Capture of Derne.

CHAPTER IV.

ADMINISTRATION OF JEFFERSON.

THOMAS JEFFERSON, the most famous of the early Presidents, next to Washington, commenced his administration at a fortunate time. The country was at peace; the storm which threatened war had blown over; the treasury was well filled; commerce was flourishing; and the country had commenced a career of unbounded prosperity, its population already numbering over five millions. The federal party was decidedly overthrown, and democracy had commenced its reign.

Change of public officers.

One of the first acts of the new President was to change the great officers of state, and appoint those who were strong party-men — a course perhaps necessary, but different from that pursued by his predecessors. James Madison became Secretary of State; Albert Gallatin, Secretary of the Treasury; Robert Smith, Secretary of the Navy; and Levi Lincoln, Attorney-General. A change, still more uncommon, was also made in inferior offices throughout the country.

Repeal of certain laws.

When Congress assembled in December, it acted in the spirit of the President, and repealed many of the laws enacted by the Federalists — for the administration had a large majority in both houses. The judiciary act was repealed, and also that imposing direct taxes, which were ever obnoxious to the people, especially the excise

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on distilled spirits. Jefferson regarded the public debt as a great evil, and recommended its speedy payment, as well as the curtailment of offices and salaries.

The first session of Congress was not marked by any other measure of great importance, except authorizing the President to fit out a naval force against Tripoli, with which state the United States were forced to declare war.

War with Tripoli.

The command of a squadron was given to Morris, and five frigates and one schooner were added to the ships already in the Mediterranean. The squadron, however, accomplished nothing of consequence, except the blockade of Tripoli. The ships, in the course of the summer of 1803, were relieved by others under the command of Edward Preble, who hoisted his flag on board the Constitution.

New expedition against Tripoli.

One of the frigates sent to relieve the old squadron, the Philadelphia, commanded by Captain Bainbridge, on her passage out, captured a Morocco cruiser of twenty-two guns, and retook an American brig, which caused the emperor of Morocco to disavow any order to commit hostilities.

Loss of the frigate Philadelphia.

But a great misfortune befell Bainbridge on his way to Tripoli to join Preble. His ship struck on a sunken rock, and, while in a defenceless state, was attacked by a flotilla of Tripolitan gun-boats, and taken. The crew, with their commander, were carried to Tripoli and held as valuable prisoners, for whom a great ransom was demanded.

Decatur retakes and burns the frigate.

Soon after, a bold exploit was performed by Lieutenant Decatur, then commanding the Enterprise. This brig had captured a small vessel, bound to Constantinople, with a present of female slaves to the sultan. She was taken into service, called the Intrepid, and, being manned by volunteers from the Enterprise, stood into the harbour of Tripoli, where the Philadelphia was refitting for sea. At midnight, she approached the Philadelphia, and,

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being supposed to be a trading vessel, having lost her anchors, was permitted to approach so near that the American assailants, who had been heretofore concealed, were enabled to board the frigate sword in hand: they drove the barbarians overboard, set fire to the ship, and, whilst she was burning to the water's edge, sailed unharmed out of the harbour, under a heavy fire from all the batteries. This gallant action of young Decatur contributed much to raise the character of the American navy.

The blockade of the harbour of Tripoli was continued during the spring and summer, and, in the latter part of the season, was bombarded, but without much effect.

Derne taken by Eaton.

In the following spring, an attack was made by land also, under Eaton, consul at Tunis, to co-operate with the naval forces. Eaton, with 400 men, adventurers from various countries, Tripolitan exiles, and Arab cavalry, marched through the desert from Egypt, countenanced by Ali Pasha; and, assisted by the Argus, the Hornet, and the Nautilus, American ships of war, he succeeded in taking Derne, the Tripolitan port and settlement nearest Egypt (April 27th, 1805), which brought the bashaw to terms, and led to a negotiation and peace with Tripoli, much to the dissatisfaction of Eaton, who expected to reap some great advantage.

Peace secured.

1803.

The purchase of Louisiana.

But an event of more importance than a war with this piratical state occurred soon after it commenced. This was the purchase of Louisiana from France. Ex-Chancellor Livingston and Mr. Monroe were sent to Paris, as special ministers, to negotiate that bargain. Napoleon wanted money more than an unprofitable settlement on the banks of the Mississippi. After the usual haggling between the French and American diplomatists, the French agreed to a cession of the whole territory for the comparatively unimportant sum of fifteen millions of dollars—deducting

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little less than four millions of dollars as an indemnification to American merchants for the spoliations which had been made. This arrangement was justly received with great exultation by the President and his cabinet, and was ratified (October 20th, 1803) by the United States Senate. Some doubts and difficulties still remained respecting boundaries, the French claiming more territory than Spain was willing to concede; but these were allayed by the moderation and pacific policy of the President.

After the peaceful acquisition of an immense territory for a comparatively trifling sum, no great political event of general interest occurred during the first administration of Jefferson. Party politics, however, ran high, and the federal leaders made a great outcry.

Duel between Burr and Hamilton.

Unfortunately, this intense party animosity, never since equalled, led to the duel between Aaron Burr and Alexander Hamilton, into which the latter was forced by his unprincipled opponent. Burr was eager for the blood of Hamilton; and nothing short of his death could possibly appease him, in order that he might remove the great obstacle to his ascendency, or gratify the malice of disappointed ambition. This melancholy and disgraceful duel was fought on the 11th of July, where Hoboken now is, opposite New York, on the Jersey shore. "The parties," says a recent historian of the United States, "having exchanged salutations, the seconds measured the distance of ten paces, loaded the pistols, made the other preliminary arrangements, and placed the combatants. At the appointed signal, Burr took deliberate aim, and fired. The ball entered Hamilton's side, and, as he fell, his pistol too was unconsciously discharged. Burr approached him, apparently somewhat moved; but, on the suggestion of his second, the surgeon and the barge-men already approaching, he turned and hastened away, Van Ness, his

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second, coolly covering him from their sight by opening an umbrella. The surgeon found Hamilton half sitting on the ground and supported in the arms of his second. The pallor of death was on his face. 'Doctor,' he said, 'this is a mortal wound,' and, as if overcome by the effort of speaking, he swooned quite away. As he was carried across the river, the fresh breeze revived him. His own house being in the country, he was conveyed at once to the house of a friend, where he lingered for twenty-four hours in great agony, but preserving his composure and self-command to the last."

Death of Hamilton.

His eulogy.

Thus died Hamilton, the leader of the federal party, and one of the greatest men that this country has yet produced — the friend of Washington, the chief framer of the American Constitution, in the forty-eighth year of his age, and in the midst of usefulness and honour. New York never witnessed a more mournful spectacle than at his funeral, from Trinity Church, in which Gouverneur Morris pronounced his eulogy, before all that were learned and distinguished in the city.

Execration of Burr.

The public indignation against Burr was tremendous. He was regarded as a wilful murderer, and was forced to flee. He embarked quietly for Georgia, lost all political influence, and gained an infamous reputation, which will ever cling to his name, even as the stigma of treason will for ever be attached to the memory of Arnold — two men who equally aimed at power even at the sacrifice of fame, friends, and country.

1805

Re-election of Jefferson.

The peaceful acquisition of Louisiana, the curtailment of the public expenses, the prosperity of the country, and the great talents and patriotism of Jefferson, secured his re-election to the presidency and the greater predominance of his party.

Meanwhile, Burr, disappointed in all his hopes of

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power, and blasted in reputation, abandoned himself to desperate and dangerous schemes. In April, 1805, with several nominal objects in view, he departed for the West, but with the probable intention of raising an expedition for the conquest of Mexico, or of separating the South-western States from the Union and erecting out of them a monarchy, of which New Orleans was to be the capital.

Burr's conspiracy

He however failed to gain over to his views any men of political influence, although he succeeded in entrapping Blennerhasset, an Irish gentleman of property, settled on an island in the Ohio, opposite Marietta. Rumour accused him of something equally disgraceful in his intrigues with the wife of this enthusiastic gentleman — for Burr was vain of his power over women, who were too frequently victims of his arts. Burr had made great calculations on receiving the co-operation of General Wilkinson, commander-in-chief of the army and governor of Louisiana, as well as of General Eaton, with Truxton, Preble, and Decatur, naval commanders. But these men were true to themselves and their country; and Wilkinson especially, detecting the dangerous schemes of Burr, did all in his power to defeat them, acquainting the President with Burr's intentions, arresting his coadjutors, and putting New Orleans in a state of defence (1806). Even Burr himself was arrested in Kentucky, through the agency of Daviess, the district-attorney, and his trial commenced at Frankfort; but, the principal witness relied upon by the government failing to appear, Burr had a triumphant release. Meanwhile the boats which Blennerhasset had prepared for the descent of the river were seized. Still, Burr persevered in attempting to win over the Western country, including the troops stationed at military posts on the Mississippi. He remained some time near Natchez, fearing to descend the river to New

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Orleans, on account of the measures of Wilkinson and the proclamation of the President, which called upon all persons in authority to exert themselves to suppress an enterprise which had for its object the invasion of the Spanish territories. The governor of the Mississippi Territory actually called out 400 militia for the purpose of arresting Burr, and he was obliged to surrender. There was not, however, evidence sufficient to convict him, and he remained at the house of one of his sureties; but, hearing that Wilkinson had sent some officers from New Orleans to arrest him, and fearing to fall into his hands, he fled. He was, however, captured and sent under guard to Washington, the seat of government of Mississippi Territory. The exaggerated accounts of Burr's force having become subjects of ridicule, and the alarm excited at New Orleans having subsided, there was a reaction of public opinion, and Burr found defenders in Congress. Nevertheless, he was tried for high treason at Richmond, before Chief Justice Marshall, and was acquitted. The Federalists were inclined to make light of the whole affair; but the Democrats viewed it more seriously, especially the President, who watched the trial with great interest and ardently desired his conviction. Soon after the trial, Burr embarked for Europe, and lived a while at Paris in straitened circumstances and an object of suspicion to government. He returned to America just before the war with England, and resumed the practice of the law. But his political prospects were completely blasted, and his character was sullied by private vices. He lived to the age of eighty — deserted, lonely, and embarrassed.

Arrest of Burr.

His trial and acquittal.

1807

Meanwhile matters of greater national interest took place. Napoleon, at this time, was in the height of his victories and at war with England. In consequence, the Americans enjoyed the carrying trade of the world. Great

1805.

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fortunes were made by American merchants. Being at peace with both France and England, American vessels traded with these two great belligerent powers of Europe as well as with their colonies. These mercantile advantages were regarded with jealousy by British merchants; and British privateers-men and many naval officers complained that there were no longer any prizes to take. The British Courts of Admiralty lent an ear to these complaints, and passed decrees which declared that vessels engaged in carrying West India produce from the United States to Europe were legal prizes. The seizure and condemnation of several American vessels with valuable cargoes followed, which, of course, occasioned loud complaints in the United States. Public meetings were held to consider the state of affairs.

English decrees against rights of neutrals

Claim of right of search for British seamen.

These were not the only grounds of offence. England claimed the right to search American vessels for deserters from its own service; in consequence of which, great annoyances were inflicted on merchant vessels, and American sailors often forced into the British naval service. Congress retaliated by prohibiting the importation of many of the most important articles of British manufacture.

British orders in council.

But graver causes of offence soon after occurred. Great Britain, with a view to cripple Napoleon, as well as to please her merchants, passed orders in Council (May, 1806) which declared several European ports, under control of the French, to be in a state of blockade; thus authorizing the capture of American vessels bound to them, and violating the law of nations.

Berlin decrees.

Napoleon, also, wishing to retaliate on the English, rather than to injure American commerce, devised a system by which he hoped to exclude English manufactures from the Continent, and thus cripple Great Britain in the most vital point, especially since by the battle of Trafalgar

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England was the undisputed mistress of the ocean. He accordingly issued his famous Berlin decrees (November, 1806), by which Great Britain was not only declared to be in a state of blockade and all intercourse suspended, but which forbade the introduction of any English goods into the Continent of Europe.

The English retaliated by declaring the whole coast of Europe to be in a state of blockade, and prohibited neutrals altogether from trade with the Continent. Napoleon then issued his Milan decree, which confiscated not only the vessels of neutrals which should touch at an English port, but such as should submit to be searched.

Milan decree.

Critical state of American commerce.

Under these decrees, the capture of nearly all American property on the high seas was rendered almost certain, and thus a condition of things most disastrous to American commerce was effected through the efforts of these two belligerent powers to embarrass each other in their strife for mastery.

These were great evils; and, during their continuance, American commerce between France and England as well as the rest of Europe was virtually suspended: for American vessels might be seized by either French or English, and rates of insurance rose to a ruinous height.

The greatest alarm now prevailed in the United States. The Federalists clamoured for war, and large appropriations for military defences. The Democrats thought that there were not sufficient causes of war, and, in accordance with the suggestion of Jefferson, only asked for an increase of gun-boats, of no use, except in rivers. The American ships, however, were so much exposed to capture that Congress, in 1807, decreed an embargo, or a prohibition to American ships to leave their ports.

The embargo.

This efficient measure, although all parties had urged the government to adopt a vigorous course in order

to avenge the honour and protect the property of the country, soon excited a general opposition, especially in the New England States; and, not being able to enforce the restrictions imposed by the embargo without military coercion, government prudently yielded and had recourse to another expedient, — that of non-intercourse.

Capture of the Chesapeake.

The general irritation was also increased by the unfortunate affair of the Chesapeake. This national vessel was attacked by a British ship of superior force, the Leopard, and compelled to surrender, after several men had been killed and wounded. The outrage was inflicted on the ground that the American vessel sheltered deserters from the British navy, and four of the crew were carried off on that plea, three of whom were Americans. The British government, however, disavowed the act of the naval officer, although it offered no adequate reparation; and, notwithstanding the disavowal, it contributed to swell the feeling of indignation against England throughout the land. This spirit of hostility was further increased by the refusal of England to revoke her obnoxious decrees, so unjust, and so injurious to American interests. The decrees of Napoleon also were equally injurious; in consequence of which Congress at last was compelled, in March, 1809, after all negotiations had failed, wholly to interdict trade and intercourse with both France and England.

1808.

Jefferson's policy.

Such were the events of greatest public interest during the administration of Jefferson, characterized on the whole by great wisdom and forbearance. Though hostile to Great Britain, he was averse to plunging the nation into war, which, however, could not be averted, under his successor, without a loss of national honour.

It was Mr. Jefferson's policy to diminish the public debt, to restrict the army and navy, to repeal all direct

taxes, to reduce the tariff, to maintain friendly relations with the Indians, whose rights were respected, to add new territories to the country, to extend the liberty of the press, and to favour unbounded religious toleration. This policy, with some exceptions, has since continued to guide the course of the American government, and must continue to do so, in accordance with the popular wishes. Since the term of the first democratic President, the general principles of his party have been in the ascendant. Political contests, however, though sometimes exhibiting much warmth, have not been attended with that extreme degree of animosity which characterized the early contests between the two old parties. American citizens have come to believe, that a political antagonist is not necessarily an enemy to his country, and that no party whatever has the smallest chance of success, which does not in the main support the honest principles of republicanism and the honour and interest of the whole country.