Sometime between the years 1685 and 1692—probably not long before the latter date—a French Protestant named Pierre (Peter) Poinsett sailed from England to Charleston, in what was then the British province of South Carolina. He seems to have left his birthplace at Soubize, France, in 1685, when the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes took place, and to have stayed in England until his migration, together with many of his fellow-religionist countrymen, to the New World. Before leaving France, Peter Poinsett had

1 This article is based primarily upon the large collection of Joel R. Poinsett's personal, diplomatic and scientific correspondence in The Historical Society of Pennsylvania, hereafter referred to in the footnotes as Poinsett Papers; in the same collection (XXI.76) there is a manuscript biography, without pagination, by Joseph Johnson; it is referred to hereafter as Johnson Biography.

Johnson Biography; Arthur H. Hirsh, The Huguenots of Colonial South Carolina, pp. 10, 21, 23, 59, 119, 254. Soubize is twenty miles south of La Rochelle. The birth at Soubize is proved from the "Liste de Francoises et Suisses" settled in Charleston, on the Santee and in the orange quarter of South Carolina, who desired naturalization; this list was prepared probably about 1695–1696 (compiled by David Ravenel, New York, 1888); see also Transactions of the Huguenot Society of South Carolina, 1897, no. 5
married a French Protestant lady, Sara Fouchereau, probably from Soubize also. She accompanied him to Charleston.

Poinsett was one of a group of Huguenot merchants who came to South Carolina shortly after it had been founded by West Indian planters seeking relief from crowded Barbados and St. Kitts. The province’s first historian, David Ramsay, had the lords proprietors in mind when he said that “Commerce is of noble origin in South Carolina.” But the remark might aptly have been applied also to the Huguenot merchants who supplied the province with a much-wanted business acumen, resulting in that combination of aristocracy and trade for which the province became noted.

It was not long before the Poinsetts became persons of substance and standing in their community, an important and rapidly-developing social and economic center of the English colonies in America. By 1704 Peter Poinsett had removed to “a more commodious house” at the corner of Church and Elliott Streets, an advance from the “small place of entertainment” which he had opened, apparently soon after his arrival, for the support of his family, at the northeast corner of Church and Queen Streets. By 1740, when the Poinsetts had been about fifty years in Charleston, their property was the fifth largest among those of the French Protestant families destroyed by the great fire of November 18 that year. Two years later, Peter Poinsett became a member of the South Carolina Society.

Peter and Sara Poinsett had a son, Joel, who married Susanna Varin, also of French Protestant descent.

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2 History of South Carolina from its first Settlement in 1607 to the Year 1808 (Charleston, 1809), II. 232.

8 Johnson Biography.

4 Hirsh, op. cit.

5 Ibid.
A vintner by trade, Joel Poinsett died, probably in March, 1744, leaving a considerable amount of property—at least £1,000. He had a son by the name of Elisha who married a lady named Catherine, whose surname is not known. Elisha Poinsett, his son, after acquiring such medical instruction as Dr. Samuel Wilson of Charleston could impart, completed his medical education in London. There he married Ann Roberts, who is said to have been an only child. She seems also to have been of French Protestant descent. Dr. Elisha Poinsett had four children, two sons and two daughters, three of whom died young and unmarried, apparently from some form of consumption.

In June, 1776, shortly after Dr. Poinsett returned from his English studies, the Charlestonians beat off a strong English attack. During the Revolution, Dr. Poinsett served as a surgeon with the army of the United States; he attended Pulaski on his death bed at the siege of Savannah. Sometime in March, 1779, Dr. Poinsett's second son, Joel Roberts, was born at Charleston. It is the seventy-three years of Joel Roberts Poinsett's life of eager activities that we shall endeavor to trace.

On May 12, 1780, Charleston surrendered to a large force of the English army and navy. The city of fifteen thousand people, much the largest in the southern colonies, was sacked and robbed more mercilessly than any other captured by the British in the Revolution. Most of the citizens fled, the parents of Poinsett's...

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7 Both William, the eldest child, and Elizabeth, the youngest daughter, seem to have died at quite an early age; Susan, the elder daughter, was in her young womanhood when she passed away in 1804. Poinsett died in Stateburg, S. C., Dec. 12, 1851. The Johnson biography gives the date of his birth as March 2, 1779; but Mrs. Ann Manigault's diary gives it as March 17, 1779.  
closest friend, Dr. Joseph Johnson, going to Philadelphia. Two years later, Dr. Poinsett took his family to England. In 1778 nine-year old Joel returned with his parents to Charlestown—to the gayest and most delightful city in the United States, the fourth in population and the metropolis of the South. Apparently Dr. Poinsett resumed the practice of medicine as well as the enjoyment of what appears to have been a steadily-increasing and well-invested income, sufficient not merely to maintain his social standing in the community, but also to provide young Joel with such a varied course of education and travel as was very seldom enjoyed by American youth of that day. Indeed, between 1790 and his death in 1803, Dr. Poinsett bought about $62,000 worth of real estate, including fourteen tracts of land in Charleston, a plantation of 400 acres on the north side of the Ashley River, and a lot on the west side of East Bay.

From the time he was nine years old until he reached the age of fifteen, Joel received the rudiments of a classical education in Charleston from the Rev. James H. Thompson, an excellent teacher who is described as "the principal of a classical seminary of great eminence;" he had been, incidentally, a prisoner of the British at St. Augustine, Florida, toward the close of the Revolution, and apparently was a Congregationalist or Independent. After completing his early education at this seminary, Joel was sent to the celebrated academy of Timothy Dwight, afterward president of Yale, at Greenfield, Connecticut. Many South-

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9 He was president of the South Carolina Society from 1792 until his death in 1803; for his estate, see Probate Court Records, Charleston, S. C., Will Book, 1803; see also Joseph Johnson to Poinsett, March 17, 1825; Poinsett Papers, II.

10 Ibid.

11 For the Rev. James H. Thompson, see Howe's History of the Presbyterian Church in South Carolina, I. 461, note.

12 Johnson Biography.
ern youths were then sent to New England to study, especially to Connecticut; Poinsett's rival and opponent, John C. Calhoun, was graduated from Yale in 1802, and a number studied at Tappan Reeve's famous law school at Litchfield. Joel remained about two years at Greenfield, living in the family of Timothy Dwight, but the New England winters seem to have affected his health much as those of Scotland did later. In 1796 Dr. Poinsett, now president of the South Carolina Society and one of the most prominent gentlemen of Charleston, decided his only surviving son should complete his studies in England. For the greater part of the next thirteen years, Joel's time was spent in European and Asiatic travel and study.

Before the Revolution, a number of young men from the colonies, especially from South Carolina and Virginia, had gone abroad to study medicine at Edinburgh or law at the Inns of Court in London. But during the Revolution, and for some years afterward, the number naturally fell off, although after 1790 the more opulent families in Charleston continued the old tradition of sending their sons to Eton, Westminster, and Oxford or to read law at the Temple. Study and travel in Europe at the end of the 18th century were, however, luxuries in which few young Americans could indulge unless they were masters of vessels, and then they almost always confined their journeys to the seaports. Lewis Littlepage had served in the Polish army and Count Rumford was to manage Bavaria and Everett Edwards visited Albania a little later; but they were exceptions. Travelling for pleasure in Europe was not easy during the Revolution and the Napoleonic Wars, especially if one's language was English; and few Americans could then converse well in any foreign tongue. John Ledyard had, it is true, crossed Siberia,

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13 Ravenel, op. cit., 434.
but he was another exception. To meet the cultured and refined society of Europe in that age gave a youth from across the Atlantic more knowledge of the world than any degree from Harvard, Yale or Princeton, especially as the colleges of the United States seemed stagnant at the time, and to be able to converse fluently in their own tongue with Europeans in society was an accomplishment which exceedingly few Americans possessed, or seemed to have cared to possess. Very few of our diplomatic and consular representatives knew anything of the language, literature or customs of the countries to which they were sent, and their point of view was but too frequently tainted with the idea that the United States of America was the greatest country on earth.

When, in 1796, young Poinsett’s father sent him to England, his mother’s relative, John Dollond, the inventor of the acromatic telescope, who was equally noted as a religious liberal, caused him to receive further instruction by living with Mr. Roberts’ cultured family in London, just as he had lived with the Dwights at Greenfield. His closest friend, Joseph Johnson—the only one throughout his correspondence who addresses him informally by his second name—emphasizes in his biographical sketch that young Poinsett enjoyed, while living in the Roberts household, “the society of his [Mr. Roberts’] highly cultivated, literary and genteel visitors” as much as “the benefits of Mr. Roberts’ instruction.” After spending a year with the Roberts family, Poinsett enrolled on October 25, 1797, at the University of Edinburgh in courses of medical, chemical and pharmaceutical lectures. It was the same year in which Dr. Benjamin Smith Barton of

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15 Johnson Biography.
16 Poinsett Papers, XXIII. 43. His cards of admission to these medical courses are pasted on this page.
Lancaster, Pennsylvania, was graduated from Göt-tingen as the first United States student who had com-
pleted a course of study at a German university. The
autumnal and winter climate of Edinburg, however,
proceeded more immediately to disagree with Poinsett
than had that of Connecticut, and one of his professors,
Dr. Gregory, "urged his immediate removal to the
milder climate of Lisbon, whither he sailed from Glas-
gow and where he arrived after a long and very stormy
passage through the Bay of Biscay." Even before
leaving the ship, Poinsett's health improved, and when
he sailed from Oporto for England after his stay in
Lisbon, in the spring of 1798, he seems to have entirely
recovered.

Poinsett apparently returned to Dollond's hospitable
home at South Lambeth near London. He seems to
have endeavored to enter the military academy which
had just been opened at Woolwich, but, possibly be-
cause he was not a British subject, he was not allowed
do so. Instead, he began military studies under a
former French officer named Marquois who instructed
him in the "Exercises of the Cavalry and Broad
Sword;" in engineering, mathematics, drawing cal-
culations, projectiles; in "The Rules of Fortifications,
their Designs and Proportions, in the Science of be-
sieging and defending such fortresses, with the exer-
cises of Field Artillery," and in those of infantry,
with marching, counter-marching and maneuvering,
and fencing with the small sword and sabre. These
studies so engrossed and fascinated Poinsett that he
wished to adopt the army as a career; but his father,
who had been paying for all this education abroad, de-
murred; and he returned to Charleston in 1800 to

17 Johnson Biography.
18 William Wills to Poinsett, London, Nov. 1829; Poinsett Papers,
VI. 28.
19 Johnson Biography.
20 Ibid.
enter another branch of study, the law, reading in the office of William H. de Saussure, afterward chancellor of South Carolina. Perhaps the elder Poinsett wished his son to do this with a view to entering some phase of state or national politics. But that was not to be. Poinsett's wander years were not yet over. He procured a list of books on international and other phases of law—Vattel, Burlamaqui, Blackstone, and Gilbert's *Law of Evidence* are mentioned among them—from his worthy law teacher who had selected them "with a view to your general improvement as a Gentleman and Citizen, who has rights to vindicate & duties to perform." Then he sailed again to Europe from Baltimore, probably in June, 1801, landing at Havre in the fall of 1801. He spent that winter in Paris, to which, when the Peace of Amiens was concluded on March 27, 1802, at the end of nine years of war between France and England, many English tourists, including some of the most distinguished contemporary Englishmen and Englishwomen, flocked. On July 3, 1802, Fulwar Skipwith, Jefferson's cousin, who was then United States Commercial Agent at Paris, issued Poinsett a passport which was to carry him over much of Europe. It was visaed by no less a person than the Swiss patriot, Alois Reding, who was then resisting the French Directory. The dates of the visaes are: Schweitz on July 8 and Solothurn on July 25, 1802. Poinsett's passport was probably the only United States passport ever visaed by that brave Swiss leader. Poinsett, indeed, became personally acquainted with him and ac-

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21 de Saussure to Poinsett, May 26, 1801; Poinsett Papers, I. 5.
22 Johnson Biography.
23 See James B. Campbell, *Reminiscences of Poinsett*, for Poinsett's life in Paris at this period. According to Campbell, Poinsett was present at the famous final interview between Napoleon and the British Ambassador Whitworth, which took place on March 13, 1803.
24 Poinsett Papers, XXIII. 40. This passport is covered with curious visas.
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companied him during a part of his campaign against the French.

From these warlike scenes he passed to Coppet\(^2^5\) to converse with Necker (who had lost all his teeth) and Necker's daughter, Madame de Staël. Once, when Poinsett was calling on them, he served as interpreter between Robert R. Livingston, United States minister to France, to whom de Saussure had given him a letter of introduction, and Necker.\(^2^6\) Livingston was so deaf he could not hear Necker, and Madame de Staël, catching what her father meant to say, would repeat it to Poinsett who translated it to Livingston, giving proof of his linguistic abilities. His passport was visaed at Coppet on August 10, 1802; thence he proceeded to Lausanne, and Vevey, and along the upper shore of Lake Geneva to Martigny, thence across the Alps to Italy.\(^2^7\) Stopping at Milan, he reached Bologna on August 29; then went to Mantua; on September 2 to Verona; and arrived at Venice on the 7th of September. His next visits were to Ferrara on November 18 and Bologna on November 20, from whence he proceeded to Florence. Apparently, during the winter of 1802-1803, he visited Sicily and Malta, travelling extensively among the Greek ruins in the former islands. He then sailed back to Genoa and was at Nice the 30 Floreal Year 11 (May 19, 1803). On May 30, 1803, he was at Marseilles. After another sojourn in Switzerland, he reached Vienna in October, 1803, where he seems to have remained about three months and where he formed the acquaintance of the celebrated Prince de Ligne, a leader in the very aristocratic society which survived in its full force in Vienna, despite the French Revolution. Here he learned that his father had died at Boston on September 18, 1803, and that his only surviving sister was there

\(^2^5\) This passport was visaed at Coppet July 30, 1803.
\(^2^6\) Johnson Biography.
\(^2^7\) Poinsett Papers, XX. 5–40.
among strangers. On December 27, 1803, therefore, he procured a visa at Vienna from Champagny (afterward Due de Cadore), then French ambassador there; the Dutch minister's visa was affixed the next day; and sometime in January, 1804, he sailed from Rotterdam for the United States.

Finding his sister Susan in Charleston dying from consumption, he took her to New York hoping the sea voyage would improve her health; but it was too late. She lingered a few months, and died in his arms in that city. He was now the sole surviving member of his family, for his mother had predeceased her husband. So Poinsett was left at the age of twenty-five without immediate family ties and was thus free to continue his travels.

In 1804 Poinsett travelled extensively throughout the State of New York, proceeding down the St. Lawrence River to Kingston, Montreal and Quebec, after which he returned to the United States by the way of Vermont and New Hampshire and thence to Boston. We know nothing of what took place in his life during the year 1805; it is the one year for which we have no evidence of his activities. It is probable, however, that he spent some time in settling the estates of his father and of his sister Susan, which left him possession of an income of approximately $5000 a year. This not merely made him a very rich young man, but enabled him, now that all immediate ties were gone, to set off on renewed European adventures.

He seems to have sailed for Europe in the summer of 1806 and to have conferred, either in the United States

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28 Johnson Biography; Dr. Elisha Poinsett's will was proved before the Probate Court of Charleston October 28, 1803; Joel Roberts Poinsett did not qualify there as an executor until May 10, 1804 (Probate Court Records, Charleston, S. C.).
29 Poinsett Papers, XXIII. 44.
30 Ibid., XX. 27-40.
or in England, with Mr. J. Allen Smith of Charleston, who has been described as the first United States citizen to travel in Russia. Poinsett sailed from Harwich, England, to Gothenburg, Sweden, where he apparently arrived in October, 1806. After visiting Stockholm and noting there the chief objects of interest, he proceeded to St. Petersburg, after an adventurous voyage of six days across the Gulf of Bothnia to Finland. At that time the greater part of Finland was still under British control; the entire country was not given over to Russia until 1809; and Poinsett, meeting some Finnish officers and finding them extremely ignorant of what was going on in the rest of Europe, enlightened them concerning conditions there, just as five years later he was able similarly to enlighten people in the various parts of South America through which he travelled. He reached St. Petersburg shortly before November 30, 1806, at which date he wrote a long letter in excellent French to an unnamed correspondent, describing his journey from England. The biography prepared by his widow and cousin claims, among other inaccuracies, that only one United States citizen had travelled in Russia before him; but in reality, a considerable number of United States merchant vessels from Boston, Philadelphia and other ports, had from 1784 on sailed to European Russian ports; and both John Ledyard and John Paul Jones had made extensive Russian journeys some twenty years before Poinsett arrived there.

Nothing, therefore, but a pure love of adventurous travel seems to have prompted his Russian journeys. In Russia, it is interesting to note, he was greatly aided

81 Poinsett Papers, XXI. 14–19. Poinsett's account of his Swedish travels is written in excellent French.
82 "Mr. Poinsett ... is led by curiosity to visit your part of the world;" letter of introduction from J. Allen Smith of Charleston, to M. Giraud, Smyrna, dated October 11, 1806; Poinsett Papers, I. 7.
in society by his rank as colonel on the staff of Governor Charles Pinckney of South Carolina; such a uniform indeed appears to have been very useful to him in his position and standing in St. Petersburg. He undoubtedly wore it to the luncheon to which the Emperor Alexander I. invited him; it seems, indeed, to have served him as a "full dress" at the Russian court. It "saved him from the great expense of new suits, and new court dresses on every public occasion;" and, as a colonel, he could visit the Russian and Prussian armies during the critical years of Wagram, Jena and Friedland.

Everywhere he went, Poinsett seems to have made the acquaintance of those whose friendship was particularly valuable to him. In St. Petersburg he met Lord Royston, the only son and heir of Lord Hardwick; and with him he started on an adventurous journey in 1807 to the southeastern parts of the Russian Empire. In June, 1807, they visited Moscow and Kazan. Then they descended the Volga to Astrakhan, where they remained for three weeks, saw some Brahmans and learned much from them of their religious beliefs. Then they proceeded to Georgia, Persia and Armenia and were present at the unsuccessful siege of Erivan by the Russians. Resuming their journey, Poinsett saw dromedaries and camels for the first time, arriving at Kizliar on July 4, 1807. Was it this Fourth of July in southeastern Russia to which Poinsett referred thirty-eight years later in his speech at Greenville, South Carolina, when on another Fourth he spoke of the feelings of one who passes that day.

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88 He solicited this from his friend Joseph Johnson in a letter to him dated February 20, 1807; ibid., I. 13.
89 Johnson Biography.
90 Poinsett Papers, XXI. 5-13; XX. 56-58.
91 Ibid., XXI. 63, 78-84.
92 Ibid., XXI. 5-13.
abroad, far from home. They left Kizliar with an escort of Cossacks, were benighted in the desert and passed on through "the encampments of Calmuck Tartars in the Steppes or Valleys of that mountainous country," where they obtained an insight into the worship of the Dalai Lama of Tibet, seeing the prayer wheel revolve. Next they came to a village on the Sulak governed by a Prince Sefi whom seemed surprized "how the inhabitants of a country could exist where there are no deserts." Prince Sefi courteously accompanied his English and American visitors to Tarku, the residence of the Shemkall, a personage subsidized by Russia. From Tarku they proceeded to Derbent; after leaving that city they had a dangerous time crossing a river, and here, as elsewhere in this region, passed the night on the roof of a house. Their entertainments were by no means over. Sheikh Ali Klan of Kooba entertained them royally; he had never had a South Carolina colonel and the son of an English peer as his guests before. Singing and dancing girls and buffoons amused them at a magnificent fête offered them by this Sheikh. From Kooba they went on to the Khanate of Baku, crossing a dreary desert after spending the night near Joyek. At Baku in August they saw the oil wells, which Poinsett calls "the sources of naptha," and the temple of Eternal Fire at Apsharon, where "inflammable vapour is carbonated by hydrogen gas." They saw panthers and tigers, and jackalls howled at them when they stayed at the Caravanserai at old Shamarkie. They went on to Tiflis by way of Ganja. Before leaving the Caucasus Poinsett notes that he "supped with Her Majesty the Queen of Imeretia on the roof of the house." The Poinsett papers do not inform us exactly where or when this event took place. Three days after

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88 Speech at Greenville, South Carolina, in memory of Andrew Jackson, July 4, 1845, in Library of Congress.
they had left Kizliar, the Czar Alexander had concluded the peace treaties of Tilsit with Napoleon, on July 7, 1807; but the Russo-Turkish war was to continue for almost five years longer. A heavy escort accompanied Poinsett and Royston as they visited Morok and Terek after leaving the fortress of Vladikavkaz. They remained ten days at Terek, Poinsett spending six of them in bed with a violent fever; then they went on to Prokladny, crossed the Kuban to see a troop of Circassians, and finally arrived at Ekaterinodar. From the fortress of Taman they crossed the straits to Kertsch, then travelled over the Crimea where Poinsett noted the Genoese ruins at Theodosia, stating that there were “no Greek ruins in the Crimea!” Russian archeology had not progressed very far in 1807. He described Sevastopol as the “harbour of the Russian ships of war” and, on the return journey to St. Petersburg, visited Simferopol, Nicolaev and Kieff with its many churches. Winter came on; the travelers’ carriages were put on sledges at Sevak; thus they passed through Orel and Toula, seeing the manufacture of iron and steel at the latter place; then to Moscow, finally arriving at St. Petersburg sometime before February, 1808. Poinsett seems to have spent about the equivalent of five thousand dollars a year while in Russia in the first decade of the nineteenth century.

That this journey temporarily so affected Poinsett’s health as to cause him to remain at St. Petersburg for the first five months of 1808 is to be inferred from his letters to Joseph Johnson, dated February 10 and March 15, 1808. In the latter he requests “Dear Joe”

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\* Writing forty years later and referring to the war between the United States and Mexico, Poinsett stated that in 1807 he passed through the heart of the Caucasus; “at that time it was necessary to wait the departure of a train from post to post, as it was unsafe to move with less than two pieces of artillery and a full company of infantry.”

\* Poinsett Papers, I. 13.

\* Ibid., I. 17, 18.
to send him five hundred pounds to the care of Messrs. Hottinguer at Paris, and again refers to his intention to visit Greece; J. Allen Smith of Charleston had given him in 1806 letters of introduction to the Most Illustrious Logothete at Athens, also to a M. de Susieri, and a M. de Favel there, as well as to Prince Italinski, the Russian Ambassador at Constantinople. Another letter from Smith commended the young South Carolinian to Mr. Robert Wilkinson at Smyrna. But these Levantine journeys were never performed by Poinsett, possibly because of the continuation of the Russo-Turkish War. Fifteen years afterward, when Poinsett was in Congress, he delivered an important speech on the independence of Greece—a country he never visited.

Some idea of the favorable impression created and left in Russia by Poinsett may be gathered from a letter to him from Edward Coles, written at Hamburg, December 15, 1816, when returning from a special official mission to Russia for President Madison, in which Coles stated that he had often heard Poinsett’s name favorably mentioned in St. Petersburg, adding that “Count Romanzoff made many friendly inquiries after you. . . . [He] seemed to take a deep interest in the United States. . . . [It is] his earnest desire to connect and preserve the most friendly relations with them.” On December 27, 1845, Poinsett wrote to John C. Calhoun that during his stay in Russia the Emperor Alexander had frequently spoken to him of the claims of the United States on the North West Coast of America, and that that monarch “advocated our claim to the 54° and proposed to enter into a treaty of mutual guarantee of the possessions of Russia and the United

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Poinsett Papers, I. 6-12.


*Poinsett Papers, I. 193; Allan Nevins, ed., Diary of John Quincy Adams*, p. 76.
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States to that limit.” Poinsett added that “these proposals I submitted to Mr. Madison and Mr. Monroe, but our possessions on the North West Coast did not excite much interest at that period.”

Poinsett appears to have left St. Petersburg in June, 1808, for the baths of Teplitz in Prussia, arriving in that country in one of the most critical periods of its history. On July 6, 1807, Queen Louise had had her celebrated interview with Napoleon, which had not melted the Emperor’s heart; the secret society of the Tugendbund had been founded shortly before, in April, 1808; and Scharnhourtst’s Military Reorganization Committee was beginning its activities in Prussia. That unfortunate country was soon to sign, on September 8, 1808, the harsh evacuation treaty (concluded by Champagny, as French representative with Frederick William) which document was characterized by Poinsett’s friend Alexander as rendering indefinite the French occupation of Prussia.

As he passed through Koenigsberg, where the Prussian court had taken refuge, he met Queen Louise of Prussia, and asked her if she had been treated discourteously by Napoleon a year earlier at her interview with him. This she explicitly denied, and said she had no cause to complain, except that Napoleon had not granted all that she requested. Frederick William

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46 His Russian passport was issued to him at St. Petersburg June 9, 1808; Poinsett Papers, XXIII. 37, signed by Count Nicolas Romanzoff. It was visaed at Riga, June 16, 1808.
47 R. B. Mowat, The Diplomacy of Napoleon, p. 179.
48 Ibid., pp. 217, 218; Baron Roenne, then Prussian Minister at Washington, writing to Poinsett, then Secretary of War, from New Brunswick, New Jersey, in 1839, states “I have no doubt the King of Prussia remembers you” and urges Poinsett to revisit Prussia. Frederick William died in 1840.
49 His passport was visaed at Koenigsberg July 11, 1808; Poinsett Papers, XXIII. 41.
seems to have confided some of his troubles to the South Carolina colonel, for he complained to him that Czar Alexander had urged him on "to this unhappy war" and had accepted from Napoleon a slice of Prussian territory. Here at Koenigsberg Poinsett also renewed his acquaintance with the Prince de Ligne, whom he had met in Vienna in 1803. He then passed on through Strasbourg to Paris, which he reached in time to be severely cross-questioned by Fouché as to some of his alleged indiscreet remarks. He was present at the memorable diplomatic reception at Saint Cloud on August 15, 1808, when Napoleon severely upbraided Metternich. He remained in Paris for nearly a year, but all that is known is that he informed Armstrong, the United States minister there, of his Russian experiences, and urged that a United States minister be sent to that country. The ever-obliging J. Allen Smith had given Poinsett a letter of introduction to Masséna, who had instructed that Charlestonian in fencing before the French Revolution. The letter was duly presented, and through Masséna Poinsett met many Napoleonic officers, Clausel and others. Masséna told Poinsett of a "private interview with Napoleon" which was interrupted by the discharge of a gun. An attendant had rushed into the apartment and found Masséna bleeding with a wound in his head, and Napoleon lamenting it and saying that the gun had gone off accidentally in his hands. This seems to have been the generally accepted version of the story as then current in Paris; but Masséna, confined to the "dark chamber" where his surgeon had ordered him to remain to try to save his

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50 Johnson Biography.
51 His Strasbourg passport is to be found in Poinsett Papers, XXIII. 36; he is described therein as an American colonel travelling with a mulatto servant; Johnson Biography.
52 Ibid.; his future chief, John Quincy Adams, received the appointment in 1809.
eyesight from the effects of the wound, told Poinsett in confidence that it was not an accident, that Napoleon in a great passion had tried to kill him. "The cursed little fool," he said, "could not even shoot straight or he would have killed me."53

In what appears to be the last letter written from Paris, dated March 20, 1809, and addressed to Joseph Johnson,54 Poinsett commented on the European political situation as follows:

Nothing can be more impolitic than the continental expeditions of the English. They always will be driven shamefully from the continent.

There appears to be an unaccountable fatality or stupidity in all the coalitions against France. Austria waits with patience untl the troops, which were withdrawn from Germany, and sent post into Spain, have finished the campaign gloriously, and are on their march back again, before she talks of war, and will probably wait until they are on the banks of the Rhine before she commences hostilities.

Relations between the United States and England had become very strained as the year 1809 went on. War seemed imminent, and Poinsett felt that he had gathered much military experience which he wished to put at President Madison's disposal. So he returned after nearly five years' absence to his native land. We do not know exactly when he left Europe or arrived in the United States, but, once at home, he endeavored through his friend and fellow Huguenot, Albert Gallatin, then Secretary of the Treasury, to procure some position in the War Department where his experience might be of use to his country. Madison, however, at Gallatin's instance, offered him a mission which was to open a new and advantageous series of chapters in his life. It was to proceed to Buenos Aires, Santiago de

\[\text{According to the Johnson Biography, this acquaintance with Masséna took place when Poinsett was in Paris after his return from Russia; according to the James B. Campbell reminiscences, it was at least five years earlier, during Poinsett's first visit to Paris.}\]

\[\text{Poinsett Papers, I. 19.}\]
Chile and Lima as agent for the United States government, and to ascertain and report what was really going on there. The next four years of Poinsett's life were adventurously spent, not merely in compliance with these duties, but also in a series of circumstances such as few United States representatives abroad have ever encountered. Poinsett was now thirty-one years of age. He possessed private means and an unusual knowledge of foreign languages. As is apparent from his writings, he was a close and careful observer and was able to convey to the authorities at Washington an accurate and precise picture of the countries he visited. It would have been difficult to find anyone in the United States, where there were then practically no trained diplomats, better qualified for his mission than was Poinsett.

II.
OFFICIAL MISSION TO BUENOS AIRES AND CHILE
1810–1814

We know nothing of Poinsett's activities during the year 1810 until he was appointed by President Madison to proceed on an important mission to South America. From the Madison papers in the Library of Congress, it appears that David Gelston was first offered this mission, but declined it. It is not clear from fragmentary evidence at hand whether it was originally intended that either Poinsett or Gelston was to go to South America, or whether the two different functions of special agent and of agent for seamen and commerce were to be combined in the same person. In any event, on June 28, 1810, Robert Smith, of Baltimore,

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55 Gallatin to Madison, August 15, 1810.
56 From a letter written by Poinsett to President Monroe on May 7, 1817 (Poinsett Papers, XI. 8), he seems to have understood from Madison that he would have been appointed United States minister to Buenos Aires or Chile had the United States recognized their independence.
who was Secretary of State, instructed Poinsett to proceed to "South America" as a special agent of the United States, his destination and duties there being somewhat more particularly defined in additional instructions issued nearly two months later, on August 27, appointing him "Agent for Seamen and Commerce" at the port of Buenos Aires. Likewise on August 27, with almost incredible ignorance, similar instructions were issued to him to serve in a like capacity at the "Port of St. Iago in Chile" and the "Port of Lima in Peru." Since these instructions were the first ever issued by the State Department to one of its representatives in South America, and since they apparently served as Poinsett's sole guide for his official conduct during the next four years, they are quoted in full:

Department of State
August 27th 1810

Sir:

As a crisis is approaching which must produce great changes in the situation of Spanish America, and may dissolve altogether its Colonial relations to Europe, and as the Geographical position of the United States and other obvious considerations give them an intimate interest in whatever may affect the destiny of that part of the American Continent, it is our duty to turn our attention to this important subject, and to take such steps, not incompatible with the neutral character and honest policy of the United States, as the occasion renders proper. With this view you have been selected to proceed without delay to Buenos Ayres, and thence if convenient to Lima—in Peru or St. Iago—in Chili, or both. You will make it your object wherever it may be proper, to diffuse the impression that the United States cherish the sincerest good will toward the people of Spanish America as neighbours, as belonging to the same portion of the globe, and as having a mutual interest in cultivating friendly intercourse; that this disposition will exist whatever may be their internal system or European relations, with respect

57 Poinsett Papers, I. 20, 21, 22, 24. An extract of this letter, as printed in House Rept., No. 72, 20th Cong. 2d session, p. 7, is reprinted in Manning, Diplomatic Correspondence of the United States Concerning the Independence of the Latin-American Nations (N. Y., 1925), I, pt. 1, p. 10, with the statement that the original is not to be found in the State Department.
to which no interference of any sort is pretended; and that in
the event of a political separation from the parent Country and
of the establishment of an independent system of National Gov-
ernment, it will coincide with the sentiments and policy of the
United States to promote the most friendly relations and the
most liberal intercourse between the inhabitants of this Hem-
isphere, as having all a common interest, and as lying under a
common obligation to maintain that system of peace, justice
and good will, which is the only source of happiness for nations.

Whilst you inculcate these as the principles and dispositions
of the United States it will be no less proper to ascertain those
on the other side, not only towards the United States, but in
reference to the great nations of Europe as also to that of Brasil,
and the Spanish branches of the Government there; and to the
commercial and other connections with them respectively and
generally to inquire into the State, the characteristics, and the
proportions as to numbers, intelligence and wealth of the several
parties, the amount of population, the extent and organization
of the military force, and the pecuniary resources of the
Country.

The real as well as ostensible object of your mission is to
explain the mutual advantages of a commerce with the United
States, to promote liberal and stable regulations, and to transmit
seasonable information on the subject. In order that you may
render the more service in this respect, and that you may at
the same time enjoy the greater protection and respectability
you will be furnished with credential letters, such as are held
by sundry Agents of the United States in the West Indies, and
as was lately held by one at the Havana, and under the sanction
of which you will give the requisite attention to Commercial
objects.

You will also receive herewith a cypher, which, being the
same with one held by Mr. Shaler at Mexico, will enable you to
correspond, in that mode, as well with him as with this Depart-
ment, when occasion may render it necessary. And you will bear
in mind that your communications to the Department will be the
more acceptable in proportion as they are full and frequent.

As your reasonable expences will be allowed, you will keep a
regular account of those incurred by you in the prosecution of
this business, and also the vouchers for the Same, and where
vouchers cannot be obtained, you will exhibit a statement of
the details.

I have the honor to be
Very respectfully
Sir
Your Ob* Ser*
R. Smith
Department of State
August 27th 1810
To Joel Roberts Poinsett, Esquire

Sir:

The Commerce between the United States and Buenos Ayres rendering the establishment of a Consul there of considerable importance, and as the authorities thereof may possibly refuse to give a public recognition and character to a Consul of the United States, it has been thought proper and suitable under present circumstances to vest you, and you are accordingly hereby vested with the character of Agent for Seamen and Commerce in the aforesaid Port of Buenos Ayres, and such other ports as shall be nearer to it than to any other agent of the United States. Your own regard to the public service will induce you to attend to the Commercial and other concerns of our Citizens in all the cases where they would fall under the patronage of a Consul, and you may appoint Deputies wheresoever it may be found necessary in your District, being yourself responsible for their acts. A copy of the standing Consular instructions is enclosed, and also copies of several circular letters to Consuls, containing directions for the execution of the Consular office, all of which you will attend to as far as they can be a useful guide.

I have the honor to be, &c.

R. Smith

It seems advisable in this connection to insert here Monroe's instruction to Poinsett dated at Washington, April 30, 1811, since it not merely complements the above two instructions, but serves to indicate that they were considered by the State Department as ample for their purpose. James Monroe became Secretary of State on April 2, 1811, and at once, apparently, began taking a much greater interest in Latin-American affairs than did his predecessor.\footnote{Department of State, Dispatches to Consuls, I, 365; Manning, \textit{op. cit.}, I, pt. 1, p. 11.}

Washington, April 30, 1811

Sir:

The instructions already given you are so full, that there seems to be little cause to add to them at this time. Much solicitude is felt to hear from you on all the topics to which they relate. The disposition shewn by most of the Spanish provinces to separate from Europe and to erect themselves into independent States excites great interest here. As inhabitants of the same Hemisphere, as Neighbors, the United States cannot be unfeel-
ing Spectators of so important a movement. The destiny of those provinces must depend on themselves. Should such a revolution however take place, it cannot be doubted that our relation with them will be more intimate, and our friendship stronger than it can be while they are colonies of any European power.

Official relations between the United States and South America had been initiated ten years before. In 1800 Augustin Medan was appointed consul at La Guaira, in what is now Venezuela, and in 1808 Henry Hill was appointed consul at Sao Salvador (now Bahia), Brazil. In 1809, after the removal of the Portuguese Court to Rio de Janeiro, Thomas Sumter of South Carolina was appointed minister at that place; but no further steps had been taken to appoint official representatives of the United States elsewhere in South America. We know nothing of the conversations which Poinsett must have had with President Monroe, Secretary Smith, and other officials before he left for South America, nor of what steps he took before sailing to inform himself of conditions there. It scarcely seems possible, however, that the events of May 25, 1810, in Buenos Aires could have been unknown to him. In fact there is a bare possibility that they may have influenced his instructions of August 27, since news of them had been printed in several American newspapers shortly before that date.

The eagerness with which the Junta then directing the affairs of the United Provinces of the Rio de la Plata officially received Poinsett on February 13, 1811, the day of his arrival at Buenos Aires, requires a brief comment on the conditions then prevailing there, as well as an outline of their history prior to that year. Though the independence of Buenos Aires had been de-

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69 Manning, op. cit., has “moment” for “movement.”
clared on May 25, 1810, both foreign and domestic affairs were in almost as confused a state as those of the United States in 1777. There was no unanimity among the leaders as to what form of government should be established, or as to who should exercise the supreme authority. The danger of the return of the city of Buenos Aires, to say nothing of most of the hinterland, to the status of a Spanish colony, was such as to render extremely difficult the situation of those who desired definitely to separate the region from Spain. Spanish forces continued to occupy Montevideo; Chile had only recently taken her first steps towards independence (September 18, 1810); and no other Spanish colony had actually made itself independent, though there were rumblings and mutterings in some of them. Moreover, the English invasion of Buenos Aires and Montevideo had occurred only four years before Poinsett's arrival; and in view of the close alliance between England and Portugal-Brazil, the aims of England on the River Plate countries were still uncertain. Continental Portugal was practically a British protectorate; Mauritius had been taken by the English on December 2, 1810; the Portuguese possessions of the Azores, Madeira and Goa were held by English garrisons; and in the midst of the Napoleonic Wars then raging, the future of Spain itself was in the early months of 1811 very much a matter of speculation.

Poinsett sailed from New York City in October, 1810, in the United States merchant vessel Niagara which, since she "was not coppered and was a dull sailor" and had "neither sextant nor chronometer on board," did not arrive at Rio de Janeiro until December 25, encountering severe storms on the way at Cape St. Roque.\(^{41}\) He seems to have remained in Rio de Janeiro about three weeks, and has left us a vivid though brief

\(^{41}\) Library of Congress, Poinsett's MS. Diary, Ac 1843.
account of seeing the Prince Regent John lolling out of a window gazing at the passersby, of the crowds of negroes in the streets and of the intrigues going on at the Brazilian Court directed by John’s imperious and ambitious wife, the Princess Carlotta. This lady is frequently referred to in Poinsett’s correspondence from Buenos Aires, and it was fortunate that he was able during his visit to Rio de Janeiro to obtain some first-hand information regarding her character and program. In Poinsett’s diary he notes that he considered her husband “incapable of governing” while Carlotta “aspired to the possession of all Spanish America.” Poinsett’s report to Robert Smith, dated at Rio de Janeiro, January 11, 1811, tells what he had learned in the Brazilian capital of affairs in the River Plate countries.\textsuperscript{62} Poinsett seems to have apprehended some difficulty with the British forces in leaving Rio de Janeiro, and succeeded in making his exit from that city to Buenos Aires almost by stealth. Although he procured a passport for himself and his faithful negro slave Sam, it was made out for “the southern ports” (of Brazil) and not for Buenos Aires.\textsuperscript{63} At least 125 merchant vessels flying the Stars and Stripes had arrived at the River Plate ports at Buenos Aires and Montevideo since the first appeared in 1798, and a considerable number had brought hides and tallow thence to the Atlantic ports of the United States. This trade had existed on sufferance merely; the American ship captains and resident merchants had presented a series of complaints to the Viceroy Del Pino in 1802, and other difficulties had occurred at the time of the English invasions. In 1804 there were at least five United States citizens more or less permanently residing in Buenos Aires; by 1807 at least two Yankees, Halsey of Rhode

\textsuperscript{62} Poinsett Papers, I. 28.
\textsuperscript{63} Ibid., XXIII. 40.
Island and De Forest of Connecticut, were competing with each other in business there; and 24 ships in all from seven states had been there in 1810. Thus there was trade, as well as citizens, to be protected.

Poinsett not merely kept the State Department fully informed of the series of political changes that took place in Buenos Aires in 1811, but also offered a number of suggestions for what might be called a Pan-American Policy for the United States. He also furnished the first commercial reports ever received from that region, as well as such complete geographical and statistical data as probably could have been collected at that time. It is difficult to see how any representative could have given the State Department a more complete picture of conditions as they then existed there.

Meanwhile the Junta governing Buenos Aires had observed to Poinsett, when he was presented to them on the day of his arrival, that his credentials were "not directed to them, nor signed by the President." But due to the friendly intervention of one of their number, Juan Larrea, Poinsett was allowed freely to exercise his rights as Agent, since "as a preliminary toward the treaties which must be established between nations, the rules for a permanent commerce must be arranged." This was a decisive diplomatic triumph, for Poinsett had caused himself to be recognized as his country's representative before any European power had even accredited anyone to the Junta. Poinsett's friendship with Larrea deepened; and during his residence in Buenos Aires, received more and more of his confidence.

The most important problem before the Junta was the question of the definite declaration of independence from Spain. England was so closely allied with Spain
that such a move might well bring about some form of English intervention, such as co-operation with the Spanish forces under General Elio, which still held Montevideo, where the British fleet seemed to hover. Buenos Aires had as yet no navy, though a United States citizen, William White, and other foreigners under the guiding force and energy of Poinsett's friend Larrea, were soon to create one for her; and Poinsett could by no means be sure of any naval support from his own country for the Argentines in a war for independence. He had, therefore to proceed warily and to watch constantly the commercial and political activities of Great Britain, while following the shifting internal political scene and fanning the pro-United States sentiments which, he reported, were widespread among the masses of the people, as well as in the army. He particularly endeavored to promote the idea that aid from the United States, especially in the form of munitions of war, should be directly and officially solicited by the Junta. Before his arrival, they had indeed sent a letter to President Madison, which was forwarded to Secretary Monroe from Philadelphia by Taleifero de Orea on June 18, 1811. This document informed Madison of the breakup of Spanish authority and the need for ending Spanish tyranny, for which purpose a Congress of deputies from the interior was to be called at Buenos Aires to decide upon a definite form of government. It was stated further that the Junta did not doubt for one moment that the President, because of his high character, would approve their conduct, would view their cause in a friendly light and receive their report with pleasure. On February 13, 1811, the day after Poinsett's arrival, the Junta sent Madison another note, telling him of their recognition of Poinsett; and it was not long before they directed

two citizens, Diego de Saavedra and Juan Pedro de Aguirre, to go to the United States as commissioners for the purchase of military supplies. Poinsett apparently did not feel that the mission of Saavedra and Aguirre was sufficiently important. But in an important letter to Secretary Monroe, on October 24, 1811, he formulated for the first time his very farseeing ideas of a Pan-American policy. After commenting on the intricate situation existing among the leaders in Buenos Aires, he informed Monroe "that he had found it necessary to direct their attention to some plan of effecting their independence," and "that he had suggested to them as the only means of opposing an effectual barrier to the ambitious views of the European Powers an alliance of all Spanish America engaged in the same cause, or that might under the auspices of such a confederation declare themselves, then to solicit the aid and protection of the United States and make one great simultaneous movement of the whole continent." As the first step toward this ambitious program, he endeavored to get some high official in the Junta to go to Washington in a purely diplomatic capacity. The continuously provocative measures taken by the English naval authorities, especially their endeavors to impress seamen and to exercise police authority in the marginal waters of the Rio de la Plata, gave Poinsett frequent opportunities to advance these ideas before the Junta, always according to his own account, through third parties. It will be seen that his influence along these lines ultimately met with considerable success. The English naval provocations just alluded to were but a part of their general policy in South America at this time. They disliked Poinsett's mission and seem to have endeavored to check it, fearing its after effects in

*For this mission, see Antokoletz, Historia de la Diplomacia Argentina, I. 201-205.*
his encouraging the formation of independent re-
publics. The Infanta Carlotta, in a communication ad-
dressed to the Cortes on June 29, 1811, complained that
"The United States Envoy has not ceased to influence
the revolution of Buenos Ayre." Lord Strangford, at
Rio de Janeiro, became disturbed at Poinsett's ac-
tivities.69

We have already noted that President Madison had
accredited Poinsett as Agent to Chile (as well as to
Peru and Buenos Aires) and, during his latter months
in Buenos Aires, Poinsett frequently alluded to his in-
tention to cross the Andes. His duties, however, as well
as the weather, detained him, and it was not until No-
vember 11, 1811, that he left that city in a large and
unwieldy Spanish coach, with four postillions, for
Santiago de Chile. William Gilchrist Miller of Phila-
delphia, whom the authorities had just recognized as
Vice Consul of the United States of America,70 re-
mained in Buenos Aires in charge of that country's in-
terests there. He duly reported developments directly
to the Department of State, also keeping in touch with
his superior in Chile.71 For the first and last time in our
diplomatic relations, the same person represented the
United States on both sides of the Andes. According to
Poinsett's diary, he was accompanied by two servants
(one of whom was probably the faithful Charleston
Negro Sam, who served his master in Russia and
France, as well as in South America and Pennsylvania)
and "two dragoons which the Junta sent to me, a few
hours before my departure, requesting that they might

69 For this mission, see Antokoletz, Historia de la Diplomacia Argen-
tina, I. p. 201.
70 Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores y Culto, Catalogo de la Bib-
Miller was recognized as vice consul November 22, 1811. According to
that publication he was the first foreign representative recognized by the
Argentine government.
71 Most of his reports are in Manning, op. cit.
serve me as an escort to Santiago. Several of my Creole acquaintances accompanied me as far as Lujan." From there Poinsett entered on the "vast Pampas of Buenos Ayres," noting their resemblance to the steppes in the South of Russia which he had traversed four years before. The Spanish coach was so shattered by the bad roads that two days had to be spent at San Luis for repairs, which enabled that vehicle to proceed to Mendoza. So far as the author has been able to ascertain, Poinsett was the first United States citizen to visit either Argentine city and the first to cross the Andes from Mendoza to Chile. We learn from his diary that the inhabitants of Mendoza overwhelmed him "with questions and caresses. They had been kept in ignorance of the rest of America and their questions respecting the United States were highly entertaining. All they could hope for under the Colonial Government was to maintain their families on the bare necessaries of life, and no exertions were made to go beyond this limit; but now that luxuries are within their reach, this powerful incentive to industry is visible in the improvement of agriculture and manufactures."

A new outfit had to be procured for Poinsett at Mendoza; ten mules were hired, at "eight Buenos Aires dollars" per mule; and a Madrina, or a mare with a bell around her neck, was also engaged to keep the mules together. As the party proceeded, Poinsett, who always managed firearms well, first shot a Guanaco, later a Condor. They passed by the Puente del Inca and traversed the pass of Las Galeras. The fourth night after leaving Mendoza was spent "at the foot of the steep ascent which leads over the crest of the Cordillera."

A glimpse of inter-Andine commerce in 1811 is gained from Poinsett's observation that they passed twenty-seven droves of loaded mules, the smallest drove consisting of fifteen and the largest of fifty-five,
carrying freight across the loftiest American mountain range. Ninety-nine years after Poinsett's first Trans-
andine journey a railroad crossed this range; the writer accomplished in ten hours in 1916 what took Poinsett a
week; and today airplanes have further diminished this
distance. The first official representative to Chile from
the United States entered that country by way of the
Valley of Aconcagua, which he descended to Santa
Rosa. "Leaving San Felipe el Real, we passed along
one of the finest valleys in the world." The scenes he
witnessed as he descended the Andes into the ever-
deepening foliage and verdure of the bright Chilean
summer, the vistas through the green-grey mountains
and hills, reminded Poinsett, as they have twice re-
minded the writer, of Switzerland. On December 29
Poinsett entered the capital city, Santiago, and the two
years and four months he spent in Chile were perhaps
the most critical in its history. Although he does not
seem to have received any instructions whatever from
the State Department during his term of office there,
"from the moment of his arrival," to quote the noted
Chilean historian Feliu Cruz, "he supported the move-
ment for complete independence, using his diplomatic
position to sustain it, and fighting in person on the bat-
tlefield for it." One might compare John Quincy
Adams' position in Russia as United States minister
from 1810 to 1814 with Poinsett's in Chile during the
same period.

(To be continued)