



Wm. Adams

A SKETCH OF THE LIFE

OF THE

HON. PHINEHAS ADAMS,

OF

MANCHESTER, NEW HAMPSHIRE.

BY

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PREFACE.

A BRIEF sketch of the life of Honorable Phinehas Adams was prepared for and published in the Manchester *Daily Union* on the 9th of December last.

Since then, the writer has been requested by numerous friends of Mr. Adams to prepare the same for publication in a more permanent form.

In deference to the wishes of these people,—being assured that many others would be glad to have such a memento as this, and believing there is no citizen of Manchester who is more highly esteemed,—the author has revised the article referred to, adding thereto many heretofore unpublished facts, gathered from various sources, all of which are hereby respectfully presented.

MANCHESTER, N.H., February 6, 1880.

PHINEHAS ADAMS was born in Medway, Massachusetts, the twentieth day of June, 1814, and comes from the very best Revolutionary stock of New England. His grandfather and great-grandfather participated in the battle of Bunker Hill, and served through that memorable war. He had three brothers and seven sisters, of whom the former all died previous to 1831. Three sisters are now living: Sarah Ann, born in 1816, the wife of E. B. Hammond, M.D., of Nashua; Eliza P., born in 1820, widow of the late Ira Stone, Esq., formerly an overseer in the Stark Mills; and Mary Jane, born in 1822, widow of the late James Buncher, Esq., a former designer for the Merrimack Print Works at Lowell, Mass. Mrs. Buncher is the present popular and very efficient librarian of the Manchester Public Library.

His father, Phinehas Adams, Senior, married Sarah W. Barber, a native of Holliston, Mass., in 1811. Her father was an Englishman; came to America from Warrenton, England, during the Revolutionary War, and married in this country a Scottish lady who came from Edinburgh.

Phinehas Adams, the senior, was both a farmer and a mechanic, and became quite an extensive manufacturer. At a very early date, he constructed hand-looms, which he employed girls to operate; and,

subsequently, started the first power-loom that was ever established in this country, at Waltham, Mass., in the year 1814.

In this year and in the same town, he became a mill overseer, and afterwards gave his whole attention to manufacturing. He resided, when Phinehas was a child, at different times in Waltham, Cambridge, and in Nashua, N.H., to which latter place he removed later in life, and became proprietor of a hotel,—the Central House.

This business was now more agreeable to him, since he had broken three or four of his ribs and received other injuries from an unfortunate fall.

Hon. William P. Newell, of this city, who was agent of the Amoskeag Old Mills from 1837 to 1846, was once a bobbin-boy for the elder Adams. This was ten years before the son, who was attending a private school in West Newton, Mass., until 1827, began to work in the mills.

In the last-named year, his father became agent of the Neponset Manufacturing Company's mills,—which were owned by himself, Dr. Oliver Dean, and others,—at Walpole, in the same State; and to this place he removed his residence.

When quite young, the son disliked close confinement in school, the task of poring over books being to him rather dry and irksome; but his father said to him that he must either study or go to work in the mill. At the latter place, he was soon found engaged in a work well calculated to dispel boyish romance in a summary manner.

He almost repented making this choice, but pluckily “stuck to the work” with the indomitable persever-

ance so often displayed in after life, and was employed as bobbin-boy for a year by the Company.

He then entered Wrentham Academy, where he remained, making good progress in his studies, for a year and a half, when his father was compelled to inform him that he had met with serious losses by reason of the failure of the Company, and that he, Phinehas, would now have to leave the Academy and go to work.

The father very much regretted feeling obliged to take this course, having cherished the hope of being able to give his son a thorough education.

The latter, readily accepting the situation, replied to his father that he was ready and willing to work, but that, if he must go to work in a mill, he preferred that it should be in a large one, and not in a "one-horse concern"; for he desired a wide field and the best possible opportunities to gain a knowledge of the business in its many details.

One of the greatest events in the commercial history of our country was the founding of the "City of Spindles," Lowell, in 1821. Very naturally, the junior Adams was led to go there to gain his desired knowledge.

On the 10th of November, 1829, he proceeded to this city, and at the age of fifteen became employed as bobbin-boy in the mills of the Merrimack Company.

At that time, the Company had only about thirty thousand spindles in its mills; but now its five mills contain (in 1876) one hundred and fifty-eight thousand four hundred and sixty-four spindles, and three thousand nine hundred and forty-one looms; has a

capital of two and one half million dollars, and employs eighteen hundred female and nine hundred male operatives.

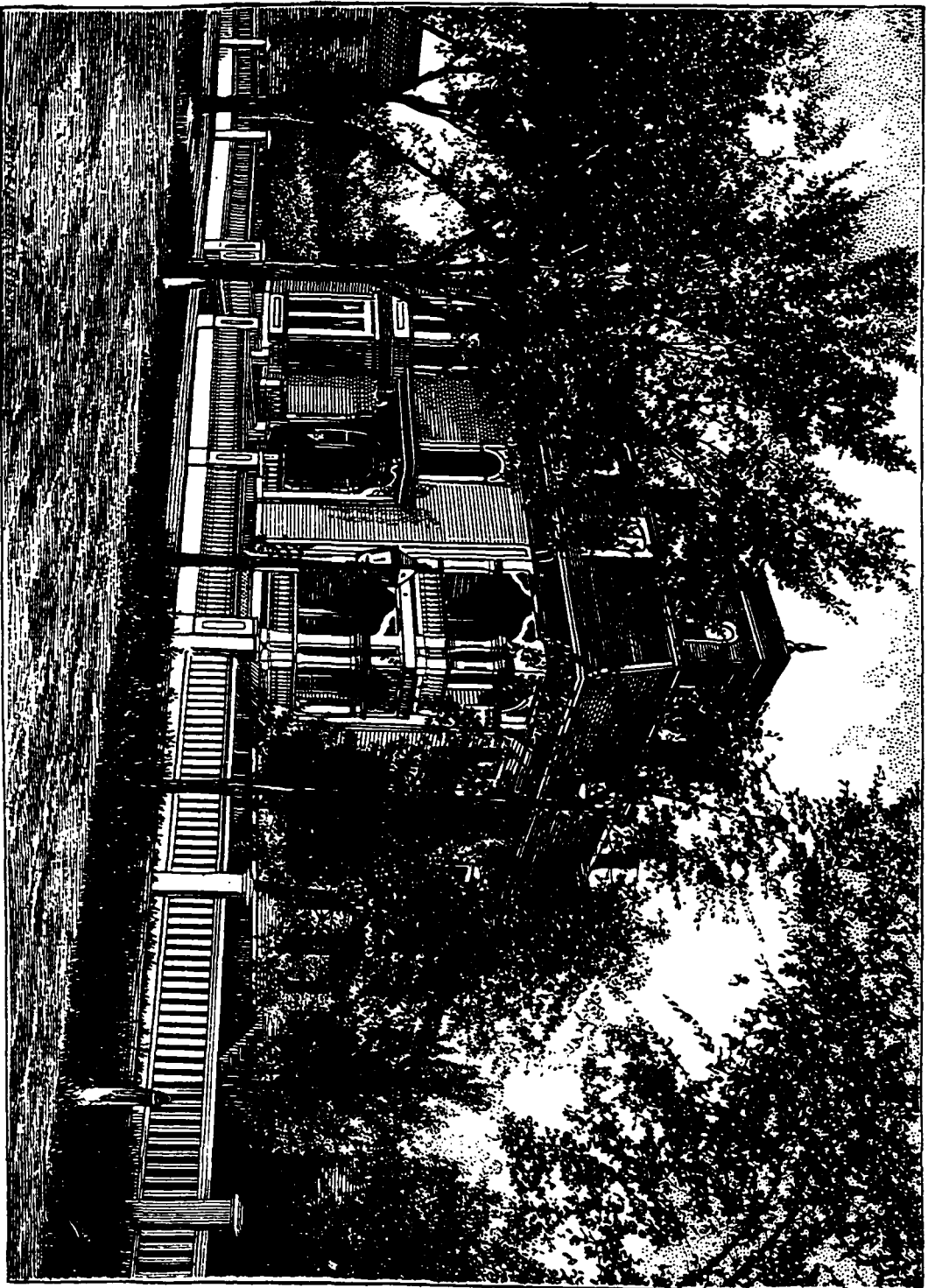
In these early days of manufacturing, the system was adhered to in Lowell of keeping fierce bull-dogs—one, at least—in each mill. They were liberally fed with fresh meat, *not* for the purpose of making them *less* savage, and chained near the entrance to the mill, making effectual sentinels while the watchmen were making their rounds. This custom was followed until about 1831.

Mr. Adams was early possessed of an ambition to become an overseer; and to this end he labored hard and faithfully, never thinking or dreaming, however, that he would become agent of a large mill.

This was his real beginning, the wedding to his long and uninterrupted manufacturing life, the “golden wedding” anniversary of which event occurred in November, 1879.

Soon after his commencement at Lowell, he was promoted to the position of second overseer in the weaving department, a post he retained until 1831, when he passed to a similar position in the Methuen Company's mill, of which his uncle was agent. In 1833, he made another change, going to Hooksett, N.H., where he became overseer in the Hooksett Manufacturing Company's mills, of which his father was then the agent.

Not long afterwards he assumed a similar position in the Pittsfield Manufacturing Company's mill, at Pittsfield, then under the administration of Ithamar A. Beard, Esq., agent, who was by profession a civil engineer. Mr. Beard went from there to Brunswick,



RESIDENCE OF PHINEHAS ADAMS.

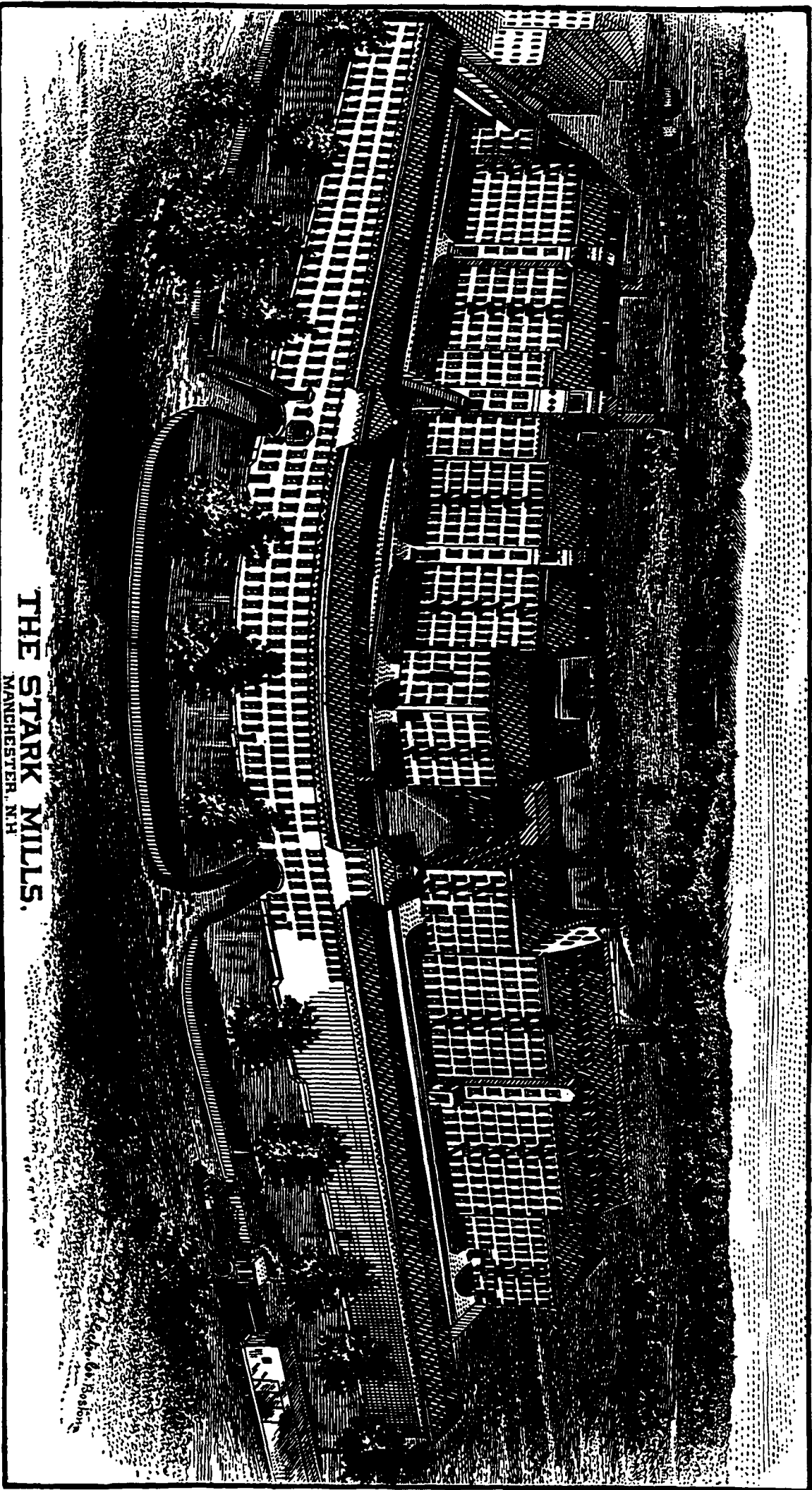
Maine, where he was subsequently engaged in the construction of mills.

Mr. Adams remained in Pittsfield from December, 1834, until Mr. Beard resigned. The latter urged the former to continue in his position at Pittsfield, and gave him an excellent letter of recommendation, saying, as he handed it to Mr. Adams, "There, young man, you can keep this: it may never do you any good, but it will never do you any harm. I can indorse it with a good conscience."

It was on a Saturday night, the 7th of March, 1835, that Mr. Adams, who had previously decided to return to Lowell, left Pittsfield; being driven in a team to Hooksett, where he secured a night's lodging. In good season the next morning (Sunday), he embarked in the mail stage, and found himself about noon of the same day at Nashua, where his parents then resided. In those days there was no city of Manchester, neither was there a splendid railroad service running through the fertile Merrimack valley. But the waters of the Merrimack, though scarcely at all utilized at that time to propel water-wheels, carried upon its fleeting bosom myriads of heavily laden vessels from Boston, *via* the old Middlesex Canal, running as far north as Concord. From the Boston and Lowell Railroad, the former course of this canal can now be traced much of the way. It ran through Charlestown, Medford, Billerica Mills, and Middlesex Village, at which latter place it intersected with the Merrimack River. Locks were in use at Garvin's Falls, Hooksett, Manchester, Goffe's Falls, Nashua, and at other points. A passenger steamer plied in those days between Lowell and Nashua upon the river, which was higher than the canal.

Mr. Adams remained at home only until Monday, —a short visit. But he was industriously inclined, and proceeded immediately, we learn, to the Merrimack Mills in Lowell, the scene of his earlier labors, as previously mentioned, where he accepted the office of overseer. He remained with this Company until he came to Manchester, in 1846.

In December, 1841, the late John Clark, Esq., the agent of the Merrimack Mills at Lowell, proposed that Mr. Adams should enter the office as clerk. This idea was very distasteful to Mr. Adams, as he detested book-keeping, having previously had much of it and other writing to do for his father, when overseer and book-keeper in his father's mill. However, he yielded to the wishes and advice of Mr. Clark, who had excellent opinions of Mr. Adams, and who said to him on this occasion, "You have a thorough knowledge of manufacturing, and ought now to get acquainted with book-keeping and the general business of the mills; for you are destined to fill a higher position." Time has abundantly proven the truth of Mr. Clark's prophecy. During the five years he held this position, Mr. Adams had good opportunity to observe the lively interest Mr. Clark took in his *employees*. There was a fellow-clerk, a young man, who was given more or less to the demoralizing habit of loafing around saloons. On one occasion, Mr. Clark, himself always strictly temperate in his habits, censured the practice of that young man, and requested Mr. Adams to talk with him, and at the same time to inform him that he could not be promoted without mending his habits. In this connection, it can be said that Mr. Adams has never used tobacco or intoxicating liquors during his life.



THE STARK MILLS.
MANCHESTER, N.H.

In the year 1846, Mr. Adams left Lowell to assume the agency (succeeding the Hon. William P. Newell) of the "Old Amoskeag Mills," then located on the west side of the Merrimack River at Amoskeag Falls,—now a part of the city of Manchester,—on the present site of ex-Governor P. C. Cheney's paper-mill.

The building of the Amoskeag Mills was the beginning of Manchester's wonderful career of prosperity, which has developed to such great proportions. Her many mills, now running more than three hundred thousand spindles, many looms, and many cloth printing-machines, and the many other signs of industry, are abundantly attesting to the truth of the statement.

With the Amoskeag Corporation Mr. Adams remained until the 17th of November, 1847, when he became agent of the Stark Mills.

Of the great manufactories of Manchester, that of the Stark Mills Company ranks third in magnitude and second in age. This Company was organized September 26, 1838, and began operation the following year.

During its forty years and more of busy existence, it has had but two resident agents, John A. Burnham, Esq., holding that position from the inception of the Corporation until the 17th of November, 1847, the date marking the commencement of the long term of service by the present incumbent, the Hon. Phinehas Adams. At that time, the capital of the Stark Mills Company was the same as now,—one million two hundred and fifty thousand dollars. The shares, the par value of which was and is one thousand dollars each, were worth six or seven hundred dollars, when

Colonel Adams was chosen agent; but they rose to fourteen or fifteen hundred dollars each share during the late civil war.

In the early days of New England manufacturing, more labor was performed by hand than is to-day; and, though substantially the same machinery was employed, yet it had by no means attained its present capacity and wonderful completeness.

In December, 1863, Mr. Adams was commissioned by the Directors of the Stark Mills to go to Europe for the purpose of securing machinery and information relating to the manufacture of linen goods. At that time, owing to the war, cotton goods were very scarce and expensive. For unmanufactured cotton itself, the Stark Company paid as high as one dollar and eighty-six cents per pound, and a higher price than even that was paid by other companies. A bale of cotton brought nine hundred and thirty dollars.

Mr. Adams travelled extensively through England, Scotland, and Ireland, and visited the city of Paris. He ordered considerable machinery of the English manufacturers, who were very busy with American orders at the time. So great, in fact, was the demand upon them, that the Stark machinery did not arrive until the September following,—nearly a year after being ordered.

At Paisley, about seven miles from Glasgow, Mr. Adams examined the interesting process of making the far-famed “long Paisley shawls.” They were made principally by weavers upon hand-loom, at their places of abode; some of the rooms in which many elegant shawls were manufactured being found to be low-studded, dark, and dingy in the extreme. The

different-colored yarns were "given out" to the weavers to be made into shawls in the same manner as are stockings, in this city, to be "heeled and toed." He saw a pattern for one long shawl that a man was constantly engaged in painting for the space of nine months.

From choice, Colonel Adams has been quite clear of politics, having only served as Ward Clerk when a young man in Lowell, and, later, as a Presidential Elector for General Grant. He was Governor Straw's chief of staff, which, by the way, it is believed never "turned out in a body" as such. He was also four years a Director in the Concord Railroad, just after the decease of Governor Gilmore. About the year 1848, he was chosen one of the assistant engineers of the Manchester Fire Department, in which capacity he served with peculiar fidelity for twelve years.

Never being "up for office," as were many of his friends, he could act with positive independence; and he invariably did act, as he thought, for the best interests of the city.

This sort of conduct was in marked contrast with the non-committal policy of politicians who felt obliged to please (?) the firemen, who at that period, as is well known, exerted great influence in municipal politics.

Mr. Adams and the other engineers resigned their positions after two steamers had been obtained, thus giving the captains of the old companies chances of promotion.

He has for a long time been closely identified with the moneyed institutions of this city, having served as a Director in the Merrimack River Bank from 1857

to 1860; the same in the Manchester National Bank from 1865 to the present time; and as a Trustee in the Manchester Savings Bank nearly all the time since it obtained its charter.

Since the decease of Hon. Herman Foster, Mr. Adams has been one of the committee on loans for the latter institution.

He is one of the Directors of the Gas-Light Company, and was for many years a Trustee of the Public Library.

He was elected in 1865 one of the original Directors of the New England Cotton Manufacturers' Association.

Three years ago last October, Colonel Adams attended a class reunion of scholars of Mr. Seth Davis, then ninety years of age, at his home in West Newton, Mass. Ex-Governor Alexander H. Rice and other prominent men were of this number.

Mr. Davis lived upon a large farm (one hundred and seventy-five acres), and kept a private school for boys from six to twelve years of age, some of whom he boarded. Mr. Adams attended this school in 1826-27, and was one of seventeen lads who lived in their tutor's family. Some of them had parents or friends residing in or near Boston, who were in the habit of driving out to visit, and to give the boys cakes, candies, and other dainties.

Now it used to happen that nearly every Monday morning found the ranks of this solid seventeen broken; and it also happened, said Mr. Adams to the writer once, while conversing upon the days of long ago, that sickness was the cause thereof, or rather the *effect*,—for those pernicious sweetmeats were the primary *cause* of thin ranks on those occasions.

For many years, Mr. Adams has been engaged, as opportunity occurred, in procuring rare coins, medals, etc. Of the former, he now possesses very complete collections of the various denominations in gold, silver, nickel, and copper; and he has a great number of valuable medals. Many of these antiquities command a very high price in the market, their numbers being absolutely limited, and the demand for them steadily increasing.

The present officers of the Stark Mills are: Clerk, Phinehas Adams; Treasurer, Edmund Dwight; Directors, William Amory, J. Ingersoll Bowditch, Lewis Downing, Jr., T. Jefferson Coolidge, John L. Bremer, J. Lewis Stackpole, and Roger Walcott; Manufacturing Agent, Phinehas Adams; Selling Agents, J. L. Bremer & Co., Boston. Mr. Amory was Treasurer at the commencement, and is now President of the Corporation.

During the administration of Colonel Adams, which covers a long series of eventful years, a great many changes have taken place. In what may be called, more particularly, the manufacturing world is this especially true.

He is the oldest agent and the longest in such position in the city,—nay, more, in the entire Merrimack Valley; and most of those holding similar positions thirty-two years ago are now passed from this life.

That fine old estate on Hanover Street, for a long time known as the “Harris Estate,” was formerly owned by the Stark Company, who built the commodious mansion now converted into a charitable institution,—the “Orphans’ Home,”—for the use of their agents. John A. Burnham was its first occu-

pant; and next, Mr. Adams, who resided there nine years, beginning with 1847.

When Baldwin & Co.'s steam mill on Manchester Street, where D. B. Varney's brass foundery is now located, was, with other structures, burned on the 5th of July, 1852, that house then occupied by Mr. Adams was set on fire by the flying sparks; but the fire was speedily extinguished. Mr. Adams was at the time attending to his duties as engineer where the fire raged the fiercest. Thus Mrs. Adams and those of her household were without the protection of the sterner sex in the early part of their peril. Soon, however, aid was proffered by several men, of whom Mrs. Adams admitted Mr. Walter Adriance and three others, friends of the family, whereupon she securely barricaded the doors. The work of passing water to the roof was very lively for a while.

In 1856, Mr. Adams moved into the house No. 2 Water Street, now occupied by Moses O. Pearsons, Esq., where he lived also about nine years, when he purchased his present fine residence No. 18 Brook Street.

On the 24th of September, 1839, Mr. Adams was united in marriage with Miss Elizabeth P. Simpson, daughter of the late Deacon Samuel Simpson, of Deerfield, N.H. He served in the war of 1812; and his widow, who is now eighty-one years of age, draws a pension from the Government.

Mrs. Adams's paternal grandfather, Major John Simpson, participated in the battle of Bunker Hill, and, it is said upon good authority, fired the first shot of that famous engagement, on the American side.

It occurred in this wise: The men in his line were

instructed by their commander, Colonel Stark, not to fire a gun until the British had arrived at a certain point, forty paces distant from the American works. When the red-coated invaders had advanced to within that distance, the major (who was then a private), an excellent marksman, being unable to withstand so good an opportunity, fired before the order was given, and dropped his man. The fire was then opened along the whole line. On being reproved for disobeying orders, Mr. Simpson replied, "I never could help firing, when game which I was after came within gun-shot." He died October 28, 1825.

From this happy union of Mr. Adams with Miss Simpson, two children have sprung: Elizabeth, born June 15, 1842, and Phinehas Adams, Jr., born December 26, 1844,—both being born in the same house in the city of Lowell.

The former is the wife of Daniel C. Gould, Esq., paymaster of the Stark Mills, and the popular tenor singer at the Franklin Street church, to whom she was married the 10th of September, 1868. Mr. Gould is a son of Deacon Daniel Gould, who was the first railroad station agent in Manchester, a position he held until succeeded by the late Henry Hurlburt.

Mr. Phinehas Adams, Jr., married Miss Anna P. Morrison, of Belfast, Maine; and they reside with the family of the subject of this sketch. He (the son) is engaged in the cotton business in Boston.

About a year after being married, the father of the latter joined the First Congregational Church in Lowell, Rev. Amos Blanchard, pastor. Mrs. Adams was also a member of this church. On removing to Manchester, both had their relation transferred to

the Franklin Street Congregational Church, the Rev. William V. W. Davis being the able and esteemed pastor thereof.

At a recent business meeting of the Stark Corporation Directors, on the suggestion of Edmund Dwight, Esq., it was voted to present Colonel Adams with a suitable token, bearing testimony of the high respect in which he is held by them.

Therefore, on the 17th of November, 1879, that being the date completing his thirty-two years of service as agent of that Corporation, they presented him with one of the most valuable gold hunting-case, stem-winding watches ever made by the Waltham Company, together with a massive gold chain and an elegant seal. Inside the watch-case is engraved the following: "The Stark Mills to Phinehas Adams, November 17, 1847-1879, William Amory, Edmund Dwight, treasurer."

Accompanying these superb gifts was the following letter, expressive of sentiments that any honorable man would be justly proud to merit:—

BOSTON, Nov. 15, 1879.

My dear Sir, — I send you a watch and chain by request of the Directors of the Stark Mills. It will reach you on the anniversary of the day on which you entered their service, thirty-two years ago.

Will you receive it as an expression of their great respect for your character, and their high appreciation of the service you have rendered the Corporation during the third part of a century?

It is their sincere hope that the connection which has lasted so long may long continue.

With great regard, yours sincerely,

EDMUND DWIGHT, *Treasurer*.

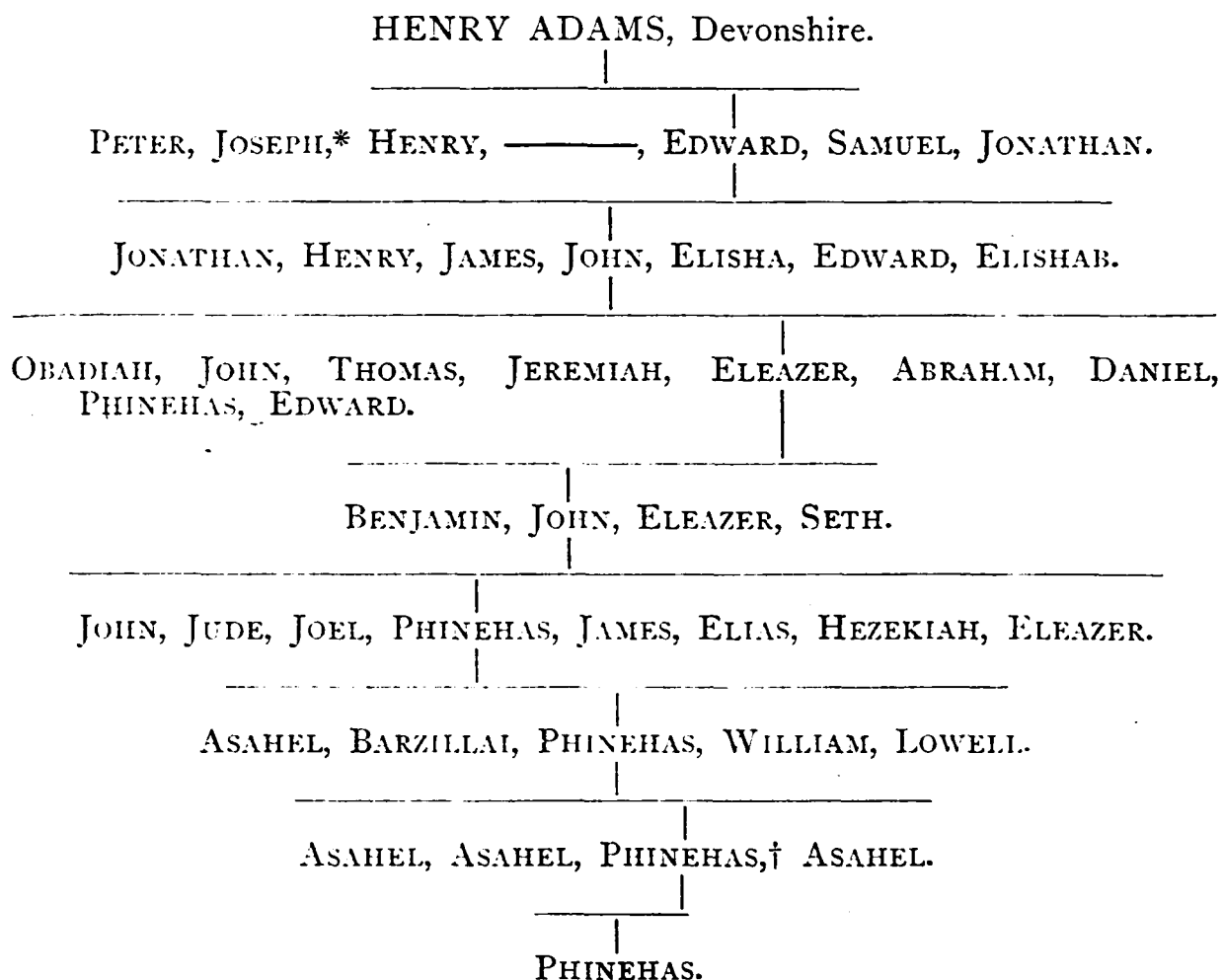
PHINEHAS ADAMS, Esq.

This testimonial was eminently deserved, as no one is held in greater or more universal respect than is the upright, courteous, and genial recipient.

The life of Mr. Adams proves that tireless persistence and devotion to duty accomplish much. The influence exerted by his life is far greater than is commonly supposed or realized. It can hardly fail to stimulate young men to honorable exertions, and to teach them that extensive notoriety is not necessarily indicative of true greatness, and also that too eager grasping after mere political distinction or after temporal riches is far less desirable than linking their lives to immortal principles.

No sermon could be more potent than such a life as this, illustrating the fact that exalted character is the choicest of all possessions, bearing ever large interest in this life, and likewise in the life hereafter.

THE "PHINEHAS ADAMS" BRANCH OF THE ADAMS FAMILY,
COPIED FROM THE ORIGINAL CHART PREPARED BY
ELIJAH ADAMS, AND DATED MEDFIELD, MAY 2, 1798.



* The line through which descended John Adams, John Quincy Adams, Charles Francis Adams, and Samuel Adams.

† The subject of this sketch.

HENRY ADAMS was the first of the name of Adams that came to America. He came from the County of Devonshire, England, embarking at Bristol, and arriving at the town of Braintree near Boston about the year 1630.

He brought with him eight sons, four of whom settled in Medfield, one in Braintree, two, it is supposed, in Chelmsford,—though but one of their names is known,—and one returned to his native country.