JARED SPARKS.*

IN no department is American literature confessedly stronger than in history. The names of Bancroft, Prescott, Motley, and Parkman — to mention no others — are enough to show that the United States have a creditable standing not only in making history but also in recording it. Among the names of our noted historians that of Jared Sparks is not always mentioned, but he was the forerunner of the modern school of investigators who go to the original sources and write at first-hand. He made extensive journeys in the Southern States in search of documents in which the story of the Revolution was told by the actors in it; he went to Europe several times to labor in the English State Paper office, and in the French public record offices; wherever he learned that letters or journals of Washington or Franklin or their great associates were to be found, there he bent his assiduous way and spent laborious days, copying or extracting. Professor Adams, who is thoroughly qualified from his work as a professor of history to do justice to Sparks, thus states his claims to grateful remembrance by Americans:

> It is, then, as an original investigator, as a pioneer in American history, that Jared Sparks will chiefly interest the present generation. Probably Mr. Sparks never expected to be the final authority upon the Life and Writings of Washington and Franklin, upon Ethan Allen and Benedict Arnold, La Salle, Ribault, Marquette, Pulaski, Charles Lee, Gouverneur Morris, or upon any other of the numerous historical subjects that occupied his careful attention in biographical and editorial ways. Nobody knew better than he under what limitations original and pioneer work is always done. No one would have rejoiced more heartily than he at the prospect of better facilities, better methods, better editions, better results than his were in his time. His labors were chiefly *bahnbrechend*, or pathfinding in the vast wilderness of American history. He first opened roads along which modern students are now easily and swiftly passing, too often without a grateful thought for the original explorer.

It has become too much the fashion with recent historical writers, whose labors will not bear comparison with his, to blame Sparks for loose methods in the editing of such works as the Correspondence of Washington. Grave charges were made by Lord Mahon in Sparks' lifetime, even, to the effect that he added, omitted, and altered matter without justification. These charges Sparks refuted, but it has become necessary to state his case anew, and this Professor Adams does with much vigor, charging home in particular upon Mr. W. C. Ford, the latest editor of Washington's writings. Much of this matter in the long introduction and in the body of the work will have little interest for the majority, who will also incline little to read the details of Sparks' prolonged researches in the South and in Europe.

The picture, however, which is presented of Jared Sparks making his own way to an education in Harvard is one of universal interest. It is not an unfamiliar one, but it never loses its attraction for those who can recognize the true heroisms of modern life. Sparks was born May 10, 1789, in the little town of Willington, Conn.; from his mother he inherited a fondness for books and a special inclination to history. Living for some years with an unprosperous uncle, who for one thing ran a sawmill, young Sparks "while waiting for the saw to make its long course through the logs, took the opportunity of studying *Morse's Geography* in the warm sunshine on the south side of the mill." Franklin's autobiography fell into the boy's hands very early, and taught him "that circumstances have not a sovereign control over the mind." He studied astronomy with a special aptitude, taught school, worked at the carpenter's bench, and finally at twenty years of age, through the kindness of Rev. Abiel Abbot, found his way clear to enter Phillips Exeter Academy on a foundation. He walked from Willington to Exeter in four days, a distance of 120 miles; this was by no means an extraordinary specimen of his mettle. At Exeter he did much work beside distinguishing himself in mathematics and classics, and entered Harvard in his twenty-third year, far more mature than most of the collegians of that time. He was a tutor at Havre de Grace, Md., for some

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months, where he first met Dr. Channing and Josiah Quincy, his steadfast friends. He taught school at Bolton, Mass., and studied theology with Dr. Thayer of Lancaster. Before entering the Unitarian ministry Sparks was for a time the working editor of the *North American Review*, a periodical to which, as it used to be, Professor Adams properly gives much space.

Sparks had his choice between an easy parish in Boston and a new and hard one at Baltimore. Characteristically he chose the latter. At his ordination on the 5th of May, 1819, Dr. Channing preached the famous sermon on "Unitarian Christianity," which made compromise between the two wings of the Congregational Church of New England thereafter impossible. At Baltimore Sparks was for several years a faithful minister and a zealous propagandist, through the press, of Unitarian beliefs. He resigned his charge in 1823, as his health suffered from the climate, and for the next seven years devoted himself again to the *North American*, which he established on a profitable financial basis and to which he contributed numerous articles on South American subjects. His sound ideas on economic science were also noteworthy. The subject which was to occupy him for years — a biography of Washington and an edition of his writings — took firm possession of his mind in 1824, and from this time on Professor Adams' biography is mainly the story of Sparks' labors on this and kindred tasks — a tale of books projected, wrought out laboriously, and published. A life of Ledyard, the traveler, was his first volume, in 1828, and the Library of American Biography the most comprehensive of his editorial labors. Whatever the task, Sparks, unlike Bancroft, spared no pains in gathering all accessible information, especially from governmental archives and private collections. Not a brilliant writer, he made his mark in the sphere of research, and his "great merit as an historian" was his reliance upon original manuscript documents.

When Jared Sparks went to London and Paris in 1828, he saw many of the distinguished persons of the time, but his account of Wordsworth is the most interesting thing in his journal; it is too long to quote. Returning from Europe he was, after some years, elected McLean professor of history at Harvard College. He had lectured on history with great success to popular audiences for some years previous. In 1849 he was chosen president of the university, but he held the office for four years only; the constant attention to details of administration which had little interest for him affected his health unfavorably, and he gladly returned to his more congenial tasks as an investigator and editor. His long cherished work on the American Revolution he had given up, confining himself to editing the diplomatic correspondence of the period.

One chapter toward the end of Professor Adams' ample biography is devoted to Sparks' private life; it gives a pleasant picture of his bachelor life until his first marriage in 1832, and of his residence, until his death in 1866, in the well-known Sparks house in Cambridge, now opposite Memorial Hall on Quincy Street. His married life was extremely happy. He had never been a recluse but was especially fond of ladies' society. Col. Brantz Mayer's description is borne out by the portraits here given:

> In personal appearance Mr. Sparks had a noble presence, a firm, bold, massive head, which, as age crept on, sometimes seemed careworn and impassive but never lost its intellectual power. His portraits show that in his prime his face was remarkable for dignified manly beauty. His manners were winning, and though undemonstrative and rather reticent among strangers, with friends he was always cheerful and hearty.

Professor Adams has executed a difficult task in an exemplary manner; his biography is well proportioned and well adapted to the purpose of a limited edition intended mainly for libraries and special students. In one minor detail of orthography he deserves special thanks for writing Sparks' name in the possessive without the superfluous final letter, which no one can pronounce without interjecting a vowel before it, the absence of which the apostrophe is used to denote! A little logic will go a long way in ridding English books of many unnecessary sibilations, already too numerous in our tongue.