

American Statesmen

EDITED BY

JOHN T. MORSE, JR.

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181
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MARTIN VAN BUREN

BY

EDWARD M. SHEPARD

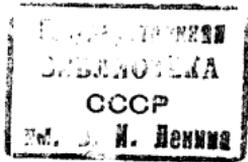


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PREFACE TO THE REVISED EDITION

SINCE 1888, when this Life was originally published, the history of American Politics has been greatly enriched. The painstaking and candid labors of Mr. Fiske, Mr. Adams, Mr. Rhodes, and others have gone far to render unnecessary the *caveat* I then entered against the unfairness, or at least the narrowness, of the temper with which Van Buren, or the school to which he belonged, had thus far been treated in American literature, and which had prejudicially misled me before I began my work. Such a *caveat* is no longer necessary. Even now, when the political creed of which Jefferson, Van Buren, and Tilden have been chief apostles in our land, seems to suffer some degree of eclipse, — only temporary, it may well be believed, but nevertheless real, — those who, like myself, have undertaken to present the careers of great Americans who held this faith need not fear injustice or prejudice in the field of American literature.

In this revised edition I have made a few corrections and added a few notes ; but the generous

treatment which has been given to the book has confirmed my belief that historic truth requires no material change.

A passage from the diary of Charles Jared Ingersoll (Life by William M. Meigs, 1897) tempts me, in this most conspicuous place of the book, to emphasize my observation upon one injustice often done to Van Buren. Referring, on May 6, 1844, to his letter, then just published, against the annexation of Texas, Mr. Ingersoll declared that, in view of the fact that nearly all of Van Buren's admirers and most of the Democratic press were committed to the annexation, Van Buren had committed a great blunder and become *felo de se*. The assumption here is that Van Buren was a politician of the type so painfully familiar to us, whose sole and conscienceless effort is to find out what is to be popular for the time, in order, for their own profit, to take that side. That Van Buren was politic there can be no doubt. But he was politic after the fashion of a statesman and not of a demagogue. He disliked to commit himself upon issues which had not been fully discussed, which were not ripe for practical solution by popular vote, and which did not yet need to be decided. Mr. Ingersoll should have known that the direct and simple explanation was the true one, — that Van Buren knew the risk and meant to take it. His letter