

CHAPTER III.

ADMINISTRATION OF ADAMS.

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1797. PRESIDENT ADAMS, on his accession to power, made no important changes in the cabinet, and retained the ministers who had officiated under Washington. Thomas Jefferson, as Vice-President, presided over the Senate, in which the federal party still predominated.

State of
the rela-
tions
with
France. One of the first things which demanded the attention of the executive was the treatment which the French Directory had shown towards the foreign ministers. The French, in the fury of revolutionary excess and triumphant power, were disappointed and indignant that America had rendered no important service to the cause of their revolution, and apparently even favoured the English, as they chose to infer from the treaty made by Jay. Nor did the French government like the recall of Monroe, who then sympathized with revolutionary France more than Pinckney, whom Washington had appointed in his place. Accordingly, the Directory refused to receive Pinckney, or any other ministers, until the grievances of which the French complained were satisfactorily redressed. The hostility of the Directory was still further increased when the news arrived of the election of Adams to the presidency, instead of Jefferson, the French favourite. Pinckney was treated with studied insolence and neglect, without any recognition of his

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official position. Nor was this all. A decree was passed against American commerce, by which American vessels and cargoes were liable to capture for any cause recognized as lawful by the British treaty. This was little short of a declaration of war, which was not agreeable to any party in America — for Napoleon was in the height of his victories, and all the nations of Europe were in terror and alarm.

Under these circumstances, the President resolved to send a special mission to France — for it was the object of the French government to compel the United States to renounce the British treaty, to renew all ancient differences with Great Britain, and, in short, to make use of the United States as an instrument against England, whose naval and commercial greatness had ever been the object of French jealousy. The whole secret of the favour extended to this country by France, during the revolutionary struggle, was to injure England: and France has been friendly or hostile in proportion as America has been hostile or friendly to Great Britain. It is a mistake to suppose that French alliance was rendered from knowledge of or respect for this country. France looked upon us as a weak, divided, money-making nation, careless of national honour, and not disposed to resent insult, as proved by the contemptuous treatment of Washington and this country by Genet, when he was minister — a treatment not sufficiently punished, and even sustained by violent partisans opposed to a strong executive.

Nor was the solicitude which the federal party felt respecting French ascendancy without foundation. Napoleon was advancing from conquering to conquer, and his country seemed to be rapidly realizing the dream of Louis XIV. respecting universal empire. The Bank of England had stopped specie payment, threatening destruc-

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Envoys
to Paris. Great pains were taken by the President in the appointment of envoys to France, and, after great deliberation, John Marshall, of Virginia, and Elbridge Gerry, of Massachusetts, were added to the mission. They departed separately to France, in July and August, there to unite with Pinckney in a new attempt to terminate all differences. Having joined each other in October, at Paris, they sent notice of their arrival to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Prince Talleyrand, who informed them that as soon as the report on American affairs was finished, he would let them know what was to be done. After an interval of ten days, they were informed that the Directory were exasperated against the United States for some parts of the President's speech at the opening of Congress, and that no audience would be granted until the conclusion of a private unofficial negotiation. The person sent to negotiate was Hottinguer, the banker, who informed the envoys that a loan to the Republic, and a private *douceur* of \$240,000 for the members of the Directory, would be insisted on. A long unofficial intercourse ensued, which ended, notwithstanding all the arts of French diplomacy, in the refusal of the envoys to grant a loan or a *douceur*. The agents of Talleyrand threatened war and other calamities, but the envoys were firm, indignant, and patriotic. The French evidently hoped to terrify the envoys into a course not merely undignified and mean, but opposed to the whole policy and Constitution of this country. Nothing was settled. No official intercourse took place, and Pinckney and Marshall returned

The demands
of the
French
Directory.

Rejected
by
the
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voys.

home, leaving Gerry to manage negotiations with Talleyrand. Infamous proposals were made to him, and advantage taken of his weak points; but Gerry maintained the national honour, and finally, after unsuccessful negotiation, returned to America. Nothing showed the grasping, unprincipled, rapacious, contemptible meanness of the French Directory more than the overtures unofficially made to the American envoys, which virtually amounted to secret bribery to the French executive, and a repudiation of the treaty with Great Britain and of that neutral policy which the American government had then and has since constantly maintained.

The American government, long before the return of the envoys, prepared for war; and Congress authorized the President to instruct the commander of the national ships of war to seize any armed vessel which committed depredations on American commerce—for the merchant-vessels of the Americans were still seized by the French, in defiance of all neutral rights, and property amounting to more than a million of dollars had been unjustly seized. Moreover, an act was passed (June 12th, 1798) suspending all commercial intercourse with France. On the 25th of June, the President authorized merchant-vessels to defend themselves by force against search or seizure, and large appropriations were made for the navy.

Anticipating a war with France, Congress, before adjourning, appointed Washington lieutenant-general and commander-in-chief of all the forces raised or to be raised in the United States, and the hero accepted the appointment, although reluctant, in his old age, to leave his peaceful pursuits at Mount Vernon. In view of the conduct of the French Directory—"its insidious hostilities," said he, "to our government," "disregard of treaties," "war upon defenceless commerce," "treatment of minis-

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Prepara-
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war.

Wash-
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Ch. 3. ters," and "demands amounting to tribute." In the appointment of generals and other high officers, Adams acted without much advice, and a coldness between him and his cabinet resulted. He was jealous of Hamilton, and would have deprived him of a high military appointment, as first major-general, had not Washington insisted upon it as the only condition upon which he himself would serve. Adams's great defect was unwillingness to ask or receive advice, trusting to his own judgment alone, which was often warped by his strong passions and prejudices. He thus did great injury to his party, and was by no means its oracle, as Jefferson was of the Republicans.

French advance to reconciliation Upon the return of Gerry to the United States, the French government, really not desiring war, but only a bribe, made advances to reconciliation, took off the embargo imposed on American shipping, and released those who were imprisoned; which, however, was of no great consequence, since but few American vessels were then in French ports. Nor was Congress, more than the executive, disposed to submit to the arrogant demands of France; and, expecting war, unhesitatingly prepared for it—added considerably to the navy, made large naval appropriations, and passed an act of non-intercourse.

Minister to the French Republic. War was averted by the overtures of Talleyrand and the consequent appointment of a minister to the French Republic. Adams, at first, nominated M'Murray, resident minister at the Hague, on the suggestion of Talleyrand, but without consulting his cabinet, which widened the breach between him and the Federalists. This appointment was unpopular, and a great clamour was raised; but the President refused to withdraw the nomination, and M'Murray was rejected by the Senate. Adams then, without withdrawing his appointment, nominated, conjointly with him, Chief-Justice Ellsworth and Patrick

Henry; and the nomination, thus modified, was confirmed. Henry declined to serve, on account of age and infirmities, and General Davis, of North Carolina, was appointed in his place.

The envoys were instructed to demand their passports and return to America, if negotiations for the settlement of difficulties were not commenced within twenty days after their arrival at Paris. They were required to insist upon indemnification for spoliations and the repeal of the French decree for confiscating neutral vessels having English merchandise on board.

A portion of Adams's cabinet were disinclined to a renewal of diplomatic relations with France; and the great leaders of the federal party were disposed to coincide in this opinion, from doubts which they entertained of the sincerity of the French government, and from a want of confidence in Talleyrand. But Adams, bent on preserving peace by any means, did not consult his cabinet, and hastened the departure of the envoys, even after news had arrived of a change in the French Directory; which slight on the cabinet consummated the breach in the federal party, subsequently broke it up, and threw power into the hands of the Republicans, in the ensuing elections.

But, however annoying and disagreeable his course was to leaders of the party which had supported him, Adams was determined to preserve peace, and also to act independently of party dictation. He was President, and was resolved to exercise his prerogative—a resolution far from agreeable to strong party-men, especially of his own cabinet, who, particularly Pickering and Wolcott, resolved to get rid of him at the close of his term of office, and substitute a more reliable party-man—a man whom they could control—the great policy of all political partisans since that time, as shown in their disinclination to

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Ch. 3. elevate to office the strongest and best men of the country. No man can ever hope to be elevated to the presidency by a party-vote, when he himself is stronger than his party, or is any thing else than the mere organ and tool of a party, ready to adopt the most extreme party measures.

Restoration of peace. News being received (May, 1800), from the envoys to France, of the probability of a favourable termination of difficulties, an act was passed discharging the officers and men of the additional regiments, with three months' pay. The envoys had been well received, and negotiations were carried on with a mutual desire to settle all differences in an honourable manner, and peace was soon fully restored.

Events of Adams's administration. This protracted negotiation with France, and those measures of national defence which grew out of it, were the great events of Adams's administration, although acts of considerable importance were passed by Congress, and other events of interest, of a personal rather than of great national import, took place.

Death of Washington. The year 1799 was memorable for the death of Washington (December 14th), which was a great loss to the federal party. All parties, however, sincerely mourned his death, and united to confer upon his memory every testimonial of respect. The funeral oration was pronounced by Henry Lee, and all that Congress or the nation could do to commemorate his great services and exalted character was done. The approaching anniversary of his birth (February 22d) was set apart for eulogies, orations, and other suitable manifestations of public grief throughout the Union; and, so far as a nation can mourn for any one man, it mourned for him.

In the course of the summer, the seat of government was removed to that new federal city, on the Potomac,

which is called by his name, although the public buildings were scarcely completed, and the city was ill furnished with accommodations.

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Adams and his party.
The most marked peculiarity of the administration of Adams was the virulence of party-feeling, which divided, not merely the leading statesmen of the country, but even the cabinet of the President, and which induced him to act more independently of it than was in accordance with popular views, and finally led to the dismissal of Pickering and M'Henry and the resignation of Wolcott, as well as to the total disorganization of the Federalists and the ascendancy of the Republicans. The hostility against the President, even from his own party, was probably caused by his jealousy of Hamilton, his egotism and vanity, his eagerness to assume responsibility, and his independent course, especially in reference to France, which was viewed as decidedly anti-republican.

Election of Jefferson.
In the presidential election of 1801 the republican party gained the ascendancy, which it has since, under different names, retained. The Federalists, as a party, were completely defeated, partly by their own dissensions, and partly from the growth of more democratic ideas, or ideas supposed to be so. Adams and Pinckney were the candidates of the Federalists, and Jefferson and Aaron Burr the candidates of the Republicans, for President and Vice-President. The two latter were elected; but, as they both had an equal number of votes, the election passed into the House of Representatives, by whom Jefferson was chosen.