



Engraved by J. B. Forrest from a drawing by T. G. Louns after an original sketch by B. F. H. H.

ABRAHAM BALDWIN.

*Abt Baldwin*

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**A**MONG the notable men who helped to mould the character of the State of Georgia as well as fix the destiny of the government of the United States, Abraham Baldwin played a conspicuous part. He seemed to have been one of those "providential men" who are set apart in the scheme of human development to fill a large place in public affairs. No thoughtful student of history can contemplate his career nor measure his achievements without saying "for these things was this man come to the kingdom."

He was born November 6, 1754, at Guilford, Connecticut. Of his early life we know little. We have hints that he was a dreamy, thoughtful lad, asking questions often that his elders could not answer. The loss of his mother at an early age put a shadow over his boyhood life that made him even more reserved and determined to honor her memory by developing his powers as best he could and filling a useful career. Longfellow described a boy in his case when he says:

"A boy's will is the wind's will,  
But thoughts of my youth are long, long thoughts."

His father must have given him exceptionally good advantages for he graduated from Yale College in 1772 at eighteen years of age. He was regarded as one of the best mathematical and classical students of his day and was immediately employed as tutor in his *alma mater*. He filled a professorship in this institution until 1779, when he began the study of Theology. He then served as chaplain in the Continental Army until the close of the war.

Upon the termination of hostilities between this country and England he began the study of law. With unflagging industry the intense grasp of his powers soon mastered the science, and under the advice of General Nathanael Greene he moved to Savannah, Georgia, in 1784, and began the practice of his profession. At Savannah his commanding personal bearing and his magnetic intellectual force brought him into immediate notice. It may sound strange to readers of our own time, but within three months from the date of his arrival in Savannah he had been elected a member of the Georgia Legislature. When he took his seat in the Legislature the providence of his coming to Georgia began to be revealed. His first dream of a great commonwealth was a commonwealth of educated constituents. He drew a charter for a complete system of State education, supported by taxation of all property in the State, with a great university at the head and common schools at the base. The charter, born in the brain of this militant educationist, lawyer, and statesman, adopted by the State before the Federal Constitution had been ratified, has come down to us practically unaltered to this day. His provisions have been, one after another, put into execution by successive legislation until now the system, as outlined by Baldwin in 1784, is well nigh complete. Only one provision indeed remains to be added, viz.: the provision for secondary schools in each county in the State.

From the preamble to this charter, which as a whole has evoked encomiums from the learned and the virtuous, we make the following extract as illustrating the wisdom and patriotism of Mr. Baldwin:

"As it is the distinguishing happiness of free governments that civil order should be the result of choice and not of necessity, and the common wishes of the people become the laws of the land, their public prosperity and even existence very much

depend upon suitably forming the minds and morals of their citizens. When the minds of the people in general are viciously disposed and unprincipled, and their conduct disorderly, a free government will be attended with greater confusions and evils more horrid than the wild, uncultivated state of nature. It can only be happy when the public principles and opinions are properly directed and their manners regulated. This is an influence beyond the reach of laws and punishments, and can be reclaimed only by religion and education. It should therefore be among the first objects of those who wish well to the national prosperity to encourage and support the principles of religion and morality, and early to place the youth under the forming hand of society, that by instruction they may be moulded to the love of virtue and good order. Sending them abroad to other countries for their education will not answer these purposes, is too humiliating an acknowledgment of the ignorance or inferiority of our own, and will always be the cause of so great foreign attachments that upon the principles of policy it is inadmissible."

The State of Georgia was then in a most impoverished condition. The losses and distractions experienced during the war just ended had been immense. In the face of every retarding circumstance Mr. Baldwin compassed this important measure; and the University of Georgia to-day is a living monument of his wisdom, prescience and patriotism. The munificence of the Hon. John Milledge and the co-operative aid of Governor John Houston and the Honorables James Habersham, William Few, Joseph Clay, William Houston, and Nathan Brownson, were potent factors in the consummation of this educational scheme, which for a century has proven of incalculable benefit to the commonwealth of Georgia. Had he performed no other public duty than this, Mr. Baldwin's title to the gratitude of succeeding generations would have been unquestioned.

His political advancement was rapid. In 1785 he was elected by the Legislature to a seat in the Continental Congress, and from that time until the day of his death he remained in the public service. When he died, four years of his second term as United States Senator from Georgia had not expired.

Of the convention, which in 1787 framed the Constitution of the United States, he was a very active member. It is stated on good authority that some of the essential clauses of that memorable instrument were formulated by him.

"His manner of conducting business" says the author of the sketch which appears in the fourth volume of *The National Portrait Gallery of Distinguished Americans* "was worthy of the highest commendation; he may have wanted ambition to make himself brilliant, but he never wanted industry to make himself useful. His oratory was simple, forcible, convincing. His maxim of never asserting anything but what he believed to be true could not fail to be useful in carrying convictions to others. Patient of contradiction, and tolerant to the wildest opinions, he could be as indulgent to the errors of judgment as if he had stood the most in need of such indulgence for himself."

Mr. Baldwin was a Federalist. So manly was his course in Congress and in the Senate of the United States, so conservative were his views, so conscientious was his conduct in the discussion of all constitutional questions, and so steadfast his adherence to what he conceived to be the cardinal principles of government, that he acquired and retained in a wonderful degree the confidence of the party to which he was attached, the respect of those who held different notions, with regard to the political questions which then agitated the country, and the approbation of his constituents. Of him it has been truthfully said he "died with the consciousness of having faithfully and fearlessly filled the measure of his public duties."

Col. C. C. Jones, in *Biographical Sketches of Delegates to the Continental Congress*, says:

"In private life he was correct in all of his habits and given to benevolent deeds. Never having married he expended his accumulations in assisting worthy young men in acquiring an education and in establishing them in business. In this regard his charities were akin to those which so beautified the life of Alexander Stephens. Upon the death of his father in 1787 he assumed in large measure the payment of his debts and the maintenance and education of his six orphan children. So far as the record stands the reputation of Mr. Baldwin for purity of character, honesty of purpose and act, fidelity to trusts reposed, and genuine benevolence, is most admirable."

To Connecticut is Georgia greatly indebted for Lyman Hall and Abraham Baldwin. Of their adopted citizenship she is justly proud, and in token of her appreciation of their virtuous lives and useful services she perpetuates their names in two of her counties.

Mr. Baldwin died in harness as a senator from Georgia at the national capital, on the 4th of March, 1807. His last illness was so short and his death so unexpected that none of his relatives, except his brother-in-law, were able to be present at his funeral. But it seemed as if the public in general were his near relatives. There have rarely been witnessed more general and genuine marks of regret at the loss of any of the great benefactors of our country, particularly among the members of Congress from Georgia. In this State his loss was most deeply felt, though very sensibly perceived in the councils of the Union. Though his funeral was two days after Congress dissolved, many members stayed expressly to attend it. His remains were deposited by the side of his old friend, General James Jackson, his former colleague, whom he had followed to the grave just one year before.

G. R. GLENN.