instructive pages, and it was a recognition of this truth, and a consciousness that his own experience had been rich, far beyond the average, in lessons especially fitted for the guidance of American youth, that prompted his desire that this record should be made. That his estimate of the exemplary

value of his own career was just, it is believed the following pages will sufficiently prove. If they do not. — if there shall be found few instructive lessons, whose observance is a condition of our national welfare, in the life of Amos Kendall, — it may still be claimed that his was purely and distinctively an American life, and as such deserves careful study in these days when nationality is in danger of fading into a mere ideal sentiment.

The work of the editor in the preparation of this volume has been mainly that of selection and arrangement. The mere story of Mr. Kendall's career is, for the most part, told in his own words, — than which no words could tell it better. These writings represent and reflect with strict fidelity the nature of their author, and are themselves comprehensively and felicitously biographical.

The editor's chief difficulty has been in selecting from the great mass of Mr. Kendall's writings those best fitted for a place in the present work. This difficulty has been a serious one, and the necessity of confining the volume within reasonable limits has caused the omission of a large amount of matter which seemed, and still seems, essential to a satisfactory treatment of the subject. But it was necessary to draw the line somewhere, and this the editor has done according to his best judgment.

In offering this autobiography to the public, the editor has made no claim for it of literary merit or artistic and effective construction. Its preparation has been to him a labor of love, and if he has succeeded in giving a view not wholly unworthy and inadequate of the life and character of one whom it was his privilege to know intimately and love tenderly, — one of the very last of "the simple great ones gone," — he will consider his labor well bestowed, and his reward sufficient.

WM. STICKNEY.

WASHINGTON, D. C., February 1, 1872.

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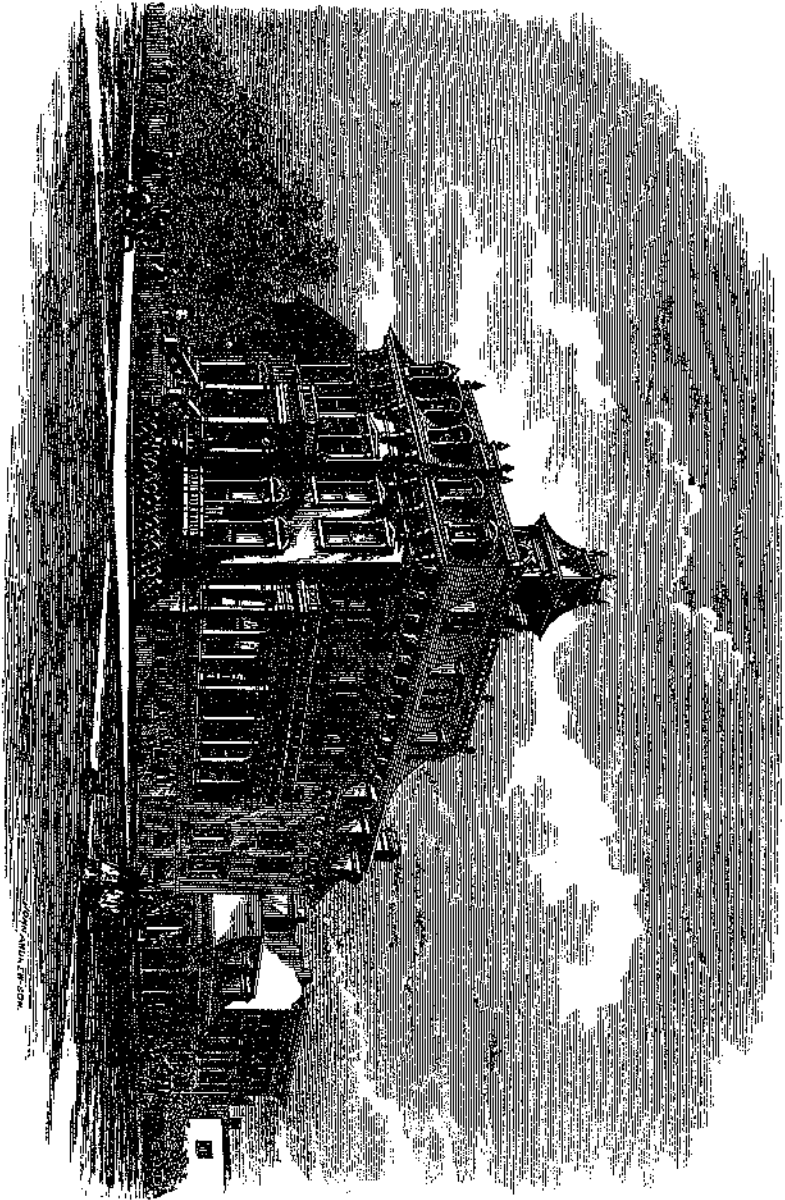
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RESIDENCE OF AMOS KENDALL, WASHINGTON, D. C.

W. H. RAY, PRINTER

AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF AMOS KENDALL.

CHAPTER I.

THE Kendall family is one of the oldest in New England. The traditions of the family represent that two brothers, Thomas and Francis Kendall, came from England about 1640, and settled in Woburn, Massachusetts. Thomas had no sons.

Francis Kendall, the progenitor of the family, had four sons, Francis, Thomas, Ralph, and Jacob, — all born in America.

Jacob, born in 1686, was twice married, and had nine sons, Jacob, Daniel, Joseph, and Hezekiah by his first wife, and John, Ebenezer, David, Nathan, and Abraham by his second wife.

John, Ebenezer, and Abraham moved to Dunstable about the year 1726. There John had five sons, John, Jacob, Temple, Edward, and Zebedee.

John the second had two sons, John and Zebedee.

Zebedee, the father of Amos, had nine sons, six of whom grew to manhood; namely, Zebedee, Samuel, George-Minot, Amos, John, and Timothy. All these were living in 1858, presenting an array of old men not common in the same brotherhood.

Amos Kendall was born on Sunday, the 16th day of August, 1789. From early boyhood he was habituated to hard work on his father's farm. The farm was composed of bog meadow, pine plains, and oak hills. The meadows yielded the coarser kinds of grasses intermixed with various ferns, cranberry-vines, and small bushes; but they also supplied most of the hay on which the cattle subsisted during the long New England winters. Through these meadows meandered a sluggish stream called Salmon Brook, stocked with various kinds of fish. The pine plains rested on a bed of gravel, and, except along the foot of the hills, were almost barren. From these, however, the bread of the family was for the

most part drawn. Next to the hills there were two four-acre fields cultivated alternately in corn and rye. The corn crop was always manured, and the rye was sown in the fall among the corn; so that these fields were manured alternately every other year. The plains between these fields and the meadows were generally used as sheep pastures, but once in five or six years they produced a very small crop of rye of excellent quality.

The oak hills were composed of clay soil, so full of rocks in many places as to preclude cultivation without removing them. With great labor small tracts were so far cleared as to become good upland meadow, furnishing excellent hay for horses and working oxen. These uplands supplied an abundance of stones, with which the whole farm, except the pine plains, was enclosed; the fences were of stone combined with posts and rails. The upland meadows were cultivated in potatoes or corn once in five or six years, but seldom in rye, on account of its inferior quality when produced on a clay soil. A patch of flax was generally a part of the annual crop, and this, with the wool from a small flock of sheep, manufactured and made up in the household, furnished almost the entire clothing of the family.

The rougher portions of the upland, much of which was never cultivated, furnished pasturage for the horses, oxen, and milch cows during the summer; but as much of the stock as was not used on the farm was generally driven in the spring to a pasture on Flat Mountain, in New Ipswich, N. H., twenty-five miles distant, whence it was brought back in the fall.

The father and mother of Amos Kendall were exemplary members of the Congregational Church, of which the former was a deacon. Grace before and thanks after meat, and morning and evening prayers, with the reading of a chapter in the Bible and the singing of a hymn on Sunday, accompanied by the bass-viol, played by their oldest son while he was at home, constituted the regular religious exercises of the family. The father and mother never failed to attend church on Sunday, except in case of sickness or when absent from home; and the entire family, one member only excepted, were required to maintain a like regularity in Sabbath observances. Except in special cases, all labor beyond the simplest preparation of food for man and beast and all recreation were strictly prohibited on Sunday. The evening was spent in learning and reciting the Westminster Catechism, in reading

religious books, and in practising sacred music. The whole family could sing, and when all were present, could carry all the four parts of ordinary tunes.

The family government was strict, and, so far as it bore upon their eldest children, severe. They were not only prohibited from dancing, playing cards, and all like amusements, but from going to places where they were practised. The consequence was, that the elder sons deceived their parents and indulged in those forbidden recreations clandestinely. But a change came over the father and mother before Amos grew up, and with him and the younger children advice and admonition took the place of prohibition.

The change which took place in the minds of this worthy pair with reference to domestic discipline is well illustrated by an example. When Amos was a little boy, a fiddle was an abomination to his father and mother. His eldest brother, who had quite a taste for music, having constructed a bass-viol or two, determined to try his hand upon a fiddle, and produced a very good instrument.

Not daring to bring it to the house, he kept it in a cooper's shop not far distant. His father, hunting there for something one day, mounted a bench, so that his head was raised above the beams of the shop, when his eyes fell upon the unlucky fiddle. He took it by the neck, and apostrophizing it, "*This is the first time I ever saw you,*" dashed it into the fireplace.

Being on a visit to his parents about thirty years afterwards, Amos Kendall went to meeting in Dunstable on a Sunday, and there sat his father in the deacon's seat beneath the pulpit, as in former times, and *there was a fiddle in the choir!*

The early education of Amos was in the free schools of Massachusetts and New Hampshire. The boundary line between these States ran through his father's farm, who paid a school tax in both States, and had the privilege of sending his children to school in both. The summer schools were taught by women, and were in general attended only by children who were not old enough to assist their parents in their daily labors. They were generally kept from two to three months in each summer. The winter schools were usually kept by men, and lasted from six weeks to two months in each year. They were open to children of all ages from infancy to manhood.

These schools were from one to two miles distant from Deacon Kendall's, and having five children, of whom Amos was the youngest, and one niece to be taught, he hired a female teacher one winter and established a school at home. Here Amos won his first distinction. He had just begun to read and spell, and had no lessons to learn beyond the spelling-book. But he spelled in a class with the other children, and the teacher having promised a book to the one who should keep longest at the head, the prize was awarded to him, the youngest competitor.

At school he was obedient and studious, excelling in all branches except penmanship, in which he seemed to feel little interest. He was particularly fond of arithmetic, and by means of sums set by his elder brothers, and worked out in evenings by the light of the kitchen fire, he became master of the fundamental rules before he was allowed to cipher at school. He had just begun to read when he heard his father promise his elder brother George, that if he would read the Bible through in one year, he would give him a new one. He asked his father whether he could have a new one on the same condition, and was answered in the affirmative. The prize was easily won.

It was the custom of Deacon Kendall to allow his boys about two hours' nooning in the summer. A large portion of this time and of the winter evenings Amos devoted to reading, while the other boys were at play. There was a small township library in Dunstable, in which his father held two shares, entitling him to take out a book on each share and retain it two months. The use of one of these shares he gave to Amos, who in a very few years had read nearly every book in the library. On one occasion he brought home the second volume of Morse's large Geography, when his father smilingly asked, "Do you expect to read that through in two months?" Receiving an affirmative answer, he said, "Well, if you do, I will give you a pistareen." This was a Spanish coin then in circulation, worth about twenty cents. The pistareen was earned and paid.

This early reading was, perhaps, better remembered than the reading of subsequent years, since almost every sentence of it presented some new idea to the impressible and expanding mind. The value of it, especially in relation to geography and history, was fully appreciated by him in subsequent stages of his education.

In the free schools Amos had but one competitor for pre-eminence in spelling. This was a little girl of about his own age, named Sally Wright. For two or three years the competition was very keen, though Sally took the lead. At spelling-matches, then quite common, she was always the first chosen, and Amos Kendall was the first on the other side. Owing, however, to the superior advantages possessed by the latter, he finally took the lead of his fair rival. In this competition there was not a particle of envy or ill-will; on the contrary, the boy admired little Sally Wright for her smartness, and thought that when they grew up he would ask her to be his wife. But the Fates otherwise ordered. Sally married a worthless man. It was perhaps thirty years before she and her youthful competitor and admirer again met. He was then casually passing her residence, which bore all the outward signs of poverty, when it occurred to him to call, for the double purpose of seeing her once more and ascertaining whether she would recognize him. He knocked and was told to come in. On entering he beheld Sally Wright sitting in a plain but cleanly room, with several children around her, all clad in coarse clothing, but as neat as a good mother's labor could make them. "Do you not know me?" said he. "No, sir," was her reply. "Do you not recollect the boy, Amos Kendall, who used to go to school with you?" She sprang from her chair, and seized his hand, as if he had been a long-lost brother. The last he heard of her she was a widow, living with a brother.

So sober and thoughtful was Amos when a little boy, that he was generally called "the Deacon." Though often praised for his scholarship, he was as diffident and bashful as any girl. This peculiarity was, no doubt, natural; but in after life he attributed it chiefly to a singular incident which occurred when he was a little boy.

Though Dunstable was more than thirty miles from the sea, tales of money buried in that region by pirates, particularly by one Captain Kidd, were current among the population, and generally credited. This money was supposed to be in iron pots under the special charge of the Devil, who, though he could not harm those who might dig for it, would employ all sorts of noises and terrifying apparitions to scare them away, and not succeeding, would turn the money into something else. In this shift, however, his infernal majesty might be baffled by laying upon the trans-

AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF AMOS KENDALL.

puted money a Bible and an open penknife, under the influence of which it would, in the course of a few days, resume its original character.

One of Amos's elder brothers was a full believer in these tales, and the boys of the neighborhood entered into a conspiracy to test his courage.

They filled two small iron pots with blacksmith's cinders and buried them under a large white pine-tree in the midst of a dense wood. One of the boys was then commissioned to notify the destined victim that money was buried in that spot, and propose that they two should go in the night and dig for it. Arrangements were made, and in the middle of a dark night, rendered darker by the surrounding forests, the boys repaired with lanterns and tools to the designated spot, and began operations. They had not proceeded far before strange noises were heard in the bushes around them: dogs barked, cats mewed, sheep bleated, cows lowed, and horses neighed. The diggers came to a big root of the white pine, which they began to cut away. The noises redoubled, accompanied by the blowing of trumpets and other alarming sounds. Under the big root they came upon a large black snake lying upon a flat stone, which the companion of young Kendall pretended to kill. At this stage the noises became terrific: dogs howled, cats yelled, cattle bellowed, women screamed, and bang, bang, went guns over their heads in the pine-tree and among the surrounding bushes. Though his companion pretended to be much terrified, the brave boy, who believed it all the work of the Devil, nothing daunted hauled out the black snake, and, turning up the stone on which it was deposited, came upon the eagerly sought treasure; but the Devil had transmuted the gold and the silver into common blacksmith's cinders. As this was not unexpected, the boys lugged the pots home and deposited them in young Kendall's chamber, placing upon the cinders in each a Bible and an open penknife. There Deacon Kendall found them a few days afterwards and pitched them out of the window.

This incident led Amos to conclude that his father's children were not so smart as the neighbors' boys, and, enhancing his natural diffidence, produced a bashfulness and reserve which became habitual and invincible. Only once during boyhood was it thoroughly overcome in the presence of strangers. On a public occasion a larger boy began to insult and abuse his next older

brother, when young Amos, highly excited, opened upon and soon silenced him. The lookers-on thereupon insisted upon the vanquished blackguard's "treating" Amos and his brother, which he did, — with rum-toddy and gingerbread.

The mind of Amos Kendall always had a mechanical turn. When a boy, he constructed in a rude way the machinery of little wind and water mills and put them in operation. He thought much on means of using the air as a regular motive power, but with no result. He invented, however, a pump, on a principle not in use in this country, and never, so far as he knew, put into operation. His father had a cider-press operated by two large wooden screws. It occurred to him that if the threads had a water-tight covering, and one end of the screw was immersed at a suitable angle in water, and then made to revolve in the right direction, the water must necessarily follow the groove and be discharged at the top. With a jackknife he cut a groove around a stick of pine wood, tied over it a sheepskin, which made it nearly water-tight, and, turning it with the hand, one end being immersed in water, found it to answer his expectations.

Years afterwards he learnt that it was an old invention attributed to Archimedes, and had long been in use in Holland for draining marshes. Yet the conception was as original with Amos Kendall as it was with the first inventor.

It was a part of the parental teaching in the Kendall family never wantonly to take the life of any creature, snakes excepted. Birds and beasts which destroyed the farmers' crops, or were valuable for food, or on account of their skins, were fair game for his boys. In the neighboring streams and meadows were minks and muskrats, which were trapped by them, and the skins sold to raise "spending-money." Many an autumn morning Amos left his bed before daylight, and, walking or running two or three miles, visited his traps, and got home before sunrise. The boys were also allowed to cultivate a small patch of tobacco, which they manufactured into "pigtail" and sold to the chewers in the neighborhood. From these two sources were derived nearly all the funds they were able to control.

The amusements of Deacon Kendall's boys, other than such as are common to all youngsters, were fishing, both with the rod and spear, and hunting on a small scale. Salmon Brook, which ran through their father's farm, was stocked with a great variety of

fish, though none of them were large. Fishing with the spear was chiefly practised at night. The boys had a skiff, constructed by the oldest brother, in the centre of which was raised a jack, composed of iron ribs, upon a standard four or five feet high. On this were piled pine-knots, which, being set on fire, produced a brilliant light. The pickerel sleep in still water near the surface, and by careful rowing they may be closely approached. It was a beautiful sight to see them lying motionless near the surface of the water; but it was cruel sport to strike them dead in that condition.

An incident occurred while the boys were fishing with the rod which made a deep impression on the mind of Amos. They were joined by some neighboring boys, who suggested that fishes' eyes were excellent bait. The experiment was tried, and several fish just caught having been ruthlessly deprived of their eyes, the sport proceeded with gratifying results. One of the boys put back into the stream a sunperch, yet in full life, both of whose eyes had thus been extracted. This method of providing bait was new to the young Kendalls, but when they gleefully described it to their father, he gave them an impressive lecture upon its cruelty, and painted so vividly the condition of the poor blind fish returned to its native element to starve, that throughout his long life Amos Kendall, whenever he thought of it, seemed to see the mutilated creature, as he saw it then, making its dark way through the water among the bulrushes of Salmon Brook. It was thoughtlessness, and not cruelty, which furnished the occasion for this useful lecture.

The following instance of the motherly affection of a mouse, witnessed by Amos Kendall, and the impression it made upon him, are not unworthy of record.

He was passing in the fall through his father's cornfield, when he came upon a bundle of cornstalks lying between two rows, which had been overlooked when the rest were removed. He raised it up, when a mouse ran out of a nest which she had made under it. He sprang forward to kill her, when she suddenly stopped and turned back. Struck with this singular movement, he paused to await the result. The mouse came up to him, appearing to be perfectly tame. He stooped and put down his hand to her, when she crept into it and up his arm in the most confiding manner. On examining the nest, he found it full of young ones. It was evident that maternal affection had conquered fear; and her

movements were so much like an appeal for mercy to her offspring, that young Kendall gently replaced the bundle of stalks upon the nest, and left her to raise her family in peace.

The day on which the Governor of Massachusetts was inaugurated was formerly known as "Lecture Day." It was a holiday for the farmers' boys, who spent it in fishing, hunting, or such other amusements as they might fancy. It was in the latter part of May, a season at which the birds had hatched their young or laid their eggs, and the boys of the neighborhood were accustomed to have a hunt on that day for blackbirds' eggs, for the birds themselves, for crows and other feathered game. A blackbird's egg counted one, a blackbird two, a crow's egg or a young crow five, an old crow ten, etc. A meeting was held and sides chosen some days before "Lecture Day," and the woods were scoured for crows' nests. If any were found containing young ones, these were generally taken home and fed until the day of the hunt, for no bird not killed on that day was to be counted. The day was chiefly spent in exploring the bog meadows along Salmon Brook for blackbirds' eggs, and at first quarts of eggs were collected. In the afternoon the parties all came in, and the side which exhibited the most game was the victor. The day's amusement was closed by *threshing eggs*. In this game an egg was placed on the ground, and the thresher, taking his stand about two rods distant, with a large switch in his hand, advanced, with his eyes shut, and made a blow at the egg. The only reward of victory in the hunt or the game was the pride of success.

These hunts were encouraged by the farmers of the neighborhood as means of diminishing the number of mischievous birds, and they were eminently successful.

To that end young Amos contributed in another way. There was a large stake by the side of a causeway through his father's meadow, upon the top of which he observed a blackbird almost always standing. He set a small steel trap upon the top of this stake, and at first caught nearly a dozen birds a day. The survivors seemed finally to understand that there was danger at the stake, and captures soon became unfrequent. One morning the trap was missing, and not a trace of it could be found. Some time in the day a flock of crows in the edge of the woods, a few hundred yards distant, attracted attention by angry screams and violent plunges among the bushes. It proved that a large owl was there,

with the lost trap hanging by the middle claw of one of his feet. He had carried it thus far, and being unable to alight in the trees, had fallen upon the ground. He could rise a few feet, but the weight of the trap dragged him down again. The owl was easily despatched, and thenceforward the trap was fastened.

One winter, when Amos was about fourteen years old, two or three neighboring men, after a deep snow, called at his father's to borrow tools for the purpose of digging out a fox which they had traced into a burrow in a neighboring wood. His brother George and himself accompanied them and witnessed the operation. After the next snow-storm they also went fox-hunting. Falling upon a track, they followed it to the burrow where the fox had sought shelter. With no great labor they opened it, and found therein two foxes, which they secured. Thus encouraged, they sallied out after the next storm, and soon caught a fox in the same way. They then took a wide circuit and came within a quarter of a mile from home, when they saw a fox at a distance wallowing through the snow, and gave chase. He, however, showed no disposition to burrow, but led them on a run about a mile and a half directly from home, when it becoming dark they gave up the pursuit. The snow was nearly knee-deep, and they were much heated and fatigued by the race. After stopping at a neighbor's and procuring a drink of cider they made towards home; but Amos complained of weariness in his limbs, which increased as he progressed, so that within half a mile of his father's house he gave out. He remembered having heard his grandfather speak of sleeping comfortably under the snow when out on a hunt, and proposed to his brother to cover him with the same bedding and go home for a horse. After attempting in vain to assist him to walk, his brother accordingly removed the snow with his feet, when Amos laid down on the ground, and, with the fox-skin over his face, was covered with several inches of snow. He fell asleep instantly and had a pleasant nap. Waking, he felt perfectly well, and thought he could walk home; but on getting up and making the attempt he found it impossible. The sinews of his legs seemed entirely unstrung, and he had no control over them. It was now night; but he was soon relieved by seeing his brother approaching through the darkness with a horse. Aided by his brother he mounted and rode home, but after his arrival could not walk without assistance. He felt entirely well, however, ate his supper