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# William Pitt Fessenden

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By *WILLIAM SALTER, D. D.*

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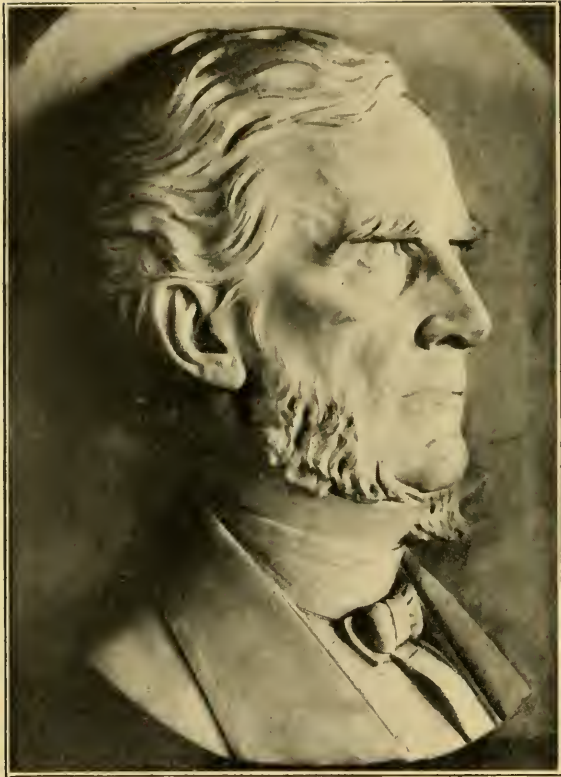
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WILLIAM PITT FESSENDEN

From a marble medallion by Larkin G. Meade, which was presented to the Historical Department of Iowa by Mrs. James W. Grimes.



## WILLIAM PITT FESSENDEN.

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BY WILLIAM SALTER, D. D.

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The Congress of the United States is the most important deliberative and lawmaking body in the world. It represents the American people more than the British Parliament or the German Parliament or the French Chamber of Deputies represent the people of their respective countries. No member of Congress holds his seat except by re-election, for more than two years in the case of Representatives, or for more than six years in the case of Senators. The American government is in the hands of the American people by frequent elections. It is a Democracy, a Referendum, such as no great nation ever had before. The administration of it depends upon the intelligence, the virtue, and the good sense of the people in the exercise of the elective franchise. If they are ignorant or corrupt, and elect incapable and dishonest men to office, they have only themselves to blame for a bad government.

Wise and good men in Congress are the palladium of the Nation, and the people's welfare. In the highest rank among such men was William Pitt Fessenden, and close beside him for ten years, in the most momentous period of our country's history, was James W. Grimes. They stood together, and gave the full measure of their strength to the life and credit and salvation of the Nation in the crisis of its fate. What Grant and Sherman were in the march of the army, Fessenden and Grimes were in the field of legislation. When the catastrophe was over, Mr. Grimes told Mr. Fessenden that he ought to write a history of that period. But death intervened. The work was subsequently undertaken by one of his sons, and now appears in the *Life and Public Services of William Pitt Fessenden*.\*

\**Life and Public Services of William Pitt Fessenden*, by his son Francis Fessenden, Brigadier General, Retired Major General, U. S. A. 2 vols.; pp. 374, 367. Houghton, Mifflin & Co.



Of the many accounts of that period none are so lucid and graphic as to what was done in the halls of Congress. President Lincoln and the army and navy were supported by taxes levied, money borrowed, and the appropriation of millions, all of which passed under the hands of Mr. Fessenden as chairman of the Senate Committee of Finance, or Secretary of the Treasury. Early in the war he saw the necessity of giving freedom to the slaves. He and Mr. Grimes were in advance of the Emancipation Proclamation of President Lincoln, and at last, after a long and severe struggle, crowned his work with the seal of the Constitution.

A graduate of Bowdoin College at the age of 17, and admitted to the practice of law at the age of 21, Fessenden early became a distinguished lawyer. He was twice chosen to the legislature of Maine. At the age of 34, he was elected to Congress, and served one term. In the prime of his powers, at the age of 48, he was elected to the United States Senate. The repeal of the Missouri Compromise and the crime against Kansas were then the questions at issue. He at once took part in their discussion in sharp debates with Senators Jefferson Davis and Stephen A. Douglas. Cass, and Butler of South Carolina, also interrupted him, only to be worsted. Mr. Sumner said that a champion of Freedom had come.

Mr. Fessenden was less than two years older than Mr. Davis. They were men of like stature and figure, tall and slender. Both were forcible speakers, high-strung, and prompt to resist attack, but Fessenden was superior in a lofty nature, in freedom from personal ambition, in knowledge of the Constitution and the laws of the history of the United States, and of the world. On one occasion Mr. Davis remarked that he attacked nobody, and did not suppose any one was afraid of him. Mr. Fessenden said that he was, which Mr. Davis took seriously, when Mr. Fessenden explained that he spoke only from an intellectual point of view, which caused laughter in the Senate.

Senator Douglas was also a forcible speaker, but coarse, overbearing, a master of sophistry, and on several occasions opprobrious towards Mr. Fessenden, who answered him indig-



nantly and severely. Later, speaking of great men, Mr. Douglas said, "Henry Clay was the most fascinating, Daniel Webster the most powerful orator, John C. Calhoun the logician of the Senate, William Pitt Fessenden the readiest and ablest debater." Many years later, Mr. Sumner said, that as a debater Mr. Fessenden was "without a superior, without a peer. Nobody could match him in immediate and incisive reply."

One of Mr. Fessenden's strongest speeches was in a debate with Jefferson Davis upon the admission of Kansas, under the Lecompton Constitution, into the Union. President Buchanan recommended it, and a bill to that effect passed the Senate, but was lost in the House. Mr. Fessenden denounced the whole thing as a fraud, infinitely dishonorable to all concerned. He said that "the South had lost all claim to honor, and the Democratic North never had any."

When South Carolina opened fire upon Fort Sumter, Mr. Douglas saw that his efforts to propitiate the slave-interest were in vain. He at once turned front, and advised his friends to sink party ties, and support President Lincoln; soon afterwards he died.

Mr. Fessenden also measured swords with Senator Seward upon a bill brought in by Jefferson Davis to increase the appropriation for the army to eight million dollars, under pretense of fear from the Mormons, but really to uphold slavery in Kansas. Mr. Seward was the only Republican Senator who voted for it. "He is perfectly befuddled, but thinks himself wiser than any of us," said Mr. Fessenden.

In a home letter of this period, Mr. Fessenden wrote, "If I leave my sons nothing else, I shall bequeath them the legacy of eternal warfare upon the infamous slave system. It is to be a contest of years, and I will not live to see the end. If you do not witness its extinction, you will, I trust, live to see its gradual and sure decay—the fatal arrow in its side."

In the discussion, February, 1859, upon a Pacific railroad, Mr. Fessenden gave it as his opinion that it should be built by the government, and its control remain in the hands of Congress. Later, he said, "It should be a national work. National

*bedevilment*

works should not be put into the power of corporations, for it was getting to be the case that the country was to be controlled by great corporations, and legislation controlled by them." He did not vote for the Union Pacific Railroad bill, but secured the proviso that Congress should preserve control of the road, with power to legislate for it in the future.

Upon his election to a second term in the Senate by a unanimous vote of the Maine legislature, he wrote to his son: "I am exceedingly gratified at the good feeling and unanimity. I am doubly bound to serve the people honestly, and to justify their confidence. I can say with truth that I have never sought a nomination to office. I have not the shame of recollection that I owe my success to unworthy means. For many years I struggled on in a hopeless minority, content, as far as I was concerned, to remain there, retaining a clear conscience and my own self-respect."

Speaking of the difference which the circumstances and employments of men made in their opinions, Mr. Fessenden, from his own observation of human nature, said: "In cities, politics are necessarily influenced by trade. The mercantile class, as a class, is always mercenary and unreliable in public affairs. Sometimes one rises above the selfishness begotten by his calling, and in emergencies and crises is capable of great sacrifices. Still, as a general rule, men engaged in Southern trade cannot look beyond the present to the future. I never calculate on such men; but the heart of New England is sound." He added "I would rather belong to a small and free State than be subject to an oligarchy so overbearing and tyrannical as the slave-power. What I have left of life is at the service of my country. I hope the storm will blow over, and that these Southern fools will not attempt to pull down the fabric which, if it falls, will surely bury them in its ruins."

The first term of Mr. Grimes in the Senate was coeval with Mr. Fessenden's second term. They early came into a warm friendship, which continued to the end of their days. They were fond of taking walks and strolls together all over Washington, and when absent from the city, they kept in friendly correspondence with each other to the last. Of different tem-

peraments, and Mr. Fessenden the senior in age by ten years, they mixed and mingled as if kith and kin, while each was independent, self-reliant, and acted from his own convictions. Both were frank and outspoken, Mr. Fessenden with his impassioned nature, and Mr. Grimes with his cool and deliberate mind, and his temper under command.

Both realized the determined and desperate character of the rebellion at its outbreak, and that the issue of life or death was before the Nation. Throughout the war, Mr. Fessenden gave his sleepless vigilance to provide the sinews of war for its enormous expenses, especially to have every soldier paid in honest money. Mr. Grimes was equally vigilant to promote the efficiency of the navy, and bring about the great achievements of Farragut and Porter. Three of Mr. Fessenden's sons served in the army; one was mortally wounded in 1862 at Bull Run; another was severely wounded at Shiloh, and again in the Banks' Expedition. To this son we owe the memoirs of his father, written with filial devotion in his crippled condition, with much care and pains.

Mr. Fessenden, May 7, 1861, wrote from his home in Portland to Mr. Grimes: "Frank desires to take part in the war, but I desire that he shall first re-establish his health, and then, if he desires it, I cannot refuse him, dear as he is. I think our Southern friends will soon lay aside all hopes of Northern aid. Our people are all but unanimous, though there are some who sympathize with the traitors. With love to Mrs. Grimes, yours always."

He wrote, June 1, 1861: "It has struck me that our friends at Washington had on a pretty good head of steam. At present, however, they are behind the popular feeling. It is to be presumed that what they have done thus far is to be submitted to Congress, and confirmation requested. There may be some doubts whether Congress will not limit the government, but after all in the present excited state of public feeling there is more danger of error upon the other side. I confess that were I in Lincoln's place a small scruple would not detain me from doing what was needful. And it is safer to excuse the exercise of powers not warranted, in an extraordinary emergency, than to grant a power easily perverted."

At the special session of Congress, July 4, 1861, called by the President, Mr. Fessenden and Mr. Grimes were in their seats in the Senate. Early in the session, Mr. Grimes proposed a diversion of the men and money employed in the Coast Survey to the prosecution of the war. Mr. Fessenden objected. He spoke of the importance of the Coast Survey, and said: "We do not know how long the war will continue. It may end in the course of a few months." Mr. Fessenden also objected to some other measures proposed by Mr. Grimes, whereupon the latter said: "My experience has taught me that it is futile to war against the Chairman of the Committee on Finance. His eloquence, and will, and persistency are such that it is useless for me to press any amendment against his wishes. I therefor withdraw the proposition, hoping to receive his support some other time."

Portland, September 26, 1861.

My dear Grimes:

I was glad to get your letter, though it was a continual growl from beginning to end. Of course I could expect nothing else.

As to this unfortunate Fremont affair, I am with you entirely, so far as the proclamation is concerned and wrote Fremont to that effect, as soon as I saw the President's foolish letter. The people here, as with you, are all for the proclamation, and the President has lost ground amazingly. It was a weak and unjustifiable concession to the Union men of the border States, who cannot take care of themselves, and are haunted by the Slavery demon night and day. I fear however that this is but a trifling matter. A friend in St. Louis, who liked and thought highly of Fremont, writes me that he fears all is going wrong, that Fremont has surrounded himself with a set of corrupt broken-down speculators from California, and is playing the very devil with the public money, etc.—but I will hope for the best, for, if obliged to lose faith in Fremont I shall not know where to look.

I am patriot enough, my friend, to rejoice most heartily that our money affairs are so much better than I expected. It would grieve me to lessen your opinion of your own financial sagacity in any way, but you will permit me to say that, as yet, there has not been time enough to consider the experiment as fairly tried. You must not be too hard on Chase and me, for you will reflect that we never had that peculiar experience in raising the wind which is only acquired by Iowa Banking. \* \* \*

And so our sweet friend ——— is going to Europe. Joy go with her the world over. May God bless her, and make her as happy

as she deserves to be. If I could believe that any effort would have made me the possessor of such a jewel, and that I was in any degree worthy to possess it, such an opportunity lost would be a lifelong regret. It would be folly in me, however, to think of such a woman, and selfishness even to wish that youth and loveliness should be sacrificed to the solace of my few remaining years. I have resolutely schooled myself to look disagreeable truths squarely in the face. And none is more obvious than that, at my age, I have no right to look for woman's love, or any sentiment beyond respect and esteem. I must therefore go on my way alone. Excuse me for making a serious matter of your joke.

Why did you not come? Believe me when I say that no man would be more welcome to my house and heart. I am living here quietly, taking little part in what is going on around me, impatient until I get the news of the day, and somewhat hard pressed to dispose of time after I get it. My oldest son who has a fine business, a sweet wife, and two little boys, has undertaken to raise a company of sharpshooters, and my only hope is that he will fail. Sam annoys me every day on the same subject, and I expect to wake some morning and find him gone.

I do so long to hear something creditable to our army. When is it to be? If this state of things shall continue much longer I shall join the grumblers. Politics however is a great captain, and I try hard to keep cool.

Portland, Nov. 10, 1861.

These are delightful times, are they not? What a lovely report that was of old Thomas (Lorenzo), and what excellent good sense and taste was displayed in publishing it. We shall have to investigate the matter. I think that even Floyd would have shrunk from anything so utterly shameless. These people must give some sounder reasons than I have seen yet, or their treatment of Fremont will damn them. Who and what are at the bottom of it? In the very best view I can take of it, our affairs on the Potomac have been, but a succession of blunders. I reserve my *public* opinion until I have learned more.

Mr. Chase commended Edwin M. Stanton to Mr. Fessenden as a man of great ability and entitled to the highest confidence, and in January, 1862, Mr. Fessenden in the Senate gave his warm approval to the confirmation of Edwin M. Stanton "as just the man for Secretary of War."

Portland, Sept. 25, 1862.

Dear Grimes:

My youngest son was mortally wounded at Bull Run. He lived about thirty-six hours, manifesting through all, I am told, as in the



battle, the most heroic calmness and self-possession, uttering no complaint, but dying like a man and a soldier. The loss has affected me most severely, and the fact that two others of my sons are exposed to the same fate renders me unquiet and unhappy—but I have nothing but patience and submission.

I presume you are not more pleased than I am with the present condition of our affairs. McClellan as usual lost the golden opportunity on Thursday. I see nothing before us but a renewal of last winter's campaign. You have read Pope's report. I have no doubt of its truth, nor has anybody who was in Washington at the time. The President knows it to be true. And yet he gave McClellan the command of the army, and at his request restored to their places Porter, Franklin and Griffin, through fear of his influence with the army. The Proclamation is, however, to make up for everything with you radicals. I, being less sanguine, do not expect as much from it as many others, but pray that it may produce all the anticipated good.

Portland, Oct. 19, 1862.

I am glad that you have done so well in Iowa. The folly of the President has lost Ohio and Indiana, and I am surprised that its effects have not been still more calamitous. Wade, I am thinking, will close his senatorial career with this Congress. He has some faults, but I shall be sorry to lose so true a man.\*

Private advices from Washington are to the effect that McClellan is to be removed from command of the army, and Halleck is to take his place. We should gain little by that in my judgment. I am for Hooker. He has shown more brains than any of them.

I shall go to the old place if I can get my old room, and hope you will do the like. Having become accustomed to you, I am content to tolerate your infirmities for the good that is in you.

Upon the meeting of Congress in December, 1862, the Senate took into consideration the recent disasters of the army. Mr. Fessenden, Mr. Grimes, and other Senators regarded the course of Mr. Seward and his influence over the President as in a measure responsible. Mr. Seward had opposed the employment of negro soldiers. While our enemies were being supported by the labor of their slaves, he had informed the governments of Europe in a circular to our foreign ministers that slavery had nothing to do with the rebellion. A committee of Senators held a conference with the President, and recommended a removal of Mr. Seward from the Cabinet. Mr.

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\* Mr. Fessenden was mistaken about Ohio; Mr. Wade was re-elected to the Senate.



Seward sent his resignation to the President and Mr. Fessenden advised its acceptance. But the matter became complicated by Mr. Chase sending in his resignation. Mr. Fessenden felt that Mr. Chase could not be spared from the Treasury. Holding up Mr. Chase's resignation, Mr. Lincoln said, "Now I have the biggest half of the hog, I shall accept neither."

In 1863, Mr. Seward changed front, and supported the employment of negro soldiers, and the Emancipation Proclamation of that year.

In the fall of 1863, Mr. Grimes visited Mr. Fessenden, and in a letter to Mrs. Grimes said:

Portland, Nov. 24, 1863.

I reached Mr. Fessenden's without accident, and am now at his house. I wanted to leave to-day for Boston, but he restrained me, and I shall not go until tomorrow. I shall be in Boston until Friday, when Mr. Fessenden is to meet me, and we shall go to Washington together. I judge Portland to be one of the pleasantest cities in the United States. Fessenden has a grand old place; house and everything in it appearing to be not less than fifty years old and upward. He expressed his regret that you were not with me. All of his family, including sons, brother-in-law, etc., seemed to be pleased to see me, and all inquired kindly for you, as if they knew you. In Fessenden's chamber I found four framed portraits, his wife, Samuel, who is also dead, and my wife and my wife's husband.

Upon Mr. Fessenden's appointment to succeed Mr. Chase as Secretary of the Treasury, Mr. Grimes wrote him a letter of exceeding pathos and tenderness, to which Mr. Fessenden replied with his characteristic sympathy and warm affection. The correspondence is in the *Life of James W. Grimes*.\* pp. 263-66. An additional part of Mr. Fessenden's letter is as follows:

Washington, July 24, 1864.

I suppose you, like everybody else, were disgusted with the disgraceful manner in which the recent raid upon Washington was met. Where the fault was I am not able to say. Perhaps in the stupidity of entrusting important commands to such men as Sigel and Wallace. Yet we blunder on. Only worse blunders on the part of our adversaries will save us—and there is our chance.)

Mr. Fessenden served eight months as Secretary of the Treasury. He took the office at the earnest solicitation of the

\**Life of James W. Grimes*, by William Salter. N. Y., Appleton & Co., 1876.

President. It was in the gloomiest period of the war, the movement of our armies in doubt, the national credit at its lowest ebb. There was a debt of nearly two billion dollars; an inflated paper currency, irredeemable, of six hundred millions; daily requisitions upon the treasury for three millions; and gold at 225. Mr. Fessenden said:

I consented to take the Treasury not only with extreme reluctance, but with much pain, having little strength for labor of any kind, but I could not resist the appeals to try to save our sinking credit—upon which the success of our cause depended. It was unfortunate for me that just at that moment I was believed to possess the confidence of the country to an extent which imposed the effort upon me. Under this state of things and in the hour of peril, I did not dare to refuse, whatever might be the consequences to myself. It may result in the destruction of all the reputation I have gained. Be it so—I owe that to my country as well as my life. My days are devoted to hard work, and I find many things to harass and perplex me. I could, however, do well enough but for the constant trouble in my head. But I do not feel like complaining when I think of Frank's amputated limb, or the many thousands of glorious fellows who bear wounds and suffering patiently and cheerfully because their country demands the sacrifice. All I can do and bear is trifling in comparison.

By vigor and skill in the management of the Treasury putting an end to any further issue of irredeemable paper, Mr. Fessenden restored confidence in the national credit. He addressed the people directly in a spirited appeal, told them the situation frankly, and called for their support. He said, "It is your war. The brave men who are fighting our battles must be fed and clothed, and the munitions of war be furnished, or the war must endure defeat and disgrace." The people responded in large subscriptions, and the country was saved from bankruptcy. The famous work of Hamilton in providing for the Revolutionary war debt was surpassed in providing for the greater debt incurred by the war of the Rebellion.

In a letter to the President, February 6, 1865, resigning his office, to take effect March 3d, Mr. Fessenden said:

I desire gratefully to acknowledge the kindness and consideration with which you have invariably treated me, and to assure you that

in retiring I carry with me great and increased respect for your personal character, and for the ability which has marked your administration of the government at a period requiring the most devoted patriotism and the highest intellectual and moral qualities for a place so exalted as yours.

Allow me, also, to congratulate you upon the greatly improved aspect of our national affairs, to which and to the auspicious result of our prolonged struggle for national life, now, as I believe, so near at hand, no one can claim to have so largely contributed as the Chief Magistrate of this great people.

That your future administration may be crowned with entire success, and that you may at its close take with you into retirement the well-deserved gratitude of the people you have well and faithfully ruled, is the most fervent wish of

Your friend and obt. servant,

W. P. FESSENDEN.

To The President.

Upon Mr. Fessenden's election to a third term in the Senate, he expressed in a letter to the Maine legislature his gratification at this renewed proof of their confidence, and said: "The administration of President Lincoln has been marked by extraordinary events. It has formed a memorable epoch in history. The struggle has enchained the attention of the world—the result must seriously affect the welfare of ages to come. Let it be our boast that in the emergency Maine was true to the cause of civil liberty, that at no moment did her people falter or faint, that no sacrifice could shake her purpose or weaken her faith."

Upon the death of President Lincoln, Mr. Fessenden deemed it the duty of the new President to call Congress together in view of the extraordinary condition of things. The new President thought otherwise. He took the government of the rebel States into his own hands, without authority of law. He had promised to be the Moses of the late slaves, but abandoned them to be despoiled by their late masters.

Upon the assembling of Congress in December, 1865, Mr. Fessenden labored in personal interviews with the President to convince him of the authority of Congress over the rebel States. Their armies were captured or surrendered, their president a prisoner, their slaves emancipated, their people under martial law, with no government of their own. At the

outset of the rebellion, they withdrew their Senators and representatives from Congress. The questions now pending were as to their readmission into the Union, and the terms upon which they might again send Senators and representatives to Congress. Mr. Fessenden said it was an infamy in President Buchanan to allow the rebellion to gain force and form, but it would be more infamous to allow the rebel States to come back, send Senators and representatives to Congress, without guaranteeing the safety of the Nation, without assenting to the abolition of slavery, without repudiating the rebel debt, or without giving the rights of freemen to their former slaves.

A joint committee of both Houses on "Reconstruction" was appointed, to inquire into the condition of the Confederate States, and report upon these questions. Mr. Fessenden was made chairman of the Committee. Mr. Sumner wanted the place, but was deemed "too ultra." Mr. Grimes was second on the committee. Mr. Fessenden's labors with the President were futile. The President asserted his own authority, and later he defied Congress. The labors of the committee were arduous. There were contrary opinions. The strife and strain imperiled Mr. Fessenden's health, and nearly broke him down. But in weariness and painfulness he held his head aloft in long and sharp debates, and braved every difficulty. At last, he saw the crown of his labors in the adoption of the Thirteenth, Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments to the Constitution. As the war of the Revolution led to the adoption of the Constitution, so the war of the Rebellion led to the adoption of the Amendments. They were the corollary of the Rebellion, the inevitable consequence of its failure and defeat.

The final report of the Committee on "Reconstruction" was drawn up by Mr. Fessenden, and presented to the Senate, (June 11, 1866: "In my opinion," said Mr. Grimes, "it is the ablest paper submitted to Congress, since I have been in the Senate.")

When the revision of the tariff was under consideration, some parties, who were making enormous profits in steel, charged Mr. Grimes with exerting an influence upon the Fi-

nance Committee, in favor of reducing the duties on steel. Mr. Fessenden, referring to the matter, said: "I will frankly say that if there is a man in or out of the Senate who possesses influence over me, it is the honorable Senator from Iowa. No man possesses more. I have great respect for his opinion, and for the uniform integrity of his character, as we all have. But I must say in justification of the Senator, and of the Committee, or of the chairman of it in this instance, that the Senator never spoke to me upon the matter referred to, or alluded to it in any way. All I ever heard him say on the subject was said here on the floor of the Senate."

The folly and malfeasance of President Johnson early aroused Mr. Fessenden's indignation, but he doubted the expediency of impeaching him. The question took form in the House of Representatives in January, 1867, when it was referred to the Judiciary Committee (James F. Wilson chairman), for examination. The Committee took a large amount of testimony, but could not complete their investigation during that Congress, and the matter was turned over to the next, the 40th, which met March 4, and continued in its first session till March 30, and subsequently by adjournment July 3-20, November 21-30.

When some Senators were freely expressing their minds upon the matter in the Senate, Mr. Fessenden said, July 20, 1867, that he deemed it "improper for one, who was to act as a judge in the case, to commit himself in advance upon the guilt of the accused, but should hear the case without prejudice or passion."

The Judiciary Committee of the House, by George S. Boutwell, made a report, November 25, in favor of impeachment. Mr. Wilson did not agree with it, and made a minority report. The subject was then postponed to the next month. On December 7, a vote was taken, when the yeas were 57, nays 108.

The situation was changed February 21, 1868, by the President's removal of the Secretary of War, Edwin M. Stanton. Congress had passed a law to protect Mr. Stanton in that office, and his removal was deemed a crime that demanded impeachment. The vote now stood, yeas 126, nays 41. The next day,



James F. Wilson stated that if the President could not be convicted on the ground of his removal of Mr. Stanton, he probably could not be convicted on the other charges against him. The trial was made to hinge on that article, though the other charges were presented and discussed.

On the 5th of March, 1868, the Chief Justice of the United States and the Senators took the oath to do impartial justice in the matter according to the Constitution and the laws. The trial went on in long arguments and speeches *pro* and *con* until the 16th of May, when 35 Senators voted "guilty," 19 "not guilty," and the impeachment failed, two-thirds being required for conviction. Ten days later, votes were taken on other charges with like result, and the Senate sitting as a Court adjourned *sine die*.

The following extracts from Mr. Fessenden's letters to Mr. Grimes show his views of how things went on :

Portland, May 8, 1867.

It was taken for granted that there would not be a session in July unless something new "turned up"—though Sumner professed to know that there would be. These fellows considered themselves beaten and were very sore. Wade's vision of the Presidency and Schenck's of succeeding him during the present Congress were somewhat dimmed—though the former and his Lieutenants are arranging their forces for the next campaign and are abusing everybody—not excepting Grant.

We had a hard time of it during the called session. The fight among ourselves was a severe one, but the *leaders* found themselves in the vocative at last, and were pretty thoroughly used up. Impeachment had got to be a matter of ridicule before the session closed, but the movement has done us harm.

I trust your health is restored. We needed your help very much, but a consideration of your very critical condition induced us to forgive you.

Yours always with the best regards to Mrs. Grimes.

Portland, June 18, 1867.

Shall you go? It is all nonsense in my judgment, and Stevens and others are jumping at a pretense. I am disgusted with Johnson for giving them such a pretense. God only knows what mischief will be done if we get together. We shall have to consider July and August as mortgaged. Besides, we shall be weak. The Pacific coast is not to be counted on, and Morrill of Vermont and Sherman, with many of the House are in Europe.



I see that our V. P. is fairly in for the Presidency. I suppose he will divide the West with Colfax. Under which of these doughty champions will Iowa range itself?

Portland, July 14, 1867.

What do you think of Andy's reconstruction scheme? It strikes me that the rebels are having it all their own way. The papers say that Montgomery Blair approves. It is quite time, in my judgment, that the Blairs were laid aside, though as Fox [Gustavus V., Assistant Secretary of the Navy] belongs to the family, I suppose the Committee on Naval Affairs will go with the administration. I have been hard at work gardening, and my health has improved wonderfully.

Portland, Sept. 20, 1867.

My dear Grimes:

I have just finished my evening cigar, and, as it happens to be a good one, I am in a most desirable condition. Beside the cigar, I am just now in excellent health—eat well (in spite of chronic dyspepsia which my friends assign in excuse of my bad temper)—sleep well—my garden flourishes—and Frank with his charming little wife and pretty boy make a part of my family. Should not all these happy circumstances and surroundings enable me to bear even Mr. Sumner's philippics with a reasonable degree of equanimity?

The truth is I didn't get angry with Sumner *this time*. The whole thing was exquisitely funny. All the world this way is laughing at him. It was manifest that the thing was deliberately got up. I will bet you a guinea he either had a week to prepare, or took that time to revise the manuscript.

With you, however, I *was* surprised at the appearance of such stuff in the *Advertiser*. Mr. Chandler (J. P.), the principal owner and director, was away, as was the leading editor. Chandler wrote me from the country that he don't understand it. I have sent him your letter for edification.

The truth is that for some reason or other, this particular clique have resolved to write and talk me down—to persuade the people that I am untrue to the principles of the party—a friend and defender of Andrew Johnson. They would do the same by Grant if they dared. See Sumner's hints and Phillips' open attacks. Forney cottons with them and beslaughters Grant. They don't want him if it can be avoided, and mean to dispose of me in case any happy incident should kill off Grant. Now, so far as I am concerned, they need not trouble themselves. I would go as far to avoid being a candidate myself as I would to defeat Wade. But the malice is only equalled by their meanness and cowardice.

I have recently returned from a water expedition to St. John in company with Hooper [Samuel] and Conkling [Roscoe]. We talked freely of Sumner's manifesto, and Phillips' letter found us at East-

port; Conkling was evidently much annoyed, and thought he should have a friendly talk with Sumner. He says, Phillips' letter, so far as it refers to me, was but a repetition of what he had heard Sumner say in the cars when riding from the Capitol. I have not heard from Edmunds. As both of them were fond of complimenting Sumner, I shall let them settle the matter in their own way.

We are looking to the Western elections with much interest. I mark your prediction. If it comes true, I think the hopes of these gentlemen will be somewhat clouded.

Is it true that Wilson [James F.], has written a letter in favor of impeachment? If so, he has not acted with his usual discretion.

Keep cool my friend, enjoy your leisure, and come back full of love to all your associates—particularly for the writer who, with best regards for your wife, remains as always yours.

Portland, Oct. 20, 1867.

As you predicted the elections have surprised people, though Iowa has held her own very well. Our friends Wade, Chandler & Co. must feel particularly gratified with the result in Ohio. I see Stevens imputes it to the corruption of Congress in not impeaching the President. Most of our influential journals, however, think it is owing to a general disgust with the leadership of Stevens and his drive.

\* \* \* All is Grant now, and I do not see but he will go in by general acclamation, without any declaration of his principles, or pledges of his action. It will be only necessary for the Democrats to nominate him also, and we shall have an administration "without regard to colour"—and shall see in due time, what is to come of it. You must be on the look-out for squalls. There will be plenty of crimination and recrimination. Will you and Edmunds and others be prepared to take a part in the fight, or are we to be silent and take all the abuse certain gentlemen will load us with?

Mr. Fessenden held that the act of Congress which was intended to protect Mr. Stanton in his office was unwarranted by the Constitution. He delivered an elaborate written opinion to that effect. Later, upon the election of General Grant as President, that act was repealed. At the close of his opinion Mr. Fessenden said with reference to the diatribes against him: "I should consider myself unworthy a place among honorable men, if for any fear of public reprobation, and for the sake of securing popular favor, I should disregard the convictions of my judgment and my conscience. The consequences which may follow from conviction or acquittal are not for me to consider. The future is in the hands of Him who made and governs the universe, and the fear that He will not govern

it wisely and well would not excuse me for a violation of His law."

In the trial Mr. Sumner held that the Senate was still a political body, and the Senators under a political responsibility; Mr. Fessenden held that the Senate was now a Court. The difference in their point of view appeared in the fact that Mr. Sumner and his side addressed the Chief Justice as "Mr. President." Mr. Fessenden and Mr. Grimes always addressed him as "Mr. Chief Justice."

Washington, June 12, 1868.

My dear Grimes:

Glad to hear that you are improving. All you have to do is to enjoy yourself, and let public affairs take care of themselves. Trumbull has been very busy of late getting the rebel States in—including Alabama, to which he was opposed. The fools outvoted us as usual, as if our burdens were not heavy enough now.

Andy has behaved very well so far, and I think he will hold on until after the Democratic convention. The Democrats go to see him, such as Hendricks and Buckalew, and I think he is comparatively safe in their hands.

Have you seen the London papers? All with one accord congratulate this country upon its escape from a serious blow at its government, and praise us for our firmness. They evidently consider impeachment in this case as a mere scheme of Jacobinism to get power. Was it not about so? Stanton, I learn, is very bitter. This does not surprise me though I deeply regret such an exhibition of bitterness in such a man.

Mr. J. M. Forbes, of Boston, May 23, 1868, wrote Mr. Fessenden: "I hope you do not care anything for the ravings of our radical papers; and I know you will not let them move you a hair from the even tenor of your way. The more I agree with them, in the main, the more they make me mad with their extravagance and unreasonableness." In reply Mr. Fessenden said:

Washington, June 21, 1868.

\* \* \* I have felt outraged by the gross attacks made upon me by some of the Republican journals. However, I cannot but feel that time will set all things even. Whether it does or not, the path of duty is plain. No considerations of this sort could justify me in departing from my line of duty. A man who has knowingly and deliberately put at hazard all that most public men value, in obedi-

ence to his sense of right, will not be likely to throw away all the consolation that remains to him—his own approval.

Grimes will be in Boston before long, and I hope our friends will see and cheer him. He is a noble fellow, and I love him more than ever.\*

A large number of citizens of Boston of the Republican party, “desirous of expressing their sense of the value of his public services,” invited Mr. Fessenden to a public dinner to be given in that city. They said:

“While some of us strongly dissent from the conclusion at which you arrived with regard to the conviction of President Johnson, we all heartily recognize and admire your courage and conscientiousness under circumstances of peculiar difficulty.”

Declining the invitation from considerations of his duty in the Senate and of his own health, Mr. Fessenden referred to the “circumstances of peculiar difficulty” alluded to. A few extracts from his letter show how he regarded the situation:

Washington, June 25, 1868.

To the Hon. Alexander H. Bullock, and others:

\* \* \* The impeachment of the President was a most extraordinary event, and will constitute a remarkable chapter in our country’s history. The conduct of the President almost from the beginning of his administration had been such as to render him obnoxious to the suspicion of designing to defeat the cherished object of those who had elected him, and of plunging the country back into a condition little better than that from which it had been rescued at so vast a sacrifice. It was not only humiliating, but irritating in the extreme.

\* \* \* I do not wonder that the idea of impeachment was popular, nor did it surprise me that but few should stop to consider that the long catalogue of the President’s alleged offenses prior to the removal of Mr. Stanton had for the most part been under investigation by a learned and able committee of the House, and had been reported upon, and that the House by a large majority had voted against impeachment for those offenses.

The President was arraigned upon specific charges. Although the offenses were political, the proceeding itself I could not but regard as of a judicial character. The constitution of the tribunal, the oath imposed upon the members, impressed me with the belief that I was bound to lay aside all prejudice against the individual, and to try

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\* *Letters and Recollections*, John Murray Forbes. II, 164-66.

him solely upon the law and the facts, the crimes and misdemeanors charged. \* \* \* The members were, to be sure, servants of the people, responsible to them, but only as judges are for an honest decision; all the attempts to coerce a decision by outside pressure, by appeals to party obligation, by threats and vituperation, were as wrong as if applied to any case of private right before any court in the land, and subversion of justice and of public and private morality. I considered the matter entirely beyond and above party jurisdiction. For the vote I gave I offer no excuse or apology, and ask no vindication; nor do I consider myself entitled to any special credit for courage or conscientiousness in the discharge of what I considered an imperative duty.

Andrew D. White in his Autobiography, II, 147, calls Mr. Fessenden's action "an example of Spartan fortitude, of Roman heroism worthy to be chronicled by Plutarch," and says, "The time will come when a statue will commemorate his great example."

To Mr. Grimes.

Washington, June 24, 1868.

We are getting along stupidly as usual here. The impeachers are not particularly happy, though most of them have become very civil. Wade is said to be very cross, and refuses to be comforted. I am told that Forney says the party had a narrow escape. I am informed that General Grant talks well and properly, as a sensible man should. His particular friends and organs have come to the conclusion that they cannot afford to throw away any support.

I shall decline the Boston invitation. I could not avoid saying something about Sumner's resolutions, but I have treated them respectfully, and said nothing of him. Every day he gets some hard rubs in the Senate all round. Yesterday I was obliged to defend him, as he was badly treated.

Evarts' nomination is to be bitterly opposed by Congress and others, but I hardly think he can be rejected, though there are a great many fools in the Senate. Stanton I never hear spoken of.

I am glad to hear that you continue to improve.

July 2. I struck out of my Boston letter all that related to Sumner. I am glad that you like the letter. It was not easy to tell what not to say.

Mr. Grimes to Mr. Fessenden.

Bath, Maine, July 7, 1868.

\* \* \* I have not heard of a man here who disapproved of your course after he came to understand it. Nor did I in Boston. I discovered that Hooper [Samuel] telegraphed and went to Boston, while



the matter was pending, to get up a public meeting in favor of conviction and it was to head off that movement that R. H. Dana, Jr., introduced his resolution into the House [Legislature of Massachusetts] where he was chairman of the Judiciary Committee, and which came near passing that Body.

From the extracts I have seen of Butler's [B. F.] report, I judge that it is the most discreditable public paper ever issued in this country, and to permit it to go to the world unaccompanied by the evidence on which it was based is infamous, and in my opinion involves in the infamy all who are party to it, and agree to it.

In April, 1869, Mr. Grimes went to Europe in hope of regaining his health. It improved in London, but in Paris a second attack of paralysis again prostrated him. When able to hold a pen, he wrote Mr. Fessenden:

Paris, July 9, 1869.

Your welcome letter came duly to hand. \* \* \* This attack closes up my political career. I shall never, I am sorry to say, sit by your side as a member of the Senate again. \* \* \* There is one thing we lack in America more than anything else, to make up an accurate history of our country, and that is, memoirs of public men. I am greatly struck with that fact here, where they have ever been so abundant. What kind of history can any man coming after us make up of the last ten years from the newspapers? None at all. Now, you have lived in the most eventful period of our country's history. You have had a leading part in public affairs for twenty-five years; you have a cool head, a retentive memory, a facile pen. I insist that you ought in justice to the future, in behalf of your own memory, and for the common good, to spend a few leisure hours every day in preparing your memoirs. You need not take up subjects *seriatim*, begin with any one of the many interesting topics, and after one is completed, you will be more in the humor to begin another. If you do not choose to publish them in your own time, leave them to be published in some future time, in vindication of your memory, and to promote the cause of truth.

The last of Mr. Fessenden's letters to Mr. Grimes was the following:

Portland, August 8, 1869.

I was rejoiced, and my mind relieved to get a letter in your own handwriting, for I had heard a rumor of your second attack, and felt much alarmed. I am grieved to learn how much you have been afflicted. Under the skilful treatment you can find in Paris, I shall still hope to see you again in your old place before I leave the Senate, if not at so early a day as I could wish—unless you retire under



the advice of those best able to judge of what your permanent good requires. \* \* \*

[As to re-election to the Senate] What the result will be I cannot foresee, and on my own account do not much care, for I am about tired of the whole thing. I shall be a candidate, for duty to myself and the State requires it of me. But I shall contend at some disadvantage, for I will not use the means that will be used against me. If money is to be used, be it so. It will not be used by or for me. I will have no hand in corrupting legislative morals. If elected, it must be on my merits, and because the people so desire. For corrupt and corrupting honors I have no desire. My hands are clean thus far, and I mean to keep them so. Any but an honest and high-minded people I have no desire to serve. If Maine desires that her Senators shall be elected by petty newspaper and office-seeking politicians, it is very clear that I shall not be one of them, nor, in such a case, do I wish to be—and that is the end of it.

\* \* \* Take good care of yourself, my dear friend, and believe me with the kindest regards to Mrs. Grimes and Mary [afterwards Mrs. W. B. Allison].

Ever yours most truly,

Hon. James W. Grimes.

W. P. FESSENDEN.

In reply Mr. Grimes wrote from Switzerland:

August 31, 1869.

Your letter of the 8th has just reached me in the midst of the Savoy Alps, being douched and soaked in hot sulphur water.

Perhaps you have observed that I have resigned my place in the Senate. I regret to leave on your account, and on Trumbull's.

We shall not return to America this year. We have it in contemplation to spend the winter in Italy, a considerable part of it in Rome, and I shall take the liberty to kiss the pope's great toe on your account and in your behalf. Read Milton's invocation beginning

"Avenge, O Lord, thy slaughtered Saints!"

and then fancy that we are right among the descendants of those slaughtered saints.

In the night of the same day the letter was written, Mr. Fessenden was seized with a fatal illness at his home in Portland, and died nine days afterward. Upon receiving the intelligence, Mr. Grimes in a letter to Mr. Lyman Cook, of Burlington, Iowa, wrote:

Vevay, Switzerland, Oct. 10, 1869.

I have never been so afflicted by the death of any man as by the sudden decease of Mr. Fessenden. He was my most intimate, sincere, and attached friend, and the sentiment was most cordially reciprocated. I knew him as no other man knew him, for he always made

me his confidant. I admired as only those admired him who knew him intimately. He was the highest-toned, truest, noblest man I ever knew. I never knew or expect to know a man who can approach him in the qualities that go to make a grand man and a noble statesman. The man does not live who can take his place in the Senate. To tell you the truth, his death has been a serious blow to me. The news nearly upset me. I have not been able to think of much else since I heard it. Only four days before the news came, I received a long, cheerful, and characteristic letter from him.

Writing later to Mr. Cook with reference to the Impeachment trial, Mr. Grimes said:

I would not exchange the recollection of that grasp of the hand and that glorified smile given me by that purest and ablest of men I have ever known, Mr. Fessenden, when I was borne into the Senate chamber on the arms of four men, to cast my vote, for the highest distinction of life.

Senator James Dixon, of Connecticut, had said in a letter to Mr. Fessenden:

It is due mainly to you and Grimes that the country was saved from seeing a President removed when any party desired it. This was averted by a degree of courage and patriotism the world has never seen surpassed. My respect for men who resisted a tremendous influence brought to bear upon them is too great for ordinary language to express.

George W. Julian, a representative from Indiana, said, twenty years afterward:

I was one of the many men whose partisan madness and exasperation carried them headlong into the Impeachment movement, but I was not long in discovering my mistake; and no man is more willing than myself to do honor to the brave men who faced the wrath and scorn of this party in 1868.\*

In the Memorial Addresses delivered in Congress three months after Mr. Fessenden's death, Senator George H. Williams, of Oregon (Judge of the First District of Iowa, 1847-'52), said of him:

When he spoke, he bore himself proudly, and with graceful ease, his nerves firm and electric as a Damascus blade, always choosing simple language. Few beholding his imperial bearing would suspect that some nervous prostration followed every effort. He had no

\* *Iowa Historical Record*, VIII, 360.

taste for grandiloquent oratory, but of that unaffected speech which is in earnest to force conviction, he was a consummate master. Fitted to shine in society, he usually avoided it, to the regret of his friends, as they felt that he would have been more widely beloved, had he been less of a recluse. Those who were invited to his home found him cordial in manner, fascinating in conversation, a brilliant talker, often speaking with humor, more willing to show his learning, his love of poetry, and his literary treasures at his own fireside than in any public theater.

Senator Sumner said :

During the whole period of the war, when appropriations were beyond precedent in the world's history, Mr. Fessenden's influence swayed the Senate, and what all our best generals were in the army he was in the financial field.

Hannibal Hamlin (Vice President, and presiding officer of the Senate, 1861-'5), said :

The duties and victories of civil life are as important as those of arms, and the statesman, who aids in wisely directing the councils of the Nation, should be held in as cherished remembrance as he who successfully commands our armies in the field. Such is the position the historian will assign Mr. Fessenden.





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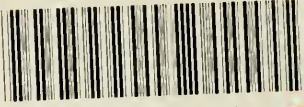
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