AMERICAN INFLUENCE ON THE FRENCH REVOLUTION

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AMERICAN INFLUENCE ON THE FRENCH REVOLUTION

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CHAPTER I

THE AWAKENING OF FRENCH INTEREST IN AMERICA

On the eve of the American revolt France outwardly seemed content to remain in the lethargy into which she had sunk under the Bourbon kings. The extravagance of rulers, coupled with their indifference to the condition of the country and the people, had reduced France to a torpor from which she could only sleepily eye her achievements of the past.[1] Beneath the surface of this apparent lassitude men were beginning to think. Voltaire with his satire and scorn of the established church had weakened materially the heretofore unassailable position of that august group.[2] Rousseau with his theory of the "natural man" had struck a blow at the "divine right" of kings still maintained in France. "Popular sovereignty" and "natural rights" had been concepts since the sixteenth century[3] but had remained in the realm of speculation and theory as yet unproven in practice. People from all classes in France were convinced of a need for

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[1]Bernard Fay, Revolutionary Spirit in France and America, p. 4.

[2]Henry Elridge Bourne, Revolutionary Period in Europe, p. 4.

[3]Cambridge Modern History, VIII, 5.

change, and far-reaching reforms, but as yet no public expression of this need was made.[4]

Louis XV, still called the "well-beloved," was the most hated man in France. Although aware of the needs of his people, he was concerned only with ending his reign in peace and was indifferent to the problems his successor might inherit.

Men read and praised Montesquieu's Spirit of Laws which had been published in 1748, and Rousseau's Social Contract, but continued to live under despotic rule. During the second half of the eighteenth century the corruption of the church was forgotten while the thinkers of that period critically surveyed the government and its weaknesses.[5]

By 1770 the prevalence of ideas considered revolutionary at that time is shown by the common usage of the terms "patriot" and "citizen" in the conversations of the French people. Although the people themselves had as yet no well defined campaign or purpose, the popularity of their usage indicates the trend national thought was taking and the willingness of the people of France to adopt new ideas.[6]

France was in need of new ideas. They were undergoing

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[4]George Burton Adams, Growth of the French Nation, p. 260.

[5]E. J. Lowell, The United States of America, 1775-1782, p. 4.

[6]Fay, op. cit., p. 7.

a religious and political transformation in thought but there was as yet no clear ideal toward which they could direct their impulses. The examples of American revolutionary endeavor were soon to furnish that ideal.

Abbe Raynal in 1770 published a book which focused French attention on America. Appearing under the ponderous title of A Histoire Philosophique et Politique des Establissments et du Commerce des Europies dans des deux-Indes, this work embraced a wide variety of interests.[7]

While inexcusably inaccurate in much of its information, it pictures America as a land of progress, where the agricultural arts and sciences are to bring about a new era for all humanity. The moral reform of all the world would be achieved through the example and influence of the British colonies, predicted Reynal. He suggested a collaboration between the Americans and the French whereby the French should furnish the ideas and theories for the Americans to adopt and act upon.

Reynal exploited all of the wonders of the new world and impressed the reader with all of the original and picturesque features of that country. In addition to his treatment of America, Reynal included attacks on the intolerance, cupidity, and other evils of European governments which by contrast presented the colonies in a most favorable light.

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[7]Ibid., p. 8.

He glowingly portrayed the Quakers of Pennsylvania as the representatives of common sense and wisdom and saw in their life the proof of his belief that kings are not necessary for the happiness of a people. His opinion was that "the righteous man, the free man needs only his equal to be happy."[8]

The effects of the work of Reynal in France can hardly be estimated. It made him the acknowledged spokesman for all of the discontented, inspired Monsieur Chevalier de Chautebriand to set forth in search of the Northwest Passage, and became the model for all similar books on America during this period. The authors used Reynal's data so completely that his errors became accepted as established facts which no amount of denying by Americans could erase in the public mind of France. Until 1789 hardly a year went by without the appearance of an imitation of Reynal's book, most of whose authors borrowed material from Reynal without bothering to acknowledge the source.

A certain Abbe De Pauw followed Reynal with a book on America whose only importance lies in the attention attracted among his countrymen. In it he pictures the people of North America as being infirm and weak due to the inferiority of that continent. This inferiority, he insisted, was caused by its recent origin. In his opinion the "state of Nature"

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[8] Ibid., pp. 13-14.

was a myth and perfection could be attained only in Europe.[9]

De Pauw's work was disputed and attacked by another writer, Dom Pernetty, who believed in a theory of nature.

Buffon then took both writers to task by saying each was partly right and partly wrong. All three were basing their conclusions on false assumptions, as was proven by Jefferson's Notes on Virginia.

An example of the false conception of American life held by the French people of that period is given in Guillard de Beaurier's writings dedicated to the people of Virginia. Here was described a model education, a boy who grew to manhood in complete isolation, and discovered for himself all that man needs to know, which, according to the writer, was a perfect mixture of civilization and nature. This book was dedicated to the inhabitants of Virginia "because they have found means to cultivate their country without cities, without luxuries, without crimes and without infirmities. You are as nature would have us all,"[10] avers Beaurier.

The writers and philosophers of France in this period were not concerned with facts in America. They preferred to interpret American life in the light of their own theories, consequently the true picture was often distorted to coincide with conclusions previously formed in the mind of the writer. The most important outcome of the literature on America

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[9] Ibid., p. 19.

[10] Ibid.

during this time was the interest aroused in America and in events transpiring there. Whether the interest was based on fact or fiction matters little when the results of that interest are studied.[11]

Another link in the chain of good feeling increasingly evident between France and America was the Philadelphia Philosophical Society. The founder, Benjamin Franklin, kept up a regular correspondence with French scholars. This resulted in the translation of Franklin's works by M. Dubourg, two volumes of which appeared in 1773, and laid the foundation for Franklin's popularity in France which was to be of untold value for America during the Revolution.[12]

It needed no more than the foregoing reasons for restless France to become deeply interested in America, but the persecutions England was heaping upon the colonies redoubled French interest. Everywhere in France people were taking the American side.[13] Leaders in that country still remembered the humiliating treaty imposed in 1763 ending the Seven Years' War.[14] Their interest was not due merely to an opportunity to gain revenge but also to the fact that here

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[11]Gilbert Chinard, "How the New World Freed the Old," review of book thus titled, Current Literature, LII (May, 1912), 561.

[12]Fay, op. cit., p. 21.

[13]Ibid., pp. 21-22.

[14]Adams, op. cit., p. 271.

were liberty, equality, ideals of primitive simplicity, and nearness to nature which French idealists so admired. They saw in the American war a fight against despotism and the efforts of the "insurgents" were regarded as exemplifying the cause of the human family.[15]

Thus public opinion and the leaders of thought in Paris fostered an idea of the Anglo-American, which in the midst of confused thinking and restlessness represented a sort of moral and social ideal. It was a Utopia half unreal and half true. This opinion is illustrated by an extract appearing in the Mercure in April, 1774:

> Our navigators who have studied the northern continent well, assert that an innate taste for liberty is inseparable from the soil, the sky, the forests and the lakes which keep this vast and still new country from resembling the other parts of the globe. They are persuaded that any European transported to this clime would contract this peculiar characteristic.[16]

Reynal's book led people to seek eagerly any information regarding the colonies and to form the most flattering conception of them as an agricultural, philosophical, tolerant, pious, reasoning, and happy nation.

Some of the European explorers had pictured the American Indians as people of a golden age and used them to support the theory of natural man. The savages, they argued, were happy because they lived without laws, without kings,

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[15]A. Aulard, The French Revolution, I, 112.

[16]Fay, op. cit., p. 22.

without social organization of any kind.[17] This picture, largely the result of wishful thinking, was not based on reality. The colonists hated the Indians and religious toleration was not popular in America at this time.

The American colonists, due to life in the wilderness, had been greatly changed. They had become more direct and more violent, especially in the North where life was hard. In the South, where slave labor allowed time for meditation and leisure, abstract ideas of independence had developed, bold ideas and even violence found fertile soil there. From these groups came the strong leaders without which the American Revolution could never have occurred.

In 1770 the thirteen colonies no longer saw France as a menace after the treaty of 1763 removed them from close proximity. For years she had been a common enemy. The colonists, however, were bound to England with the ties of a common language, also the body of their institutions and customs were British. Young leaders such as Washington and the success of the colonial troops had given the colonies confidence in themselves, which prompted them to be more critical of the mother country.[18]

England at the close of the Seven Years' War was determined that the colonists should help pay its cost. Parliament

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[17]Chinard, op. cit., p. 561.

[18]Bernard Fay, American Influence on the French Revolution, p. 25.

was unaware of the real state of affairs in America and hurried into unfortunate action. The Intolerable Acts were passed and little attention was given to a pamphlet by James Otis entitled Rights of the British Colonies Asserted and Proved.[19] England repeatedly tried to tax the colonies and the colonies stubbornly resisted. There was no mention of independence as yet.

In 1770 all taxes were repealed except that on tea. The Boston Tea Party soon followed, and England closed the port of Boston. She then changed the Charter of Massachusetts and the colonies united to prepare for resistance.

The American revolt was not purely political and economical. It was also a moral, religious, and sentimental crisis. It involved a complete change in the thinking of the colonies. Virginia was refusing to accept Anglican priests from England. The Baptist doctrine was spreading, new denominations such as Methodism were gaining converts. The colonists were attempting to free themselves in religion as well as in politics. The Americans, comparatively free of restraint because of their isolation, felt that the less restraint, the happier the man. This was the doctrine of Samuel Adams, one of the most farsighted of American leaders.

While in 1773, the word "nation" had not been thought

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[19]Frederick Ogg, The Pageant of America, VIII, 38.

of by the colonists, they were headed that way.[20]

By 1774, France had gained much popularity in America. By this time numerous teachers of fencing, dancing, and deportment had come from France to instruct the wealthier colonists. Franklin in 1750 had drawn up plans for a university in which the teaching of the French language was to have a prominent place. Reading of French novels and books became general although some of the good ladies of New England were shocked by their immorality. Several universities including Pennsylvania, Yale, and Harvard had the teaching of French in their curriculum. Voltaire's Trait de la Tolerance enjoyed wide popularity and Franklin is said to have read it as early as 1764. The French philosophers Rousseau and Montesquieu were read and discussed also, but Montesquieu seems to have been the more widely read. Reynal was read and quoted, but care was taken to omit his inaccuracies. So close a feeling between the two countries was aroused that questions causing excitement in France woke echoes in America. America was aware of the part that France was to play as arbiter between England and her colonies and dimly felt a secret understanding which was coming into existence between America and France.[21]

Such were the relations between France and America in

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[20]Fay, Revolutionary Spirit in France and America, p. 31.

[21]Ibid., pp. 40-41.

May, 1774, when Louis XV died. He had reigned so long and so badly that his death was greeted with indifference throughout the land. Little was known of the young monarch succeeding him but the people had hopes he would respond to the wishes of the people and reorganize the kingdom.

Louis XVI faced the almost insurmountable task of restoring parliamentary liberty, freeing Negro slaves, and reestablishing religion. The new king wished to please his subjects and to govern wisely, but he had absolutely no strength of will in upholding his judgment.[22] This weakness was well known to his Minister of Finance, Turgot, who once warned him, "It was weakness, sire, which laid the head of Charles I on the block." Louis well understood that miracles were expected of him but he did not like to make decisions. To aid him in his reign he had the frivolous Marie Antoinette, daughter of Maria Theresa of Austria, whose extravagance was to hasten their downfall.[23]

The king in selecting his ministry chose his friend, the Count de Maurepas, whom he nicknamed "mentor," as his Prime Minister. It was said that Louis called Maurepas to consult with him on public business and Maurepas calmly assumed that he was appointed. A man of charming manner, he had absolutely no political principles.[24] As Prime Minister

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[22]Benjamin Ide Wheeler, The French Revolution, p. 86.

[23]Ibid., p. 123. [24]Lowell, op. cit., p. 4.

Maurepas could usually cause the dismissal of any other minister, but in his own department each minister was responsible only to the king. The only minister to hold his place throughout the American War was Vergennes, Minister of Foreign Affairs.[25]

For his Minister of Finance, Louis XVI chose Turgot who had been born in Paris, studied theology, and in 1750 had written a treatise in which he contended that the Christian religion had contributed materially to the welfare of mankind. In the same year he had written another treatise predicting the separation of the colonies from England. Turgot was a philosopher and free thinker, but he did not possess the tact or wisdom by which his enlightened ideas could be transmitted.[26]

The Count de Muy, whose honesty was famous, was appointed Minister of War. The king had hoped to select a ministry whose wisdom would free him from the necessity of making decisions, but he was faced from the beginning with two primary needs: first, to reform the internal administration, and second, to restore the international importance lost since 1763. All might have been well with Louis had he not chosen as his Minister of Foreign Affairs the Count Gravier de Vergennes, ex-minister to Sweden.

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[25] Ibid.

[26] Ibid., p. 5.

Meanwhile, the colonists had armed themselves and the Second Continental Congress had met in Philadelphia in May, 1775. Washington had been appointed Commander-in-Chief, and the colonists had taken up arms. There was still no talk of independence but Congress addressed an appeal for aid to the French king.[27]

Louis XVI and France were called upon to take a definite stand, so one of the first important questions for the king to decide was that of aid to America and the advice of his ministers conflicted.

Turgot wanted to cure France from the inside. He was convinced that colonies were a hindrance instead of a help to a country and wished no part of the American controversy. As minister of finance he realized better than anyone else the precarious financial condition of France, and the cost of a foreign war. It was his opinion that the colonies would eventually succeed because they had right on their side, but the American struggle interested him only as a curious phenomenon to be watched with interest from a safe distance.[28]

Vergennes, on the other hand, believed that restoration of national prestige was the most important task facing the government. While not yet committed to active participation

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[27]Fay, Revolutionary Spirit in France and America, p. 46.

[28]M. Guizot and Madame Guizott De Witt, World's Best Histories of France, V, 270.

in American affairs he saw in England's difficulty with the colonies an opportunity to embarrass that country and gain revenge for the treaty of 1763.[29]

Vergennes was fifty-four years of age when he became Prime Minister. He had been trained in diplomacy since his youth, was grave in manner, methodical and cautious, and willing to bide his time until he saw an opportunity to put his plans into execution. He had closely watched developments in America and had declared shortly after 1763 that England would have cause to repent the removing of the only check which could keep the colonies in awe. They no longer stood in need of Britain's protection and when called upon to help bear expenses of the Seven Years' War, they would answer by striking off all dependence. History soon proved the minister right. So long as the French were in America, the colonies needed and wanted protection. When the French menace was removed through the annexation of Canada by England, they felt themselves to be self-sufficient.[30]

Choiseul, whom Vergennes succeeded in office, had kept himself well informed on American affairs. In 1764 he had sent M. de Pontleroy to inspect the English colonies in America. Later he sent an agent whose name is not known who had interviewed most of the revolutionary leaders. This agent reported a strong sentiment of liberty among the people

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[29] Ibid., p. 270.

[30] Robert Ergang, Europe from the Renaissance to Waterloo, p. 601.

he investigated. In 1768 Choiseul dispatched on a similar mission the professional soldier, Baron De Kalb, whose visit had but little result except for the disappointments suffered by the Baron. Continuing in the ways of Choiseul, Vergennes in 1775 sent Orchard de Bonvouloir to America, who interviewed such American leaders as Franklin, John Adams, and Samuel Chase.[31]

Although Vergennes was virtually carrying on a one-man crusade among the ministry for American support in 1775, he did have several elements of support in France. The soldiers wanted to fight, the middle classes admired the Americans, the young nobles were extremely curious about the colonies, and the writers saw here an opportunity for a philosophic crusade.[32]

The king was inclined toward peace. He was not convinced that aid to the colonies would be honest when France was at peace with England. He was not certain that public opinion favored America, and above all, he wished to act for the best interests of France. He had, as befitted a Bourbon king, absolutely no sympathy for "insurgents."[33]

Prime Minister de Maurepas was opposed to any action

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[31]Fay, Revolutionary Spirit in France and America, p. 51.

[32]Ibid., p. 54.

[33]Claude Halstead Van Tyne, The American Revolution, 1775-1778, p. 204.

which would prevent him from ending his career in peace.

At a time when Vergennes seemed balked in his pet project, he received some unexpected support from a source he had not anticipated -- Beaumarchais.

Beaumarchais, the son of the court clockmaker to Louis XV, had already gained considerable notoriety by his love affairs, lawsuits, talent, and wit. He had made a fortune in speculation, and became well known to the higher circles at court where he was admitted in a subordinate capacity.

He had written a play, the Marriage of Figaro, which caricatured the French nobility and of which the king had forbidden the production until the public demand to see it had caused Louis to rescind his order.[34]

A delicate situation requiring the services of a skilled agent had arisen across the Channel. Louis XV toward the end of his reign had, with the aid of his representatives in England, drawn up a secret plan for its invasion. This plan had fallen into the hands of one Chevalier D'Eon, a minor diplomat in the king's secret service, who threatened to sell it to Britain. A bold and clever representative was needed who might prevent the plans from falling into the hands of the English. As the qualifications of Caron de Beaumarchais seemed admirable for this purpose, he was sent to London to negotiate with the traitor.

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[34]Casimir Stryenski, The Eighteenth Century, p. 269.

While in London Beaumarchais spent his spare time in widening his circle of acquaintances, one of whom was a Mr. Arthur Lee, an enthusiastic supporter of the American cause. In the course of his talks with Lee, he became inspired with a desire to become a central figure in the liberation of America.[35] While at the onset Beaumarchais had no idea of causing a revolution, he became very active in pleading the American cause with Vergennes, who in turn gave his letters to the king. On February 29, 1776, Beaumarchais submitted to the king a paper entitled "Peace or War" which he said came from a secret agent of the colonies. According to this agent, America would give France all of the trade advantages formerly held by England if she would help the colonies. Also America would guarantee the possessions of France in the Western Hemisphere. If France refused this offer, the agent was to make a similar offer to any or all of the other nations of Europe.[36]

The ministers of Louis XVI were still not ready to enter into the American quarrel, but sentiment among them had by this time changed to the point that they were agreeable to aid the colonists provided this action could be concealed from England.[37]

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[35]Fay, Revolutionary Spirit in France and America, pp. 56-57.

[36]Van Tyne, op. cit., p. 206.

[37]Lowell, op. cit., p. 210.

The suggestions of the playwright began to carry much weight with the king and his councils as he played upon the fears of the king and appealed to their aversions for England.[38]

In September, 1775, he reported to the king a highly colorful account of happenings in America. According to this report, twenty-eight thousand colonists were besieging Boston while forty thousand more were defending the remainder of the country. The authenticity of Beaumarchais' reports is questionable. Lee, no doubt, was the secret agent referred to and if so, he had no authority to suggest the conditions of a treaty between France and America.[39]

Supported by the opinion of his fellow enthusiast, Vergennes was able to convince the king that the time was propitious for aid to the colonies and that such an opportunity to harm England, without danger to France, might not again present itself. The king, acting against his natural inclinations, gave his consent.

Beaumarchais was ordered to return to France and was authorized to establish a maritime and trading company which could be used as a screen behind which American aid could be furnished.

In June, 1776, he received one million livres from

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[38]Van Tyne, op. cit., p. 210.

[39]Lowell, op. cit., pp. 27-28.

Louis XVI, and a like amount was given by the Spanish government in August. The Spanish gift was made because of efforts of Vergennes to enlist Spain on the side of the colonies. With this money Beaumarchais set up operations under the name of Hortalez and Company, and Louis XVI had taken the first step toward the French Revolution.[40]

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[40] Ibid., p. 29.

CHAPTER II

FRENCH ASSISTANCE IN THE CREATION OF A NEW NATION

In the year 1775, although there were leaders in both France and America who desired close cooperation between these two countries, there was as yet little common knowledge of each other. Prior to the revolt, England had closely controlled the commerce of the colonies and this policy had resulted in very little contact between the colonies and any other nation. There also existed in America a traditional prejudice against Catholicism, the predominant religion of France.

French knowledge of America was derived from woefully inaccurate books written by authors who were more interested in proving their theories than in giving actual facts. Only a limited group in each country had been in actual contact and had a true conception of the other.[1]

England was well aware of the dangers of possible French intervention and Lord Stormont, popular British minister to France, left nothing undone to prevent France from taking the side of the colonies. Pamphlets denouncing the revolt of the colonies as a peril to all of the monarchies

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[1]Fay, The Revolutionary Spirit in France and America, p. 65.

of Europe, if allowed to succeed, were printed in Holland and distributed by Stormont to all of the rulers of Europe. His opinion was supported by the French philosopher D'Alembert, who wrote: "Although a war two thousand leagues away concerns me less than did that of 1756, I still fear lest this drop of oil spread till it reaches us."[2]

Vergennes had won his point of giving secret aid to the insurgents, for he believed that colonial success could be attained only by forming an alliance with them and sending an army to their assistance. His effort to bend public opinion to his will was not encouraged by the actions of French officers between 1775 and 1776. In 1776 Silas Deane had arrived in France, and his instructions empowered him only to enlist engineers for his country's cause. He did grant commissions to a number of French officers whose only interest was high rank and money. These were not highly regarded in America and were a detriment rather than an aid to Washington. They are not to be compared with Lafayette and others who came later. These disgruntled volunteers returning home were very antagonistic to anything American.[3]

Turgot, while he had reluctantly agreed to the policy of secret assistance, was still opposed to active intervention. In addition to his beliefs that France could not

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[2]Frederick Ogg, The United States of America, p. 34.

[3]Fay, The Revolutionary Spirit in France and America, p. 68.

afford another war, and that the colonies would succeed without the help of any other country, he thought that an attack on England by France would be the signal for a reconciliation between England and the rebels. He wished the war to continue as it was bothersome to England, but he wished France to remain formally neutral.

Maurepas still desired peace and Louis XVI, while he had agreed to Vergennes' plea for secret aid to the colonies, was unwilling at this time to go further.[4]

Such was the position in which Vergennes found himself during the years 1775-1776. By what process of reasoning he arrived at his next step is not known. Certainly he was motivated by a desire to hurt England coupled with a sincere desire to assist the colonies. In 1775 he became convinced that the only way in which France could be of further help to the Americans would be for them to declare their independence, when they could negotiate with France as a nation. That such an idea should occur to a minister of a monarchy seems remarkable. In his instructions to Bonvoulier, whom he sent to America in 1775, Vergennes ordered him to say: "As long as you are subjects of Great Britain we cannot and must not do anything for you. The only means you have of gaining our support is by declaring your independence."[5] Adams, Franklin, and Lee heard this message and were deeply

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[4] Ibid., p. 70.

[5] Ibid.

impressed by it.

The colonies were in a dilemma; they must have aid to continue the war. They had not abandoned the idea of a reconciliation with England, but Britain was indifferent to their advances. They could not send ambassadors to France unless they were independent. At the suggestion of Samuel Chase, Congress finally decided to send an agent to France to persuade them to give America arms and munitions. However, the idea of independence had been implanted in the minds of the colonists. This is shown by the newspapers throughout the country, which in 1775 spoke repeatedly of "France and Alliance."

Thomas Paine published his brilliant plea for independence, Common Sense, on January 10, 1776. This pamphlet sold one hundred thousand copies and became the Bible of the revolution to follow.[6]

Richard Henry Lee introduced a proposal for a Declaration of Independence in Congress on June 7, 1776, but after being debated, it was defeated by the moderates, led by John Dickenson.

On July 4, 1776, the United States declared independence. In the declaration were incorporated many of the ideas of Rousseau and John Locke, but Jefferson stated that at the time of writing it he had not consulted any pamphlet or book.

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[6]Ogg, The United States of America, p. 106.

This declaration transferred bold and new ideas from the realm of speculation and theory into the province of the practical.[7] The declaration was well received in France, where it had a wide private circulation. During that year, the United States became the leading topic of conversation in Paris.

In the meantime, as has been mentioned before, Deane had established himself in Paris, where he was enthusiastically received. Rightfully or not, the Americans were hailed by the French as fellow addicts of philosophy and their principles were applauded in French salons throughout the land.[8] Vergennes had talked with Deane a few days after his arrival and while refusing to discuss the possibility of an alliance, had informed him that Beaumarchais could be trusted to give any assistance that gentleman might promise. In other quarters he had been warned that the French agent was a man of pleasure and could not be trusted, but the American had no reason to doubt him and easily though secretly saw through his disguise as a merchant. It was quite apparent that the playwright was acting in the interest of the French government.

Evidences of Beaumarchais' good faith were given shortly after Deane's arrival when two hundred brass cannon and a

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[7]Fay, The Revolutionary Spirit in France and America, p. 82.

[8]George H. Allen, The French Revolution, p. 186.

quantity of clothing were dispatched to the colonies. That the money being spent for supplies was being furnished by the king became increasingly evident to Deane when he was informed that the supplies could be paid for by the Americans at current prices on arrival, or their cost in France with insurance and commissions.[9]

Early in 1777 three vessels carrying consignments of clothing and stores sailed for America. Five more ships soon followed and all but one of them reached their destination safely.

A correspondence of a business nature was carried out by Deane and Beaumarchais, who signed all invoices, bills of lading, and letters of advice with the signature of Hortalez and Company. He was handicapped in his actions, as the agent of Congress, by his inability to speak French; also, by the fact that Vergennes wished to keep secret the part of the crown in allowing supplies to be taken from government arsenals for shipment to America.[10]

After the Declaration of Independence, the United States named three ambassadors to France. Arthur Lee and Benjamin Franklin were named as well as Silas Deane, who was still there. Franklin sailed October 26 and arrived in Nantes in December, 1776, after a perilous journey. His instructions

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[9]Ogg, The United States of America, p. 30.

[10]Lowell, op. cit., pp. 29-30.

closed with these words, "Obtain as early as possible a publick acknowledgement of the independency of these states by the Court of France."[11]

Franklin had also been empowered to form a treaty of alliance with France on a footing of equality. He was to offer the king no commercial monopoly and secure his promise to undertake no conquest on the American continent. In addition he was to ask for protection of the American Merchant Marine by the French fleet, financial aid, and arms.[12]

These terms caused no enthusiasm, but Franklin's personality more than made up this deficiency. Posing as a refugee and scholar bewildered by a war-mad world, he deceived many of the diplomats and clever people. Simple folk made no such mistake; to them he was the representative of freedom. He saw people of all classes, artisans, philosophers, and officers. Some of them came only for conversation, while others such as the soldiers wished to gain favors as commissions to fight in America.

He established his residence at Passy on the outskirts of Paris. From this secluded retreat he allowed himself to be drawn into the highest literary and social circles, only to retire into seclusion when it best suited his purpose. The French were charmed by him and Franklin became the man of the hour.[13]

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[11]Willis Stell, Franklin in Paris, p. 57.

[12]Fay, Revolutionary Spirit in France and America, p. 83.

[13]Ibid., p. 85.

Franklin's presence was most fortunate for America because Arthur Lee was suspicious of the French motives and was a hindrance rather than a help. He soon became openly antagonistic to Deane, who was called home to explain the matter of purchases from Beaumarchais as a result of his accusations. Lee contended that all aid furnished by Hortalez and Company should be considered in the nature of gifts from the French government, while Deane was positive in his assertions that valid contracts were held by Beaumarchais and payment should be made. Lee countered by saying that Deane was a rascal and was receiving five per cent commission on all shipments made to America. The matter was further complicated by the denial of the French minister to America that the French king had made any gifts. Vergennes could not allow the king's name to be mentioned in the activities of Hortalez and Company, since it would prove he was guilty of duplicity with England.[14] Deane was discredited in the dispute and remained embittered the rest of his life.

Franklin's good influence for the American cause cannot be overestimated. Shortly after his arrival, M. Leroy, a French manufacturer of ceramics, fitted out a vessel loaded with munitions, at his own expense, which he dispatched to America to aid the colonists in their fights for freedom. This was a result of his meeting with the American

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[14]W. E. Woodward, Tom Paine, p. 106.

philosopher and his liking for him.[15]

Of all the notables encountered by Franklin while serving as ambassador, the most important, from the American viewpoint, was the Marquis de Lafayette, a member of the powerful Noailles family. Lafayette had become interested in the American revolt after reading the Declaration of Independence.[16] He conceived the idea of organizing an expedition and sailing for America. Deane and Franklin, aware of his high position, thought he would be of value to their country and offered him a commission as general in the American army. Lafayette recruited a force and sailed despite orders from the court forbidding his departure. No serious effort, however, was made to detain him and news of his venture caused a sensation in Paris. Public opinion in France had now reached the point where Vergennes, who had been maintaining a discreet silence, was publicly criticized for not aiding America more than he had.

Lafayette's gesture was interpreted by the French as a crusade for a suffering and enslaved world. The wrath of the people was aroused against the French government and Vergennes because they did not come to the rescue of the Americans.[17]

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[15]Stell, op. cit., p. 46.

[16]A. Aulard, The French Revolution, I, 114.

[17]Fay, Revolutionary Spirit in France and America, pp. 86-87.

Vergennes, despite opinion to the contrary, was doing all in his power to sway public opinion to the point where Louis XVI could no longer ignore it. He was aided and abetted by one Edme Genet, who busied himself from 1776 to 1783 in publishing and reproducing inflammatory pamphlets under the guise of magazine articles in Les Affairis de l'engleterre et de l'amerique. This paper was under the directorship of Genet but Franklin was editor-in-chief. While no direct attacks were made on French policies, the paper did not hesitate to attack conditions in England which had their counterpart in France. In an analysis of the Declaration of Independence the writer approved especially of the principle of equality of men and the idea that legislative authority comes from the people. Long extracts were reprinted from Thomas Paine's Common Sense, representing the American conflict as a moral and religious reform which would ultimately satisfy the "deepest needs" of man. It also published Price's Observations on Civil Liberty, which had been suppressed as dangerous by the censor of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. It offered all of its subscribers an "American code," thus spreading throughout France the theories from across the sea. In 1778-1779 the American constitutions were translated by the Duke de La Rochefoucauld and published in this journal.

An effort was made to halt this spread of American sentiment by a court order that American affairs were not

to be discussed in cafes, but as no attempt was made at enforcement, it was disregarded.[18]

Franklin, in a letter dated May, 1777, revealed the passionate interest with which American affairs were followed in France:

> All Europe is on our side of the question as far as applause and good wishes can carry them. Those who live under arbitrary power do nevertheless approve of liberty and wish for it; they almost despair of recovering it. In Europe they read the translations of our separate colony constitutions with rapture. It is a common observation here that our cause is the cause of all mankind and that we are fighting for their liberty in defending our own.[19]

From all sides came indications that France as a nation was ready for an alliance with America. The king was uncertain which course to adopt. Vergennes and Beaumarchais were constantly preaching the advantages to be gained by such an alliance. Madame Adelaide, the king's close advisor, wanted peace, as did Maurepas and Turgot, his ministers.[20]

Diane de Polignac, a member of the court, recounted the admirable qualities of Franklin so many times to the king that he sent her a certain vessel found at that time in every bedroom. The eye which custom placed on the bottom

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[18] Ibid., pp. 89-91.

[19] Ogg, The United States of America, p. 41.

[20] Aulard, op. cit., I, 112.

of such vessels was replaced by a picture of Franklin.[21]

If the king had been allowed to express his own wishes, he would never have given the "insurgents" the secret aid, which still brought forth expressions of remorse when he thought of it. The English newspapers were acquainted with this attitude of Louis' and placed on him their hopes for continued peace with France. Curiously enough, they accused the queen, who had even less sympathy for the Americans than the king, of inciting him to war. The king and Vergennes had intentionally kept the queen out of all diplomatic affairs. She was cold to all policies in which she did not have a part.[22]

In 1777 Louis wavered before the popular demand for war in support of the colonies, but the news of the setback suffered by the Americans at Long Island caused him to wait for further developments.[23]

Meanwhile the populace of France were beginning to voice their wishes. Linguet wrote in 1777:

> It is the fact that while defending only their own interests it is really our own cause that they plead. In calling the English crown to account it is the abuses of all monarchies they are attacking. The blind hope of being able perhaps to imitate them

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[21]Van Tyne, op. cit., p. 206.

[22]Fay, Revolutionary Spirit in France and America, p. 92.

[23]Ibid., p. 93.

> some day and even of being aided by them in breaking our own chains, this is what wins the insurgents so many friends among us.[24]

The philosophers of the period were particularly enthusiastic over the Declaration of Independence, especially over its assertion of the natural rights of men.[25]

The regions far from Paris gave voice to their sentiments and even at Marseilles a club was formed which met every month to celebrate American victories and to discuss their virtues.[26]

Meanwhile Franklin at Passy was laying the foundation for the Franklin legend. He was admired by fervent followers of revolutionary mysticism. When he went out in society all of the ladies kissed him. Madame Helvetius, widow of the French philosopher, virtually adopted him and used her influential salon to assist him in furthering his schemes. He called Turgot his close friend as well as the La Rochefoucaulds, the Noailles, and other influential people of the court. He inspired everyone with respect and veneration. They imagined him to be the perfect and complete example of the people of America. He seemed so prudent that he reassured the timorous while inspiring the more enthusiastic.

Another element which added to sentiment for America

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[24]Van Tyne, op. cit., p. 214.

[25]Fay, Revolutionary Spirit in France and America, pp. 93-94.

[26]Ergang, op. cit., p. 645.

among those who loved display and heroism was Lafayette's example which fired the imagination of the people. Too, his powerful family and friends in France certainly added support to Franklin's endeavors.[27]

The news of Burgoyne's surrender, which reached France in December, 1777, put a new face on American affairs. Up to this time no foreign nation had been willing to commit itself on American aid. Vergennes saw his opportunity and was ready to act. Maurepas, surprised by the victory, gave up resisting. Louis XVI, convinced that an alliance with America would be popular, yielded gracefully. Washington had succeeded in defeating one of England's greatest generals with the supposedly inferior colonial troops.

Beaumarchais actually dislocated his arm in his haste to reach the king with the news, while Paris rejoiced as though it had been a French victory instead of an American one.[28]

Vergennes in securing consent for an alliance had been successful in shaping public opinion in the direction he desired. "He had caused France to accept in general American ideals which France believed to be the most perfect and nearest to nature."[29]

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[27]Fay, Revolutionary Spirit in France and America, p. 95.

[28]Ibid., p. 97.

[29]Van Tyne, op. cit., p. 223.

Vergennes was afraid Britain would acknowledge American independence before the alliance could be perfected. Through his spies in Passy he learned that Deane and Franklin were negotiating with England. Terms were quickly agreed upon but for military reasons the papers were not signed until February 6, 1778.[30]

On this date Franklin and Deane were presented at court in Versailles and were assured by the king that he had no intention of taking advantage of the critical situation in their country. He stated that his only desire was a lasting treaty of "peace and amity." He did not pretend that his action was not governed by the effect this alliance would have on England and that his only condition was that the Americans should not make a separate peace with Great Britain giving up their independence.[31]

Other terms of the compact provided that should war break out between England and France as a result of the alliance, then America would be joined by French forces in a common war. American independence was recognized and the new government was conceded the same rights as any other nation.[32]

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[30]Fay, Revolutionary Spirit in France and America, p. 101.

[31]Van Tyne, op. cit., p. 223.

[32]Ogg, The United States of America, p. 44.

Nowhere in this treaty is there any indication that France had any objective other than American independence. There was no commercial advantage gained, and she could expect a heavy drain on her treasury.

On the 13th of March, 1778, the Duc de Noailles, French ambassador to Great Britain, informed the British government of the existence of a treaty with America, a fact they had known for some time. Lord Stormont, British embassador, was recalled from France and while no formal declaration of war was made, three months later two French frigates were attacked and captured by the English fleet.[33]

News of the alliance greatly heartened the Americans and probably shortened the war. Although rumors were spread by the Loyalists that parts of America had been ceded to France, the general opinion was one of unbounded joy.[34]

Samuel Adams said, "France has dealt generously with America." Richard Henry Lee expressed "heart felt gratitude" and Washington stated, "France has acted with wisdom and generosity." Toasts were drunk to the health of Louis XVI and newspaper articles predicted a speedy close of the war in America, as hostilities would soon break out in Europe, diverting British attention to affairs at home. Throughout the length of the embattled country, the signing

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[33]Beckles Willson, America's Ambassadors to France, p. 8.

[34]Ogg, The United States of America, p. 49.

of the alliance was celebrated. The American army was fired with joy.[35]

A wave of enthusiasm for each other swept both America and France. The aristocratic court of Louis XVI applauded the American principles, heedless of the fact that these same principles would destroy the whole structure of their government. This was the zenith of the reign of Louis XVI. There was talk of nothing in France save enlisting to serve the country, setting out for America as a volunteer, and dying for liberty.[36] They relished the idea of having beyond the seas a brother people, noble and courageous, whom they loved so well and knew so little.[37]

M. Gerard, one of the secretaries of the Foreign Office, sailed from Taulon with the French fleet under the command of Count D. Estaing and reached Delaware in early June. His orders stated that his principal object was the maintenance and consolidation of American independence. He was directed to work against any separate peace, and toward unification of the thirteen colonies.[38]

Vergennes, before signing the American treaty, had sent messengers to Madrid urging the king to declare war on England and recognize the independence of America. Spain was

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[35]Van Tyne, op. cit., p. 226.

[36]Fay, Revolutionary Spirit in France and America, p. 105.

[37]Allen, op. cit., p. 186.

[38]Fay, Revolutionary Spirit in France and America, p. 109.

unwilling since she had a new ministry and did not wish to encourage revolution in America. In 1779 she declared war on England, but not as an ally of the United States. This action aided America very little except for the threat England saw in the Spanish fleet.[39]

A difference of opinion now arose in Congress which created a group who were destined later to attract a large following in the United States. Beaumarchais was becoming insistent that Congress pay him for the supplies he had been furnishing America. He had invested much money of his own, as well as that of friends, in the shipments made by Hortalez and Company. Most of the sales were made to a certain "Timothy Jones," whom everyone knew to be Silas Deane. In spite of small returns, the operations of Hortalez et Cie had steadily increased. Congress was somewhat perplexed when Arthur Lee informed them that no payment should be made because everything being furnished by Beaumarchais was a gift from the king of France. Gerard felt he must defend the honor of the king, who would be guilty of duplicity if Deane's statement was true. Gerard seemed to be siding with Deane, thus antagonizing the powerful Lee family. Thomas Paine entered the controversy on the side of Lee. Congress did nothing and Beaumarchais was ruined. Importance of this difference was the suspicion aroused among a powerful group

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[39]Bernhardt Knollenberg, Washington and the Revolution, p. 97.

against France.[40]

Gerard was replaced by the Count de Lucerne who was fat, myopic, and a routinist. He had orders not to be over zealous and succeeded in regaining some part of the good will of the Lees and their partisans.[41] The French minister outwardly made no effort to concern himself with the actions of Congress, but he wished to keep himself well informed. To accomplish this end he secretly employed Thomas Paine, who had been dismissed from his place as Secretary of Foreign Affairs because of indiscretion. The French minister believed he had been partly responsible for Paine's loss and asked him to continue his writing and not attack France. Paine agreed and while in his employ wrote The Crisis, which he submitted to Lucerne for approval before publication. So well pleased was the minister that he asked the great pamphleteer to write a history of the war, but indolence prevented the writer from ever doing so, although he was paid one thousand dollars a year so long as Lucerne was in America. This association seems significant as Paine was later to become one of the moving spirits of the French Revolution.[42]

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[40]John Bassett, A Short History of the United States, p. 198.

[41]Ogg, The United States of America, pp. 32-33.

[42]Ibid., pp. 133-135.

CHAPTER III

EFFECTS OF THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION IN FRANCE

Lafayette had left a young wife and a life of ease to come to America against the wishes of his father-in-law and sovereign. Promised the rank of major general and a command, he had accepted without a murmur a position on Washington's staff where, because of his courage, zeal, and obedience, he was highly regarded. The young Frenchman was made to be a hero, but it was only in America that he fulfilled his destiny. At twenty he was energetic, generous, and filled with a patriotic faith. He never came in conflict with Congress, as did many of his countrymen and all America praised him. He was received in the highest and wealthiest circles, as were his fellow officers. Interest was renewed in the French language and customs by this dashing young officer.[1]

Long since, Lafayette's fame had spread in France. He was the hero of the young nobles. Stories of him were greatly exaggerated, but of all the French nobles in America, he was the most talked of in France.[2]

That he absorbed many of the ideas of the land he was

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[1]Allen, The French Revolution, p. 189.

[2]George Morgan, The True Lafayette, p. 216.

fighting to free is shown in a letter to one of his friends shortly after his arrival in America. He wrote: "I have always considered a king to be more or less useless; from henceforth he will be a far sorrier figure than ever before."[3]

Returning to France on February 6, 1779, Lafayette was the man of the hour. Being in technical disgrace, he was bidden to confine himself to the bounds of the Hotel de Noailles, but that was the extent of his punishment. At the end of the week he had been forgiven and was granted an interview with the king, who asked him many questions and complimented him on his achievements. Verses were composed in his honor and he was presented with a sword by Franklin's grandson, acting for Congress. All of the young nobles wished to become "Lafayettes." In spite of all this attention the young hero remained modest, unassuming, and untiringly devoted himself to securing more aid for his adopted country. Lafayette had a large part in convincing the Court that it was necessary to send troops to America. He hoped to command them. Vergennes and the Court listened to him, but when they decided that a force of six thousand men should cross the sea to fight the English, they chose a distinguished veteran of the Seven Years' War, Lieutenant-General Comte de Rochambeau, to command. Accepting this disappointment with good grace, Lafayette received an appointment to go ahead to confer with General Washington on

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[3]Aulard, The French Revolution, I, 115.

preparations for the arrival of the troops. His arrival in Boston on April 28 was hailed with great rejoicing and it is said that there were tears in the eyes of the commander-in-chief when he greeted the young Frenchman.[4]

Thus far the French alliance had been of little direct help to the American general and his sorely pressed troops. Really it had been of enormous indirect benefit. It had neutralized and locked up much British energy. The French government had also furnished Congress with large sums of money, and had sent a fleet under the direction of D'Estaing which suffered a severe defeat at Savannah.

On the tenth of July, Admiral Ternay with seven ships-of-the-line had arrived at Newport, bringing with him a force of six thousand men commended by Count Rochambeau. This army had been placed under Washington's command, and was well equipped, having such prominent officers as the Marquis de Chartellux and the Duke de Lauzen-Biron.[5]

At the same time Vergennes in France acted as agent for America in all diplomatic circles. It was at his insistence that a gift of 10,000,000 livres and a loan of 47,000,000 more were made to their ally.[6]

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[4]Henry Dwight Sedwick, Lafayette, p. 115.

[5]John Fiske, The American Revolution, p. 208.

[6]Fay, The Revolutionary Spirit in France and America, p. 120.

In spite of the help they were getting, Congress began to grow suspicious of the intentions of France when Vergennes inquired what peace terms Congress would want at the close of the war. In the debates which followed, Adams demanded fishing rights at Newfoundland for New England, a concession France wished to retain. Others demanded navigation privileges on the Mississippi River. The Minister of Foreign Affairs had entertained no thought of the States being dissatisfied with their existing boundaries and had little sympathy for any ambitions to expand. Many members of Congress felt no affection for France at all. They longed for a return to the commercial relations with people speaking the same tongue. These discussions caused some coolness between France and America during the years of the alliance.[7]

During the war the value of Benjamin Franklin's services to America cannot be overestimated. He was the first of American diplomats, and in the opinion of George Bancroft "the greatest diplomat of the century," and certainly the greatest ever to represent America.[8] Franklin's personality and his stay in Paris were the source of most of the visions and hopes that were the immediate preparation for the French Revolution. Without his presence in Paris

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[7] Ibid., p. 119.

[8] J. Henry Smythe, Jr., The Amazing Benjamin Franklin, p. 1.

from 1776 to 1783, Vergennes would have been powerless to guide public opinion. Certain manifestations were becoming evident which Vergennes could not favor and the American went much further in promoting and aiding these tendencies than is ordinarily believed today.[9]

Chosen as one of three commissioners to France, Franklin arrived in Paris in December, 1776. From the beginning he was the most sought after man in the country. To his house came Turgot, former Minister of Finance; Buffon, the naturalist; Cabanis, the physician; D'Alembert and La Rochefoucauld, Reynal, Mabley, and other leaders of French thought. His face was to be seen on rings, snuff boxes, and pictures that hung in show windows. If he made a joke it was soon known throughout France.[10]

"To the people he was the personification of the rights of man." He was honored in every way honor could be shown. His immense popularity made it possible for him to exert great influence on French thought during the critical period of American history. These thoughts were not abandoned when the war closed in 1783.[11] To the high society of Paris and Versailles he was the incarnation of Rousseau's "natural man" with his plain clothes and manners.[12]

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[9]Fay, The Revolutionary Spirit in France and America, pp. 145-147.

[10]John Bach McMasters, Benjamin Franklin, p. 221.

[11]Ibid., p. 222.

[12]Ergang, Europe from the Renaissance to Waterloo, p. 645.

Franklin took a house in Passy, a few miles from Paris, where he entertained few visitors, installed a printing press, and had leisure for work. When he did entertain, it was well done, but he contrived at all times to appear strange and foreign, which heightened the curiosity of those who wished to see him. He succeeded so well in his purpose that his memory lasted in France for half a century after him. It was thought that the three editions of the American Constitutions, published in Paris between 1778 and 1783, were issued through his efforts; that the Duc de La Rochefoucauld had translated them at Franklin's suggestion was definitely known. He put the Articles of Confederation into circulation the same way.[13]

The effect was astonishing. Liberty, constitutions, rights of man, began to be heard on every side. Some found fault with the Constitutions of New Jersey and North Carolina for barring Roman Catholics from office, and others thought Massachusetts was wrong in giving Harvard College the right to bestow honorary degrees, "which was undemocratic." A few thought the laws and usages of England had been followed too closely by the States, but the Mercure de France, which was the popular voice of France, was loud in its praises of the Constitutions.[14]

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[13]Fay, Revolutionary Spirit in France and America, pp. 149-150.

[14]McMasters, op. cit., p. 224.

During the dark period while France was still undecided whether the colonies might succeed, Franklin's wit and confidence served his country well. An example of his deftness in discounting misfortunes at home is illustrated by his reply to the Englishman who opened a conversation with, "Well, Doctor, Howe has taken Philadelphia." "I beg your pardon," Franklin replied, "Philadelphia has taken Howe."[15]

Much of Franklin's energy went into a kind of propaganda which compared the sins of the British with virtues of his own country. Of course, one great object of this propaganda was to secure loans, but it was also important to secure definite recognition from the French government. Although Vergennes was sympathetic, and was willing to secretly aid America, recognition had to wait until after Burgoyne's surrender in the last days of 1777.[16]

In addition to his other activities, Franklin became the center of the Masonic movement in Paris. Before leaving America he had been Grand Master of the lodge at Philadelphia. All through the country at this time secret societies were being formed directly or indirectly under the influence of Freemasonry. When Franklin arrived in Paris he had found the difficult situation of a people enthusiastic toward his country, but who wanted to avoid war. This state of affairs

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[15]John Stevens Cabot Abbott, Benjamin Franklin, p. 332.

[16]Everts Green, The Foundations of American Nationality, p. 488.

seemed hopeless, but French aid must be secured or the American cause was lost. Franklin, after surveying the ground, thought he saw a way. Freemasonry was the means to accomplish his purpose.[17]

French Freemasonry had just been reorganized and a very influential and bold new lodge had just come into being. This lodge of the Nine Sisters had become the intellectual center of Freemasonry. Helvetius, the banker-philosopher, and Lalande, the famous astronomer, were the organizers. After the death of Helvetius, his widow continued to sponsor the lodge in a "motherly way." Franklin wisely settled near her at Passy and won her favor so completely that she could not get along without him from 1777 to 1785. He was soon admitted to the Lodge of the Nine Sisters and was elected Master and served in that capacity the two terms from 1779 to 1781. This organization was a channel through which he launched his "bold, systematic, and careful propaganda" to make the American revolution popular and fashionable in France. The lodge was filled with prominent philosophers, artists, priests, and poets. They helped him to coin mottoes and slogans and to spread them nation-wide to influence public opinion.[18]

The "insurgents were already well known but they were made universally popular by clever phrases and picturesque

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[17]Bernard Fay, Revolution and Freemasonry, p. 254.

[18]Ibid., p. 255.

descriptions with which Franklin's propaganda endowed them." From one end of France to the other Masonic Lodges glorified American freedom, the war of independence, the venerable Franklin, American and Mason. Masonic brethren drew, painted, spoke, and wrote for him cartoons, pictures, and tapestries in praise of America. All through the country symbols of American independence were mingled with those of Masonry.[19]

The most clever trick practiced by the "sage of Philadelphia" was the careful avoidance of taking part in political life. He took as little advantage as possible of his diplomatic privileges, but played the part of a man of science and a brother Mason. "His whole behavior had a religious touch." He labored day after day for America, and Masonry alone enabled him to succeed. The members of the Craft secured his recognition by the French government as Minister from the United States and later forced France to enter the war on the side of America.[20]

Franklin, through Masonry, was enabled to exert an intellectual influence throughout Europe. Admiration for America, which he fostered, was indirectly a criticism of most of the governments abroad. Until the American revolt, all revolutions had been looked upon as crimes against the government and society; henceforth they were to be regarded

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[19] Ibid., p. 257.

[20] Ibid., p. 258.

as steps in the progress of the world. "Revolution against tyranny is the most sacred of duties" became a generally accepted slogan. It was a popular saying during the French Revolution, but it was of American origin and became popular through the propaganda of the "sage of Philadelphia."[21]

The American ambassador, as a member of the Lodge of the Nine Sisters, had won the high nobility. The membership of this lodge included nobles from ten of the leading families of France. Through the power of this group, he won the masses and with the aid of public opinion was able to receive favorable consideration from the king.[22]

It is doubtful whether Franklin realized the far-reaching effects of his efforts to gain support. He admired France and never consciously saw the tremendous wrongs which soon deposed Louis XVI.[23] The participation of the aristocracy in the propagation of ideas aimed at their own destruction seems strange, but the nobles of the French Court never envisaged the end in which their activities resulted.[24]

The Musee de Paris, a sort of free-thinking university where the public was offered a higher education that was modern and scientific, was founded by the Lodge of the Nine

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[21] Ibid., p. 261.

[22] Ibid.

[23] Abbott, Benjamin Franklin, p. 334.

[24] Ibid., p. 286.

Sisters. Branches of this institution were founded throughout France and all were loyal to the United States. Another associate organization was the "Society of the Friends of the Blacks," whose leading spirit was Brissot.[25]

For the period from 1778 to 1780 Freemasonry spread its influence throughout the country and the Lodge of the Nine Sisters was the source of most of the ideas and theories preached in these lodges. Although outwardly assuming a respectful attitude toward established authority, indirectly they were critical as in the case where they praised Voltaire and accepted him for membership when he was in royal disfavor.[26]

The doctrine of equality, as practiced in the lodges, was especially popular with the rank and file of the French army. In 1789 there were twenty-five military lodges in France and many of the soldiers belonged to others. This spirit of equality was destructive to discipline and may explain in part the inability of French officers to command their troops in the earlier days of the French Revolution.[27]

In summing up the influence of Franklin and Freemasonry during his stay in Paris, it should be made clear that Freemasonry did not make the revolution, but prepared and achieved it. Once the revolution started, Masonry tended

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[25]Fay, The Revolutionary Spirit in France and America, p. 294.

[26]Fay, Revolution and Freemasonry, p. 263.

[27]Louis Madelin, The French Revolution, p. 28.

to disappear. This fact has caused many historians, such as Leo Gershoy,[28] to state that Freemasonry had nothing to do with the revolution. This is an error. The Catholic Church, without engaging in politics, has always played an important part in national affairs. This institution has always tried to preserve tradition and consequently to impress people with the need of opposing change. Freemasonry similarly, but with a completely different aim, wanted to prepare a new era of happiness. This institution, looking at the future, was forced to accept change and revolution had been the usual method of effecting change during the past two centuries. Masonry had always preferred men like Franklin to lead its campaigns. So France was influenced by Masonry, which in turn was dominated by Franklin from 1776 to 1785.[29]

By 1782 a movement as yet obscure and without purpose was developing; all of those who had united and worked against England and had succeeded in breaking down her domination in the new world and on the seas, all who had been drawn together by great ideas, and had read the Declaration of Independence with such enthusiasm, found themselves carried further than they had anticipated. Vergennes wished to turn his attention to internal reforms which, while taking into account the new spirit, would respect the ancient

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[28]Leo Gershoy, The French Revolution, p. 4.

[29]Fay, Revolution and Freemasonry, p. 314.

dogmas of government and religion. The disciples of Franklin wished to bring to full realization in France the theories of government which had reached fulfillment in America. They realized a new nation had been created by the assistance of France and refused to believe that reform in France must be limited to a mere readjustment.[30]

America and France had been a stimulant to each other during the war years, and though their relations were to grow cooler after the Treaty of 1783, an "intellectual and sentimental" movement had been put in motion whose strength was to be felt throughout Europe.[31]

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[30]Fay, The Revolutionary Spirit in France and America, p. 162.

[31]Ibid., p. 163.

CHAPTER IV

AMERICAN INFLUENCE IN FRANCE, 1783-1789

Viewed from almost any angle, the intervention of France in the American War of Independence is a notable historical occurrence. The Americans could probably not have achieved complete independence at this time without French aid.[1] That the head of one of the most absolute monarchies was finally prevailed upon to take up arms in behalf of a people fighting for independence is one of the "most singular freaks in history."[2]

In 1783 Great Britain had been compelled to acknowledge the independence of the United States. All of Europe beheld the spectacle of a people who had asserted natural rights and overthrown a government that displeased them. A profound impression was made upon the people of France.[3]

True, Vergennes was indignant when he learned that the animosity of Jay and his supporters had resulted in a separate peace which was contrary to the alliance. However, no public indication of his feelings escaped the French Minister of Foreign Affairs and while he mentioned America less

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[1]Allen, The French Revolution, I, 200. [2]Ibid., p. 186.

[3]Edward Raymond Turner, Europe Since 1789, p. 42.

frequently, he uttered no word of censure, although he was responsible for the cutting off of Paine's pension and the discontinuance of salaries to certain members of Congress.[4]

His countrymen had no such feelings, for they were stirred with pride in the part they had in the liberation of the United States. The spectacle of a people endowed as they supposed with all of the natural virtues, who had with great heroism successfully struggled against tyranny and oppression, thrilled French society who were discontented with their own lot.[5] French philosophers saw the American government as a natural and rational one. They praised it as a Utopian state and watched it with anxious enthusiasm, ready at all times to give American statesmen their advice.[6]

A mighty influence to democratic ideas was derived from assisting the Americans. The Frenchmen who came to their aid observed among them equality and general well-being, due chiefly, it is true, to the nature and resources of the country, but none the less striking. The Americans in their Declaration of Independence spoke the language of abstract philosophy perfectly understandable to the French.[7]

The Americans had put into practice theories which had

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[4]Fay, The Revolutionary Spirit in France and America, p. 173.

[5]Allen, op. cit., p. 200.

[6]Fay, Revolution and Freemasonry, p. 277.

[7]Cambridge Modern History, VIII, 92.

been discussed thoroughly in French drawing rooms for two hundred years but had scarcely been whispered in public. To the imaginative French, America appeared to be a country of heroes and philosophers as well as natural men at their best, not debased by civilization.[8]

Thus France, while still an absolute monarchy, undertook a war of political rights. Poor Louis was dragged in against his will. He was no radical, and change to him meant harm and his instincts were right as far as he personally was concerned. Young Frenchmen who had entered the war in a spirit of adventure returned shouting "liberty" and "equality." Voltaire, Rousseau, and Montesquieu were more widely read than ever before. Officers back from their success at Yorktown were loud in their praises of republican manners and of the respect shown virtuous women.[9]

It is an acknowledged fact that many officers returned filled with subversive ideas and filled with enthusiasm for the new country.[10] They felt that they had seen in practice in that country that which they could only read of at home. "America had established a constitution without any dangerous convulsion." They saw no reason why France could not do

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[8] Ibid., p. 92.

[9] Edward J. Lowell, The Eve of the Revolution, p. 332.

[10] Fay, The Revolutionary Spirit in France and America, p. 178.

likewise.[11] Most of the French officers had been impressed with the idea of a government resting on the assent of the people while those volunteers who had gone before 1778 were highly critical of everything American,[12] but these last mentioned officers were only a small minority and their sneers were lost in the voice of the multitude.

"Rochambeau's officers had departed Frenchmen and returned Americans."[13] They had sought only perils and glory; they brought back systems and patriotic enthusiasms. Their coats were covered with republican decorations and they had suffered wounds in the cause of liberty.

Society affected American ideas and the notion took root that a republic was the ideal form of government.[14]

Lafayette installed in his house in Paris in 1783 a large copy of the American Declaration of Rights with a vacant spot beside it awaiting the Declaration of the Rights of France, and made use both in speaking and writing of the phrase "we republicans."[15]

The influence these returning veterans, members of the noblest families of France, exerted on French thought was

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[11] Cambridge Modern History, VIII, 93.

[12] Turner, op. cit., p. 93.

[13] Raymond Phineas Steerns, Pageant of Europe, p. 383.

[14] Allen, The French Revolution, I, 201.

[15] Aulard, The French Revolution, I, 115.

well expressed by Madame Campon:

> Our Youth flew to the wars waged in the new world for liberty and against the rights of thrones. Liberty prevailed; they returned triumphant to France and brought with them the seeds of independence.[16]

The French officers saw in Washington all the best features of the great generals of history. The Chevalier de Chastellux, who served under Rochambeau, was a member of the French Academy, champion of the idea of progress, and a Mason. He had been the real spiritual leader of the expedition and during his stay in America had talked with Jefferson on the subjects of liberty and religion. He also made it a point to visit all of the more interesting places in his vicinity while there and on his return published an account of the United States as it was in 1780.[17]

The group who had been most favorably impressed with the young nation were the priests who accompanied the army, the most noteworthy of whom was Abbe Robin, a charter member of the Lodge of the Nine Sisters. His book, Nouvean Voyage, was published in 1792 and was an expression of the enthusiasm which the expeditionary force felt for America. Robin had been attached to Rochambeau's army as chaplain on Franklin's recommendation, and had followed particularly the Vicomte de Noailles and his regiment. While his journal

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[16]Ergang, Europe from the Renaissance to Waterloo, p. 645.

[17]Fay, The Revolutionary Spirit in France and America, p. 182.

left much to be desired in the matter of accuracy, it gained much sympathy among its readers for American principles. Another priest, Abbe Bandole, had preached before Congress in honor of the surrender at Yorktown.[18]

When news of the proposed Society of Cincinatti reached France in 1874, Franklin was indignant and persuaded the young Count de Mirabeau to write a pamphlet attacking it. Although the idea was abandoned in America shortly thereafter, Mirabeau's assault is interesting in that it represented willingness of one of the privileged classes to attack the principle of heredity which was the foundation of all private and public life under the Bourbon monarchy. Mirabeau's work marked the beginning of a campaign intended to influence French public opinion. It was an indirect attack on the government of France.[19]

So strongly did the public favor American principles during this period that Arthur Young was moved to write, "The American Revolution has laid the foundation for another in France if the government does not take care of itself."[20]

Similar sentiments were also expressed on the stage. In the play La Vallie de Shenandoah in Virginia a colonist welcomed the immigrants who fled oppression in Europe, and

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[18] Ibid., pp. 177-178.

[19] Fay, Revolution and Freemasonry, pp. 280-284.

[20] Arthur Young, Travels in France, p. 81.

also treated his slaves as friends. Then the entire cast sang,

> Here there reigns equality,
> Here man to man is brother
> And in this land reigns no false pride
> Adored in every other.[21]

The most influential molder of public opinion during the years 1783-1789 among the writers was probably Jean Pierre Brissot. He was one of the most daring writers and forerunners of the revolution. Brissot, from his earliest youth, had serious tastes and high ideals. He was well acquainted with Franklin and also was a member of the Lodge of Nine Sisters. He was the leading spirit in the organization of the Friends of the Blacks and the Gallo-American Society. The latter was organized to spread republican ideas throughout France. Both of these societies were offshoots of the Lodge of the Nine Sisters.[22]

Becoming indignant over the tone of mockery toward Negro slaves used by Marquis de Chastellux in his *Le Voyage*, Brissot wrote a rebuttal in which he defended the blacks as human beings. He also proclaimed the theory that all men, free or slave, are endowed by nature with equal dignity. With this argument he gained a large following among the masses.[23]

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[21]Ergang, op. cit., p. 645.

[22]Fay, Revolution and Freemasonry, p. 272.

[23]Fay, The Revolutionary Spirit in France and America, p. 238.

Allying himself closely with all those desiring reform, he engaged in a campaign to correct wrong impressions concerning the United States, and drew attention to the trade advantages France could gain from close friendship with America.[24]

In 1788 he went to the new country ostensibly on a diplomatic mission, but really to extend membership in his "societies" to Americans. He founded several and had talks with Washington. He returned home only when he saw in the newspapers that the Estates General was soon to convene.[25]

Brissot brought back powerful weapons for the revolution. While in America he had made a study of revolution. He had faith and a concise idea of what he wished to accomplish. He could speak to middle classes in a language they could understand, and so gained the support of the most active group in attacking the root of the problem of reform in France.[26]

The strongest advocate of American ideals in the years following the close of the American revolt and preceding the French Revolution was Lafayette. This young gallant had generously devoted his energy and resources to the American cause at a time when the king was still wavering. He had commanded a company of "insurgents" and had played a prominent part in their victory. In return the United

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[24] Ibid., p. 243.

[25] Ibid., p. 244.

[26] Ibid.

States had adopted him as a citizen and Washington loved him as a son.

Lafayette returned home full of a burning desire and thoughts of a liberty which transplanted to France would produce in that country the ideal state he so ardently desired. His own idealism is even less surprising then the popularity it excited at the court.[27] He shared honors with Franklin as the best-known man in Europe, all of which came to know him either actually or by reputation. He traveled widely outside of his own country, always wearing the uniform of a Major-General of the Republican Army of the United States. He lost no opportunity to declaim the praises of Washington and of his adopted country.[28]

Back home again, he filled his salons with American visitors. His entire time was devoted to American interests and Masonic activities.[29]

Everyone saw in Lafayette the spokesman for the ideas that were considered American; as the suppression of slavery, liberty of the press, and parliamentary government. Gradually all of his companions grouped themselves around him in a party known to other members of the court as "Americans."[30]

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[27]Stearns, op. cit., p. 384.

[28]Brand Whitlock, Lafayette, I, 295.

[29]Fay, Revolution and Freemasonry, p. 288.

[30]Fay, The Revolutionary Spirit in France and America, p. 190.

Lafayette did not foresee nor wish the changes made by the violence by which they were finally accomplished, but in a small way he did what he could to put some of his principles into practice. In 1785 he had bought a plantation in "French Guinea," where he put into effect a program of gradual emancipation for his Negro slaves. Before giving them their liberty, he insisted that they know the fundamentals of religion and morality, and a Catholic priest was engaged to instruct slaves in these matters.

Washington, when he learned of the Marquis' generous action, commended him in a letter in which he also expressed doubt that a similar course of action was advisable in America at that time.[31]

Persuading the colonies to create a commission in 1786 to examine mercantile relations between the United States and France, Lafayette was responsible for the free entry of many American products into France. In appreciation of his efforts on their behalf, the inhabitants of Nantucket sent him an enormous cheese weighing five hundred pounds which was made from the milk of their cows for a twenty-four-hour period.[32]

He had as his constant guest Thomas Jefferson, who had

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[31]Whitlock, op. cit., I, 296.

[32]Ibid., p. 297.

succeeded Franklin as ambassador and was of much assistance to him, according to a letter written by the sage of Monticello to Madison in 1786.[33]

Yet the Crown was suspicious of Lafayette's political ideas. When the first list was being made for the Assembly of Notables, his name was struck off "on account of the wild notions he had brought back from America." Intercession by his friends caused this omission to be corrected. It was the Marquis at this meeting, February 21, 1787, who suggested that royal game preserves be suppressed and transactions showing the fraudulent transfer of certain royal domains be recorded. By this action he antagonized many members of the court, particularly the Count d'Artois. At a later meeting shortly after the Easter holidays Lafayette made a motion requesting the king to call into session the Estates-General and on May 23 astonished the meeting by moving that the king be petitioned to end the proscription against Protestants. At the conclusion of the assembly Lafayette was the most popular man in France, but to the Court, as Brienne remarked in the council of ministers, "He is the most dangerous man of them all."[34]

This opinion gained credence some two years later when on July 11 Lafayette spoke to the assembly and laid before

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[33]Andrew Lipscomb, The Writings of Thomas Jefferson, VI, 69.

[34]W. E. Woodward, Lafayette, p. 183.

them his Declaration of the Rights of Man, which he had discussed with Jefferson and which conformed in many respects to the principles of "the American era." This Declaration was printed and widely circulated and became the basis for the declaration finally adopted.[35] It is still believed in some quarters that Jefferson was the author of the final draft of the Declaration read by Lafayette before the National Assembly.[36]

There is some disagreement among historians as to the influence exerted by Jefferson in his nearly five years in Paris. Some assert that he concerned himself only with his diplomatic duties, carefully avoiding any action which might be construed as unbecoming to a minister representing a foreign country.[37]

Bernard Fay takes a contrary view of Jefferson and believes that he was one of the advisers and directors of the Lafayette group which met weekly in the Marquis' hotel in Paris.[38]

They recognized him as one of themselves and liked him. He in turn was as interested in the reform of France as if he had been a Frenchman. He went daily to Versailles to

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[35]Whitlock, Lafayette, p. 326.

[36]Woodward, Lafayette, p. 205.

[37]Willson, Ambassadors to France, p. 36.

[38]Fay, The Revolutionary Spirit in France and America, p. 248.

attend the debates of the National Assembly. Lafayette and others asked his suggestions. The Archbishop of Bordeaux, as head of a committee of the National Assembly, charged to draft the project of a constitution, invited him to attend and assist at their deliberations. This he declined to do but later in private conference he advised them to secure a charter signed by the king.[39]

Jefferson was a close observer of trends in public opinion in France and wrote Madison that the French radicals regarded America as a model for their imitation and added, "Our authority is treated as that of the bible, open to explanation, but not to question."[40]

Such on the whole were American influences in France on the eve of the French Revolution. Lafayette and Brissot had gathered about themselves a nucleus comprised of the higher classes who regarded Lafayette as their leader while Brissot occupied a similar position in relation to the masses.

In France by 1788 there were already a strong group who believed in the sovereignty of the people, and who considered man endowed with certain inalienable rights such as happiness, property, and the liberty of thought and conscience.[41]

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[39]John T. Morse, Jr., Thomas Jefferson, p. 77.

[40]Willson, op. cit., p. 35.

[41]Fay, The Revolutionary Spirit in France and America, p. 249.

Lafayette, Brissot, Condorcet, and Turgot and their friends had agreed on these principles without being consciously republicans. They had rejected the very spirit of monarchy and its doctrines. They tolerated it as an existing condition and did not dream of attacking it directly for their aim was to break down aristocracy and the Catholic Church and take possession of their social prestige and spiritual power. These aims reveal the extent to which the people had been influenced by the example of the United States. It was America which had drawn the eyes of the world to a sovereign people. It was America which had wakened enthusiasm and faith and brought the world to see the value of fraternity. It was the example of the United States that drove them to action.[42]

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[42] Ibid., p. 250.

CHAPTER V

THE IMPORTANCE OF AMERICAN INFLUENCE IN FRANCE, 1789-1792

Had France been less generous in the matter of aid to America, the Revolution might have been averted or at least postponed. The American war had added at least 1,200,000,000 livres to the burden under which the royal government was staggering, and without any definite advantage to France.[1]

Necker, Minister of Finance, had raised this money by floating loans. He had not increased taxes but had misrepresented the state of French finances to the people. When credit was exhausted by this means, new taxes became the only solution. The people could not understand why new taxes should be necessary during peace time when they had remained the same throughout the war.

Calonne, who succeeded Necker in 1783, did little to improve the financial status of the nation. His policy was to appear prosperous by spending money. In a very short while he had completely availed himself and the country of every source of credit. It was he who advised the king to call the assembly of notables to discuss the situation. The nobles were not interested and only contributed the suggestion

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[1]Allen, The French Revolution, I, 201.

that Calonne be dismissed. This advice Louis followed and Necker was recalled. His first suggestion was that the Estates-General be convened.[2]

It was the Estates-General which gave the Third Estate an opportunity to bring its grievances out in the open.[3]

At Versailles on May 5, 1789, the king formally opened the first Estates-General called since 1614. Necker spoke at length on the deficit but said very little about constitutional reform.[4]

The convention soon resolved itself into two groups. The first was composed of the nobility and the clergy who did not know exactly what they wanted and were desirous on the whole of keeping things as they were. Many of these people, as well as the king, realized that there were a great many things wrong with France but they had no definite program. The other side was a determined group who, in spite of confusion in their ranks, wished to achieve a new order.[5]

The aristocracy, whose idealism had promoted the popularity of American principles, now saw the masses represented by the Third Estate who interpreted these same ideas in ways they had never dreamed of. The work of Vergennes,

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[2]Ergang, Europe from the Renaissance to Waterloo, p. 652.

[3]Ibid., p. 646.

[4]Crane Brinton, A Decade of Revolution, p. 2.

[5]Ibid., p. 3.

Franklin, Lafayette, and other advocates of the "American" movement had converted popular opinion to a point where it exceeded their expectations.[6]

In the first group Lafayette aspired to the same leadership in his own country that his friend Washington had gained in America, but when confronted with choosing between his class and the patriots, he hesitated. To his contemporaries he soon became a "man of straw." He seemed to be always following advice. He had no clear idea of his political goal and at times seemed as lacking in power of decision as Louis himself.[7]

Jefferson had repeatedly urged Lafayette and his circle of friends to form a "bloc" with the people and the king against the privileged classes, but the Marquis could not bring himself to accept this advice.[8] Throughout these troublesome days Lafayette was to be seen wearing the American uniform decorated with an emblem representing the tree of liberty planted above a crown and a broken sceptre.[9]

The Estates-General was unable to agree and six weeks later, on June 17, the Third Estate took the bold step of declaring themselves the National Assembly, since they

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[6]Fay, The Revolutionary Spirit in France and America, p. 255.

[7]Brinton, op. cit., p. 13.

[8]Fay, The Revolutionary Spirit in France and America, p. 256.

[9]Aulard, The French Revolution, I, 115.

represented nearly the whole of the French people.[10] On June 20, angered by the action of the king in closing their meeting place, they adjourned to a nearby tennis court, promising each other they would not adjourn until they had made a constitution for France. They now considered themselves as a National Constituent Assembly and disregarded the rights of the First and Second Estates, and did not wait for the sanction of the king.[11]

The king saw no alternative to recognizing the new institution, so on June 27 the nobles and clergy were commanded to join the deputies in the National Assembly. On July 14 the Bastille fell. In October a mob, composed largely of women, marched to Versailles and forced the royal family to return with them. In the country the peasantry took up arms, stormed the castles and destroyed the remnants of feudalism in most districts. Everywhere chaos reigned.

Twenty-three articles of the "Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen" were accepted by the Assembly on August 27. There is proof that this document was suggested and influenced by the examples of America.[12] In France in 1789, it was clearly recognized that they were following an American tradition in bringing about the acceptance of a Declaration of Rights. The theories set forth

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[10]Albert Hyma, Europe from the Renaissance to 1815, p. 466.

[11]Fay, The Revolutionary Spirit in France and America, p. 270.

[12]Ibid.

were not new to France, but it had been America which had first made practical use of them. The leaders, swaying the decision of the Assembly, were influenced by Noailles and La Rochefoucauld, who were thoroughly under the influence of the American example. Noailles had been with Lafayette in America while La Rochefoucauld had grown up in a circle which had adored everything American.[13]

In the latter months of 1789 Lafayette seemed to loom as a considerable moral force in France. He had some justification for thinking his fondest wish, that of democracy, was about to be realized. He wished to remain at the head of the revolutionary movement and devoted hours every day to cultivating his popularity, but he was neither a great organizer nor a gifted orator. His conception of a revolution was that it would be a succession of reciprocal concessions. To the new groups who had formed and were eager for action, this idealism of Lafayette seemed silly and futile. When the altruistic and enthusiastic tone of the Marquis is compared to the harshness of Brissot and Madame Roland, it is not difficult to see why he could not long remain the leader of this movement.[14]

Enthusiasm for America had been a bond between the young nobles and members of the Third Estate early in 1789, but the discussions at the Assembly and the necessity for agreeing

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[13] Ibid., pp. 268-270.

[14] George Morgan, The True Lafayette, p. 258.

on a definite program brought about a complete rift between them. In the course of these quarrels the nobles allowed the advantage of their prestige to slip away from them. Little by little their American laurels were fading. American theories seemed mere talk to the more radical element.[15]

During the two years 1789 and 1790 newspapers and pamphlets were constantly discussing the favorable side of the American government. Journals all over France spoke of it. Mirabeau's Courrier de Provence and Brissot's Patriote Francais made mention of Americans in every issue.[16]

The question of the division of the legislature created a wide breach between the radicals and the conservative monarchial group. The conservatives desired two houses and cited America as an example. The "Patriots," remembering Franklin's oft-repeated assertion that a single body was the true democratic ideal, adopted his opinion as a moral principle and a proof of confidence in the people.

The monarchists then turned to the example of the English government in defense of their argument, and some so belittled the American Constitution that by so doing their leaders lost much of their influence with the convention. Lafayette in this instance remained silent and escaped for the time being the suspicion with which he was later regarded

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[15]Fay, The Revolutionary Spirit in France and America, p. 278.

[16]Ibid.

by the revolutionists.[17]

When the conservatives could find any American example supporting aristocratic beliefs, they immediately made use of it, and the failure of the United States to grant universal suffrage and the limitations placed on the president were given wide circulation in their papers. Letters were published purported to have been written by Washington, in which he disapproved of the course taken by the French in the formation of their constitution.

Authentic letters by Franklin were printed in which he expressed regret at the "alarming news from France."

The ambition of Lafayette was unfavorably contrasted by the democrats with the modesty of Washington, and the aristocrats soon found it dangerous to do anything to increase the prestige of America, which always reacted to their own disadvantage.[18]

The religious status of the country across the seas caused the patriots to examine the Catholic Church and its position in France and in the nation's political affairs with critical eyes. The fact that the Americans had been able to build up a strong religious spirit without state recognition of any religion attracted favor among them.[19]

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[17]Brinton, op. cit., p. 18.

[18]Fay, The Revolutionary Spirit in France and America, p. 283.

[19]Brinton, op. cit., p. 12.

While Lafayette, through loyalty to the church, remained silent on this issue, Brissot dared in his writings to portray the American clergy as worthy and "well behaved" because of their natural mode of life, as contrasted with the French priests, who led an "artificial and immoral existence."[20]

The death of Franklin in 1790 allowed the leaders of the French to deify him as a saint. As long as he remained alive there was some fear that he might express some opinion contradicting them, but now all groups could make full use of the "Franklin legend" to prove their beliefs.[21]

The Assembly went into mourning for thirteen days and Mirabeau stated from the rostrum:

> The sciences owe Franklin their tears, but it is liberty, it is the French people who should mourn him most deeply; the liberty that we enjoy he aided us to attain, and the sparks of his genius glow in the constitution that is our boast. He went to the grave gently with the thought that Liberty spreading everywhere was destined to better mankind, for it was with the betterment of man he was concerned.[22]

The commune of Paris, not to be outdone, on July 21, 1790, held a great funeral ceremony in memory of the "sage of Philadelphia"; and the Abbe Fauchet, chaplain to the king and one of the most prominent leaders of the revolutionary clergy, praised Franklin in one of the most amazing

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[20]Fay, The Revolutionary Spirit in France and America, p. 285.

[21]Ibid., p. 287.

[22]Ibid.

orations of his time. In this discourse he praised him as the founder of American liberty, and gave him credit for the freedom attained by France. He set forth the glory of the American philosopher in his role of "friend to humanity, liberator of America, and one of the foremost builders of our sacred constitution." The liberty of France was compared with that of the United States, and in ending Fauchet declared that his dead friend would be remembered as the man who united "nature and society."[23]

If there was any doubt concerning the high regard in which the former minister from America was held, the tributes evoked by his death dispelled them. The Academy of Science met in public session to mourn him and the Lodge of the Nine Sisters published frequent eulogies of Franklin in 1790. Two groups set themselves up as disciples of Franklin: the Quakers grouped around Marsillac and Bouneville; and the Girondists of whom Brissot was the leader.[24]

Jean de Marsallic sought to take advantage of circumstances and develop Quakerism in opposition to Catholicism. He gained much support for his opinions in 1791 and 1792. In the first of the two years mentioned he requested the Assembly to authorize the "Friends" to practice their religion according to their beliefs in France. The high

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[23]McMasters, Benjamin Franklin, pp. 249-250.

[24]Fay, The Revolutionary Spirit in France and America, p. 294.

esteem in which this sect was held is shown by an extract from the Mercure de France, June 2, 1790, which said: "The Quakers are the only people who have given the world an example of society based entirely on morality."[25]

The Quaker religion was the starting point for the first republican propaganda in France. The American constitutions were constantly being republished and the fact that they were published by men like Demeusnier, who was a member of the Assembly, gave weight to their influence. It was impossible to speak of the United States without mentioning the word "republic."[26]

Early in 1789 the people were not yet ready to desert the king, but Brissot with his assertions of the superiority of the republic of the new world over the kingdoms of the old, was making an impression. In the following year the death of Franklin gave those in France who were republican minded an opportunity to speak their sentiments unchallenged.

In 1791 the United States was responsible for additional impetus to the republican movement in the person of Thomas Paine, who had by this time returned to Paris. Allying himself with Brissot and his friend, he became well known as an avowed republican and an advocate of a single legislative house.[27]

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[25] Ibid.

[26] Ibid., p. 298.

[27] Ibid.

When he first arrived in Paris late in 1789 the French Revolution was well under way and gathering strength as it moved. Those leading the movement did not know how far it would go, or what the final outcome would be. On this occasion he remained in Paris only three months and returned to London, where he followed closely the development of the Revolution and forwarded to Washington the key to the Bastille which Lafayette had sent after the prison was destroyed.[28]

Back in Paris again in July of 1791, Paine became the leading spirit of the Societe Republicaine which had as its objective the overthrow of the monarchy and the establishment of a French republic. At this time this organization had only four members other than the pamphleteer. They were Condorcet, Brissot, Achille Duchatelet, and Nicholas Bonneville. They had hoped for a membership running into the thousands but growth was slow and it never had much influence in the affairs of the nation.[29]

The "Manifesto" written by Paine was distributed in the city of Paris at the first of July. It was not signed by him but bore the signature of the Societe Republicaine. It demanded the abdication of the king and the abolishment of royalty in France.[30] The Rights of Man had been so widely

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[28]Woodward, Tom Paine, p. 180. [29]Ibid., p. 203.

[30]Ibid., p. 204.

read and created so much attention that Paine was elected in four departments of the convention although he was not well known personally and spoke French poorly.[31]

Paine, to a large extent, was responsible for the change from the belief in divine right to a respect for the rights of the people. For a time it appeared that the old order of things could be modified but as events progressed, it became apparent that drastic changes must be made to accomplish the aims of the reformers. Some like Lafayette wavered, torn between two loyalties. Others such as Paine, Brissot, and Joel Barlow, the American poet, worked persistently for a republican government.[32]

Joel Barlow had published in 1791 an essay entitled "An Address to the Privileged Orders," in which he had attacked feudalism, the church, and standing armies and demanded their suppression. It was Paine and Barlow who gave shape and direction to the thoughts that were aroused by America, although their influence cannot be said to be as great as that of Franklin and Jefferson.[33]

With the formal abolishment of royalty on September 22, 1792, and the execution of Louis XVI early in 1793, the French Revolution reached a point from which there was no

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[31] Ibid., p. 220.

[32] Fay, The Revolutionary Spirit in France and America, p. 301.

[33] Ibid., p. 302.

turning back.[34]

In summing up the American influence on the French Revolution, the evidence at times seems contradictory. Many historians have devoted themselves to showing that the revolt came as a result of deplorable economic conditions. Others have contented themselves with only a passing mention of the American example. The great historian, A. Aulard, insisted all of his life that the French Revolution was an accident, that the revolution was not planned by the men brought up in the political philosophy of the country, but rather was brought on by the stupidity of Louis XVI. In contrast, Crane Brinton offers the opinion that while the people had no clear-cut objectives, they had adopted a republican state of mind before 1789 which made their following action inevitable.[35]

France was persuaded to assist America for two reasons, the first being the influence of the European philosophers, who for two hundred years preceding the American revolt, had presented in abstract form most of the theories later adopted by the Americans. The second cause for French intervention was the desire by the leaders of France to revenge herself on her old enemy, England.

Regardless of why Louis XVI was finally persuaded to

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[34]Woodward, op. cit., p. 243.

[35]Brinton, op. cit., pp. 19-20.

help the rebelling colonies, France, once embarked on this project, developed an admiration for everything American. They saw in the colonies only what they desired to see, and the true picture of America was distorted by French writers to fit the theories they wished to prove.

Vergennes, in urging the colonies to declare their independence, was not motivated by any desire for a republican form of government; but in supporting this view through the newspapers he controlled, the public's former concepts concerning rebellion underwent a decided change.

The French had very little factual knowledge of her ally during the war against England, but they saw in Franklin the typical American. This great diplomat, writer, and philosopher used all of his talent in promoting a sympathy for American principles while in France. He implanted his ideas among the nobles and through his Masonic activities spread his propaganda in such a way that it could not be traced back to him. While Franklin did not wish to promote revolution in France, the principles with which he indoctrinated all those with whom he came in contact did not die with him. While in France, most of his fellow lodge members and those in his social circle were leaders in the early days of the revolution.

Lafayette did much to popularize the American cause in France at a time when it needed assistance. When he returned from across the sea he became a leader of the reform

movement and had he cast his lot with the radical group, no doubt he could have been one of the leaders throughout the revolution. He was a great influence in the movement to follow the American example. He, with the other nobles, wished reform, but not revolt. When their reform movement threatened to reach lengths they had not anticipated, they became divided in their loyalties. The nobles were supplanted by leaders of a more radical and violent nature, such as Brissot, who in turn were influenced by Thomas Paine, who wished to see a republican government formed in France.

Soldiers and officers returning from America brought more concrete knowledge of democracy in action. They had liked what they saw and joined the group demanding reforms.

The calling of the Estates-General indirectly can be traced to American influence on France since the condition of French finances was to a great extent the result of money spent in the American war. Had the king not needed money so badly, the convening of the Estates-General would never have occurred.

In concluding, while many factors were responsible for the French Revolution, American influence must be included as one of them.

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