

## CHAPTER XXII

## Alexander Hamilton

1757-1804

LESS than a month after Samuel Adams had locked the doors of the court-room at Salem and had put the key in his pocket, a meeting of patriots was called in New York City (July, 1774). This meeting was held in the open air and was attended by crowds of citizens. The speakers were quiet and without enthusiasm; the speeches did not arouse the people; the meeting was proving a failure.

Near the platform a young student was standing. He had been in the colonies two years only, but he had become a most earnest patriot. He felt that the people would never be brought to oppose English oppression by any such half-hearted remarks. He thought that many things that ought to be said had not been said.

Quietly he pushed his way through and climbed upon the platform. When there was a suitable pause, the youth stepped to the front without being announced or introduced.

For a moment the boy stood hesitating, as the throng stared, surprised at his boldness. He was but seventeen years old and looked younger. In another moment a laugh

would have followed, or perhaps cries to come down and not interrupt his elders. But the boy's embarrassment was over and he began to speak.

He was a born orator, and in a few minutes his thoughts came faster than he could utter them. The crowd listened with close attention as he gave clear and sound reasons for resisting the king. A murmur ran through the audience: "Hear the collegian! Hear the collegian!" The meeting was no longer a failure; the people of New York were ready to follow Patrick Henry and Samuel Adams.

Who was the seventeen-year-old boy? His name was Alexander Hamilton, and this was the first public step in a life full of service for his adopted country. During the next two years Hamilton was busy in the cause of the colonists. He wrote pamphlets replying to the leading Tories of New York. He took part in public meetings and spent much time in studying military affairs. When the British army left Boston and came to New York, Hamilton was appointed commander of a new artillery company, though still less than twenty years of age.

One incident that happened during the interval between Hamilton's first public speech and the arrival of the British army in New York illustrates a remarkable trait of his character.

He was but a boy and filled with all a boy's rashness and daring. Yet he had the cool mind of a much older man. More than once Hamilton was able to prevent the mobs in New York from committing violence. The British ship-of-war *Asia* at one time opened fire upon the town. At once all was commotion and excitement. The "Liberty Boys" began to threaten injury to every Tory in the city. Among the most prominent of these Tories was Dr. Cooper, the president

of the college. The mob rushed to his house. On the steps they found Hamilton ahead of them, determined to prevent or delay their entrance. He at once began to speak, urging them to show reason and not to commit any rash act. Just at this point President Cooper called out to the crowd from an upper window, advising them not to be guided by such a madman as Hamilton. Then he fled by a rear entrance.



HAMILTON LEADING THE CHARGE AT YORKTOWN.

Hamilton had perhaps saved the old man's life, while the worthy president supposed that his young student was urging the people to attack him. It was a fine act in the boy thus to risk his life and his influence "in behalf of law, order, and mercy."

Five years passed before the surrender of Cornwallis. Much of this time young Hamilton was an aide on the staff of General Washington and met many leaders of the day. His principal employment was to answer the many letters which the general received; but he was present at all the great battles and always acted with courage and bravery. In the siege of Yorktown Hamilton led a brilliant charge against the enemy, attacked them with great vigor, and carried everything before him.

Hamilton was much more than a mere orator or a gallant soldier. He was an earnest student of all matters connected

with the government. Soon after the war was over he began to see that the States must be united more closely. He was certain that, though they had kept together during the war, because of their common danger, they would quarrel now that peace had come. So, together with George Washington, James Madison, and other statesmen, he wrote and worked for a convention to form a more perfect union.

Four years after the peace of 1783, the Federal Convention met in Philadelphia. For four months the delegates from the different States worked in secret, until they had prepared the Constitution of the United States.

Before this could be used it must be accepted by at least nine of the States. As the proposed Constitution was very different from the form of government under which the country had been governed for several years, many people did not like it and tried to have it defeated.

For many months the contest for and against the new Constitution continued in the different States. One by one they accepted it, until finally the decision seemed to rest on New York. If that State adopted it, the necessary nine States would have been obtained. The New York convention met with forty-six members opposed to the Constitution and nineteen in its favor. Day after day discussion followed discussion, and Hamilton was on his feet continually, answering objections and giving arguments. Finally the convention voted, and three more votes were given for the Constitution than against it. Hamilton had won, and the Constitution of the United States was adopted.

Now the new government must be begun and Presidential electors chosen in the different States. There was but one man thought of for President—the general who had so skil-

fully carried the army through the Revolution and had then quietly retired to his home at Mount Vernon. He was truly "first in war, first in peace, and first in the hearts of his countrymen." Every vote was cast for George Washington for President. John Adams, of Massachusetts, was elected Vice-President.

When Congress had counted the electoral votes, messengers were sent to notify Washington and Adams. The Presi-

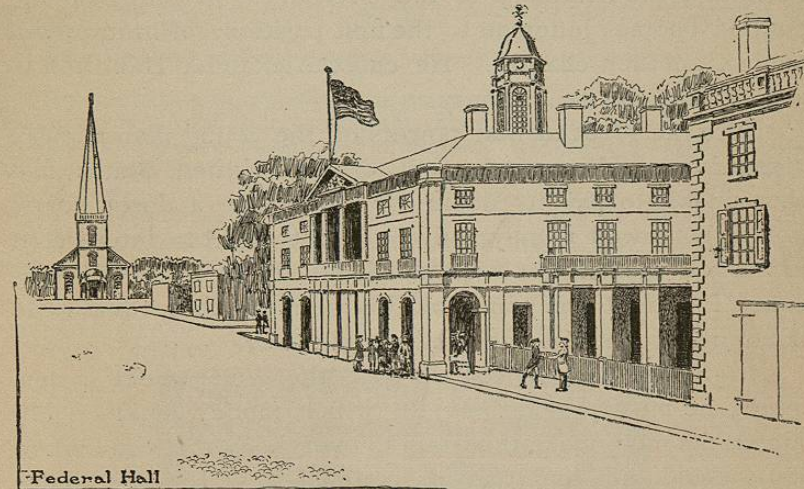


WASHINGTON'S JOURNEY TO HIS INAUGURATION.

dent-elect left Mount Vernon and traveled in his carriage to New York City. Everywhere he was enthusiastically welcomed by the people, who rode by his carriage as he came into and left the towns; who gave him public dinners; who scattered flowers in his path; who built triumphal arches under which he must go. From the New Jersey shore he was rowed to the city by thirteen oarsmen, in a handsomely decorated barge, and was saluted by the firing of thirteen guns.

On the 30th of April, 1789, Washington was inaugurated

President at Federal Hall on Wall Street. He passed through the troops into the hall, where Congress awaited him. When the Vice-President announced that everything was ready for the oath of office to be taken, the President-elect went to the balcony of the building. This overlooked the street, which was densely packed with citizens who waited in respectful



Federal Hall

FEDERAL HALL, NEW YORK, WHERE WASHINGTON WAS INAUGURATED PRESIDENT.

silence. Washington solemnly took the oath to "preserve, protect, and defend the Constitution of the United States," and with closed eyes whispered:

"So help me, God!"

Then the air was rent by the joyous cry of the people: "God bless our Washington! Long live our beloved Washington!"

The minister from France afterward wrote: "Tears of joy were seen to flow in the hall of the Senate, at church, and

even in the streets, and no sovereign ever reigned more completely in the hearts of his subjects than Washington in the hearts of his fellow-citizens."

After the inauguration the new President chose his Cabinet—men who were to advise him and to help him carry on the government. The two leading officers were the Secretary of State and the Secretary of the Treasury. Washington appointed Thomas Jefferson to the first position; of him we will read in another chapter. He chose Alexander Hamilton to have charge of the Treasury.

Here the great mental powers of the young man showed themselves. The government of the United States had been unable to pay its debts for more than a dozen years. It had borrowed money and could not pay the interest; it still owed the soldiers who had fought for it in the Revolution. Its credit was gone; by this we mean that it had little or no money, and no one would lend it any.

It was Hamilton's task to give the government a new credit; he must provide ways by which money could be obtained; he must make it certain to everybody that the United States could and would pay all its debts. All this Alexander Hamilton, as Secretary of the Treasury, did. He thus performed a service for his country which may be considered as important as is the service of a great general in carrying on a war.

Had the United States not been able to pay its debts, it would have failed just as surely as if it had not obtained its independence by the War of the Revolution.

Hamilton remained in the Cabinet of the first President until his great work was done. Then he resigned, and practised law until he died at the early age of forty-seven.

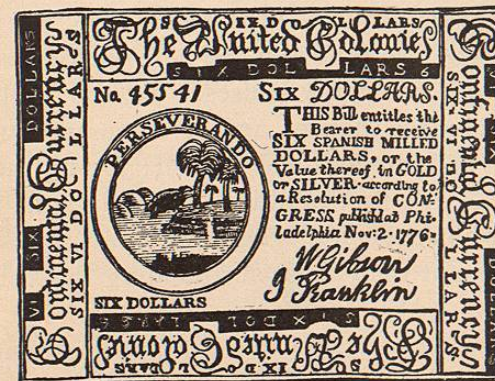
Meanwhile Washington was unanimously chosen a second

time, but declined a third term. He also retired from public life, and spent his last years at his home at Mount Vernon. Here he died, after having served his country faithfully all his life, and after having been honored by his country with every honor which they could give him.

Describe the meeting in New York; the steps taken by Hamilton before the Revolution began; his work during the Revolution; his part in obtaining the adoption of the new Constitution; his service as Secretary of the Treasury.

Tell the story of Washington's journey and inauguration.

How did Hamilton prevent the meeting in New York from being a failure? What did he have that the other speakers lacked? How did Hamilton's position on the staff of General Washington aid him in his later life? What caused the great change in the voting in the New York Convention? Why did Washington travel from Mount Vernon to New York in his own carriage? How else could he have traveled? Why were there thirteen oarsmen and thirteen guns? Is credit any less necessary to a nation than to a business man?



THE OLD CONTINENTAL MONEY.