

THE INFLUENCE OF ALEXANDER HAMILTON UPON  
THE ADMINISTRATION OF JOHN ADAMS

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THE ADMINISTRATION OF JOHN ADAMS

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## CHAPTER I

### BACKGROUND OF THE CONFLICT BETWEEN ADAMS AND HAMILTON

#### Early Life of John Adams

John Adams was the fourth generation from Henry Adams, the first of the family to emigrate to America from England. He was the eldest son of John and Susanna Adams, born on October 19, 1735, at Braintree, Massachusetts.

In youth Adams was an admirable specimen of the New England Puritan of his generation, not excessively strait-laced in matters of doctrine, but religious by habit and by instinct, rigid in every point of morals, conscientious, upright, pure-minded and industrious. He received his education at a cost of considerable sacrifice on the part of his parents.

Adams, on graduating from Harvard College, 1755, taught school at Worcester with the thoughts of becoming a minister, the purpose for which his parents sent him to school; but the domineering and persecuting spirit of Calvinism drove Adams from the profession of divinity.<sup>1</sup>

Nor did he find the occupation of a schoolmaster suited to his ambitions. In searching for a channel for his talents,

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<sup>1</sup>Charles Francis Adams, editor, The Works of John Adams, I, 40.

he entered temporarily into local politics. As he further deliberated his choice of a profession, he was attracted more and more by law. After talking with James Putnam, a lawyer, he decided to take up the study of law under his guidance. He entered this field in the conviction that "the study and practice of law . . . does not dissolve the obligations of morality or of religion."<sup>2</sup>

For the profession of law, Adams had been endowed with a sound constitution of body, a clear and sonorous voice, a quick conception, a discriminating judgement, and a ready elocution. His confidence in his own judgement, founded on the consciousness of his powers, gave it a cast of stubbornness and inflexibility, perhaps necessary for the successful exercise of the duties of a lawyer; but if he were to become a great statesman, he needed to use more self-control in the halls of legislation and at the courts of kings.<sup>3</sup>

Adams was presented for admission to the Boston bar November 6, 1758, by Jeremiah Gridley, a leader of the profession and attorney general of the province. Finding his law practice growing slowly, he had time for town matters and wrote for the newspapers on public affairs. He continued in this manner of living for some time. He married Abigail Smith October 25, 1764, and his marriage greatly widened his connections and his wife was a great help and comfort to him

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<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 32.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 31.

throughout his career. Adams was a leader, for the most part, in every patriotic movement that developed in New England, but the Stamp Act gave him his first real opportunity, and the resolutions of protest he prepared for Braintree were followed throughout Massachusetts. Adams disapproved of the Stamp Act riots, but opposed the Act on legal grounds, arguing that "Parliament could not lawfully tax the colonists,"<sup>4</sup> because they had never consented to it.

Adams considered the destruction of tea in the Boston harbor as "the grandest event which had yet happened since the controversy with Britain opened,"<sup>5</sup> but again he was opposed to mob outbreaks. He condemned the Boston Port Act and his general attitude on the controversy with Great Britain resulted in his election as one of the delegates from Massachusetts to the first Continental Congress. Since Massachusetts thought war was inevitable, Adams endeavored to prepare Congress for war, and not without valuable results. The work accomplished by this Congress was the preparation of a petition of a declaration of the colonists' rights drawn up by a committee including John Adams.

In the winter and spring of 1775, regular legal government broke down in colony after colony as the governors refused to let the legislatures meet. During this turbulent disorder the Second Continental Congress met. Adams pointed

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<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 80.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., EX, 333.

out the probable necessity of forming a confederacy of separate states, each with its own government.

Nothing can save us but discipline in the army, governments in every colony, and a confederation of the whole . . . . Discipline in the army! (Thump with the hickory cane). A written constitution in every state! (Thump again). A union and confederation of thirteen states, independent of Parliament, of minister and of king!<sup>6</sup>

He opposed unsuccessfully another petition to the king and he served on a committee to draft instructions to Washington, for whose appointment to command he was largely responsible. After many months of discussion of independence, the way was paved for the final act when Richard Henry Lee's motions concerning independence, foreign alliances, and a confederation were laid before Congress June 7, 1776, and seconded by Adams, now dubbed "The Atlas of Independence."<sup>7</sup> Committees were appointed to prepare a declaration of independence and a plan of treaties with foreign powers; Adams was appointed on both. Adams was the author of the plan of treaties for trade and not alliance. To the text of the declaration he contributed nothing of importance, but to him fell the severe task of defending it in its passage through Congress. This great event established the position of Adams in Congress and in the country.

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<sup>6</sup>Quoted in Charles Drinker Bowen, John Adams and the American Revolution, p. 552.

<sup>7</sup>Claude H. Van Tyne, The American Revolution, Vol. IX of The American Nation Series, edited by A. B. Hart (28 vols.), p. 72.

The history of the Western world for the next decade is filled with efforts to work their way out of the imperial impasse. The storm and turmoil resulting from this war of independence whirled Adams from the obscurity of a village lawyer in a remote province to the position of a world-known statesman in Paris, The Hague, London, and Washington.<sup>8</sup>

During the days of the Revolution, when Adams was a member of the Continental Congress, he had aroused the suspicion of the military group, two of the members who were later at the head of the Federalist party -- Washington and Hamilton. Adams and Hamilton held a mutual dislike dating from this time.<sup>9</sup> One subject of disagreement was the value of the militia. Hamilton urged the maintenance of a force which should furnish the basis for future armies if needed. Congress cut the army to the lowest point; Adams favored a militia system with short enlistments. He opposed the permanency of military appointments.

I hope, for my own part, that Congress will elect annually all the general officers. If, in consequence of this, some great men should be obliged, at the year's end, to go home and serve their country in some other capacity, not less necessary, and better adapted to their genius, I do not think the public would be ruined . . . . The officers of the army ought to consider that the rank, the dignity, and the rights of whole States are of more importance than this point of honor; more, indeed, than the solid glory of any

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<sup>8</sup>James Truslow Adams, The Adams Family, p. 25.

<sup>9</sup>Henry Jones Ford, Alexander Hamilton, p. 315.

particular officer. The States insist, with great justice and sound policy, on having a share of the general officers in some proportion to the quotas of troops they are to raise. This principle has occasioned many of our late promotions, and it ought to satisfy gentlemen. But if it does not, they, as well as the public, must abide the consequences of their discontent.<sup>10</sup>

Adams' adherence to the principle of short terms was so deeply resented by Hamilton that it was the leading cause of his famous indictment of Adams over twenty years later.<sup>11</sup>

On November 28, 1777, Adams was selected by Congress to replace Silas Deane as one of the commissioners to France to help secure aid for the colonies. Changes in Europe during the interval that occurred between the time of his appointment and the time of his arrival in France rendered his expedition of little utility to his country or to himself. His stay in France was short because he soon learned that France had recognized the American States, entered into treaties of amity and commerce with them, and that war between France and Great Britain was regarded as inevitable.

Upon returning home, Adams was chosen delegate to the Massachusetts Constitutional Convention; however, he was called away from it to be sent again to France as minister plenipotentiary for negotiating a treaty of peace and a treaty of commerce with Great Britain. Conditions then were not

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<sup>10</sup>C. F. Adams, op. cit., I, 263.

<sup>11</sup>Ford, op. cit., p. 70.

favorable for peace; however, he remained in France until July, 1780, as Franklin's colleague, detesting and distrusting Franklin and the French foreign minister, Vergennes, and embroiling himself with both. Meanwhile, Adams went to Holland as a volunteer minister. In 1782 he was formally recognized as from an independent nation and secured a loan from Holland for his government. Adams was called back to France to help arrange the peace. In the final negotiations for peace Adams was largely responsible for the provisions with respect to the fisheries and the Loyalists.<sup>12</sup>

In 1785 Adams became the first minister to England. While in England, about the only thing he did was to publish a work entitled A Defense of the Constitution of Government of the United States. His independent manner and the attitude he had always maintained toward the British made it difficult for him to be diplomatic. The attitude of the court and the ministry discouraged advances, and the divided interests of the United States made it difficult for the British to have confidence in the execution of the Treaty of 1783 or in the permanence of the Confederation. Seeing no prospect of future success in England, Adams asked to be recalled in 1788. Upon his return from France he was elected vice-president and, later, president. Nothing, however, in the administration of these offices, unless one excepts his

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<sup>12</sup> C. F. Adams, op. cit., I, 380-81.

success in warding off the war with France, equaled his earlier achievements. Whatever mistakes Adams made, and they were numerous, no one can question the utter honesty of his entire public and private career.

### Early Life of Alexander Hamilton

Little is known about the birth and parentage of Alexander Hamilton as he did not leave, perhaps intentionally, a clear and authentic story about it. According to tradition, however, he was born on the Isle of Nevis in the West Indies, January 11, 1757. His mother was Rachael Faucett, of French Huguenot descent, and was unhappily married to John Levine, a Dutch land proprietor of Saint Croix. She left him to live with James Hamilton, a Scotch merchant at Saint Christopher. This man was the father of Alexander Hamilton. In 1759 Levine secured a divorce but his wife was forbidden to re-marry, due to the peculiarity of the divorce laws.

Young Hamilton received some desultory education from his mother and a Presbyterian clergyman at Saint Croix. Due to his father's bankruptcy in business and his mother's death in 1768, Hamilton, at the age of twelve, began to earn his own living. Perhaps this early maturity which was forced upon him accounted for his aggressive mannerisms which caused him to become the leader he was. He secured a position as clerk in the counting house of Nicholas Cruger of Saint Croix and after two years he was entrusted with the full management



of the business. At this time he began writing for the local press. In 1772 some friends, impressed by his literary ability, made it possible for him to come to America to complete his education. After some preliminary training at a grammar school at Elizabethtown, New Jersey, he entered King's College (now Columbia University) in the autumn of 1773. Already he had formed habits of study which he retained throughout life. Hamilton, spurred by ambition, was a child prodigy with a passion for achievement. Three years after he came to the United States he took the degree of Bachelor of Arts.<sup>13</sup> He was a scholar of profound and solid attainment.

The preliminaries of the Revolution interrupted Hamilton's college work. He spoke against British measures, and began writing for Holt's New York Journal with a vigor which attracted attention. He contributed to the "pamphlet war" of the day -- A Full Vindication of the Measures of Congress from the Calumnies of Their Enemies,<sup>14</sup> in some 14,000 words and he continued to debate in The Farmer Refuted,<sup>15</sup> which contained 35,000 words. These anonymous pamphlets showed a grasp of the issues, knowledge of British and American government, and great argumentative power. It was incredulous that a lad of seventeen could have written them! He took the

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<sup>13</sup> Henry Cabot Lodge, editor, The Works of Alexander Hamilton, VIII, 465, hereinafter cited as Lodge, Works.

<sup>14</sup> John Church Hamilton, editor, Works of Alexander Hamilton, II, 1-36.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., pp. 37-126.

position of a moderate who loyally defended the King's sovereignty and the British connection but rejected the pretensions of Parliament.

When war came, Hamilton organized an artillery company to be awarded its captaincy on examination. He won the interest of Nathanael Greene and George Washington by the proficiency and bravery he displayed around New York City during the campaign of 1776. At the age of twenty, he joined Washington's staff in March, 1777, with the rank of Lieutenant-Colonel, and served as his private secretary and confidential aide for four years. The duties with which he was entrusted included constant correspondence with Congress and some very important military missions. While on one of these missions he met Elizabeth Schuyler, daughter of General Philip Schuyler. In 1780 he became allied with one of the most distinguished families in New York by marrying Elizabeth.

Hamilton, ambitious for military glory with a zeal he never lost, became impatient with his position as merely an aide.<sup>16</sup> Just when the nerves of Hamilton were almost completely frayed, he encountered Washington on the staircase of headquarters. The general expressed a wish to see him; he replied he was on military errand, but would return immediately. When at length Hamilton appeared, the general rebuked him for what he interpreted to be intended rudeness.

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Louis Martin Sears, George Washington, p. 312.

Hamilton seized this reprimand from Washington as an excuse for abandoning his staff position. The incident, however, involved no break in their good relations due to Washington's generosity. Hamilton had no intention of resigning from the army. Later he secured, through Washington, a field command and won laurels at Yorktown where he led the American column that captured the first redoubt of the British works. The war was now practically over and Hamilton returned to civil life.

At once he started a study of law, the profession by which he intended to get fame along with bread and butter. At the conclusion of a few month's study, early in 1782, he was admitted to the bar. His preparation was hasty, but with his intensity of application and readiness of mind he undoubtedly gathered in that short time a great deal of legal learning that was systematized and arranged.

From this point on his career in the new world began. He was elected as a member to the Continental Congress from New York in 1782. After a year's service, in which he experienced the futility of endeavoring to attain reforms through this decrepit body, he returned to his law practice in New York. It was, however, impossible for Hamilton to abstain from public activity. He was selected as a delegate from New York to the Annapolis Convention, called for the purpose of regulating commerce. In this convention Hamilton saw a chance to bring about a meeting with powers great

enough to reorganize the government throughout and save the sinking fortunes of the country.<sup>17</sup>

The Annapolis Convention adopted an address, drafted by Hamilton, reciting the intolerable conditions and calling for a convention to meet the following May in Philadelphia to revise the Articles of Confederation. With this end in view Hamilton gained an election to the legislature of New York and began a fight to induce New York to send delegates to the convention. In this he succeeded, and three delegates were appointed, of which Hamilton was one; but the other two were anti-Federalists who were bitterly opposed to Hamilton's idea of a strong central government. Hamilton presented his views of a plan of government to the convention. He proposed an aristocratic republic, with a president and senators chosen for life, and the state governors appointed by the Federal government. Hamilton, no doubt aware, that the leading principles of his plan, which he actually believed, stood no chance of adoption either by the people or the convention, aimed his influence at stimulating the other members of the convention to taking advanced steps.<sup>18</sup> In this he was successful. After the presentation of this plan, which found no support in the convention, he withdrew as the two anti-

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<sup>17</sup> Henry Cabot Lodge, Alexander Hamilton, Vol. VII of The American Statesmen Series, edited by John T. Morse (40 vols.), p. 53. Hereinafter cited as Lodge, Alexander Hamilton.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., p. 61.

Federalist delegates voted against him on every question. Upon his return he heartily supported the work of the convention and signed the Constitution, as actually adopted. The struggle began with the attempt to try to get the states to ratify the Constitution. To this struggle was due the greatest of Hamilton's writings and the greatest individual contribution to the adoption of the new government. In The Federalist, a series of eighty-five essays, more than half of them written by Hamilton, the others by Madison and Jay, he successfully fought the great battle for the Constitution, winning a hostile majority to its support. It remains a classic commentary, not merely on American constitutional law but on the general principles of government. By the publication of The Federalist, Hamilton rendered his first pre-eminent service to the adoption of the Constitution; his second was securing the ratification of New York. Most of the opposition came from the Clintonians led by George Clinton, governor of New York. In this struggle he changed votes by his untiring succession of brilliant speeches. The feature of his subsequent life for which he is best known is that he served as Secretary of Treasury for six years in Washington's cabinet. During this time he was a far-seeing, courageous, and honest master of finance and as an advisor to Washington and to Congress, he influenced the course of the government.

Hamilton was a realist. Volume after volume of his work shows the directness and force with which he hammered and moulded the glowing metal of the new nation to his own shape. All of his writings are remarkably cogent, closely reasoned, logical and clear, but they are also diffuse. "He had the lawyer's love of piling phrase upon phrase and letting no possible shade of meaning escape."<sup>19</sup>

Hamilton was the father of the Federalist party, a party which he lived to see dying on his hands during the administration of John Adams. As a party leader, Hamilton was lacking in tact, offensively opinionated, impatient and insulting to well-meaning mediocrity, and dictatorial. "He did not consult -- he directed. He did not conciliate -- he commanded."<sup>20</sup> On his pedestal he was orator, soldier, lawyer, banker, writer and statesman, but his life was given glamour and romance by the enemies he made. He made many enemies because of his fearlessness, openness and directness which turned rivals into enemies, irritated smaller men, and aroused their malicious desire to pull him down. As official head of the party he thought himself entitled to real leadership and the conflict which ensued between Hamilton and Adams during John Adams' administration will be developed in this paper.

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<sup>19</sup> James Truslow Adams, editor, Jeffersonian Principles and Hamiltonian Principles, p. vi, in the Introduction.

<sup>20</sup> Claude G. Bowers, Jefferson and Hamilton, p. 35.

Economic and Political Views  
of Hamilton and Adams

The crux of the hostility between Hamilton and Adams may be attributed to their different economic and political views. Although Adams was fiercely assailed as an advocate of class government, he was far less hostile to agrarianism than was Hamilton.<sup>21</sup> He did not believe in an unchecked government by the wealthy. He feared the rich almost as much as the poor, believing that they were as prone to use the government in spoliation as the latter. He believed in a government of balance by which both the upper and lower classes should be held in check against undue usurpation. Hamilton's fundamental idea was distrust of the common man.<sup>22</sup> He placed little or no confidence in the self-governing ability of the small farmer and ninety per cent of the population was then agricultural. He viewed the rich and well-born as the safest depositories of public power, although he advocated giving the propertyless a speaking voice in the government.<sup>23</sup>

If the political problems in 1787 are attributed to economics -- the struggle waged between farmer and business

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<sup>21</sup> Vernon Louis Parrington, The Colonial Mind, Vol. I, Main Current in American Thought, p. 320.

<sup>22</sup> J. T. Adams, editor, Jeffersonian Principles and Hamiltonian Principles, pp. vi-vii, in Introduction.

<sup>23</sup> Charles Austin Beard, Economic Origins of Jeffersonian Democracy, p. 318.

group for the control of the government -- then the position of Adams and Hamilton may be explained. The bulk of Adams' property was in land, and his sympathies were not enlisted on the side of speculative capitalism.<sup>24</sup> Rather it was Hamilton who was the spokesman of the business economy. He thought in terms of nationality and espoused the economies of capitalism, because he saw in them potentialities congenial to his imperialistic mind.<sup>25</sup> From the start, therefore, he undertook to push measures through Congress which would not only enlist the moneyed interest of the new country on the side of the government but would enlarge both the extent and numbers of such interest.<sup>26</sup>

Hamilton believed his fiscal and commercial policy was advantageous to the beneficiaries and the nation at large. It appears that Adams' philosophy did not carry him so far as to approve the methods of financial accumulations associated with Hamilton's policy. In fact, Adams was often declared to be a foe of the funding system.<sup>27</sup> He believed in the protection of the rights of the rich against the poor and the creation of a system of government that would guarantee that protection.<sup>28</sup> Because of this he received the approbation

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid., p. 317.      <sup>25</sup> Parrington, op. cit., p. 294.

<sup>26</sup> J. T. Adams, editor, Jeffersonian Principles and Hamiltonian Principles, p. xi, in the Introduction.

<sup>27</sup> Beard, op. cit., p. 318.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.



of the Federalist school, for most of the Federalist leaders were involved in the speculative methods of accumulation which flourished with the funding system; and they could hardly have been expected to condemn their own actions.<sup>29</sup> This may explain in part Adams' hostility to Hamilton. He stood between two rival economies, arguing for a system of government that should be neither agrarian nor capitalistic, but should maintain a static mean; and in consequence he pleased no one.<sup>30</sup>

Hamilton's idea of an aristocratic republic which he proposed at the Constitutional Convention differs from Adams' fundamental theory of government, which was adopted in practically all the state constitutions and also the Federal one.<sup>31</sup> What he stood for, and what, mainly due to him, became the established form of American constitution, was a Republican government with an executive, legislative, and judiciary independent of each other; complete freedom of conscience and of speech; and, in his often quoted words, "a government of laws and not of men."<sup>32</sup> He was often accused of being a monarchist but just as often he denied it. He wrote to Dr. Rush in 1790:

I am no friend to hereditary limited monarchy  
in America. This I know can never be admitted

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Parrington, op. cit., p. 320.

<sup>31</sup> J. T. Adams, The Adams Family, p. 90.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

without an hereditary Senate to control it, and an hereditary nobility or Senate in America I know to be unattainable and impracticable. I should scarcely be for it, if I were. Do not, therefore, my friend, misunderstand me and misrepresent me to posterity.<sup>33</sup>

If he was no friend to monarchy or aristocracy, neither was he friendly to the rule of the people as understood in later times and expressed in universal suffrage. He always lay great stress on the three factors of birth, wealth, and talents, which he claimed formed a natural aristocracy, and denounced an unchecked democracy.<sup>34</sup> His division into three balanced branches was to check both aristocracy and democracy.

Hamilton recognized the necessity of going further toward a republican form of government than he would have liked because the people at large had come to expect it. The scheme of government and its practical operation must be so devised as to keep the common people as much out of it as was possible, compatible with their pretensions to power.<sup>35</sup> He desired that the Federal government should be the main source of power. Almost the entire body of Hamilton's writings is devoted to the problem of strengthening the Federal government. Under these circumstances, pertaining to economic and political views, it is not surprising that Adams was not in sympathy with Hamilton.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Adrienne Koch and William Paden, editors, The Selected Writings of John and John Quincy Adams, p. ix, in introduction.

<sup>36</sup> Beard, op. cit., p. 319.

### First Presidential Election and Administration

As the time approached for the first presidential election it was universally regarded as fitting that George Washington should be president. Since Washington came from the South, it was desirable to choose the vice-president from the North. Alexander Hamilton, owing to his brilliant ability and his great work in securing the adoption of the Constitution, was a most conspicuous leader of Federalist opinion; but he had not attained the age of thirty-five years, and therefore, was not eligible to the office. The names of Governor Hancock, Samuel Adams, and John Adams, as well as General Knox, were canvassed. It was thought necessary that Hancock remain as governor of Massachusetts. Samuel Adams was rendered an unsuitable candidate because of opposition to the Constitution at the beginning; although he had subsequently advocated it. Knox, a soldier like Washington, was rejected. The great services and eminent positions that John Adams had already occupied clearly pointed to him. He was a civilian; he would vacate no office; and he had written a book in defense of the Constitution. Nevertheless, there was another side to the question. Adams' relations to Washington during the American Revolution had been such that doubt was entertained if he would be acceptable to Washington. When Washington was consulted on the point he declined to interfere beyond suggesting that a Federalist should be elected,

and on that score Adams' writings in defense of the Constitution removed any objections.<sup>37</sup> Hamilton was consulted and after generalizing on Adams' vanity and temper, he wrote that he had decided to support Adams.<sup>38</sup>

According to the Constitution the electors were to vote for two persons; the candidate receiving the highest number of votes, if it was a majority, would be president and the candidate receiving the next highest, whether a majority or not, would be vice-president. In all references concerning the coming election, Adams was spoken of as a candidate for vice-president, but this gentleman regarded himself rather as a candidate for the presidency.<sup>39</sup> If he received more votes than Washington he would be president; if the votes were equal, the House of Representatives would select one of the two. Adams showed plainly that he regarded his own merits as equal to those of Washington.<sup>40</sup> He valued Washington as a soldier but he did not consider him a civil executive. Recently home from Holland, France, and England, Adams seemed to have dramatized himself as the inevitable civil head of the new state.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>37</sup>J. T. Adams, The Adams Family, p. 92.

<sup>38</sup>Ibid.

<sup>39</sup>Edward Stanwood, A History of the Presidency from 1788 to 1896, p. 26.

<sup>40</sup>Ibid.

<sup>41</sup>Paul Wilstach, Patriots Off Their Pedestals, p. 139.

Hamilton's distrust and misgivings of Adams led him to take a step to prevent this occurring. He sent word into several states advising that an unanimous vote be given to Washington and that some of the votes for the second candidate should be scattered. It has been claimed that his motive was to prevent the danger of an unanimous and therefore equal vote for Washington and Adams. It was obvious that there never was a chance of Adams securing an unanimous vote. It was not done with any wish of preventing Adams from alighting on the vice-presidential perch, but probably to clip his wings as a precaution against too frequent subsequent flights.<sup>42</sup> Whether it was done to lessen Adams in his own or popular esteem, or to make him more amenable to control, or to lessen his influence as a leader so as to open the way for Hamilton's advancement later, are among the possible reasons.<sup>43</sup>

Whatever the real reason, Hamilton's interference produced the most disastrous results. When the electoral votes were counted, Washington had received the entire sixty-nine and Adams had received only thirty-four with the remainder divided among ten other candidates. How much of the scattering vote was due to Hamilton's advice is unknown but it is not difficult to attribute the seven votes given to other

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<sup>42</sup> John T. Morse, John Adams, Vol. VI of The American Statesmen Series, edited by John T. Morse (40 vols), p. 246. Hereinafter cited as J. T. Morse, John Adams.

<sup>43</sup> J. T. Adams, The Adams Family, p. 93.

candidates by Connecticut and New Jersey electors to his influence.<sup>44</sup> At all events, the long list of scattered votes shows little reason for Hamilton's fears. No doubt his advice was followed more extensively than was needful, and more than Hamilton anticipated.

Adams justly felt a strong resentment against Hamilton who had thus interfered to prevent his receiving the full measure of popular approval. The antipathy between the two leaders, deepening with the years, was to have profound influence upon the careers of both, upon their party and the nation. The unfortunate jealousy that Adams felt for Washington, whom he considered not a statesman but merely a military hero who had owed his career to Adams, would in any case made it difficult for him to accept complacently the lower position in the government. When, in addition, he felt that the only reward for his services that he had ever asked -- a clear expression of public approval -- had been withheld from him through the intrigue of Hamilton, he entered upon his new career an embittered man.<sup>45</sup> The full effect of this mutual dislike between Adams and Hamilton was not to be visible for several years. Hamilton did not consider that Adams would resent his action. In his famous letter on the "Character of John Adams," written in 1800, with reference

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<sup>44</sup>Stanwood, op. cit., p. 27.

<sup>45</sup>J. T. Adams, The Adams Family, p. 94.

to the election of 1789, he said, alluding to his interference in the first contest:

Great was my astonishment and equally great my regret, when, afterward, I learned from persons of unquestionable veracity that Mr. Adams had complained of unfair treatment in not having been permitted to take an equal chance with General Washington, by leaving the votes to an uninfluenced current.<sup>46</sup>

For Adams, a man conscious of his own intellectual power, quick in temper, ardent in debate, the position of presiding officer of the Senate must have been an exceedingly difficult one. However, he did his duty sternly and acceptably.<sup>47</sup> During the first years, owing to the evenly balanced opinion of the Senate on a large number of questions, he was able to exert a much more immediate and direct influence upon the votes than has been the case with any other presiding officer since. Shortly after his election, Adams wrote to Richard Price saying that "I have never sacrificed my judgement to kings, ministers, nor people, and I never will."<sup>48</sup> At this time Adams said he was not a "party man." By this he meant his decisions favored no one group. But he now began to cast a deciding vote on the side of what was rapidly emerging as the Federalist party. This was only natural as, both

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<sup>46</sup> Hamilton, op. cit., VII, 692.

<sup>47</sup> J. T. Adams, The Adams Family, p. 94.

<sup>48</sup> C. F. Adams, op. cit., IX, 564.

from theory and from temperament, he was in favor of a strong Federal government. It assuredly could not have given Adams any pleasure to vote over and over again on Hamilton's side, and that he did so is evidence of the honesty of his judgment.<sup>49</sup>

At the beginning of his administration, Washington consulted Adams frequently. In 1791, at the time of his southern journey, he directed the three secretaries to consult together if anything serious should arise and determine whether his return was necessary and if the vice-president were in town, they were to call him into consultation. This appears to be almost the only case in which the vice-president was utilized as an administrative officer. Adams, one of the most honest and highest-minded men who had ever been elected to office, had infirmities of temper and habits of expression that made him an unpleasant team-mate; and for this or for some other reasons, those in authority ceased to consult him.<sup>50</sup> By a process of elimination, therefore, Washington was confined to the secretaries of the departments for his advisers.

Washington, anxious to unite the feelings of the people, began his administration by calling into his cabinet the

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<sup>49</sup> J. T. Adams, The Adams Family, p. 95.

<sup>50</sup> Edward Channing, Federalists and Republicans, Vol. IV, A History of the United States, p. 46.



leading exponents of opposite opinions. In this way, Thomas Jefferson was placed at the head of the foreign office and Alexander Hamilton was made Secretary of the Treasury. The harmony Washington hoped for did not follow. To Hamilton the difficult task had been assigned of drawing order out of the chaos of the finances. He did so by proposing plans for funding the public debt, for the assumption of the state debts, for a national bank, a system of revenue and a sinking fund. These plans all equally bristled with points of irritation to a large class of men and especially to Jefferson. Here again, the influence of Adams was important. There is no doubt that it would have turned the scale, had it been exerted in opposition to Hamilton. Although in all cases not entirely agreeing in sentiment with Hamilton, and in some particulars holding very strong opposing opinions, he felt the necessity of sustaining some general system; therefore, he gave support to this as the most practical plan.<sup>51</sup>

At this point it is pertinent to mention the degree of conflict between Hamilton and Jefferson so as to show the forming of Jefferson's bitterness which later helped defeat the Federalist party. It is possible that for a brief time the combined prestige of Hamilton and Jefferson gave a more impressive decorum to the new government, but the inevitable

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<sup>51</sup>C. F. Adams, op. cit., I, 451.

conflict of such powerful and opposing intellects soon proved a more disruptive influence than an advantage which might have been imagined from their union. In the cabinet, Hamilton offended Jefferson early because Hamilton could not rid himself of the idea that he was prime minister, a notion encouraged by the way in which Congress had thrown all sorts of questions into his hands for decisions.<sup>52</sup>

While the government was in the first stages of development, no one can maintain that Washington, Hamilton, and Adams, and their supporters, had any immediate expectation of reviving monarchy in America, although monarchy was the great habit of mankind at this time. Hamilton certainly looked upon the English system with its king, lords and commoners, with its aristocracy, its middle class, and lower sort of people as the most perfect system found anywhere, but he knew that nothing of this kind could be set up in the United States.<sup>53</sup> Adams would have honored the chief magistrate with some such title as "His majesty, the president," as he maintained that men were more easily governed when trained to habits of respect to those in high office.<sup>54</sup> Adams' opinion found favor in the eyes of Hamilton and his friends, but was greatly disliked by many others.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Lodge, Alexander Hamilton, p. 156.

<sup>53</sup> Channing, op. cit., p. 152.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

Washington's ideas of monarchy are locked up in his remarkable reticence. He asked the advice of Adams and Hamilton as to what kind of position he should keep, and the reply of the latter became the basis of his official conduct.<sup>56</sup>

#### Second Presidential Election and Administration

The steady course Adams pursued on the Federalist side led Hamilton to temper somewhat his own personal dislike, and when the next presidential election came round, Hamilton whose word was law in the Federalist party, was in favor of Adams for the second place. Hamilton stated: "Mr. Adams, whatever objections may lie against some of his theoretic opinions, is a firm, honest, and independent politician."<sup>57</sup> The anti-Federalists had by this time united in a party organization under the name of Republican. Although both parties united on Washington for president, the Republicans sought to elect George Clinton of New York as vice-president. The result of the second presidential election was one hundred thirty-two votes for Washington, seventy-seven for Adams, fifty for Clinton, four for Jefferson, and one for Burr. In this election, although the Federalists worked loyally for Adams' support, he harbored a certain bitterness

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<sup>56</sup> For their replies see C. F. Adams, editor, Works of John Adams, VIII, 491, and J. C. Hamilton, editor, Works of Alexander Hamilton, IV, 1.

<sup>57</sup> Lodge, Works, X, 24.

in the fact that Washington was obviously the choice of the nation whereas Adams was only that of a party.<sup>58</sup> Parties had developed and it was clear that when Washington retired, the choice of a party would be the only stepping-stone to either of the two highest offices.

In the second term Adams had far fewer opportunities to participate in legislation by his casting votes. Possibly one of the most important elements in these four years in its influence upon him was the fact that he had to be the target of most of the abuse of the now strongly organized opposition party. Washington, being above the party, was not criticized as much as Adams. Adams had been elected by a party, but playing a lone hand with no devoted band of political followers, he had no defense or defenders against the attacks of the Republican press. The eight years Adams spent as vice-president could hardly fail to emphasize all his most unfortunate faults. It was the worst possible preparation for his undertaking the duties of a higher position, for he was a man not only sensitive, not only properly conscious of his ability, integrity, and purity, but also vain.<sup>59</sup>

Early in January, 1794, Jefferson resigned, pleading that the opposition of views between Hamilton and himself

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<sup>58</sup>

J. T. Adams, The Adams Family, p. 96.

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Ibid., pp. 96-97.

were unpleasant and destructive to necessary harmony. A year later Hamilton resigned. From this period dates a new phase in the relations of Washington and Hamilton.

Never wholly easy up to now -- with a rather sharp difference when Hamilton resigned abruptly from Washington's military household; and with considerable strain in the cabinet incumbency when Washington's personal inclinations favored Jefferson even though his intellectual perception agreed with Hamilton. A new cordiality henceforth prevailed. Even as the star of Jefferson was dimming in Washington's affections, the star of Hamilton was rising . . . . Henceforth it is not inept to picture him as the Colonel House of Washington's Administration.<sup>60</sup>

It was as a private citizen that the political influence of Hamilton reached its maximum. The first time for Washington to call upon Hamilton after his resignation was concerning the Jay Treaty with England. He submitted the treaty to Hamilton with a request for the pro's and con's as to each article and Hamilton rendered a very comprehensive report in reply.

In the problem of securing a secretary for the State Department to replace the office vacated by Randolph and in other perplexities, the influence of Hamilton grew steadily. Pickering owed his position as Secretary of the State to Hamilton. As Washington found his problems mounting, he instinctively relied upon Hamilton who welcomed this unofficial role and played it with his customary skill. Hamilton was

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Quoted in Sears, op. cit., p. 453.

the real author of the president's message to Congress on December 8, 1795, although he embodied Washington's suggestions. In this important instance the president appeared as secretary to his own adviser -- a striking tribute to Hamilton's ascendancy throughout the entire Jay Treaty crisis and thereafter. He was fully in the president's confidence as to all the difficulties of the government.

Washington's problems were twofold: that of creating a government and carrying out its national policy. Under these circumstances that he should rely greatly upon the brilliant constructive ability of Hamilton, who was his Secretary of the Treasury for six years, was wholly natural. The ablest members of the cabinet gradually resigned, probably for the same reason that made it possible to find men of the same caliber to take their places, namely, the niggardly salaries which they received, and on which they could not even pay their living expenses in Philadelphia. Therefore, at the latter part of his term, Washington turned constantly to Hamilton for advice, rather than to the lesser men who actually formed his cabinet.

Is it any wonder, then, that Hamilton could not help but greatly influence the administration of Washington's successor -- John Adams?

## CHAPTER II

### THE INFLUENCE OF ALEXANDER HAMILTON UPON THE ELECTION OF JOHN ADAMS AND HIS CABINET

#### Intrigue

As the presidential campaign of 1796 approached, Washington let it be known that he was not to be considered a candidate. The withdrawal of his name opened the way for a clear party contest. A conference of some of the Republican members of Congress met during the summer of 1796 and readily agreed to submit Jefferson and Burr as the candidates of their party.<sup>1</sup>

The Federalists considered several names for the presidency. Hamilton was eligible, and he was the undoubted leader of his party; but he made many enemies because of his financial policy, and his candidacy would have aroused intense antagonism. Unquestionably he was the most powerful politician in his party and it was recognized that he could make a president even though he could not secure the office for himself.<sup>2</sup> "He was rather a king-maker than a candidate for the throne."<sup>3</sup> The three other most prominent candidates

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<sup>1</sup>George Gibbs, editor, Memoirs of the Administration of Washington and John Adams, II, 488.

<sup>2</sup>J. T. Adams, The Adams Family, p. 99.

<sup>3</sup>Stanwood, op. cit., p. 44.

were Adams, John Jay, and Thomas Pinckney. The opinion seems to have been that although Jay's talents fitted him for the office, his unpopularity, due to the treaty he had negotiated with England, would cost enough votes to endanger his election. Pinckney was an able man who had gained considerable prominence, especially in the South, by the negotiation of the Spanish Treaty of 1795; but Adams was directly in line for promotion. He had served his country well for many years and his conduct as vice-president for eight years had been acceptable to the Federalist party. However, there were some in the Federal ranks who entertained doubts of Adams' fitness in some essential particulars.

He was thought by them to be deficient in coolness, judgement, and in consistency, and they feared that the strength of his prejudices, and the violence of his temper, rendered him particularly unfit in the then critical state of affairs.<sup>4</sup>

Hamilton, from the beginning, urged an equal support by the electors of Adams and Pinckney on the ground that the defeat of Jefferson was more important than the question of which of the two Federalist candidates would receive the higher vote.

After much discussion the Federalists submitted John Adams and Thomas Pinckney as their candidates. The matter was generally understood that Adams was the Federalist candidate for the presidency, and that Pinckney was the candidate

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<sup>4</sup>Gibbs, op. cit., I, 378.



for the vice-presidency; but another intrigue was forming. Hamilton had never cared for the "downright Puritan of Quincy," and Adams had never forgiven him for the reduction of the Adams vote in the first presidential election.<sup>5</sup> Hamilton disliked Adams' unsubmitive temperament; and if he, as the leader of the Federalist party, was to dictate the general policy, then Adams was not the man for the presidency.<sup>6</sup> Such logic could not be openly proclaimed, neither could Adams' fitness be questioned. The tactics which he adopted to prevent Adams from becoming president precipitated one of the most bitter and fatal quarrels in American political history.

Alexander Hamilton, a leader of the leaders of the Federalist party, publicly declared himself to be in favor of Adams; secretly he attempted to secure the election of Pinckney. To achieve this he urged equal support of Adams and Pinckney as the surest way to defeat Jefferson. Due to Pinckney's popularity in the South, Hamilton foresaw that Pinckney would receive Southern votes which would not all go to Adams, and if both were solidly supported in New England, Pinckney would come out ahead.<sup>7</sup> Therefore, during the summer and fall

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<sup>5</sup> Henry Jones Ford, Washington and His Colleagues, Vol. XIV of The Chronicles of American Series, edited by Allen Johnson (50 vols.), p. 196. Hereinafter cited as Ford, Washington and His Colleagues.

<sup>6</sup> J. T. Morse, John Adams, p. 259.

<sup>7</sup> Henry Jones Ford, Alexander Hamilton, p. 316.

of 1796, Hamilton was busy with a subterranean plan to substitute Pinckney for Adams in the presidency by arranging for Federalist electors to vote for Pinckney while throwing a few Adams votes away on other people. He hoped to carry his point by this management for, as the constitution yet stood, whoever should get the highest number of votes would be president, provided that it was the majority.

#### Election

Adams was elected as president in spite of Hamilton's schemes. Eighteen Adams electors in the New England section, suspicious of Hamilton, withheld votes from Pinckney to make sure that he would not slip in ahead of Adams. Thus, they made Adams president and Jefferson vice-president instead of Thomas Pinckney. Adams was elected with seventy-one votes and Jefferson, with three less and eight more than Pinckney, was elected vice-president. Adams was bitter because he had received only one more vote than the number necessary to elect him; Jefferson had only two less than a majority. President by virtue of election by the Federalist party, Adams actually owed his place to three nameless electors: one a Pennsylvanian, another a Virginian, and a third a North Carolinian. Why any one of these electors voted for Adams is unknown; but plainly, he was president by accident.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Channing, op. cit., p. 217.

Adams occupied a perplexing political situation.

John Adams might have been the President and titular head of the party; in fact, however, it was Hamilton who was "king of the Federalists," as a Republican pamphleteer jeeringly called him.<sup>9</sup>

Hamilton's influence lay in Congress and especially in the Senate. There, a devoted group of Federalist lawmakers followed his every wish, obeyed his every command, and sought his advice on every important measure. Charles Francis Adams described the situation as follows:

During my father's administration, he had constantly exercised an influence of personal intrigue and management over a large portion of the party, controlled most of the appointments; . . . had acquired an overruling ascendancy over Mr. Pinckney, Secretary of State, over most of the Federalists of New York and over certain influential citizens of Massachusetts by the name of the "Essex Junto."<sup>10</sup>

In fairness it must be noted that Hamilton sought to rule by persuasion; he put arguments into the mouths of his spokesmen; he supported their debates with effective pamphleteering and journalism.

As the plan of equal vote for Adams and Pinckney had a certain surface plausibility, Adams did not at once realize the sharp practice Hamilton had indulged in. But when Adams learned of the intrigue concerning this election he cherished

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<sup>9</sup> Nathan Schachner, Alexander Hamilton, p. 385.

<sup>10</sup> Henry Adams, editor, Documents Relating to New England Federalism, p. 149.

toward Hamilton a resentment and distrust which, under all circumstance, were entirely natural and pardonable. Four years later Hamilton himself supplied the evidence of this intrigue in his famous letters published on John Adams.

It is true that a faithful execution of this plan (an equal vote for the two candidates in the New England States) would have given Mr. Pinckney a somewhat better chance than Mr. Adams; nor shall it be concealed that an issue favorable to the former would not have been disagreeable to me; as indeed I declared at the time in the circle of my confidential friends. My position was that if chance should decide in favor of Mr. Pinckney, it probably would not be misfortune; since he too had every essential qualification for the office and a temper far more discreet and conciliatory than that of Mr. Adams.<sup>11</sup>

It is only natural that Hamilton's cool disregard of Adams' sensibilities and his evident attempt to use Adams' own friends to carry out a policy which would have humiliated the vice-president were resented by Adams. Hamilton was not straight-forward but he was not disloyal to his party.<sup>12</sup> Nevertheless, his course laid the foundation of the estrangement, the mutual distrust, and the bitter hatred between two men, capable of large and long continued service to the country, which led to the ultimate ruin of the party.

The election brought Adams nearer to Jefferson than to Hamilton, for Adams had shown a sensibility to the candor of Jefferson's friends during the contest, and had learned of

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<sup>11</sup> Hamilton, op. cit., VII, 695.

<sup>12</sup> Stanwood, op. cit., p. 50.

personal sentiments of Jefferson toward him of a conciliatory nature. Jefferson, knowing Hamilton's opposition to Adams, tried to draw Adams nearer to the Republicans. On December 28, 1796, Jefferson wrote Adams a letter to be delivered by Madison expressing cordial friendship and made some reference to Hamilton. "It is possible indeed, that even you may be cheated of your succession by a trick worthy the subtlety of your arch friend of New York, who has been able to make your friends tools for defeating their and your just wishes."<sup>13</sup> Madison, exercising a discretion which was given him, did not deliver the letter; but the substance of it reached Adams, and in the weeks preceeding the inauguration a friendly relation developed between the president and the vice-president.<sup>14</sup> The public observed this development and the Federalists were greatly alarmed. Later, because of this friendship, Adams conferred with Jefferson on the situation in France.

Conditions existed to inspire political feuds and to foster factional animosity. This situation must be borne in mind in order to make intelligible the course of Adams' administration.

#### The Cabinet

When Adams was elected the custom had not yet been formed of a complete change of official advisors on the

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<sup>13</sup> Quoted in Gibbs, op. cit., I, 458.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

accession of a new president, and Adams retained the entire Washington cabinet: Timothy Pickering, Secretary of State, James McHenry, Secretary of War, Oliver Wolcott, Secretary of the Treasury, and Charles Lee, Attorney General. Perhaps there were several reasons for this. According to the notions of that time, the cabinet members should be regarded as bureaucratic officials; and, therefore, much more permanent officers than the president.<sup>15</sup> It was difficult to get capable men as the prominent ones were so averse to putting themselves in a position to be harried by Congress. Probably in view of the existing confusion as to party government, Adams did not in any way regard himself as the official head of the Federalist party or the chief of the clique. These cabinet members really represented the party better than he did.<sup>16</sup> They had served Washington well. It is interesting to note that Wolcott offered to resign.

On the retirement of General Washington, being desirous that my personal interests should not embarrass his successor, and supposing that some other person might be preferred to myself, I (Wolcott) tender my resignation to Mr. Adams before his inauguration. The tender was declined, and I retained my office under my former commission.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Henry J. Ford, Timothy Pickering, Vol. II of The American Secretaries of State and Their Diplomacy, edited by Samule Flagg Bemis (10 vols.), p. 234. Hereinafter cited as Ford, Timothy Pickering.

<sup>16</sup> John Spencer Bassett, The Federalist System, Vol. XI of the American Nation Series, edited by A. B. Hart (28 vols.), p. 207.

<sup>17</sup> Gibbs, op. cit., I, 450.

It is interesting manifestation of governmental inexperience that after eight years of operation under the constitution, the incoming president should have thought it wise or necessary to take over his predecessor's cabinet. It was all the more remarkable in the light of Adams' character, and his jealousy of Washington. Originally, Adams advanced the fortunes of Washington but he became extremely jealous as time passed as it pained him greatly to always be standing in the shadow of the "Immortal Washington." Had Adams felt the inclination and been strong enough to take a new cabinet in the beginning, he would at least have had some peace during his administration.<sup>18</sup>

"Schism in the Federalist party was inevitable."<sup>19</sup> Adams personified the opposition to militarism in any form; in the old days he had opposed many measures concerning the army. Hamilton, Pickering, and McHenry had been in Washington's military family. Oliver Wolcott had not served in the Revolutionary War, but he belonged to a coterie of Connecticut men who were very close to the army.

Retaining Washington's cabinet proved to be a great error on Adams' part, for Hamilton expected to continue to direct the policy of the government through the cabinet and Congress. This cabinet had been picked under Hamilton's

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<sup>18</sup> Bassett, op. cit., p. 208.

<sup>19</sup> Channing, op. cit., p. 179.

guidance and, by inclination, they were his supporters. Pickering, Wolcott, and McHenry owed everything to Hamilton -- nothing to Adams; and as they faced Adams in the cabinet room, it was to Hamilton and not to Adams that they looked as chief.<sup>20</sup> Ali Baba among his forty thieves is no more deserving of sympathy than John Adams shut up within the cabinet room with his official family of secret enemies.<sup>21</sup> If Adams had been a weak man, the situation might have been worked out with a minimum of friction. On the contrary, he was a man of oaken character, great ability, vast experience, and one who all his life had refused dictation from any quarter -- king, statesman, or public opinion.<sup>22</sup>

It seems only fair to say that Adams must have been fully cognizant of the part played by Hamilton.<sup>23</sup> As to the other side, the Hamiltonians, who formed the only party organization that the Federalists had, advocated Adams' election, because he was the only candidate whom they could possibly have elected. They knew the foibles and weaknesses of his character before his election. Having arranged themselves behind him, they should have given him their most loyal and thorough support.<sup>24</sup> Adams had been close to Washington's

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<sup>20</sup> Bowers, op. cit., p. 312.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., p. 315.

<sup>22</sup> J. T. Adams, The Adams Family, p. 103.

<sup>23</sup> Channing, op. cit., p. 180.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., p. 181.



administration and could hardly help knowing that Hamilton was consulted on all important matters, not only by Washington, but by the heads of the departments. When the time came for the president to prepare his first message to Congress, he asked the cabinet members for suggestions as to what should be put into it. Immediately, Wolcott and McHenry wrote to Hamilton and, on receiving his reply, incorporated his ideas into their own answers to Adams' request. Adams repeated a part of them in his speech to Congress. Anyone as familiar with Hamilton's mode of reasoning as Adams must have been, must have known where these suggestions came from, and recognized them.

Adams felt under no obligation to take the heads of the departments into his confidence; and he consulted them only when it suited his convenience. From the first, their attitude toward him was one of anxious supervision and guardianship. It took some time for him to realize how deeply he was betrayed in his own house, and when the explosion finally came it was too late to save Federalism. The characters and factional affiliations of the President and his advisors explain one of the forces that worked with Jefferson for the destruction of the Federalist party.

## CHAPTER III

### RELATIONS WITH FRANCE

#### Rejection of C. C. Pinckney

With the inauguration Adams found himself at the head of a nation engaged in a most violent political commotion. The bitterness of the animosity between the Federalists and Democratic Republicans was increased tenfold by the closeness of the electoral count and the conduct of the Directory of France. Foreign, not home affairs parted them. The Republicans were for yielding to the demands of the Directory, abrogating the Jay Treaty, defying England, and forming a close alliance with France. The Federalists were for the treaty, a strict neutrality, or, if necessary, a war with France.

The policy to be pursued was still unsettled when the insulting news arrived that the French government would not receive Charles Cotesworth Pinckney, the third minister sent to France. This disturbing news divided the party. The extreme Federalists, including Pickering and other members of the cabinet, would have severed all relations with France. This action, if taken, would result in war. On the other side were those like Hamilton, who sided with Adams in hopes that war could be averted. They preferred to make another

effort at negotiation, allowing the United States time to make adequate defense preparations in the event of war. Only under Hamilton's influence were Pickering and Wolcott led to follow Adams' course of action.<sup>1</sup> Hamilton continually advocated moderation, even supporting Adams at this time, and restrained the unreasoning zeal of the cabinet.<sup>2</sup>

#### First Commission

Adams' first official act was to submit a series of questions, pertaining to our relations with France, to the heads of the departments and requesting their opinion as to the course he should pursue.<sup>3</sup> Individually, the members of the cabinet promptly turned the questions over to Hamilton for his opinion. He replied to each one in great detail. To McHenry, he suggested that a commission be appointed to go to France, consisting of Pinckney, Cabot, and either Madison or Jefferson.<sup>4</sup> In addition, he requested that they ask Congress to pass an embargo on trade, increase the navy, and raise a provisional army.<sup>5</sup> McHenry adopted Hamilton's plan and submitted it as his answer to Adams. To Pickering, Hamilton wrote on March 22, 1797:

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<sup>1</sup>Ralph E. Bailey, An American Colossus, p. 269.

<sup>2</sup>Ford, Washington and His Colleagues, p. 203.

<sup>3</sup>C. F. Adams, op. cit., VIII, 540-41.

<sup>4</sup>Lodge, Works, X, 241-43.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid.

I would appoint a commission extraordinary, to consist of Mr. Jefferson or Mr. Madison, together with Mr. Cabot and Mr. Pinckney. To be useful it is important that a man agreeable to the French should go. But neither Madison nor Jefferson ought to go alone . . . . The commission should be instructed to explain; to ask a rescinding of the order under which we suffer, and reparation for the past -- to remodel our treaties under proper guards . . . . The Executive before Congress meets ought to have a well-digested plan and to cooperate in getting it adopted.<sup>6</sup>

However Pickering and Wolcott were reluctant to send a commission.<sup>7</sup> Adams, in a letter to his sister, December 11, 1799, stated:

There is a man (Pickering) in the cabinet, whose manners are forbidding, whose temper is sour, and whose resentments are implacable, who nevertheless (sic) would like to dictate every measure.<sup>8</sup>

Hamilton was compelled to bring pressure to bear upon the cabinet members before they yielded to his point of view. In a letter to Pickering, May 11, 1797, he insisted, "as to the mission . . . the more I have reflected upon it, the more has it appeared to me indispensable."<sup>9</sup>

Finally, they yielded to Hamilton's approval of a commission. Wolcott in a letter to Hamilton, March 3, 1797, wrote:

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<sup>6</sup>Ibid., pp. 244-45.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., p. 268.

<sup>8</sup>Stewart Mitchell, editor, New Letters of Abigail Adams, 1788-1801, p. 221.

<sup>9</sup>Hamilton, op. cit., VI, 246.

You know that I am accustomed to respect your opinion; and . . . that if you are known to favor the sending of a commission, so the thing must and will be.<sup>10</sup>

Thereafter, the cabinet of John Adams meekly sought and followed Hamilton's advice on almost every issue that arrived.<sup>11</sup>

Adams, unaware of this backstage diplomacy, made plans for another effort at negotiation. His task began with selecting envoys to France. The principles on which the envoys were chosen were most judicious and it was on the composition of the commission that Adams and Hamilton parted. All agreed on C. C. Pinckney as one and that the commission should consist of two Federalists and one Republican. Separately, both Adams and Hamilton thought of sending Jefferson or Madison. Adams conferred with Jefferson on the situation and it was agreed that it was unwise for the vice-president to head the commission.<sup>12</sup> Knowing the personal attachments of the cabinet members, it is easy to imagine the dismay and consternation produced by Adams' dealings with Jefferson. By the time Adams consulted his cabinet, they were suspicious of his motives and distrustful of his character. Madison was approached on the subject of the commission but he refused to go. Then, for the first time, Adams consulted the cabinet. They suggested some eminent persons devoted to the party and

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<sup>10</sup>Ibid., p. 224.

<sup>11</sup>Schachner, op. cit., p. 363.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid.

admirably suited for their character and their ideas to provoke war with France at once.<sup>13</sup> Adams did not approve, as he was suspicious of an attempt to force upon him a nomination from the Hamiltonian faction in New England. Adams suggested John Marshall of Virginia, Francis Dana, a Republican of Massachusetts, and Elbridge Gerry of Massachusetts. Gerry was a favorite with Adams. Gerry's services in the Continental Congress and the Constitutional Convention had been great, but as a representative from Massachusetts he had voted against some of the Hamiltonian measures and was not trusted by the Federalists. Of the names suggested, the secretaries preferred Marshall and Dana. Adams, showing an unusual forbearance, agreed to name Francis Dana, but on Dana's declining he overrode his cabinet members and appointed Gerry.<sup>14</sup> "From that hour, the highflying Federalists knew that John Adams would be no man's man and no man's parrot."<sup>15</sup> Finally, a commission composed of C. C. Pinckney, John Marshall, and Elbridge Gerry sailed for France, only to meet with a strange reception.

Twelve years later Adams wrote his account of the manner in which the proposition was received by the heads of the departments:

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<sup>13</sup> Bernard Fay, The Two Franklins, pp. 326-27.

<sup>14</sup> J. T. Adams, The Adams Family, p. 105.

<sup>15</sup> Bowers, op. cit., p. 345.

All this conversation (concerning Madison as a commissioner to France) on my part was with the most perfect civility, good-humour, and, indeed, familiarity; but I found it excited a profound gloom and solemn countenance in my companion (Wolcott), which after some time broke out in: "Mr. President, we are willing to resign." Nothing could have been more unexpected to me than this observation. Nothing was further from my thoughts than to give any pain or uneasiness. I had said nothing that could possibly displease, except pronouncing the name of Madison. I restrained my surprise, however, and only said, I hope nobody will resign. I am satisfied with all the public officers.

Upon further enquiries of the other heads of departments, and of other persons, I found that party passions had so deep and extended roots, that I seriously doubted whether the Senate would not negative Mr. Madison, if I should name him . . . . If I had nominated Madison, I should have nominated Hamilton with him. The former I knew was much esteemed in France, the latter was rather an object of jealousy. But I thought the French would tolerate one for the sake of the other. And I thought too, that the manners of the one would soon wear off the prejudices against him, and probably make him a greater favorite than the other. But having given up Madison, I ought to give up Hamilton too. Who then should I name? I mentioned Mr. Dana and Mr. Gerry to the heads of the departments, and to many leading men in both Houses. They all preferred Mr. Dana. But it was evident enough to me that neither Dana nor Gerry was their man. Dana was appointed but refused. I then called the heads of the departments together and proposed Mr. Gerry. All the five voices were unanimously against him. Such inveterate prejudice shocked me. I said nothing. I was determined I would not be the slave of it. I knew the man infinitely better than all of them. He was nominated and approved, and finally saved the peace of the nation; for he alone discovered and furnished the evidence that X., Y., and Z. were employed by Talleyrand; and he alone brought home the direct, formal and official assurances, upon which the subsequent commission proceeded and peace was made.

I considered Mr. Ames' candidate, Mr. Cabot, as deliberately as any of the others, and with as

favourable and friendly a disposition toward him as any other, without exception. But I knew his character and connections were as well known in France, particularly by Talleyrand, as Mr. Gerry's were; and that there were great objections against the former, and none at all against the latter.

This preference to Mr. Gerry to Mr. Cabot, was my first mortal offense against my sovereign heads of departments, and their discipline in all the states. It never was, or has been forgiven me by those who call themselves, or are called by others, "the leading men" among the Federalists.<sup>16</sup>

In general, Hamilton strongly supported the policy of the administration at this juncture, with the exception of the composition of the commission. He generously told Wolcott, "I like very well the course of the Executive conduct in regard to the controversy with France."<sup>17</sup> Perhaps it was fortunate that for once Hamilton and Adams took the same view on the situation.

#### X Y Z Affair

The popular feeling in the United States was daily growing more adverse to France. Adams addressed, to the members of his cabinet, a letter requesting their views of the proper course to be taken in case the commissioners should fail in accomplishing their purpose. McHenry and Pickering passed the inquiry on to Hamilton who, as always, was willing to oblige. McHenry sent in an answer in which he thought it better not to come to a formal declaration since a large

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<sup>16</sup>Quoted in Gibbs, op. cit., I, 465-66.

<sup>17</sup>Lodge, Works, X, 268.



number of the people had such a general aversion to war. He laid down a series of seven propositions to recommend to Congress which, if adopted, would have prepared the United States for war both by land and sea. This reply probably contained the joint conclusions of Hamilton and the three secretaries under his influence. These recommendations were almost identical with those which appear in Hamilton's private letters to Pickering.<sup>18</sup>

On October 5, 1797, the commission announced their arrival to the Directory. After many days of waiting the Americans were met by agents of the French government who presented to them a plan of bribe paying which was astonishing in its implications. These propositions were, of course, rejected. The refusal to concede to these demands resulted in new decrees against American commerce.

When the incredible news reached Adams, he once more submitted questions, now reduced to two, to his advisors: "Should all the particulars be disclosed at once to Congress? Should the President recommend a declaration of war?"<sup>19</sup> Again McHenry proposed a policy suggested by Hamilton.<sup>20</sup> Adopting this policy, Adams gave a message to Congress announcing the failure of the envoys, giving no details of the proceedings and recommending warlike measures. Meanwhile

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<sup>18</sup>Hamilton, op. cit., VI, 269-71.

<sup>19</sup>C. F. Adams, op. cit., I, 517.

<sup>20</sup>Hamilton, op. cit., VI, 274-75.

the Federalists were familiar with the content of these dispatches and the Republicans were kept in ignorance. "Hamilton, private citizen of New York, knew their contents; Jefferson, Vice-President of the United States, did not."<sup>21</sup> Hamilton, quick to see this a trump card of the war party, immediately began to work secretly for their publication. Evidence of this is found in a letter Pickering dated March 17, 1798.

I wish to see a temperate, but grave, solemn, and firm communication from the President to the two houses on the result of the advice of our commissioners; this communication to review summarily the cause of our affairs with France from the beginning to the present moment. . . .<sup>22</sup>

Another letter to Pickering, March 23, 1798, stated the following:

I understand that the Senate have called upon the President for the papers. Nothing certainly can be more proper; and such is the universal opinion here: and it appears to me essential that as much as possible can be communicated.<sup>23</sup>

At the instigation of Hamilton,<sup>24</sup> a member of the House called on Congress for full copies of all the dispatches. The President sent the documents to Congress in seven installments. They were complete in every respect except that he had substituted the letters X Y Z for the names of the emissaries engaged in the attempt to arrange the bribes for Talleyrand

<sup>21</sup>Bowers, op. cit., p. 364.

<sup>22</sup>Lodge, op. cit., X, 276.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., p. 279.

<sup>24</sup>C. F. Adams, op. cit., I, 518.

and the Directory. With the arrival of Marshall in the United States, the President completed this series of papers belonging to the negotiation. At the end, he added these important words:

I will never send another minister to France without assurances that he will be received, respected, and honored as the representative of a great, free, powerful, and independent nation.<sup>25</sup>

This statement was later to prove embarrassing to him.

The one voice to be heard was the denunciation of the humiliating treatment received from France and the approval of measures calculated to uphold the honor of the United States. Adams wanted no war but the extreme Federalists were shouting loudly for instant conflict. Hamilton wished for no war but he shouted in public as loud as the rest.<sup>26</sup> However, he wished to see the United States with a standing army. This was a crucial time for the individuals intrusted with power. Wisely handled, it might have insured the ascendancy of their policy for years to come.<sup>27</sup> The conduct of the Federalist party raised itself to the height of its power, but it was of short duration, and its strength brought with it the events which reduced it soon after to utter ruin.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> C. F. Adams, op. cit., I, 519.

<sup>26</sup> Schachner, op. cit., p. 376.

<sup>27</sup> C. F. Adams, op. cit., I, 519.

<sup>28</sup> Lodge, Alexander Hamilton, pp. 202-03.

### Preparation for War

The President chose to let Congress determine what was best to do in preparation for war. Until this time Adams had entertained little distrust of Hamilton; but with the responsibility of initiating the desired system transferred to the legislative branch, he began to see the perils.<sup>29</sup>

The policy proposed and adopted at this session of Congress was largely the offspring of Hamilton's brain, though it fell far short of the extent of his conceptions.<sup>30</sup> Congress rapidly carried out all the strong measures they deemed essential to peace -- establishment of a provisional army and the creation of a powerful navy. To Adams, no part of this program was particularly acceptable save the organization of the navy as his own system was purely defensive. He felt the army should be only a means of deterring the enemy from the idea of invasion. The creation of the provisional army marked the beginning of a problem in the Federalist party which soon led to the most serious consequences: the disrupting question of the command of the provisional army, which is discussed in the next chapter.

For all her bluster, France was not preparing for war. Elbridge Gerry, previously persuaded by Talleyrand to remain in France, now returned to the United States, October 1, 1798.

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<sup>29</sup> C. F. Adams, op. cit., I, 520-21.

<sup>30</sup> C. F. Adams, op. cit., I, 521.

He narrated the last movements of Talleyrand which furnished symptoms of a softening on the part of the French Directory.<sup>31</sup> Concurrently, Adams began to receive communications of a very interesting nature from William Vans Murray, the American minister in Holland. All of these indicated a real change in the French policy.

Reviewing these various communications, Adams could not resist the belief that a possibility yet existed of averting the calamity of war. Thus, about the middle of October, 1798, he wrote a letter submitting questions to his cabinet concerning a declaration of war or further negotiations with a new envoy.<sup>32</sup> The cabinet did not feel it necessary to reply because Adams had previously declared that he would never send another envoy unless assured that he would be received. Instead, the conspirators sat down to the framing of a message to Congress that would defeat the very purpose the letter had indicated. A secret council of their leading friends, including Hamilton and Pinckney, was held. As a result, there was a paragraph in the message which put it squarely up to France to take the initiative in the matter of a renewal of negotiations. Adams proved that he was not a mere cipher in this critical period by altering the message:

The clause, exacting from France the initiation of a new mission as a preliminary step in peace, wholly disappears, and there remains only a requirement

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid., pp. 532-33.

<sup>32</sup> Bowers, op. cit., p. 429.

of acts to prove a pacific disposition, the withdrawal of hostility, and the readiness to do justice both for the past and for the future. Negotiation was therefore made to depend upon the actual return of good faith in France, and not upon any particular mode of showing it,<sup>33</sup>

The Hamiltonians were so bent on war that they were ready to wreck their party on this issue.<sup>34</sup> The conspirators now tried to override Adams by meeting his plan for negotiations with an immediate declaration of war by Congress. When the votes were taken, Adams had triumphed by a small majority. This was the most significant incident yet -- it meant that Hamilton had lost his absolute control of the party councils.<sup>35</sup>

#### Appointment of William Vans Murray

The popular indignation toward France and the fighting qualities of the small American navy impressed France that she had aroused a nation out of reach of her armies. Some changes occurred in the French government and relations were put on grounds of national dignity. By circuitous channels, Talleyrand conveyed to Adams the fact that the government would be glad to receive an American envoy with all the respect and honor to which he was entitled. Acting on this information, and without a word to anyone, not even to his cabinet, the President sent to the Senate the nomination of

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<sup>33</sup>C. F. Adams, op. cit., I, 537-38.

<sup>34</sup>Bowers, op. cit., p. 426.    <sup>35</sup>C. F. Adams, op. cit. I, 539.

William Vans Murray to be minister to France. The Hamiltonian group was rendered furious by this action. Their present power and popularity had grown out of the trouble with France and was nearly certain to end when friendly relations were established.

Hamilton, in a letter to Sedgwick, February 21, 1799, stated: "The steps announced in your letter would astonish, if anything from that quarter could astonish."<sup>36</sup> Hamilton never believed war to be a good thing in itself; but the threat of war he considered as a necessity in order to maintain a standing army. He regarded peace now and always the first object; however, he found it difficult to restrain the zeal of the extreme partisans who actually wanted war.<sup>37</sup> The sudden change of Adams, his eager grasp at the earliest symptom of returning decency in the French government, disappointed and angered Hamilton as a hasty, needless step.<sup>38</sup> The Federalist party wanted war and their first thought was to defeat the President in the Senate. Hamilton's policy was to make the best of what had been done and to send a suitable commission. The party leaders fell in with Hamilton's views.<sup>39</sup>

As these assurances from France had come in a roundabout way, Adams suggested that William Vans Murray should not

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<sup>36</sup> Hamilton, op. cit., VI, 397.

<sup>37</sup> Lodge, Alexander Hamilton, p. 216.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., p. 219.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., p. 221.

actually go to Paris until direct and explicit confirmatory assurances were received.<sup>40</sup> The assurance came on May 12, 1799, in a letter from Talleyrand to William Vans Murray:

Be pleased to transmit to your colleagues, and accept yourself, the frank and explicit assurance that it will receive the envoys of the United States in the official character with which they are invested; that they shall enjoy all the prerogatives which are attached to it by the law of nations, and that one or more ministers shall be duly authorized to treat with them.<sup>41</sup>

The nomination of William Vans Murray precipitated a quarrel between Adams and his party.

#### Second Commission

The nomination of William Vans Murray was received with mixed and opposite emotions by the Senate. After two days of delay, the nomination was referred to a committee of five persons, all of them Federalists. Theodore Sedgwick, chairman of this committee, had already written to Hamilton for instructions. Meanwhile, this committee took an extraordinary step of visiting the President to obtain changes equivalent to an entire abandonment of it. The results of the visit did not correspond with their expectations. Adams, perceiving the committee might transfer their objections from the mission to the person named by him to fill it, made a corresponding

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<sup>40</sup> American State Papers, II, 239.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., pp. 243-44.



change in his position.<sup>42</sup> He proposed to join with William Vans Murray a commission of two other individuals.

The next morning Adams sent a new message to the Senate joining Oliver Ellsworth, Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, and Patrick Henry in a commission with William Vans Murray. Meanwhile, Sedgwick received an answer from Hamilton on February 21, 1799, stating:

But as it has happened, my present impression is, that the measure must go into effect with the additional idea of a Commission of Three. The mode must be accommodated with the President. Murray is certainly not strong enough for so immensely important a mission.<sup>43</sup>

Thus with every objection removed, the Senate ratified the commission. Adams, who for some months had been in the background of his own administration, now took matters in his own hands and became the initiative force in its policies.

The people received the news of the most noted event in Adams' administration with various and opposite feelings. Jefferson thought that the nomination silenced all arguments against the sincerity of France.<sup>44</sup> Hamilton and his friends inveighed the act as a fatal and dishonest desertion of a settled policy which required war at least until the time when the French should publicly sue for peace.<sup>45</sup> Adams

<sup>42</sup>C. F. Adams, op. cit., I, 548.

<sup>43</sup>Hamilton, op. cit., VI, 397.

<sup>44</sup>C. F. Adams, op. cit., I, 549.

<sup>45</sup>Ibid.

followed the path between these two hypotheses: "Ready for war, if France continued faithless; he was not less ready for peace the moment she showed signs of returning reason."<sup>46</sup>

In taking this step Adams knew that he was breaking up his own party on the eve of a presidential election; he knew that he was thus in all probability ruining his own chances for that second term which he desired most intensely, but he acted with a single eye to the welfare of the country, and in all American history it would be hard to point to a nobler act.<sup>47</sup>

In May, 1799, word came from Talleyrand promising that France would receive the commissioners and Adams ordered them dispatched. Pickering, still under the influence of Hamilton, postponed the execution of the President's orders for six weeks on first one pretext and then another. A change had just occurred in the French Directory, and Pickering thought this might alter their attitude toward the United States. Stoddert, the Secretary of Navy, who had been gradually losing sympathy with Pickering, wrote to Adams in Massachusetts that his presence was needed.<sup>48</sup> Adams answered that nothing was to be done about the French envoys till he arrived.<sup>49</sup> When Adams arrived, he observed the confident tone of the conclave and the presence of Hamilton and Ellsworth. Once more he was determined to teach his opponents a lesson.

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid., p. 550.

<sup>47</sup> John Fiske, "Alexander Hamilton," The Cosmopolitan, XXXIII (October, 1902), 620-21.

<sup>48</sup> C. F. Adams, op. cit., IX, 25-29.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., p. 29.

In a long cabinet meeting he said nothing about postponing the mission; but went over carefully and approved the instructions to be given the commissioners and the next day he ordered Pickering to dispatch them at once. At this time Adams ceased having any relations with Pickering except of formal character.

The commissioners Ellsworth, William Vans Murray, and William Richardson Davis, who replaced Patrick Henry, as he declined, were instructed to require an indemnity for spoliation and to secure a release from the obligations imposed by the Treaty of Alliance with France.<sup>50</sup>

The results of the settlement were much more significant than the treaty provisions. The country was saved from a useless and destructive war; but the Federalists were split, thereby opening the way for a Jeffersonian victory in the election of 1800. "With one masterful effort, Adams had pulled down the pillars of the party temple and he could not escape its fall." Adams' bold stroke had deprived Hamilton of his last chance for military glory.<sup>51</sup> He was left with a skeleton army and no one to employ it against.

<sup>50</sup> American State Papers, II, 243.

<sup>51</sup> Schachner, op. cit., p. 338.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE AFFAIRS OF THE MAJOR-GENERALS

#### Nomination of the Major-Generals

On May 28, 1798, Congress authorized President Adams to raise a military force of ten thousand men. The commander of this army was to have a sufficient number of major generals to assist him in his work. There was nothing to suggest that this measure could supply an explosive to blow up the Federalist party, but such was the effect.<sup>1</sup> The problem was the selection of generals and even now the three members of the cabinet were trying to devise ways and means of forcing the appointment of Hamilton.

At three different times, Adams casually asked Pickering who should be made commander-in-chief of the army. "The last time he asked this question when I again answered 'Colonel Hamilton,' the President replied, 'oh, no! It is not his turn by a great deal.'"<sup>2</sup> Adams refused to consider him and, in order to avoid a defense of his attitude, he hastily suggested Washington.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Ford, Alexander Hamilton, 319-20.

<sup>2</sup>Henry Adams, op. cit., 332.

<sup>3</sup>Johan J. Smertenko, Alexander Hamilton, 225.

Adams ordered McHenry to Mount Vernon to offer the chief command to Washington, with a request for advice in the formation of the officers' list.<sup>4</sup> McHenry hastened to Pickering and the conspiracy against the President began to unfold. Pickering was to send a letter on ahead urging Hamilton for the second place under Washington; McHenry was to reinforce Pickering's plea in person, and a letter from Hamilton to Washington should be delivered along with the commission from Adams.<sup>5</sup> Without waiting for Washington's acceptance, Adams sent his name to the Senate for confirmation. This step, taken without Washington's concurrence, was the source of much personal antagonism toward Adams by Washington. Despite this feeling, Washington accepted the command with two conditions: one, that he should not be called into active service unless circumstances made it necessary; and, second, that he should be allowed to select his own staff. In anticipation of the second condition, Hamilton had already paved the way with a letter, June 2, 1798, to Washington: "If you command, the place in which I should hope to be most useful is that of Inspector-General, with a command in the line."<sup>6</sup>

McHenry returned from Mount Vernon with a list of three major-generals -- Hamilton, Pinckney, and Knox, ranked in the

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<sup>4</sup>Jared Sparks, editor, The Writings of George Washington, XI, 531.

<sup>5</sup>Bowers, op. cit., p. 413.

<sup>6</sup>Lodge, Works, X, 287.

order given. The President was astonished that Hamilton preceded the others; but assumed that he would determine their relative positions later. He sent the nominations to the Senate and they were confirmed.

The question of priority among the major-generals now brought on a bitter and futile quarrel which weakened the whole Federalist party. Friends of Hamilton wanted the question settled by the order of the nomination. The President tried to reverse this order on the ground that in the Revolutionary Army both Knox's and Pinckney's ranks were actually higher than Hamilton's, but he harbored an extreme dislike for Hamilton. Pickering had this to say about Adams' attitude toward Hamilton:

The fact is, the President has an extreme aversion to General Hamilton . . . a personal resentment, . . . and if he followed his own wishes alone, would scarcely have given him the rank of a brigadier.<sup>7</sup>

Adams wrote sharply to McHenry that "General Knox is legally entitled to rank next to General Washington, and no other arrangements will give satisfaction."<sup>8</sup> Furthermore, Pinckney must also rank above Hamilton. "Any other plan will occasion long delay and confusion. You may depend upon it,"<sup>9</sup> he ended significantly, "the five New England States will not

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<sup>7</sup>Henry Adams, op. cit., p. 354.

<sup>8</sup>C. P. Adams, op. cit., VIII, 580.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid.

patiently submit to the humiliation that has been meditated for them."<sup>10</sup> At once Knox raised the question of the relative rank of the major generals, refusing to serve under Hamilton, in case they should be ranked according to the order of Washington's list. The President's action led to a desperate struggle. Public opinion was turned vigorously upon both Washington and Adams. Hamilton's friends set in motion many plans to bring about the result they desired. To Washington they represented that the Federalists in Congress have demanded Hamilton. To the Senate they urged that this was the cherished wish of Washington. A group of conspirators, Cabot, Ames, Higginson, meeting in Boston, framed a letter to Adams, signed by Cabot, assuring the President of a uniform sentiment in New England for Hamilton over Knox.<sup>11</sup> Hamilton wrote Washington that the Federalists preferred him to Knox.<sup>12</sup> In another letter he wrote Washington that public opinion wanted him and he was convinced that no injustice had been done to others in his favor.<sup>13</sup>

This struggle for control from August 4 to October 13, 1798, between Washington, who had the active support of the cabinet, and Adams, who was holding out against it. There were many anxious consultations over the situation. In fact Washington was so effectively worked upon that he threatened

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<sup>10</sup>Ibid.

<sup>11</sup>Lodge, Alexander Hamilton, pp. 165-67.

<sup>12</sup>Lodge, Works, X, 301.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., pp. 299-300.

resignation unless Hamilton were given first place.<sup>14</sup> In the face of this situation Adams relented and referred the decision to the pleasure of General Washington, who promoted Hamilton. To save face, Adams dated all three commissions on the same day. He also wrote Washington that he had signed the commissions all on the same day in the hope:

. . . that an amicable adjustment or acquiescence might take place among the gentlemen themselves. But if in these hopes he should be disappointed and controversies arise they will, of course, be submitted to you as commander-in-chief . . .<sup>15</sup>

Thus Hamilton became the second man in the army and Knox refused his commission; thereby, forming another section of the Federalist party against the "brilliant New Yorker."

Adams had yielded all along the line. Hamilton was second in titular command and first in actual command.

The President's eyes were now open; he saw for the first time the full implications of what had been taking place behind his back. His entire cabinet was wholly subservient to the outsider, Hamilton; Congress was subservient to the same man; so, it now seemed, was Washington.<sup>16</sup>

Adams, conscious of the intrigue which had gone on, wrote a sharp reprimand to McHenry for his part in it. There was general ill will among all members of the cabinet toward the President. A bitter feud between Adams and his cabinet was added to the causes now at work to destroy the Federalist

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<sup>15</sup>C. F. Adams, op. cit., VIII, 237.

<sup>16</sup>Schachner, op. cit., p. 378.



party. It was already dividing the party, and its effects were destined to be more serious as the months went by.

### The Miranda Affair

Hamilton started work as major-general with his accustomed zeal. His work of organization and preparation was of the best. December 13, 1798, he drafted a letter which Washington might send in reply to inquiries of McHenry, which really covered all the important points of army business, at the time including details of organization, discipline, and uniform.<sup>17</sup> He drew up plans of defense, including the army, navy, military academy, loans, taxes, and secret service money.<sup>18</sup> He prepared plans for the Commissariat and quartermaster's department, medical department, and the organization of the militia.<sup>19</sup>

Hamilton urged the need for a large army because of his own plans for its use. Besides contemplating an offensive war with France, Hamilton wanted an instrument for keeping down insurrection in America and for waging a war of conquest in South America.<sup>20</sup> His desire to get control of the army was but incident to a larger plan of expansion which he had formed.<sup>21</sup> Just what these plans were is not certain, but it

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<sup>17</sup> Hamilton, op. cit., VI, 97.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., p. 138.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., pp. 144-49.

<sup>20</sup> Bowers, op. cit., p. 438.

<sup>21</sup> Bassett, op. cit., p. 242.

is known that they were connected with a revolution in South America.

The plot was to have been carried out in conjunction with a mysterious South American, Francesco de Miranda, who wanted aid from the United States and England to revolutionize Spanish America. Miranda's plan was for England to furnish ships, men, and money; the United States to furnish 7,000 soldiers in exchange for part of the conquered territory. Evidence as to Hamilton's part in the project, that never came to anything, is very vague.

Miranda had written to Hamilton as early as February, 1798. On this letter there is an endorsement in Hamilton's handwriting stating that several years earlier he had frequent conversations with Miranda and possibly said that his plan was one that would interest the United States.<sup>22</sup>

In a letter to McHenry, 1799, Hamilton related:

Besides eventual security against invasion, we ought certainly to look to the possession of the Floridas and Louisiana, and we ought to squint at South America.<sup>23</sup>

As the months went by, Hamilton became more interested in Miranda's plan. Miranda was discussing it with the British ministers and with Rufus King, American minister to England, who was in correspondence with Hamilton. In correspondence with King and Miranda, Hamilton was careful to avoid the suspicions of having lent himself with the assent of his government. Hamilton wrote King, August 22, 1798:

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<sup>22</sup> Channing, op. cit., p. 197. <sup>23</sup> Lodge, Works, VII, 97.

I have received several letters from General Miranda. I have written an answer to some of them, which I send you to deliver or not, according to your estimate of what is passing in the scene where you are.<sup>24</sup>

In another letter to Miranda on the same day:

The sentiments I entertain with regard to that object have been long since in your knowledge, but I could personally have no participation in it unless patronized by the government of this country . . . . The winter may mature the project, and an effectual co-operation by the United States may take place. In this case I shall be happy in my official station, to be an instrument of so good a work. The plan, in my opinion, ought to be: a fleet of Great Britain, an army of the United States, a government for the liberated territory agreeable to both co-operators, about which there will be no difficulty.<sup>25</sup>

With all this Pickering and McHenry were familiar and in sympathy, but Adams was in total ignorance. In time the subject was cautiously mentioned to Adams by McHenry.<sup>26</sup> Adams rejected the plan with a notation that the United States was not at war with Spain.<sup>27</sup>

Due to Adams' Second Commission to France, the army was disbanded in June, 1800. Hamilton's military service went no further than plans and preparations; the only lasting result of his labors being the establishment of the West Point Academy a few years later in general conformity with his

<sup>24</sup> Hamilton, op. cit., VI, 347.

<sup>25</sup> Lodge, Works, X, 316.

<sup>26</sup> C. F. Adams, op. cit., I, 523-24.

<sup>27</sup> Bowers, op. cit., p. 428.

suggestions. He did the best that was possible in all that fell to him to do, and his strong hand was felt in all departments of the government in regard to everything relating to the war policy of the United States. In fact, McHenry turned to Hamilton for instructions on every point connected with the War Department, while Stoddert and Welcott sought his advice as to the policy to be pursued with regard to the Navy and the Treasury.

The record is too clear to leave the South American project out of consideration in seeking the reason for Hamilton's intense desire for war and a large army. Through all this period, Hamilton had visions of himself as the "Man on Horseback" -- the gallant general wresting from Spain all her vast dominions in the Americas.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Schachner, op. cit., p. 382.

## CHAPTER V

### THE ALIEN AND SEDITION ACTS

#### Provisions

Although the attention of the public was centered on warlike measures between 1797 and 1798, other events of great importance were happening. The atmosphere was one of great tension and momentary hysteria. The opposition press sent forth much criticism of the administration. Never before had officials been so profanely denounced. To make matters worse, much of the abuse was uttered by foreigners; and since war with France was eminent, it was concluded that most of these aliens were but agents of that nation. Many of the newcomers were extreme radicals who expressed their opinions by speech or pen with a venomous facility. In their old homes they had been compelled to keep their thoughts more or less to themselves. In America they could criticize officials in office without fear of the guillotine, axe, Bastille, or Tower. Federalist hostility was directed against the Irish as well as the French. Many Irish were seeking relief in America at this time. Ireland seething with rebellion, was being crushed by the soldiers of Cornwallis. The Federalists hated the Irish immigrant who was beginning to make himself felt in American politics on the side of the Jeffersonian party.

This feeling, in part a by-product of the Federalist pre-English feeling, was, in large measure, an expression of Federalist abhorrence of insurrections against constituted authority anywhere.<sup>1</sup>

The Federalist leaders were so carried away by the excitement of the times that they could not practice moderation. The publication of the X Y Z Affairs and the flight of members of the opposition from the House of Representatives left absolute control with the Federalists. The Federalists, accustomed to winning battle after battle when they had been in the minority, which was wholesome discipline on them, now became masterful and over-bearing. In Congress they were passing war measures at high speed. If war was to come defense provisions had to be made. But that was not enough for the radicals among the Federalists who thought conditions were ripe for the crushing of domestic foes as well as foreign enemies.<sup>2</sup> The Federalist party, dominated by aristocratic sympathies, was now determined to yield a death blow to the heresy known variously as "mobocracy" or "democracy."<sup>3</sup> Congress now passed the Alien and Sedition Acts and established a uniform rule of naturalization.

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<sup>1</sup> Bowers, op. cit., p. 374.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Arthur Meier Schlesinger, New Viewpoints in American History, p. 7.

The Alien Acts gave the President authority to expel from the country aliens whom he deemed dangerous to public peace and safety.<sup>4</sup> The Sedition Act made it a crime liable to fine and imprisonment for anyone to print or publish any false, scandalous, or malicious statements against the United States.<sup>5</sup> The Naturalization Law changed the length of residence, before becoming a citizen, from five to fourteen years.<sup>6</sup>

Views of Hamilton and Adams on the  
Alien and Sedition Acts

Every biographer has endeavored to clear the fame of his own hero from any complicity in these infamous acts. It does not appear that Hamilton was a leader in this extravagance and excess,<sup>7</sup> and Adams had no hand in suggesting them.<sup>8</sup> The facts remain that all Federalists were responsible for these measures. They had the full support of the congressmen and senators who passed them, and of the leaders in the states, who almost believed in them; and they also met with general acceptance by the party in the North.<sup>9</sup>

Hamilton was much alarmed by these bills and he wrote urgently in favor of modification. He thought that the Alien

<sup>4</sup> Annals of Congress, IX, 3743-44, 3754.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., p. 3776.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., pp. 3739-43.

<sup>7</sup> William Graham Summers, Alexander Hamilton, pp. 233-54.

<sup>8</sup> C. F. Adams, op. cit., I, 561.

<sup>9</sup> Henry Cabot Lodge, "Alexander Hamilton," North American Review, CXXIII (July, 1876), 135.

Law was deficient in guarantees of personal liberty.<sup>10</sup> He wrote Pickering, June 7, 1798, as to how it would be executed:

If an alien bill passes, I would like to know what policy, in execution, is likely to govern the Executive. My opinion is, that while the mass ought to be obliged to leave the country, the provisions in our treaties in favor of merchants ought to be observed, and there ought to be guarded exceptions of characters whose situation would expose them too much if sent away, and whose demeanor amongst us has been unexceptionable. There are a few such. Let us not be cruel or violent.<sup>11</sup>

As bad as the Alien Law was, it did not approach the viciousness of the Sedition Bill. The Sedition Bill as passed was mild compared to the original one framed by the Federalist leaders in the Senate. The bill declared the French people enemies of the American people, and that anyone giving the former aid and comfort should be punishable with death.<sup>12</sup> A strict enforcement of this bill would have sent Jefferson to the gallows.<sup>13</sup>

When this monstrous measure reached Hamilton, he hurriedly sent a note of warning to Wolcott on June 29, 1798:

There are provisions in this bill which, according to a cursory view, appear to me highly exceptionable, and such as, more than anything else, may endanger civil war . . . . I hope sincerely the thing may not be hurried through. Let us not establish a tyranny.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Lodge, Works, VIII, 526.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., X, 273-74.

<sup>12</sup> Bowers, op. cit., p. 377.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Lodge, Works, X, 295.



However, when the laws were modified and passed, they and the principles which they involved received Hamilton's entire support.<sup>15</sup>

It appears that Adams' participation in the Alien and Sedition Laws was limited to only a passing opinion and his official signature on them. Adams declined to insert in his speeches recommendations, offered by his cabinet, to restrict the rights of aliens. He wrote in a letter to Pickering, August 13, 1799, "The alien law, I fear, will upon trial be found inadequate to the object intended . . ."

It is worthy of remark that this letter contains the closest approximation to any expression of opinion upon the alien and sedition laws, to be found in the whole of Mr. Adams' correspondence during his administration. He was, in fact, regarded by Mr. Hamilton and the ultra members of the federal party as lukewarm, if not unfriendly to them.<sup>16</sup>

The Federalists who favored their adoption were dissatisfied with Adams' lack of confidence in their value as effective measures. The traces are visible in some of their letters, which show a radical difference of opinion between these persons and Adams.<sup>17</sup> Adams never compelled the departure of a single person out of the country or licensed any alien to restricted residence.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Lodge, Alexander Hamilton, p. 219.

<sup>16</sup> C. F. Adams, op. cit., IX, 14, footnote.

<sup>17</sup> Hamilton, op. cit., VI, 388.

<sup>18</sup> Channing, op. cit., p. 223.

### Results of the Alien and Sedition Acts

The passage of these two acts proved to be one of the greatest blunders of the Federalist party.<sup>19</sup> The Alien Act might pass under the general right of self-protection in time of war. But the attempt to punish individuals for mere expressions of opinion of public measures and public officials verged closely upon the abridgement of the freedom of speech and press. It furnished an issue for the opponents of the administration. The celebrated Virginia and Kentucky Resolutions sprang up under the guidance of Jefferson and Madison, in an attempt to awaken the country to the meaning and possible results of such legislation as the Alien and Sedition Acts. As a result, the Federalist party, divided against itself, entered the next presidential campaign with but a narrow margin for success.

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<sup>19</sup>C. F. Adams, op. cit., VI, 288.

## CHAPTER VI

### THE CABINET SHAKE-UP

#### New York City Election

The event which set off the cabinet explosion was the Federalist defeat in the New York Legislature in 1800. Since, in this era, the state legislature selected the presidential electors in some of the states, Hamilton sought to elect men of no popularity and little weight to insure the election of Federalist electors and electors that he could control against Adams. For such a strange procedure Hamilton had a definite reason. He certainly did not wish to see the Republicans triumphant; but he was equally averse to seeing Adams continue as president. He thought that with an obedient set of electors from New York, he could keep the Federalists in power and substitute C. C. Pinckney of South Carolina in the place of Adams.

Against Hamilton's mediocre ticket, the Republicans, under the influence of Aaron Burr, framed a ticket of outstanding national figures such as George Clinton, Horatio Gates, and Brockholst Livingston. Burr's efforts met with complete success. The thirteen members of the assembly from New York City were all Republicans by a majority of 500 votes. These thirteen members gave the Republicans control. Therefore, it can be said that a change of less than 250 votes

in the New York City election in May of 1800 would have given New York's vote to Adams and made him president with seventy-seven votes to sixty-one votes for Jefferson.<sup>1</sup> This victory elected Jefferson in the next presidential election, made Burr vice-president, and destroyed Hamilton.<sup>2</sup>

The greatly alarmed Hamilton was ready to use trickery to try to reverse this situation. After meeting with a group of Federalists he even went so far as to suggest a change in the election laws in a letter of May 7, 1800, to Governor Jay:

The calling of the legislature will have for object the choosing of Electors by the people in districts. This will insure a majority of votes in the United States for a Federalist candidate. I am aware that there are weighty objections to the measure; but the reasons for it appear to me to outweigh the objections; and in times like this in which we live, it will not do to be over-scrupulous.<sup>3</sup>

Jay read the letter with astonishment, made a notation that it was for party purposes and that he could not adopt it.<sup>4</sup> This plan certainly created a dark blot on Hamilton's record.

#### Resignation of McHenry

When Adams learned of the results of the election in New York he saw in his humiliation the hand of Hamilton and

<sup>1</sup>Channing, op. cit., p. 237.    <sup>2</sup>Bowers, op. cit., p. 454.

<sup>3</sup>Henry P. Johnston, editor, The Correspondence and Public Papers of John Jay, IV, 271.

<sup>4</sup>Beard, op. cit., p. 372.

his supporters.<sup>5</sup> He concluded that Hamilton was dethroned as "King of the Federalists." Adams immediately proclaimed his own independence by demanding the resignation of the two secretaries whom he characterized as Hamilton's spies. For some time now he had been cognizant of the treachery in his cabinet. There is no need to rehearse here the story of the struggle between the president and his cabinet which acted under the direction of Hamilton and in collusion with the leading Federalist senators. It will be sufficient to point out that the secretaries undertook to thwart Adams in his purpose to renew negotiations with France. They arrogated to themselves rights which the constitution had conferred upon their official chief when they sought by a clandestine appeal to Washington to secure the appointment of Hamilton to the virtual command of the army.<sup>6</sup> McHenry, Pickering, and Wolcott in doing the will of a division of the Federalist party whose leader was Hamilton, thought they were strictly right because Adams' policy was destructive to their party.<sup>7</sup> Hamilton was certainly within his rights as party leader to correspond with the secretaries and give them his opinions on political questions; but to use his influence with the cabinet to try to force the President's hand was another matter.

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<sup>5</sup> Bowers, op. cit., pp. 455-56.

<sup>6</sup> Anson D. Morse, "The Politics of John Adams," American Historical Review, IV (January, 1899), 310.

<sup>7</sup> Henry Adams, op. cit., p. 234.

Adams' cabinet, actually a tool of Hamilton, created an intolerable situation which caused a tremendous explosion when Adams finally discovered the fact that they were actually trying to usurp his executive power. He had been aware for some time that the cabinet was not aligned with him but now he feared in every cabinet recommendation there was some design to further Hamilton's interests.

On May 5, 1800, Adams was determined to reorganize his cabinet. McHenry was called in and various departmental matters were discussed. Then Adams, losing his temper, began to accuse McHenry of the many things he had done. Adams knew McHenry's relations too well and had experienced too much opposition in his cabinet not to realize the need of his removal. McHenry gives a sketch of the parting interview:

The business appeared to relate to the appointment of a purveyor . . . . This settled, he took up other subjects; became indecorous and at times outrageous. General Washington had saddled him with three secretaries, Wolcott, Pickering, and myself. I had not appointed a gentleman in North Carolina, the only elector who had given him a vote in that state, a captain in the army, and afterwards had him appointed a lieutenant, which he refused. I had biased General Washington to place Hamilton in his list of major-generals before Knox. I had eulogized General Washington in my report to Congress, and had attempted in the same report to praise Hamilton. In short, there were no bounds to his jealousy. I had done nothing right. I had advised a supervision of the mission. Everybody blamed me for my official conduct, and I must resign.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup>Quoted in J. T. Morse, John Adams, p. 313.

McHenry made a hasty retreat and prepared his resignation which was accepted immediately.

#### Dismissal of Pickering

Adams, once started on the road of ridding his household of his enemies, sent a note, five days after the stormy scene with McHenry, inviting the Secretary of State to resign and name the day. Pickering answered immediately:

Several matters of importance in the office in which my agency will be useful, will require my dilligent attention until about the close of the present quarter . . . . Nevertheless, after deliberately reflecting on the overture you have been pleased to make, I do not feel it is my duty to resign.<sup>9</sup>

Pickering also mentioned his ill financial condition in the letter as a reason for declining to resign. Therefore, Adams dismissed him on May 12, 1800.

It is surprising that this dismissal did not come long before. Adams would have eliminated much dissention within his administration if he had forced Pickering out at the first indication of a settled opposition. "As it was, the cabinet engaged in desperate warfare with the president; each faction found its supporters, and the whole party was torn to pieces."<sup>10</sup> From Pickering, Adams met the most determined resistance. The secretary's attacks deeply injured the

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<sup>9</sup>C. F. Adams, op. cit., IX, 54-55.

<sup>10</sup>Henry Cabot Lodge, "Timothy Pickering," Atlantic Monthly, XLI (June, 1878), 745.

party long before Hamilton and his famous pamphlet (discussed in the next chapter) dealt the final blow at the union and mutual confidence.<sup>11</sup>

When Hamilton learned of Pickering's dismissal, he wrote at once to Pickering: "Allow me to suggest that you ought to take with you copies and extracts of all such documents as will enable you to explain both Jefferson and Adams."<sup>12</sup> Pickering replied on May 15, 1800:

Last Saturday morning I received a summons to resign, and a desire that I would myself name the day. But I did not incline to accept this insidious favor. The President desired my answer on Monday morning, and I sent it, mentioning that some important matters would render my services useful in the office till about the close of the present quarter, but that "I did not feel it my duty to resign." In an hour I received a preemptory discharge, and on Monday evening I quitted the office, after working hard, and completing all the arrangements for the census, pursuant to a law passed in this session . . . . I am always gratified when there happens a coincidence of my thoughts with yours. I have been contemplating the importance of a bold and frank exposure of Adams; perhaps I may have it in my power to furnish some facts.<sup>13</sup>

Pickering, to the last, avowed that he did not know and could not divine the reason and motive for his discharge. Charles W. Upham in The Life of Timothy Pickering cannot explain the mystery of the dismissal. He displays evidence of mutual confidence and respect between Adams and Pickering to the

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p. 746.

<sup>12</sup> Lodge, Works, X, 376.

<sup>13</sup> Hamilton, op. cit., VI, 443.



very eve of the call for Pickering's resignation.<sup>14</sup> He hesitates between two assumed grounds for it: one, his known part in influencing some senators against the confirmation of the president's son-in-law, William S. Smith, to the office of adjutant general in the army; the other, his suspected share in Hamilton's scheme for securing General Pinckney's election as president, to preclude Adams a second term as president.<sup>15</sup> On the other hand, if Adams had seen any one of the several letters that Pickering had written to leading Federalist characters as to the president's limitations, he might well have expelled him from office in a burst of indignation.<sup>16</sup>

Adams was not fully aware of Pickering's treachery. However, he did know enough from the revelations made at the time of Murray's nomination and Pickering's delay of six weeks in sending instructions to the second commission to be convinced that he needed another advisor in the State Department.<sup>17</sup>

Wolcott, Secretary of the Treasury, was regarded by Adams as a friendly advisor within the fort. He deserved to go quite as much as either of the others but he remained, only

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<sup>14</sup>George E. Ellis, "The Life of Timothy Pickering," North American Review, CXVIII (April, 1874), 377.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid.

<sup>16</sup>Channing, op. cit., pp. 240-41, citing letter from Pickering to Timothy Williams, May 19, 1800, rough draft in Pickering Manuscripts, XIII, 514.

<sup>17</sup>C. F. Adams, op. cit., I, 568-69.

to do further injury to his good name. He continued for some months to combine external civility and deference to the president, while actually spying for Hamilton.

#### The Cabinet After Revision

The nominations by Adams of John Marshall of Virginia as Secretary of State, and Samuel Dexter of Massachusetts as Secretary of War, sufficiently indicated the intention of the president. These two men were received with satisfaction by the moderate Federalists, while they were viewed by others as precluding all further insinuations of bargaining with the opposite party, in which they had largely indulged, and, at the same time, a sure presage of the downfall of their own influence.

On November 8, 1800, Wolcott, haunted by the scruples about holding his office, sent in his resignation, effective at the end of the year, which was only two months before the end of the administration. Odd as it may appear, Adams was never cognizant of Wolcott's disloyalty and always felt kindly toward him. Adams even made Wolcott a judge during the last days of his administration. Never to his dying day was Adams aware that Wolcott had fooled him completely.

## CHAPTER VII

### THE PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION OF 1800

#### Intrigues

As the presidential election approached, it became apparent that Adams was desirous of obtaining the presidency again. The Hamiltonian group contemplated the possibility of Adams' success with sickness at heart. Could nothing be done to prevent it? Their first plan, which reflected no credit upon themselves, was to induce Washington to come out of retirement and run; but the idea had hardly developed before all hopes in that quarter were abruptly dashed by his death on December 14, 1799. According to Hamilton, Adams had lost claim to party loyalty when he suddenly came to life after three years by discharging two cabinet members. Hamilton took advantage of this to announce his opposition to Adams in no uncertain terms. In a private letter dated May 10, 1800, Hamilton wrote to Sedgwick stating:

For my individual part my mind is made up. I will never more be responsible for him (Adams) by my direct support, even though the consequences should be the election of Jefferson. If we must have an enemy at the head of the government, let it be one whom we can oppose, and for whom we are not responsible, who will not involve our party in the disgrace of his foolish and bad measures. Under Adams, as under Jefferson, the government will sink. The party in the hands of whose chief it shall sink will sink with it, and the advantage will be on the side of his

adversaries . . . . The only way to prevent a fatal schism in the Federal party is to support General Pinckney in good earnest. If I can be perfectly satisfied that Adams and Pinckney will be upheld in the East with entire good faith, on the ground of conformity, I will, wherever my influence may extend, pursue the same plan. If not, I will pursue Mr. Pinckney as my single object. Adieu.<sup>1</sup>

The factions of the Federalist party agreed upon a truce in a party caucus which met in Philadelphia soon after Congress adjourned on May 14, 1800. To throw Adams over meant open split and certain defeat so the leaders in Congress, with much misgiving, resolved to advocate a fair and equal support of Adams and C. C. Pinckney as candidates for the highest office, the designation of Adams for the preference being rather understood than avowed.<sup>2</sup> Once again Hamilton urged equal vote for both Pinckney and Adams. It was generally supposed, however, that this course might result in the election of Pinckney, a result which Hamilton openly preferred. It soon became known that Hamilton and his friends felt at liberty to describe the character and conduct of Adams for the sake of creating an ultimate preponderance for Pinckney. Confidentially, the word was passed along that Adams must be sacrificed.<sup>3</sup>

The managers of the caucus at Philadelphia had foreseen two possibilities: one, an attempt to poll the votes of South

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<sup>1</sup>Lodge, Works, X, 375-76.

<sup>2</sup>C. F. Adams, Works, I, 576.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

Carolina for Jefferson and C. C. Pinckney; or, second, that of Pinckney's winning the first place when they nominated him.<sup>4</sup> Thus Sedgwick, in a letter to King dated September 26, 1800, stated:

At the time we agreed on Mr. Pinckney as a candidate, which was at the meeting of the whole Federal party in Congress, we had every assurance which could be given by the members from South Carolina, that whatever might be the character of their electors, such was the popularity of General Pinckney, that all the votes of that state would be given to him -- if federal, of course for Adams and Pinckney, if anti-federal, for Pinckney and Jefferson.<sup>5</sup>

Hamilton, conscious that the Republicans had a strong following in South Carolina, thought perhaps the South Carolina electors might be induced to go for a southern ticket and vote for Pinckney and Jefferson, a situation which would leave the former with the whole Federalist vote and weaken Adams by those votes which were thrown to Jefferson.<sup>6</sup>

It is known among us that the legislature of South Carolina virtually seconded Hamilton's scheme. They proposed to cast their votes for Jefferson and Pinckney, or for Pinckney and Jefferson, in the conviction that it would secure his election as President or Vice-president.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>4</sup>"South Carolina in the Presidential Election of 1800" (author not given), American Historical Review, IV (October, 1898), 112.

<sup>5</sup>Charles R. King, editor, The Life and Correspondence of Rufus King, III, 309.

<sup>6</sup>Bassett, op. cit., XI, 287.

<sup>7</sup>Charles Cotesworth Pinckney, The Life of General Thomas Pinckney, p. 154 citing Alexander Garden, Eulogy on General Charles Cotesworth Pinckney.

Pinckney, their solitary hope for continuance in power, refused to co-operate in their schemes to displace Adams with himself. When the Hamiltonian faction in the legislature of South Carolina, sent a delegation to Pinckney to obtain his consent to cast the vote of South Carolina equally for Pinckney and Jefferson and thereby eliminate Adams, ". . . he firmly resisted every inducement to be associated with Jefferson at the expense of Mr. Adams."<sup>8</sup> Pinckney's rejection of this proposition as being unjust to Adams, and inconsistent with his own sense of propriety, prevented the success of the plan; however, his generosity failed to sustain his colleague.<sup>9</sup>

Meanwhile, Hamilton, under the pretext of disbanding the army in person, started on a tour of New England states in June, 1800. No one doubted that his mission was political in nature. Hamilton's purpose was to prevail upon the New England leaders to give unanimous support to Pinckney and to drop a few Adams votes or, if that was impossible, to secure an equal vote for Pinckney and Adams. He received both a cool welcome and a cordial reception, depending upon the area visited. In Massachusetts, the home of Adams, Hamilton received a warm welcome from the "Essex Junto," composed of the "Blg-Wigs," all devoted to Hamilton.

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<sup>8</sup> Letter from "Dwight Foster to Cabel Strong," American Historical Review, IV (January, 1899), 330.

<sup>9</sup> Pinckney, op. cit., pp. 154-55.

Hamilton, in a letter to Charles Carrol on July 1, 1800, summed up the situation:

The result of a comprehensive view of the subject seems to me to be that the event is uncertain, but that the probability is that a universal adherence of the Federalists to Pinckney will exclude Jefferson. On this point there is some danger, though the greatest number of strong-minded men in New England are not only satisfied of the expediency of supporting Pinckney as giving the best chance against Jefferson, but even prefer him to Adams; yet, in the body of that people there is a strong personal attachment to this gentleman, and most of the leaders of the second class are so anxious for his re-election that it will be difficult to convince them there is as much danger of its failure as there unquestionably is, or to induce them faithfully to co-operate in Mr. Pinckney notwithstanding their common and strong dread of Jefferson. It may become advisable, in order to oppose their fears to their prejudices, for the Middle States to declare that Mr. Adams will not be supported at all, when, seeing his success desperate, they would be driven to adhere to Pinckney.<sup>10</sup>

Hamilton made his observations and reached the conclusion that the leaders of the first order were in a mood to repudiate Adams, but that those of the second order (most numerous) were almost solidly for him. He merely began to change his tactics. With this uncertainty in the East the duty of the Independent Federalists of the Middle States was clear. They must refuse to give support to Adams. Then the doubtful Federalist states, alarmed for the success of the ticket, would come over to Pinckney's side.

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<sup>10</sup> Lodge, Works, X, 378.

The attempt to unite the Federalist electors on Pinckney's side had to be given up, or, the reason for making the attempt had to be boldly set forth.<sup>11</sup> The remedy was an exposure of the sort which Pickering had proposed at the time of his dismissal. With this in mind Hamilton began to seek information to write a detailed and documented report to expose Adams. To describe facts which denoted the unfitness of Adams, Hamilton had to rely on Pickering and McHenry, now out of office, and Wolcott, still Secretary of Treasury, who could give the latest and by far the most valuable information. To Wolcott he wrote July 1, 1800:

To be able to give it, I must derive aid from you, . . . But you must be exact, and much in detail. The history of the mission to France, from the first steps connected with the declarations in the speech to Congress down to the last proceeding is very important.<sup>12</sup>

Hamilton hesitated to write the pamphlet since he had to derive material from members, past and present, of the administration. He asked the men concerned their desires in the matter.<sup>13</sup> These three, Pickering, McHenry and Wolcott, readily agreed to the formation of such a pamphlet. Hamilton took some time in writing this "letter" to expose Adams.

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<sup>11</sup> John Bach McMaster, A History of the People of the United States, II, 496.

<sup>12</sup> Lodge, Works, X, 377.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.



### The Pamphlet

The ever increasing bitterness and the great openness of the quarrels among the leaders during the summer of 1800 completed the ruin of the Federalist party. Adams was not going to permit himself to be sacrificed without a murmur. He had formed opinions of the Hamiltonians which had impaired his confidence in them, no less, however, than theirs had become impaired in him. The wrath Adams had felt ever since the matter of army appointments now boiled over. He gave unrestrained expression to his feelings. Among other abusive things he openly called his opponents a British faction, and named Hamilton in particular, as acting in the interest of England. The Republican press repeated this. It was at this time that Trench Coxe, whom Adams had ousted from office in 1797, published an indiscreet letter which Adams had written to him in 1792 implying that Hamilton was under British influence.<sup>14</sup> "The true inference is that there were no British factions, no men sold to France, no subverters, evil plotters, or unpatriotic men among all whose names stand high on the roll of statesmen."<sup>15</sup>

The charge of a British faction by the obstinate head of the party against its distinguished members could not fail to have its effect in giving force and strength to the

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<sup>14</sup> Mitchell, op. cit., pp. xl-xli in Introduction.

<sup>15</sup> Sumner, op. cit., p. 239.

attacks upon them, but Adams had not the sagacity to perceive that in working their ruin, he was destroying the pillars of the platform on which he stood himself.<sup>16</sup> These expressions by Adams were repeated to Hamilton and he used them as a pretext for writing a pamphlet against Adams, a plan he had been formulating for some time now. The pamphlet was to circulate only among the Federalists; but Hamilton must have known that it would be impossible to conceal it from the rest of the world. Hamilton was determined to blast Adams in the eyes of all good Federalists so that there would be no further question in their minds about the necessity of supporting Pinckney.

Hamilton led his party to believe he was writing this in self-defense, but with or without a reason, he was bent on writing it. He wrote to Adams on August 1, 1800, for an explanation of rumors as to certain charges which the president was said to have brought against him.

It has been repeatedly mentioned to me that you have on different occasions asserted the existence of a British faction in this country, embracing a number of leading or influential characters of the federal party, as usually denominated; and that you have sometimes named me, at others plainly alluded to me, as one of this description of persons . . . . I therefore trust that you will not deem it improper, that I apply directly to yourself, to ascertain from you, in reference to your own declaration, whether the information I have received is correct or not; and if correct, what are the grounds upon which you have founded the suggestion.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup>Gibbs, op. cit., II, 427-28.

<sup>17</sup>Hamilton, op. cit., VI, 449.

Receiving no reply, Hamilton wrote again on October 1, 1800.<sup>18</sup> Both notes were courteous and straightforward but they were passed over in contemptuous silence. It must not be forgotten that at this time there was no open breach between Adams and Hamilton. Their relations were still friendly, in form at least. Moreover, only a short time before Adams had written Hamilton asking his assistance in securing a desirable position in the army for his son-in-law, William Smith, to which Hamilton complied.

Many of the best men in Hamilton's party advised him against this project, but he paid no attention to them. Several reminded him that it was a violation of the agreement made by the caucus, but that moved him not.<sup>19</sup> Fisher Ames, in a letter dated August 26, 1800, suggested voting according to the compromise agreed on by the caucus and

. . . strong as our objections are, and strongly as we would and are willing to urge them to the public, we refrain because the effect of urging them would be to split the Federalists, and absolutely to insure Mr. Jefferson's success . . . I am therefore clear, that you ought not with your name, nor if practicable in any way, that will be traced to you, to execute your purpose of exposing the reasons for a change of the executive.<sup>20</sup>

Also, Cabot wrote Hamilton a letter dated August 21, 1800, suggesting:

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., pp. 470-71.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., p. 464.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., pp. 464-65.

. . . and therefore these men (electors) act and will act fairly towards Mr. Adams, giving him all their support upon the just expectations of a similar support to Mr. Pinckney from those who prefer Mr. Adams; . . . that the plan formed at Philadelphia to support both, was a compromise which contemplated Mr. Adams as President; but liable, however, to be superseded by Pinckney from the nature of the election, and "that good faith would and ought to be observed as the only means of success, and as the only ground of content after success." Such is the tenor of our language to the public -- we think it true and we shall be greatly embarrassed at this late period, after our sentiments are extensively known, there should be a new or different ground taken -- you must allow me therefore to insist, that whatever display is made of Mr. Adams' misconduct, it must be continually recollected that he may be again chosen by us, and that we are pledged to give him the full chance of the united vote concerted at Philadelphia; so that, whatever is said against him must be explicitly avowed to be the complaint of those of us who have yielded individual opinion to the general opinion of the party as a matter of expediency, and not the language of the party; and it ought to be admitted, that the party, from various considerations, rather prefer the election of Mr. Adams than Mr. Pinckney . . . although I think some good may be derived from the exhibition of Mr. Adams' misconduct, yet I am well persuaded that you may do better than to put your name to it. This might give it an interest with men who need no such interest, but it will be converted to a new proof that you are a dangerous man. Ames and I agree that you will give the enemy an advantage to which he has no claim.<sup>21</sup>

This project spread profound alarm among others of Hamilton's political friends who had not personally engaged in the conflict with the president. They remonstrated against the publication as much as they dared differ with their autocratic commander; but they had scant influence.

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid., p. 459.

Hamilton promised his alarmed and protesting friends that the pamphlet should be privately and discreetly distributed and

Hamilton meant the final statement to be used only as a means of placating the "leaders of the 2nd class" to whom it might conceivably be shown, meanwhile planting in them sufficient seeds of doubt concerning Adams that would eventually render them more pliable to the wishes of those who desire Pinckney as first choice.<sup>22</sup>

Various reasons are given for the writing of this pamphlet. Many contemporaries have eagerly discussed the possibility that the pamphlet was due to Adams' treatment of Hamilton in the military appointments.<sup>23</sup> John Quincy Adams stated his views as to the reason for Hamilton writing the pamphlet:

But this baffled war with France, and this abortion of the army of fifty thousand men was the cause of the inextinguishable hatred of Hamilton and Pinckney to my father, in which hatred they were cordially joined and seconded by the whole Essex Junto. It was under the influence of this hatred that Hamilton published his slanderous pamphlet against my father.<sup>24</sup>

The pamphlet entitled The Public Conduct and Character of John Adams, Esq., President of the United States, was written and sent to the printer. It was to circulate only among the leading Federalists. But Aaron Burr, by some

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<sup>22</sup>Schachner, op. cit., p. 397.

<sup>23</sup>Helen Nicolay, "Our Nation in the Building," The Century Magazine, XCI (December, 1915), 200.

<sup>24</sup>Henry Adams, op. cit., p. 151.

means, not yet fully explained, got access to these sheets while passing through the press and caused the extracts to be published in the opposition newspaper far and wide before the Federalists obtained a single copy. All possibility of secrecy had come to an end. Parton gives a very colorful version of how Burr obtained the document. Burr, an early riser, was walking in the street one morning when he met a boy carrying a covered basket.

What have you there, my lad?" asked Burr who was prone to accost young people that he met in the streets. "Pamphlets for General Hamilton," replied the boy, not knowing their importance. Burr asked for one and the boy complied without hesitation.<sup>25</sup>

The paper was spread far and wide through the country as the best campaign literature of the Democrats and then at last even Hamilton could not deny his blunder. This wretched transaction utterly destroyed any hope of Federalist success. The party was divided, dispirited, and full of internal distrust which made defeat inevitable.

This letter contained some interesting political confessions, and went over the public life of Adams from the beginning of the Revolutionary War to the day when, in a rage, he drove the secretaries from his cabinet. It begins with a critical discussion of Adams' character and career. He denounced the president as a man of disgusting egotism, of

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<sup>25</sup> James Parton, Life and Times of Aaron Burr, I, 257.

distempered jealousy, of ungovernable indiscretion of temper, and of unsound maxims of administration. He then comes to the matters of the French mission, Fries Rebellion, and so on, in which he takes the extreme view against Adams. The main substance of the charges were against the nomination of the commissioners to France and the pardon of Fries who, according to Hamilton, should have been hanged.

The Fries Rebellion, an armed resistance to the levy of the direct tax by Congress, occurred in Northampton County, Pennsylvania, in the spring of 1798. John Fries, the leader of the rebellion, was put upon trial and found guilty by the verdict of a jury. He was granted a new trial which resulted in the same verdict. The order of the execution came to the president and he granted a pardon to Fries although he had led the public to believe that he would not do this. It had been stated that Adams had declared Washington's policy of pardoning similar cases had been the cause of the second insurrection and that he would prevent a third by the use of force against the offenders.<sup>26</sup> In commenting upon this act, so extraordinary under the circumstances which attended it, Hamilton observed:

It shows him (Adams) so much at variance with himself, as well as with sound policy, that we are driven to seek a solution for it in some system of concession to his political enemies; a system the most fatal to himself

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<sup>26</sup>

Quoted in Gibbs, op. cit., II, 361.

and for the cause of public order, of any that he could possibly devise. It is by temporisings like these, that men at the head of affairs lose the respect both of friends and foes -- it was by temporisings like these, that in times of fermentation and commotion, governments are prostrated, which might easily been upheld by an erect and imposing attitude.<sup>27</sup>

After devoting most of his essay to criticizing Adams, Hamilton did an "about face" and asked the Federalists to vote for him, as he realized this was all the party could safely do.

Yet with this opinion of Mr. Adams, I have finally resolved not to advise the withholding from him a single vote. The body of federalists, for want of sufficient knowledge of facts, are not convinced of the expediency of relinquishing him. It is even apparent, that a large proportion still retain the attachment which was once a common sentiment.<sup>28</sup>

Hamilton's attempting to prove in the pamphlet that Adams was unfit for the presidency and then advising the party in spite of Adams' unfitness to vote for him, showed that the author was capable of jeopardizing the success of his party for the sake of gratifying personal animosity.<sup>29</sup>

Hamilton sought to make it appear that he acted solely from motives of defense; but it did not require fifty-three pages to prove that he was not of a British faction. It

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid., pp. 361-62.

<sup>28</sup> Hamilton, op. cit., VII, 725.

<sup>29</sup> Anson D. Morse, "Alexander Hamilton," Political Science Quarterly, V (March, 1890), 16.



was not necessary for such a purpose to review at length Adams' political career. The blow had been much heralded among his intimates who said that it would crush the president; but it fell short of that effect.<sup>30</sup> Hamilton could not let his arm swing fully lest he should plainly commit party treason. It was not prudent to attack the policy of peace with France for it had clearly the approval of the people. Although the attack injured Adams, it did far more harm to Hamilton for both contemporaries and posterity have considered it an angry utterance.<sup>31</sup> Hamilton was surprised by the storm of abuse his pamphlet on Adams caused.

#### The Election of 1800

Adams was deprived of the presidency for a second term because of himself and three other men --Hamilton, Burr, and Jefferson.<sup>32</sup> It was the great Hamilton who made the defeat of Adams certain. After the death of Washington, Hamilton seemed to have looked at himself as the leader of the Federalists with the president as his puppet.<sup>33</sup> When Adams tried to usurp that leadership by ridding himself of two cabinet members, it was too much for Hamilton's pride and desire for power and the unfortunate pamphlet followed. Hamilton's part in the New York City election was also responsible. It was

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<sup>30</sup> Bassett, op. cit., p. 290.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Mitchell, op. cit., p. xl in Introduction.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

Aaron Burr who won the election of 1800 for the Republicans, by carrying the electoral vote of New York, for without New York, Jefferson would not have replaced Adams in the White House.<sup>34</sup>

An analysis of the electoral vote of 1800 dispels many illusions, especially when it is compared with the vote of 1796, the apportionment being the same both years. In each election Adams received the entire thirty-nine votes of New England. Omitting for the moment the vote of New York, Adams received in 1796 twenty electoral votes from New Jersey and the states southward, compared to twenty-six votes he received from the same states in 1800. He received no votes from South Carolina on either occasion. In 1796 Adams had fifty-nine votes plus twelve votes from New York while in 1800 he had sixty-five votes without New York. In 1796 Jefferson had sixty-eight votes without any from New York while in 1800 he had sixty-one plus twelve New York votes.

It appears, omitting the New York vote, that Adams was stronger with "the people" in 1800 than he had been in 1796, despite the Alien and Sedition Acts, Virginia and Kentucky Resolutions, Hamiltonian and Pickering intrigues, and all the opposition of Republican politicians and immigrant newspaper writers.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Channing, op. cit., pp. 219, 235-36.

Thus the downfall of the Federalist party was due to the transference of the New York electoral votes from Adams to Jefferson. Of course, South Carolina and Pinckney played a part in it too. The presidential election of 1800 hinged upon the election in New York which hinged upon Burr's manipulation of New York City politics. "To him, therefore, the downfall of the Federalists was ultimately due."<sup>36</sup>

The struggle of the election, however, did not come to an end in the electoral college. Jefferson and Burr received seventy-three votes, Adams received sixty-five and Pinckney received sixty-four. The equal votes received by Burr and Jefferson threw the final decision into the House of Representatives.

The Federalists in Congress, maddened and reckless by defeat, turned to Burr whom they regarded only as a moderate Republican as a chance of snatching the office from their arch-enemy Jefferson. They were running to perilous extremes, and once more Hamilton tried to check them.

It was time for the "King of the Federalists" to abdicate, but ironically enough, he still had the power to dictate which of these two rivals was to rule in his place.<sup>37</sup> Nobody had the slightest doubt that the choice of the party for president was Jefferson but the situation offered an opportunity for intrigue. Here was a field of operation exactly

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid., p. 236.

<sup>37</sup> Smertenko, op. cit., p. 230.

suited to the genius of Hamilton, and his conduct during this period was such as to justify John Adams in the declaration that he was the "most unprincipled intriguer in America."<sup>38</sup> Hamilton wrote to leading Federalists to hold out the bait of their support to Burr, but warns them that the support must not be given to him in reality. He tells them Burr is the more dangerous man, and, if elected to the presidency, he would conduct the government "a la Bonaparte."<sup>39</sup> Much as Hamilton distrusted Jefferson, he saw that he was far more reliable than the trickster whom he had encountered on many occasions in New York politics. While trying to convince the Federalists that Jefferson would not interfere with the practical economic interests -- fiscal, commercial, and manufacturing -- which were the special care of the Federalist party, Hamilton advised them to try to secure definite promises from Jefferson on these matters.<sup>40</sup> In fact, influential Federalists made it plain to Jefferson that Federal opposition to his election would cease if only he would assure the country that he would do none of the radical things threatened by his party -- such as wiping out the public debt and abolishing the navy.<sup>41</sup> Jefferson refused to make any promises.

Hamilton worked for weeks to prevent the election of Burr. To Bayard of Delaware, and to others, he wrote in the

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<sup>38</sup> Jere Clemens, The Rivals, p. 273.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Beard, op. cit., p. 407.

<sup>41</sup> Nicolay, op. cit., p. 202.

strongest terms against this "Catiline of America" as he called him.<sup>42</sup>

The substance of the remarkable letters through which Hamilton sought to save the presidency from Burr may be expressed in these words: Democracy is a terrible evil; but since the government must be democratic, let us place it in the hands of Jefferson, who will pursue "a temporizing policy," rather than in the hands of Burr, who is "an American Catiline."<sup>43</sup>

Though the choice that Hamilton advocated prevailed eventually, before the final vote was taken Hamilton's advice had been so disregarded by the leading Federalists that he was aware of a sense of alienation from his party. On the thirty-sixth ballot, the House of Representatives designated Jefferson, President of the United States.

#### Last Days of Adams' Administration

The last days of Adams' administration were marked with bitterness and a determination to get control of the judiciary. The Federalists, still holding power in both houses, were alarmed at the prospect of having Jefferson president because his opinions respecting the judiciary were supposed to be radical in the extreme.<sup>44</sup> They were determined to reorganize the federal courts. This change had been repeatedly urged by the executive, and was really called for by the changes

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<sup>42</sup> Hamilton, op. cit., VI, 419-24.

<sup>43</sup> Anson D. Morse, "Alexander Hamilton," Political Science Quarterly, V (March, 1890), 18.

<sup>44</sup> C. F. Adams, op. cit., I, 596.

that had taken place in the population. Congress passed an act which provided that the Supreme Court after the next vacancy should consist of five justices only and increased the district courts to twenty-three. It established a large number of offices with a life-tenure, which were to be filled. Adams tried to safeguard the reorganized judiciary. He believed that Jefferson might fill them with extreme men among his followers which would endanger the safety of the government.<sup>45</sup> Therefore, Adams conceived it his duty to set patriotism above politeness to Jefferson; he immediately filled the judiciary positions with men of his choice. It is scarcely possible for the most prejudiced man to deny that Adams' selection of John Marshall for chief justice was of very important political consequences.

Early on the morning of March 4, 1801, Adams drove away from the city, too bitter to remain and take a part in the ceremonies and amenities of the inauguration. Thus terminated the administration of Adams. His presidency had been one long and severe trial. He retired disgraced in the popular estimation, but he had fully redeemed the pledge into which he entered with himself at the beginning of his career, to "act a fearless, intrepid, undaunted part" though not forgetting "likewise to act a prudent, cautious, and considerate part."<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> C. F. Adams, op. cit., I, 598, quoting Diary of May 24, 1773, II, 320.

These qualities were exemplified in his neutral policy and helped to remove the obstacles which threatened the prosperity of the nation at that time.

## CHAPTER VIII

### THE DEATH OF THE FEDERALIST PARTY

The Federalist party was autocratic as evidenced by the tone of their leaders. A Federalist letter always began "It is decided" or "It has been determined," and the "it" meant that either Hamilton, or two or three men guided by him, had come to certain conclusions. In similar cases, on the other side of the political fence, Jefferson's commands took the form of "our friends think." The difference was wide and important and eventually evolved into what is now called the conflict between Hamiltonian Nationalism and Jeffersonian Democracy.

Hamilton was largely responsible for the autocratic thinking of the Federalist party. He failed as a party leader in part because he would not accept the conditions of successful leadership. A successful leader must follow the direction the party is inclined to take. Hamilton, instead of following, marked out the course and he would not deviate. The blemish to his reputation is not that his public activity continued but that he allowed it to produce a system of private direction of public affairs incompatible with any sort of constitutional government.<sup>1</sup> What Hamilton failed to do

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<sup>1</sup>H. J. Ford, Alexander Hamilton, p. 301.



as a political character was to hold his party together through Adams' administration. Although he was a fighter through and through, and his courage was superb; he was indiscreet in utterance, impolite in management, self-confident, opinionated, and uncompromising in ideas and methods. His policy of rigor and vigor, and his too relentless methods of pursuing it undoubtedly contributed to the strengthening of civil order and discipline; but it also produced opposition, broke up his party, and left him without influence in public affairs.<sup>2</sup>

With the exception of Jefferson and Madison, the Federalist party comprised most of the able men in the country. Washington, Hamilton, John Adams, and Marshall alone can justify all that can be said on ability. Those of second rank such as Jay, Rufus King, Gouverneur Morris, Ames, Sedgwick, Pickering, Wolcott, Dana, and the two Pinckneys added to the irresistible power. As long as these men moved in harmony they could defy a Democratic majority, but the instant perfect unity was lost, ruin became inevitable. As long as Washington was in office everything was safe. The retirement of Washington severed the bonds and the dissolution of the Federalists could have been averted only by the most consummate tact, the most delicate consideration, and mutual forbearance on

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<sup>2</sup> Sumner, op. cit., p. 238.

the part of the leaders.<sup>3</sup> After the retirement of Washington, the Federalists were not even fortunate enough to have an undisputed chief. There were two men who desired this position. Adams was the leader de jure; Hamilton de facto. Adams had been elected by the party and, supposedly, he represented that party and their policy; therefore, he was bound by every rule of common sense to hold his party together. The one necessary quality was tact, which Adams did not have. He was honest, patriotic, and fearless, but he was not a party leader and knew not how to arouse the enthusiasm of his supporters. Adams was not a politician.

I do not say when I became a politician, for that I never was. I cannot repent of anything I ever did conscientiously and from a sense of duty. I never engaged in public affairs for my own interests, pleasure, envy, jealousy, avarice, or ambition, or even the desire of fame. If any of these had been my motive, my conduct would have been very different. In every considerable transaction of my public life, I have invariably acted according to my best judgement and I can look up to God for the sincerity of my intentions.<sup>4</sup>

Despite all his courage, honesty and abilities, he failed as a leader of men therefore, he was a principal cause in the ruin of his party. He did not wreck his party, but he contributed toward its destruction. Had Adams been another kind of man he might have guided the forces which destroyed him;

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<sup>3</sup>Henry Cabot Lodge, "Alexander Hamilton," North American Review, CXIII (July, 1876), 131.

<sup>4</sup>Quoted in J. T. Adams, The Adams Family, p. 115.

but it was other hands than his which set the wedge that rent Federalism.<sup>5</sup>

The administration of Adams witnessed the total ruin of the Federalist party, a result of divided leadership. Although Adams had become president by a narrow majority of votes, his party was stronger in Congress than it had been during Washington's second administration. By the time of the last session of Congress during Adams' administration, the Republican party formed only a small majority. Instead of working in harmony, the strength of the Federalist party was wasted in internal conflict. The blame rested on both the Federalist factions. "Mr. Adams was not of Hamilton's coterie, nor was he a man to seek advice as to his course of action or to accept it with equanimity."<sup>6</sup> From this situation arose the bad feeling and secret intrigue that made this administration largely a tale of bitter feud. The story of this administration is in the main the story of Adams' awakening to the fact that he was expected to reign and not rule; that Hamilton was party leader while he was only president; and the growing bitterness of the struggle in which both lost their dignity, self-control, and judgement. It ended in the ruin of Adams' future political career and the Federalist

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<sup>5</sup> Bassett, op. cit., p. 205.

<sup>6</sup> Starwood, op. cit., p. 54.

party. Adams had a theory that he could control the party unassisted, and Hamilton had a theory he could control Adams.<sup>7</sup> To run the Federalist party without at least Hamilton's tacit approval was an impossibility. Hamilton, in his position, was at liberty to offer his suggestions to the president, if these suggestions were refused he could have held his tongue or gone into open opposition. He did neither. He undertook to manage Adams through the cabinet, which was composed of his followers. The confusion and disaster that followed might have been prevented, had the members of the cabinet been discreet and wise politicians. When they found they were unable to bend the president to Hamilton's will, they should have become agents of the president's will, or retired from office.

Adams' inaugural address was well-received, even by many who had opposed his election. The popularity which he thus achieved increased and continued during the greater part of his term. Strangely the dissatisfaction of the politicians of his own party grew more intense as the prejudice against him on the part of the people vanished. Of course, an alert opposition led by Jefferson was always present to take advantage of every mistake of the administration.

The problem which overshadowed all others during the administration was the strained relation with France. The

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<sup>7</sup>H. C. Lodge, "Alexander Hamilton," North American Review, CXIII (July, 1876), 132.

insulting rejection of C. C. Pinckney as minister became known officially only three weeks after the administration opened. The catalogue of the chief events in the history of the French negotiation included: the appointment of Gerry, Marshall, and Pinckney as a special commission; the contemptuous treatment they received from the French Directory; the corrupt proposals made to them by Talleyrand's agents; the X Y Z letters; Adams' refusal to send another minister until assurance be given that he would be received; his nomination of William Vans Murray, without consultation with any member of the cabinet, as minister on the receipt of a vague intimation indirectly conveyed, that a minister would be received; the substitution of a commission for a single minister; the opposition of the secretaries to the step, and Pickering's delay in making ready for the departure of the envoys; and Adams' order that they should sail before a specified date. The relations with France increased the popularity of the Federalist party, but at the same time created bitter dissension which sapped its life even in the moment of victory.

Adams gave mortal offense to the Federalist party in his pacific relations of his government with France.<sup>8</sup> The opposition to his policy involved the party in much obloquy from which it never recovered. The nomination of William Vans Murray as minister to France precipitated the quarrel

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<sup>8</sup> Edward S. Ellis, Library of American History, III, 619.

between Adams and his party. The French commission completed the split in the Federalist party and made the re-election of Adams impossible.<sup>9</sup>

Time proved to all that Adams was in the right in renewing the negotiations with France. In the long series of services that he rendered to his country, this was certainly one of the most heroic and beneficial, but in bestowing peace on his country he alienated an important section of the Federalist party. He served his country better than his party. Although these acts regarding France were the chief causes of his downfall, he wrote, many years later, "I desire no inscription over my gravestone other than: 'Here lies John Adams, who took upon himself the responsibility of the peace with France in the year 1800.'"<sup>10</sup>

There were many echoes of the conflict with France in home politics; the resolution to organize an army, the ensuing difficulty relating to Hamilton's rank as a major-general; the establishment of a navy, a measure most strenuously opposed by the Republican party, but heartily supported by the Federalists of both factions; the Alien and Sedition Laws; and the Virginia and Kentucky resolutions.

The quarrel with the Hamiltonians was further embittered by Adams' foolish attempt to prevent Hamilton's obtaining the

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<sup>9</sup>John Fiske, "John Adams," The Presidents of the United States, 1789-1902, p. 58.

<sup>10</sup>C. F. Adams, op. cit., X, 113.

rank of major-general. This ended with a victory for Hamilton, through the help of Washington and greatly embarrassed Adams. This quarrel produced a general ill-feeling among all the cabinet members and the president.

The relation with France placed the Federalist party at the height of its prosperity and power during Adams' administration. It controlled both the Senate and the House of Representatives. In 1798, at the height of the popular fury against France, the Federalists in Congress presumed too much upon their strength and passed the famous Alien and Sedition Acts. Although the Alien and Sedition Acts grew out of a momentary hysteria, not incomparable to that which produced the Salem persecutions for witchcraft, they rested on an outworn ideal.<sup>11</sup> Their failure left such a deep impression on the public consciousness that never since that day has our government attempted to regulate what citizens should think or say about public officials.

Outwardly, the Federalist party was great and powerful but within their dissensions were reaching a climax. The situation created by Hamilton's influence on the cabinet on every matter was enough to cause more even-tempered men than Adams to lose control over themselves. The coalition between Hamilton and Adams' cabinet -- McHenry, Pickering, and Wolcott -- placed enemies as well as spies in Adams' camp, and this may

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<sup>11</sup> Bassett, op. cit., p. 264.

account in some measure for Adams' omission in consulting his cabinet.<sup>12</sup> The dismissal of McHenry and Pickering split the party in twain and gave the country a strange spectacle of Federalists wrangling, contending, and overwhelming each other with abuse.

Adams' candidacy for the office of president in 1800 brought open warfare between Hamilton and Adams. Between them there had been for some time a feeling of jealousy and distrust. It was not based upon any serious difference of policy, but simply upon the fact that one party was not large enough to hold two men of such aggressive and masterful temperament.<sup>13</sup> Since the controversies were over personal differences rather than of principles, the situation was marked by pettiness on both sides. By intrigue Hamilton tried to secure the election of C. C. Pinckney although the Federalist caucus had agreed on equal support for Adams and Pinckney. The year 1800 was a time when the sense of political honor was running low.

Hamilton prepared an arraignment of Adams in a tract professedly private, but there was no sufficient reason for preparation unless it was intended to defeat Adams' chance of re-election; and if such was the intent there was no ground for privacy.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Justin Winsor, Narrative and Critical History of America, VII, 335, citing Van Buren, Political Parties, pp. 235-41.

<sup>13</sup> John Fiske, "Alexander Hamilton," The Cosmopolitan, XXXIII (October, 1902), 620.

<sup>14</sup> Winsor, op. cit., p. 335.



For one leader to publish an attack upon the character of a candidate upon the eve of a doubtful contest for the presidency was utter madness. It precipitated the catastrophe of the Federalist party. As a result of the publication of the pamphlet entitled The Public Conduct and Character of John Adams, Esq., President of the United States, Hamilton lost the leadership of the Federalist party, and the Federalists lost the election.<sup>15</sup> The rank and file openly blamed Hamilton for the loss of the election. His "Letter" had stirred up a hornet's nest. Had Hamilton been prosecuted for this attack on the president under the Sedition Act passed by his party, as was threatened by a political opponent, it would have been only a just rebuke to him and to his party.<sup>16</sup>

Of course Aaron Burr, a bitter enemy of Hamilton, contributed his share to the defeat of the Federalist party by the part he played in the New York City election in 1800. By framing a ticket of outstanding national figures he was able to defeat Hamilton's mediocre ticket, thus insuring Republican presidential electors. Adams would have been elected if he had received the New York vote.

The Federalist party lost power and disappeared, although it did have some influence through John Marshall as chief-

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<sup>15</sup> Sumner, op. cit., p. 238.

<sup>16</sup> Encyclopedia Britannica, XI, 123.

justice of the Supreme Court for the next thirty years. Hamilton, with only four years left until his death at the hands of Aaron Burr, was now on the outside of the administration of public affairs. Adams, an embittered and friendless man, retired to Massachusetts to live for another quarter of a century. Between them these two men had destroyed their party. Hot tempered and domineering, neither would give way, and the real, if not avowed, struggle between them brought down in ruin the party they had helped to build.

This quarrel had such vitality that it survived to other generations. Historians in each family kept the warfare immortal. The Adams writers represented Hamilton as clandestine and dishonorable. The Hamilton writers represent Adams as an obstinate blunderer, whom Hamilton strove to keep from working mischief. In fact, Hamilton, though constantly carried by his antipathy beyond the limits of good judgement, did nothing morally reprehensible; Adams, though committing very provoking errors as a politician and party leader, never went far wrong as a statesman and patriot.

The Federalist party had done a great work toward solving the problems of effective organization of the new government. The United States was respected abroad, strong and powerful at home, secure under a settled and stable government, and fairly well started on the broad road of greatness and prosperity. The Federalist party was a party of superior

class, in which there was a dozen men of great ability and administrative experience presiding over the party's destinies. What, then, stood in their way of continued success? The answer lay in their intense opposition to giving "the people" a strong voice in the government. There was a growing demand on the part of the common people for a share in the government, but the Federalists did not listen to public opinion. A second reason was that the autocratic Federalists appeared imperialistic in the eyes of many, as evidenced by Hamilton's dreams of expansion. The third stumbling block to the long-continued dominance of the Federalist party was the lack of harmony within its ranks which clustered about Alexander Hamilton and John Adams.

This party brought into contempt the ideal of government by the superior classes and no capable politician since 1800 has dared to place his cause on any other ground than the will of the people. Hamilton could not see, or would not concede, the predominating forces developing in American life -- local self-government and democracy.<sup>17</sup>

The Federalist party did not recognize the natural developing tendency toward broadening the right of suffrage in all the states. At length, they gave Jefferson, their masterly opponent, an opportunity to organize a majority of the people against their supremacy. He believed that the

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<sup>17</sup> Winsor, op. cit., p. 269.

great majority of Americans were capable of self-government under the right conditions, and was most successful in casting much unpopularity about the Federalist party. Jeffersonian Democracy came into power in 1800 in direct line with colonial development; Hamiltonian Federalism had been a break in the development. This can explain in part the overthrow of the Federalists, despite their brilliant success in organizing the government.

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