

CHAPTER IV - THE MANTLE OF WASHINGTON

The compromises of the Constitution, on whatever grounds they may be criticized, were so far justified that they gained their end. That end was the achievement of union; and union was achieved. This was not done easily nor without opposition. In some cities anti-Constitutional riots took place. Several States refused to ratify. The opposition had the support of the great name of Patrick Henry, who had been the soul of the resistance to the Stamp Act, and who now declared that under the specious name of "Federation" Liberty had been betrayed. The defence was conducted in a publication called *The Federalist* largely by two men afterwards to be associated with fiercely contending parties, Alexander Hamilton and James Madison. But more persuasive than any arguments that the ablest advocate could use were the iron necessities of the situation. The Union was an accomplished fact. For any State, and especially for a small State--and it was the small States that hesitated most--to refuse to enter it would be so plainly disastrous to its interests that the strongest objections and the most rooted suspicions had eventually to give way. Some States hung back long; some did not ratify the Constitution until its machinery was actually working, until the first President had been chosen and the first Congress had met. But all ratified it at last, and before the end of Washington's first Presidency the complement of Stars and Stripes was made up.

The choice of a President was a foregone conclusion. Everyone knew that Washington was the man whom the hour and the nation demanded. He was chosen without a contest by the Electoral College, and would undoubtedly have been chosen with the same practical unanimity by the people had the choice been theirs. So long as he retained his position he retained along with it the virtually unchallenged pre-eminence which all men acknowledged. There had been cabals against him as a general, and there were signs of a revival of them when his Presidency was clearly foreshadowed. The impulse came mostly from the older and wealthier gentry of his own State--the Lees for example--who tended to look down upon him as a "new man." Towards the end of his political life he was to some extent the object of attack from the opposite quarter; his fame was assailed by the fiercer and less prudent of the Democratic publicists. But, throughout, the great mass of the American people trusted him as their representative man, as those who abused him or conspired against him did so to their own hurt. A less prudent man might easily have worn out his popularity and alienated large sections of opinion, but Washington's characteristic sagacity, which had been displayed so constantly during the war, stood him in as good stead in matters of civil government. He propitiated Nemesis and gave no just provocation to any

party to risk its popularity by attacking him. While he was President the mantle of his great fame was ample enough to cover the deep and vital divisions which were appearing even in his own Cabinet, and were soon to convulse the nation in a dispute for the inheritance of his power.

His Secretary to the Treasury was Alexander Hamilton. This extraordinary man presents in more than one respect a complex problem to the historian. He has an unquestionable right to a place and perhaps to a supreme place among the builders of the American Republic, and much of its foundation-laying was his work. Yet he shows in history as a defeated man, and for at least a generation scarcely anyone dared to give him credit for the great work that he really did. Today the injustice is perhaps the other way. In American histories written since the Civil War he is not only acclaimed as a great statesman, but his overthrow at the hands of the Jeffersonians is generally pointed at as a typical example of the folly and ingratitude of the mob. This version is at least as unjust to the American people as the depreciation of the Democrats was to him. The fact is that Hamilton's work had a double aspect. In so far as it was directed to the cementing of a permanent union and the building of a strong central authority it was work upon the lines along which the nation was moving, and towards an end which the nation really, if subconsciously, desired. But closely associated with this object in Hamilton's mind was another which the nation did not desire and which was alien to its instincts and destiny. All this second part of his work failed, and involved him in its ruin.

Hamilton had fought bravely in the Revolutionary War, but for the ideals which had become more and more the inspiration of the Revolution he cared nothing, and was too honest to pretend to care. He had on the other hand a strong and genuine American patriotism. Perhaps his origin helped him to a larger view in this matter than was common among his contemporaries. He was not born in any of the revolted colonies, but in Bermuda, of good blood but with the bar sinister stamped upon his birth. He had migrated to New York to seek his fortune, but his citizenship of that State remained an accident. He had no family traditions tying him to any section, and, more than any public man that appeared before the West began to produce a new type, he felt America as a whole. He had great administrative talents of which he was fully conscious, and the anarchy which followed the conclusion of peace was hateful to his instinct for order and strong government. But the strong government which he would have created was of a different type from that which America ultimately developed. Theoretically he made no secret of his preference for a Monarchy over a Republic, but the suspicion that he meditated introducing monarchical institutions into America, though sincerely entertained by Jefferson and others, was certainly false. Whatever his theoretic preferences, he was intensely alive to the logic of facts,

and must have known that a brand-new American monarchy would have been as impossible as it would have been ludicrous. In theory and practice, however, he really was anti-democratic. Masses of men seemed to him incapable alike of judgment and of action, and he thought no enduring authority could be based upon the instincts of the "great beast," as he called the mob. He looked for such authority and what seemed to him the example of history, and especially to the example of England. He knew how powerful both at home and abroad was the governing machine which the English aristocracy had established after the revolution of 1689; and he realized more fully than most men of that age, or indeed of this, that its strength lay in a small but very national governing class wielding the people as an instrument. Such a class he wished to create in America, to connect closely, as the English oligarchy had connected itself closely, with the great moneyed interests, and to entrust with the large powers which in his judgment the central government of the Federation needed.

Jefferson came back from France in the winter of 1789, and was at once offered by Washington the Secretaryship of State. The offer was not a very welcome one, for he was hot with the enthusiasm of the great French struggle, and would gladly have returned to Paris and watched its progress. He felt, however, that the President's insistence laid upon him the duty of giving the Government the support of his abilities and popularity. He had accepted the Constitution which he had no share in framing, not perhaps as exactly what he would have desired, but certainly in full good faith and without reserve. It probably satisfied him at least as well as it satisfied Hamilton, who had actually at one time withdrawn from the Convention in protest against its refusal to accept his views. Jefferson's criticisms, such as they were, related mostly to matters of detail: some of them were just and some were subsequently incorporated in amendments. But there is ample evidence that for none of them was he prepared to go the length of opposing or even delaying the settlement. It is also worth noting that none of them related to the balance of power between the Federal and State Governments, upon which Jefferson is often loosely accused of holding extreme particularist views. As a fact he never held such views. His formula that "the States are independent as to everything within themselves and united as to everything respecting foreign nations" is really a very good summary of the principles upon which the Constitution is based, and states substantially the policy which all the truest friends of the Union have upheld. But he was committed out and out to the principle of popular government, and when it became obvious that the Federalists under Hamilton's leadership were trying to make the central government oligarchical, and that they were very near success, Jefferson quite legitimately invoked and sought to confirm the large powers secured by the Constitution itself to the States for the purpose of obstructing their programme.

It was some time, however, before the antagonism between the two Secretaries became acute, and meanwhile the financial genius of Hamilton was reducing the economic chaos bequeathed by the war to order and solvency. All of his measures showed fertility of invention and a thorough grasp of his subject; some of them were unquestionably beneficial to the country. But a careful examination will show how closely and deliberately he was imitating the English model which we know to have been present to his mind. He established a true National Debt similar to that which Montague had created for the benefit of William of Orange. In this debt he proposed to merge the debts of the individual States contracted during the War of Independence. Jefferson saw no objection to this at the time, and indeed it was largely through his favour that a settlement was made which overcame the opposition of certain States.

This settlement had another interest as being one of the perennial geographical compromises by means of which the Union was for so long preserved. The support of Hamilton's policy came mainly from the North; the opposition to it from the South. It so happened that coincidentally North and South were divided on another question, the position of the projected Capital of the Federation. The Southerners wanted it to be on the Potomac between Virginia and Maryland; the Northerners would have preferred it further north. At Jefferson's house Hamilton met some of the leading Southern politicians, and a bargain was struck. The Secretary's proposal as to the State debts was accepted, and the South had its way in regard to the Capital. Hamilton probably felt that he had bought a solid advantage in return for a purely sentimental concession. Neither he nor anyone else could foresee the day of peril when the position of Washington between the two Southern States would become one of the gravest of the strategic embarrassments of the Federal Government.

Later, when Hamilton's policy and personality had become odious to him, Jefferson expressed remorse for his conduct of the occasion, and blamed his colleague for taking advantage of his ignorance of the question. His sincerity cannot be doubted, but it will appear to the impartial observer that his earlier judgment was the wiser of the two. The assumption of State debts had really nothing "monocratic" or anti-popular about it--nothing even tending to infringe the rights and liberties of the several States--while it was clearly a statesmanlike measure from the national standpoint, tending at once to restore the public credit and cement the Union. But Jefferson read backwards into this innocuous and beneficent stroke of policy the spirit which he justly perceived to inform the later and more dubious measures which proceeded from the same author.

Of these the most important was the creation of the first United States Bank.

Here Hamilton was quite certainly inspired by the example of the English Whigs. He knew how much the stability of the settlement made in 1689 had owed to the skill and foresight with which Montague, through the creation of the Bank of England, had attached to it the great moneyed interests of the City. He wished, through the United States Bank, to attach the powerful moneyed interests of the Eastern and Middle States in the same fashion to the Federal Government. This is how he and his supporters would have expressed it. Jefferson said that he wished to fill Congress with a crowd of mercenaries bound by pecuniary ties to the Treasury and obliged to lend it, through good and evil repute, a perennial and corrupt support. The two versions are really only different ways of stating the same thing. To a democrat such a standing alliance between the Government and the rich will always seem a corrupt thing--nay, the worst and least remediable form of corruption. To a man of Hamilton's temper it seemed merely the necessary foundation of a stable political equilibrium. Thus the question of the Bank really brought the two parties which were growing up in the Cabinet and in the nation to an issue which revealed the irreconcilable antagonism of their principles.

The majority in Congress was with Hamilton; but his opponents appealed to the Constitution. They denied the competency of Congress under that instrument to establish a National Bank. When the Bill was in due course sent to Washington for signature he asked the opinions of his Cabinet on the constitutional question, and both Hamilton and Jefferson wrote very able State Papers in defence of their respective views. After some hesitation Washington decided to sign the Bill and to leave the question of constitutional law to the Supreme Court. In due course it was challenged there, but Marshall, the Chief Justice, was a decided Federalist, and gave judgment in favour of the legality of the Bank.

The Federalists had won the first round. Meanwhile the party which looked to Jefferson as leader was organizing itself. It took the name of "Republican," as signifying its opposition to the alleged monarchical designs of Hamilton and his supporters. Later, when it appeared that such a title was really too universal to be descriptive, the Jeffersonians began to call themselves by the more genuinely characteristic title of "Democratic Republicans," subsequently abbreviated into "Democrats." That name the party which, alone among American parties, can boast an unbroken historic continuity of more than a century, retains to this day.

At the end of his original term of four years, Washington was prevailed upon to give way to the universal feeling of the nation and to accept a second term. No party thought of opposing him, but a significant division appeared over the Vice-Presidency. The Democrats ran Clinton against John Adams of Massachusetts, and though they failed there appeared in the voting a significant alliance, which

was to determine the politics of a generation. New York State, breaking away from her Northern neighbours, voted with the Democratic South for Clinton. And the same year saw the foundation in New York City of that dubious but very potent product of democracy, which has perhaps become the best abused institution in the civilized world, yet has somehow or other contrived to keep in that highly democratic society a power which it could never retain for a day without a genuine popular backing--Tammany Hall.

Meanwhile the destinies of every nation of European origin, and of none perhaps more, in spite of their geographical remoteness, than of the United States, were being profoundly influenced by the astonishing events that were shaping themselves in Western Europe. At first all America was enthusiastic for the French Revolution. Americans were naturally grateful for the aid given them by the French in their own struggle for freedom, and saw with eager delight the approaching liberation of their liberators. But as the drama unrolled itself a sharp, though very unequal, division of opinion appeared. In New England, especially, there were many who were shocked at the proceedings of the French, at their violence, at their Latin cruelty in anger, and, above all perhaps, at that touch of levity which comes upon the Latin when he is face to face with death. Massacres and carnages did not strike the typical Massachusetts merchant as the methods by which God-fearing men should protest against oppression. The strict military government which succeeded to, controlled and directed in a national fashion the violent mood of the people--that necessary martial law which we call "the Terror"--seemed even less acceptable to his fundamentally Whiggish political creed. Yet--and it is a most significant fact--the bulk of popular American opinion was not shocked by these things. It remained steadily with the French through all those events which alienated opinion--even Liberal opinion--in Europe. It was perhaps because European opinion, especially English opinion, even when Liberal, was at bottom aristocratic, while the American people were already a democracy. But the fact is certain. By the admission of those American writers who deplore it and fail to comprehend it, the great mass of the democracy of America continued, through good and evil repute, to extend a vivid and indulgent sympathy to the democracy of France.

The division of sympathies which had thus become apparent was converted into a matter of practical politics by the entry of England into the war which a Coalition was waging against the French Republic. That intervention at once sharpened the sympathies of both sides and gave them a practical purpose. England and France were now arrayed against each other, and Americans, though their Government remained neutral, arrayed themselves openly as partisans of either combatant. The division followed almost exactly the lines of the earlier quarrel which had begun to appear as the true meaning of Hamilton's policy discovered itself. The

Hamiltonians were for England. The Jeffersonians were for France.

A war of pamphlets and newspapers followed, into the details of which it is not necessary to go. The Federalists, with the tide going steadily against them, had the good luck to secure the aid of a pen which had no match in Europe. The greatest master of English controversial prose that ever lived was at that time in America. Normally, perhaps, his sympathies would have been with the Democrats. But love of England was ever the deepest and most compelling passion of the man who habitually abused her institutions so roundly. The Democrats were against his fatherland, and so the supporters of Hamilton found themselves defended in a series of publications over the signature of "Peter Porcupine" with all the energy and genius which belonged only to William Cobbett.

A piquancy of the contest was increased by the fact that it was led on either side by members of the Administration. Washington had early put forth a Declaration of Neutrality, drawn up by Randolph, who, though leaning if anything to Jefferson's side, took up a more or less intermediate position between the parties. Both sides professed to accept the principle of neutrality, but their interpretations of it were widely different. Jefferson did not propose to intervene in favour of France, but he did not think that Americans were bound to disguise their moral sympathies. They would appear, he thought, both ungrateful and false to the first principles of their own commonwealth if, whatever limitation prudence might impose in their action, they did not desire that France should be victorious over the Coalition of Kings. The great majority of the American people took the same view. When Genet, the envoy of the newly constituted Republic, arrived from France, he received an ovation which Washington himself at the height of his glory could hardly have obtained. Nine American citizens out of ten hastened to mount the tricolour cockade, to learn the "Marseillaise," and to take their glasses to the victory of the sister Republic. So strong was the wave of popular enthusiasm that the United States might perhaps have been drawn into active co-operation with France had France been better served by her Minister.

Genet was a Girondin, and the Girondins, perhaps through that defect in realism which ruined them at home, were not good diplomatists. It is likely enough that the warmth of his reception deranged his judgment; at any rate he misread its significance. He failed to take due account of that sensitiveness of national feeling in a democracy which, as a Frenchman of that time, he should have been specially able to appreciate. He began to treat the resources of the United States as if they had already been placed at the disposal of France, and, when very properly rebuked, he was foolish enough to attempt to appeal to the nation against its rulers. The attitude of the Secretary of State ought to have warned him

of the imprudence of his conduct. No man in America was a better friend to France than Jefferson; but he stood up manfully to Genet in defence of the independent rights of his country, and the obstinacy of the ambassador produced, as Jefferson foresaw that it must produce, a certain reaction of public feeling by which the Anglophil party benefited.

At the close of the year 1793, Jefferson, weary of endless contests with Hamilton, whom he accused, not without some justification, of constantly encroaching on his colleague's proper department, not wholly satisfied with the policy of the Government and perhaps feeling that Genet's indiscretions had made his difficult task for the moment impossible, resigned his office. He would have done so long before had not Washington, sincerely anxious throughout these troubled years to hold the balance even between the parties, repeatedly exerted all his influence to dissuade him. The following year saw the "Whiskey Insurrection" in Pennsylvania--a popular protest against Hamilton's excise measures. Jefferson more than half sympathized with the rebels. Long before, on the occasion of Shay's insurrection, he had expressed with some exaggeration a view which has much more truth in it than those modern writers who exclaim in horror at his folly could be expected to understand--the view that the readiness of people to rebel against their rulers is no bad test of the presence of democracy among them. He had even added that he hoped the country would never pass ten years without a rebellion of some sort. In the present case he had the additional motives for sympathy that he himself disapproved of the law against which Pennsylvania was in revolt, and detested its author. Washington could not be expected to take the same view. He was not anti-democratic like Hamilton; he sincerely held the theory of the State set forth in the Declaration of Independence. But he was something of an aristocrat, and very much of a soldier. As an aristocrat he was perhaps touched with the illusion which was so fatal to his friend Lafayette, the illusion that privilege can be abolished and yet the once privileged class partially retain its ascendancy by a sort of tacit acknowledgment by others of its value. As a soldier he disliked disorder and believed in discipline. As a commander in the war he had not spared the rod, and had even complained of Congress for mitigating the severity of military punishments. It may be that the "Whiskey Insurrection," which he suppressed with prompt and drastic energy, led him for the first time to lean a little to the Hamiltonian side. At any rate he was induced, though reluctantly and only under strong pressure, to introduce into a Message to Congress a passage reflecting on the Democratic Societies which were springing up everywhere and gaining daily in power; and in return found himself attacked, sometimes with scurrility, in the more violent organs of the Democracy.

Washington's personal ascendancy was, however, sufficient to prevent the storm from breaking while he was President. It was reserved for his successor. In 1797

his second term expired. He had refused a third, thereby setting an important precedent which every subsequent President has followed, and bade farewell to politics in an address which is among the great historical documents of the Republic. The two points especially emphasized were long the acknowledged keynotes of American policy: the avoidance at home of "sectional" parties--that is, of parties following geographical lines--and abroad the maintenance of a strict independence of European entanglements and alliances.

Had a Presidential election then been what it became later, a direct appeal to the popular vote, it is probable that Jefferson would have been the second President of the United States. But the Electoral College was still a reality, and its majority leant to Federalism. Immeasurably the ablest man among the Federalists was Hamilton, but for many reasons he was not an "available" choice. He was not a born American. He had made many and formidable personal enemies even within the party. Perhaps the shadow on his birth was a drawback; perhaps also the notorious freedom of his private life--for the strength of the party lay in Puritan New England. At any rate the candidate whom the Federalists backed and succeeded in electing was John Adams of Massachusetts. By the curiously unworkable rule, soon repealed, of the original Constitution, which gave the Vice-Presidency to the candidate who had the second largest number of votes, Jefferson found himself elected to that office under a President representing everything to which he was opposed.

John Adams was an honest man and sincerely loved his country. There his merits ended. He was readily quarrelsome, utterly without judgment and susceptible to that mood of panic in which mediocre persons are readily induced to act the "strong man." During his administration a new quarrel arose with France--a quarrel in which once again those responsible for that country's diplomacy played the game of her enemies. Genet had merely been an impracticable and impatient enthusiast. Talleyrand, who under the Directory took charge of foreign affairs, was a scamp; and, clever as he was, was unduly contemptuous of America, where he had lived for a time in exile. He attempted to use the occasion of the appearance of an American Mission in Paris to wring money out of America, not only for the French Treasury, but for his own private profit and that of his colleagues and accomplices. A remarkable correspondence, which fully revealed the blackmailing attempt made by the agents of the French Government on the representatives of the United States, known as the "X.Y.Z." letters, was published and roused the anger of the whole country. "Millions for defence but not a cent for tribute" was the universal catchword. Hamilton would probably have seized the opportunity to go to war with France with some likelihood of a national backing. Adams avoided war and thereby split his party, but he did not avoid steps far more certain than a war to excite the hostility of

democratic America. His policy was modelled upon the worst of the panic-bred measures by means of which Pitt and his colleagues were seeking to suppress "Jacobinism" in England. Such a policy was odious anywhere; in a democracy it was also insane. Further the Aliens Law and the Sedition Law which he induced Congress to pass were in flagrant and obvious violation of the letter and spirit of the Constitution. They were barely through Congress when the storm broke on their authors. Jefferson, in retirement at Monticello, saw that his hour was come. He put himself at the head of the opposition and found a whole nation behind him.

Kentucky, carved out of the western territory and newly grown to Statehood, took the lead of resistance. For her legislature Jefferson drafted the famous "Kentucky Resolutions," which condemned the new laws as unconstitutional (which they were) and refused to allow them to be administered within her borders. On the strength of these resolutions Jefferson has been described as the real author of the doctrine of "Nullification": and technically this may be true. Nevertheless there is all the difference in the world between the spirit of the Kentucky Resolutions and that of "Nullification," as South Carolina afterwards proclaimed its legitimacy. About the former there was nothing sectional. It was not pretended that Kentucky had any peculiar and local objection to the Sedition Law, or was standing against the other States in resisting it. She was vindicating a freedom common to all the States, valued by all and menaced in all. She claimed that she was making herself the spokesman of the other States in the same fashion as Hampden made himself the spokesman of the other great landed proprietors in resisting taxation by the Crown.

The event amply justified her claim. The oppression laws which the Federalists had induced Congress to pass were virtually dead letters from the moment of their passing. And when the time came for the nation to speak, it rose as one man and flung Adams from his seat. The Federalist party virtually died of the blow. The dream of an oligarchical Republic was at an end, and the will of the people, expressed with unmistakable emphasis, gave the Chief Magistracy to the author of the Declaration of Independence.