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Adams and Jefferson: The Origins of the American Party System

Joseph Charles*

I. JOHN ADAMS

JOHN ADAMS had no such simple and definite role in the growth of parties as had Washington, Hamilton, and Jefferson. Washington's greatest importance in this connection lay in the way in which his prestige was used to further Hamilton's ends, and Jefferson was important in the 1790's mainly as a center for the growing opposition to Federalist views and policies. Adams is not, however, the less important because his part cannot be described in such simple terms as these.

Adams was important both as a public figure and as a political theorist. In the former role his influence was largely negative, but in the latter he was perhaps the leading man of his generation. The two were not without influence upon each other, but the relation between them is perhaps clearer if we follow each separately.

Adams's part in the formation of parties was negative in the sense that he did not lead either of the two contending parties as did Hamilton and Jefferson, and he had no such popularity as Washington's to lend to the support of either party if he had wanted to do so. Yet it was Adams and the moderate Federalists who saved the country from war with France and probably from imperialistic adventures in the West Indies and Latin America in 1798 and 1799. If Hamilton had come to cherish the dream of a military dictatorship, as some have charged, it was Adams rather than Jefferson who at this, the most favorable moment, made it impossible.

The importance of Adams in the formation of parties lies in the fact that while by making peace with France he checked the plans of the most vigorous and reactionary of the Federalist leaders, he was unable to consolidate his own support and remain in power. His Administration gave the time and the most favorable circumstances possible for the crucial steps in the formation of the new party. Hence no story of the struggle between Jefferson and Hamilton can ignore him.

* This is the second part of a three-part study by Mr. Charles. The first appeared in the April issue of the *Quarterly*.

For the development of Jeffersonian democracy as a political movement, the four years of opposition from 1797 to 1801 were absolutely essential. Had Jefferson been elected in 1796, as he came so near being, he would have been regarded by many people not as President of the American people, but as the tool of France. This view would not have been just in 1796 or at any other time, but the Republicans badly needed the experience they gained as an opposition party in the years 1797 to 1801 for the development of both their principles and their organization. In 1796 their views were more doctrinaire and less indigenous to America than in 1800, and their organization too loose and insecure to have withstood the impact of the events of the late 1790's. By 1800 the country had had a better chance to learn its own mind. Many writers seem to believe that Jefferson was insincere when he voiced the hope that he would not be elected President in 1796, but those familiar with the circumstances ought at least to recognize the wisdom expressed in this hope.

The circumstances of Adams's Administration could hardly have been more admirably designed for the purpose of giving an opposition party under a popular leader a chance to extend its organization and disseminate its principles. Adams was succeeding Washington, and a period of economic depression was following one of general prosperity. His own personality, with his choleric temperament and his elaborate theories, each so difficult to understand and so easy to caricature, presented the opposition with an ideal target. In the South and the middle states, his opponents made the same sort of political capital out of Adams's "monarchism" as the New England Federalists made out of Jefferson's "atheism." Throughout the country his short, round person and his bumptiousness were contrasted in every mind with the stature and grave dignity of Washington.

It is customary when writing of the Presidency of John Adams to speak of him as a man of great gifts and great shortcomings, and then to concentrate upon the latter.¹ This approach has proved as satisfactory to those who favor Hamilton and the High-Federalists as to those who favor Jeffer-

¹ It is interesting to see the comment upon Adams as President by a man whose own difficulties of temperament are generally blamed for the failure of his greatest aspirations. Woodrow Wilson wrote of him, after mentioning Adams's services, ". . . but he was still the John Adams of the Revolution, stung by jealousies which he tried in vain to conquer, too sensitive, too hasty, too acid in judgment, erratic, intolerant, irascible, sometimes irresolute,—a man to trust in the long run and to stand loyal to with steady purpose, but not a man to love or to deem above parties." Woodrow Wilson, *A History of the American People*, 5 vols. (New York and London, 1917-18), III, 31.

son. During the 1790's both groups vigorously disparaged Adams, and it is easy to show many instances of error and ineptitude on his part during these years; but few historians seem to have asked themselves what course was open from 1797 to 1800 to a President who did not wish either to follow the High-Federalists or the extreme Republicans.

Adams's personal traits are only rarely the dynamic, activating forces of his Administration. They rather restricted, or conditioned, the way in which other men acted. For this reason, rather than because of any injustice done to him thereby, a detailed examination of Adams's shortcomings is misleading; for if we are too concerned with his irascibility, we tend to overlook the nature of the circumstances in which he found himself. If we grant that any Federalist who was President at that time would have had either to follow the program of the High-Federalists until it led to war with France, declared or not, or split the party to avoid such a war, we see how largely beside the point are those expositions of this period which rest mainly on charges of Adams's vanity and unreasonableness. It is not the conflicts of John Adams's personality, but the conflicts of outlook and purpose within his Administration which we should explore.

Whenever a well-established political party splits, the question of the relations between the leaders of the two wings becomes one of great interest. To what extent were their differences personal? To what extent was the break between them merely a final parting of discordant and ill-mated groups within the party? The Adams-Hamilton quarrel had been nourished for a long time both by personal differences and those of principle and policy, but here we shall take up the more personal and obvious aspects of the feud between them. According to Adams, Hamilton's efforts to undermine him began soon after the Revolution. "I once at midnight after 18 hours of fatigue in preparing dispatches after the Peace of 1783, inserted a vain journal intended for a private Friend, Jonathan Jackson, in my dispatches to Congress by which means Hamilton obtained fewel [sic] to feed the flame of his damnable malice."² If we are to believe Adams's account that Hamilton's hostility to him went back so far, perhaps it may be attributed to the fact that Adams was among those in Congress who, during the Revolution, supported Horatio Gates to replace Schuyler, Hamilton's father-in-law, in the campaign that ended at Saratoga.

At the first Presidential election, Hamilton went to a good deal of

² Adams to Adrian Van Der Kemp, Aug. 15, 1808, Pennsylvania Historical Society (hereafter, PHS).

trouble to reduce the number of electoral votes cast for Adams. He sent word to more than one group of electors that it was necessary that they drop some votes for Adams so that there would be no risk that he would defeat Washington.³ Hamilton had no plan of defeating Adams as Vice-President and no fear that Adams would be elected President instead of Washington, but he wished to reduce his influence.

In 1792, on the other hand, Hamilton was afraid that Clinton might make a respectable showing in his effort to become Vice-President, so he aided Adams instead of hindering him; but his way of doing so was singularly arrogant. He thought Adams was remaining away from the seat of government too long, and wrote to him:

I learn with pain that you may not probably be here till late in the session. I fear that this will give some handle to your enemies to misrepresent. . . . Permit me to say it best suits the firmness and elevation of your character to meet all events, whether auspicious or otherwise, on the ground where station and duty call you.⁴

Many thought Adams personally opposed to some of Hamilton's most important measures, particularly to the establishment of the Bank, though he had done nothing to hinder their passing. Support of these measures was, in the early and middle 1790's, the cardinal point in Federalist policy; and as the election of 1796 approached, many in informed circles doubted that Adams would be called by his party to succeed Washington. Adams thought that Jay, Hamilton, Patrick Henry, or himself might be the candidate;⁵ and as the Federalists strategically delayed until the last minute Washington's announcement that he would not serve again, an atmosphere of mystery surrounded the question. Presumably, as in 1800 when Hamilton's bitterness toward Adams had increased, Hamilton was induced to accept him as a candidate only because support for him was so strong throughout New England as well as in some other states, notably Maryland. Whatever his reasons, Hamilton accepted him as the nominal Fed-

³ See Charles Francis Adams, ed., *The Life and Works of John Adams*, 10 vols. (Boston, 1850-56; hereafter, Adams, *Works*) I, 445-46, for an account by Charles Francis Adams of Hamilton's exertions to lessen the number of Adams's votes. See also *ibid.*, VI, 543, text and footnotes.

⁴ Oct., 1792, Henry Cabot Lodge, ed., *The Works of Alexander Hamilton*, 12 vols. (New York, 1904), X, 28-9. Hereafter, Hamilton, *Works*.

⁵ See Adams to his wife, Feb. 15, 1796, Charles Francis Adams, ed., *Letters of John Adams: Addressed to His Wife*, 2 vols. (Boston, 1841), II, 201-2; Feb. 20, *ibid.*, 203; Feb. 27, *ibid.*, 204-5; Mar. 1, *ibid.*, 206-7.

eralist candidate for President but began working quietly to get the electors to choose Thomas Pinckney, the nominal candidate for Vice-President, instead of Adams. *The Gazette of the United States*, the Administrative organ, ran a series of articles which criticized Adams harshly,⁶ denying that he had any share in the great achievements of the preceding Administrations. Robert Troup of New York later described the conduct of Hamilton and its results:

There is no cordiality on the part of the President to Hamilton. During the last election for President, Hamilton publicly gave out his wishes that Pinckney should be elected President. These wishes were communicated both privately and publicly to the President, and have occasioned, I suspect, more than a coolness on the part of the President. I blamed Hamilton at the time for making the declarations he did, and I foresaw that evil would arise from them. . . .⁷

Jefferson disclaimed any intention of competing with Adams if the Presidential vote in 1796 were tied, and they resumed friendly relations briefly. This worried the High-Federalists very much, as they lived in constant dread of a coalition between them.⁸ They recognized more clearly the similarity of views on some very important points held by Jefferson and Adams than have most later writers.⁹ Within a month after Adams's inauguration, Elkanah Watson, a Massachusetts Federalist then in Albany, warned him that Hamilton, Schuyler, and their connection still cherished bitterness toward him.¹⁰ Watson was particularly irritated because of the

⁶ These articles appeared in the Oct. and Nov. issues of *The Gazette of the United States* (Philadelphia), 1796.

⁷ Troup to King, New York, Nov. 16, 1798, Charles R. King, ed., *The Life and Correspondence of Rufus King*, 6 vols. (New York, 1894-1900), II, 466. Hereafter, King, *Correspondence*.

⁸ See letters of Sedgwick to King, 1798-1800, in the Sedgwick Papers, Massachusetts Historical Society (hereafter, MHS), for one of the best accounts of Federalist apprehension of an agreement between Jefferson and Adams at the beginning of the latter's term of office (letters of Sedgwick to King for this period are copies, stitched together, only part of which have been published in King, *Correspondence*. Pickering clung to the idea that there had been a "corrupt bargain" between Adams and Jefferson in 1800 by which, if the mission were sent to France and he and McHenry were dismissed from the Cabinet, Adams was to get Republican support in 1800. Pickering, convinced of this himself, was still trying to get evidence for it years later. Pickering Papers, III, 332, MHS.

⁹ Gilbert Chinard is an exception. Particularly in his *Honest John Adams* (Boston, 1933), he emphasizes similarities in the views of Jefferson and Adams.

¹⁰ Watson to Adams, Albany, Apr. 1, 1797, Elkanah Watson, *Men and Times of*

ground upon which Hamilton put his preference for Pinckney. Judge Hobart, later a Federalist senator from New York, stated:

. . . that Hamilton had said, in his presence, that Mr. Pinckney would, under all circumstances, have been the most proper character for President, because he was a new man, and would not draw in his train the spirit of party. A curious assertion, truly, for the most decided party leader in America!¹¹

On the first important question which faced the Administration of Adams—that of deciding whether or not to send a new mission to France after the French had refused to accept General C. C. Pinckney as minister—Adams, Hamilton, and Jefferson each thought one should be sent, though each had arrived at this decision separately and had different reasons for urging it. Soon after this beginning to his Administration, Adams found that its future course had been charted for him by Hamilton. He has described the plan:

Mr. Tracy of Connecticut, who indeed was always in my confidence, came to me, I believe at the opening of the special session of Congress which I called soon after my inauguration, and produced a long elaborate letter from Mr. Hamilton, containing a whole system of instruction for the conduct of the President, the Senate and the House of Representatives. I read it very deliberately, and really thought the man was in a delirium. It appeared to me a very extraordinary instance of volunteer empiricism thus to prescribe for a President, Senate, and House of Representatives all desperately sick and in a state of deplorable debility without being called. And when I maturely considered the contents of the letter, my surprise was increased. . . . That letter, though it had no influence with me, had so much with both Houses of Congress, as to lay the foundation of the overthrow of the Federal party and of the revolution that followed four years afterwards.¹²

The first open clash between Hamilton and Adams, however, came over the question of the command of the provisional army which had been authorized because of the XYZ Affair. The fact that after Washington had

the Revolution; or, Memoirs, ed. by Winslow Cossoul Watson (New York, 1856), 346-47.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² John Adams, "Letters to the Boston Patriot," Quincy, May 29, 1809, Adams, *Works*, IX, 289. The recommendations of this letter were: the sending of a new mission of three to France, Jefferson or Madison to be one; the raising of an army of 50,000 (10,000 cavalry); the Alien and Sedition Law; the spreading of taxes to as yet untaxed articles; and a national fast day.

been made Commander-in-Chief, Adams did not wish to give Hamilton superior rank over Knox and Pinckney, is generally known; but apparently it is less known that there was a concerted movement to get Hamilton made Commander-in-Chief instead of Washington. Abigail Adams, perhaps the only person who has left an account of this latter effort, wrote:

I am glad you approve the appointment, as you must I trust, of Commander in Chief, tho' some were asserting every power and faculty for Col. H—n. The President decided without communication and sent in the nomination of the old General, without the least intimation what his own mind will be. He sends the Secretary of War on Monday with the Commission. You can hardly conceive what a powerful interest is made for H—n. I am surprized at the want of knowledge of Human nature. That man would in my mind become a second Buonaparty if he was possessed of equal power. Yet my opinion is singular, what is the sentiment your way? Would any man there like he should have been made Commander-in-Chief? . . . What I have written of Hamilton is between ourselves and in confidence. I should like to learn the opinions of others. What is Knox's, what is Lincoln's? Would they Have advocated his *being first*? I hope Washington will not decline—he must not, he cannot.¹³

Washington did not decline the first post; but he did support Hamilton's claim to be second under him, announcing that he would resign if he were not given the position,¹⁴ though when he first heard about the matter he asserted emphatically that Pinckney should be offered the superior rank rather than Hamilton.¹⁵

Apart from the question of the appointments of officers, the conflict

¹³ Abigail Adams to William Smith, Philadelphia, Jul. 7, 1798, Smith-Carter Collection, MHS. Several of the letters of Mrs. Adams in those MHS collections which are open indicate that she made an effort to keep in touch with New England sentiment on important points and that she occasionally tried to shape it.

¹⁴ See Washington to Adams, Mt. Vernon, Sept. 25, 1798, J. C. Fitzpatrick, ed., *The Writings of George Washington from the Original Manuscript Sources, 1777-1805*, 39 vols. (Washington, 1931-44; hereafter, Washington, *Writings*), XXXVI, 453-62, for Washington's reasons for his insistence upon Hamilton. See also Washington to McHenry, Mt. Vernon, Oct. 1, 1798, *ibid.*, 476-77; and Washington to Pickering, Mt. Vernon, Oct. 1, 1798, *ibid.*, 475.

¹⁵ Washington to Pickering, Mt. Vernon, Jul. 11, 1798, *ibid.*, 323-27. The struggle between Adams and Hamilton over appointments did not end here. The Senate defeated a measure to make Adams's son-in-law, William Smith, Brigadier-General, giving the commission instead to William North of New York, one of Hamilton's henchmen. This appointment seems to have surprised Washington, though it did not outrage him so much as some that were made and some that were not made by the Senate Military Committee, all of whom were close to Hamilton.

between Hamilton and Adams at this time might have been due to their different conceptions of the proper mode of defense for the country. Adams stated a few years later:

I have always cried, Ships! Ships! Hamilton's hobby horse was Troops! Troops! With all the vanity and timidity of Cicero, all the debauchery of Marc Anthony and all the ambition of Julius Caesar, his object was the command of fifty thousand men. My object was the defense of my country, and that alone, which I knew could be affected only by a navy.¹⁶

Whether the main emphasis should be put upon the army or the navy in preparing for war during the late 1790's was a matter of more than ordinary significance, and it raises several very interesting questions. Were Hamilton and Adams speaking for definite groups or interests in this country when each supported his favorite arm so strenuously? If the commercial and moneyed interests of the country, who are supposed to have supported Hamilton's views, were primarily concerned about a large army, and if the agricultural branch of the Federalist party, commonly regarded as Adams's chief support, were most interested in a strong navy, it would appear that each acted in a way contrary to what might have been expected. The merchants and the financial interests would be concerned in the insuring of vessels and would desire an uninterrupted flow of commerce. One might expect these men to want our commerce to have the protection of a strong navy. Farmers, on the other hand, might be expected to be more anxious that an army be raised for the protection of the country itself. It seems very probable then that Hamilton and Adams were not spokesmen of particular groups, but that they were expressing their own views. If Hamilton based his policy upon close collaboration with England, he may have thought that we could rely upon the protection of her naval forces. Adams, on the other hand, wished above all that we follow an independent course, as he feared and distrusted England even more than France.¹⁷ To follow such an independent course we needed first of

¹⁶ John Adams to Adrian Van Der Kemp, Quincy, Apr. 25, 1808, PHS.

¹⁷ John Adams to James Lloyd, Quincy, Mar. 29, 1815: "For full forty years, three points have been settled in my mind after full deliberation.

"1. That neutrality in the wars of Europe is our truest policy; and to preserve this, alliances ought to be avoided as much and as long as possible. But if we should be driven to the necessity of an alliance,

"2. Then France is our natural ally; and,

"3. That Great Britain is the last power, to which we should, in any, the last extremity, resort for any alliance, political or military.

"These three propositions appear to me as clear, as obvious, and as demon-

all a navy; and events proved that Adams's judgment was superior to that of Hamilton, who wanted a large army, and that of Jefferson, who wanted neither.

Hamilton and Adams had differed on the best way to wage war. They differed even more intensely when Adams attempted to make peace. In February, 1799, Adams decided that the French government was showing "a disposition to do us justice," and he announced that he was accrediting William Vans Murray, then at the Hague, as a minister to treat with France whenever that government should give assurances that our minister would be properly received. Perhaps no President ever made an announcement which had such violent political repercussions. Hamilton's wing of the party, which included the most important members of Adams's Cabinet and the principal Federalist leaders in the Senate, had committed themselves entirely to a military program. They based all their calculations, both in foreign and domestic affairs, on the presumption that we should soon be fighting France. Adams's appointment of Murray, giving assurance that negotiations with France were possible and that war with her was not inevitable, took the ground from under the feet of this group and split the Federalist party. The appointment of Murray was an act of political suicide for Adams, but the logical culmination of his views as to our best policy and his conception of the duties of his office.

Whatever the state of feeling between the moderate and High-Federalists, the issue upon which they publicly broke was not a petty or personal one. The question whether or not we should join England in a war upon France at a time when France was willing to make amends for her previous conduct, called for one of the most important decisions of the early years of our government. An alliance with England and a war against France and Spain offered a most attractive opportunity for an imperialistic adventure. Increased trade with the West Indies and Latin America, perhaps a joint commercial monopoly with England of this trade, could be offered as an inducement to the seaboard, while expansion into Florida,

strable as any political principles whatever, and almost as any proposition in Euclid.

"Miranda's plot, Mr. Pitt's plot, and Mr. Hamilton's plot (if, indeed, he had any hand in it), was in direct opposition to my system, and wholly subversive of it. On the one hand, I was determined not to submit to the insolence and injuries of the French government; on the other, to enter into no alliance with Great Britain, nor any kind of connection that might embarrass us in making peace with France, whenever her government should come to her senses and show a disposition to do us justice." Adams, *Works*, X, 147.

Louisiana, and perhaps Mexico could be offered to the frontier. All these possibilities and perhaps others were in the mind of Fisher Ames, sage and spokesman for Massachusetts Federalists after he retired from Congress in 1797, when he said in July, 1798, "My faith is we were born for high destinies."¹⁸ The adjoining Spanish possessions already exercised a very strong attraction, and if we were to follow the customary pattern of intrigue, war, and annexation, we should never have a better opportunity to do so. There was at that time no reason to suppose that we should be able to expand into them as peacefully as we finally did for almost fifty years.

Adams defended preparation for war and the actual hostilities with France, as far as both went, by claiming that the course he followed was the mean between the extremes urged by French and English sympathizers, and the only truly national course possible under the circumstances. By his determination to make peace with France at the first opportunity and to steer this country in the course of true neutrality for as long a time as possible, he has cleared himself of any suspicion of wishing to make the sort of opportunity for aggression abroad and for military control at home which the High-Federalists saw in a war with France. He showed, further, a conception of the national destiny which was as indigenous and American as that of the Republicans. It was Adams's tragedy that he did not know how to implement this view, to find a basis for it in popular support. Jefferson's conception of the true destiny of the country was the more well-rounded in that he had not only the theory of government, but the ability to grasp the implications of public opinion and to give it shape in policy which was necessary to support his conception. Adams's lack of these assets made his break with his party only the more spectacular. No issue between the Jeffersonians and the Federalists was more momentous than the subject of this quarrel between the two wings of the Federalist party.

The High-Federalist leaders tried by every means to make Adams give up the appointment of an envoy to France. He compromised to the extent of sending a mission of three men to be nominated in the place of Murray by the Senate, and the Federalist leaders then hampered and delayed the departure of this mission as long as possible.¹⁹ It did not start until October, 1799, and Pickering's letters to Ellsworth, head of the mission, before

¹⁸ Ames to Pickering, Dedham, Jul. 10, 1798, Seth Ames, ed., *The Works of Fisher Ames*, 2 vols. (Boston, 1854), I, 235.

¹⁹ See Adams, *Works*, IX, 299.

the departure seem to have been calculated to dissuade him from going.²⁰

Once the mission was on its way, the split in the Federalist party became irrevocable, and in November and December the High-Federalists tried to form a ticket which would exclude Adams.²¹ They learned that he must be allowed to run again, as New England, and particularly Massachusetts,²² would not submit to having him dropped. The bitterness between the two factions increased when, in the spring of 1800, Adams forced McHenry and Pickering to resign from the Cabinet. In the party caucus held in June, 1800, just as the Congressmen were starting home, it was agreed to support Adams and C. C. Pinckney equally; but in the following months the Hamilton faction devoted themselves to a strategic attempt to get Federalist electors chosen, and to get enough of these electors to drop Adams to make Pinckney President in his place.

In October of 1800 appeared Hamilton's famous pamphlet against Adams—the climax of the growing struggle between the two wings of the Federalist party, which had become so bitter toward each other that some members of each preferred the election of Jefferson to that of their foe within the party. Under these circumstances the publication of Hamilton's pamphlet leaves unanswered the question of whether or not Hamilton intended it to defeat Adams. Thus the quarrel between the two men was not only important in determining what the contending forces should be in the election of 1800; it may quite possibly have given a decisive turn to the struggle itself.

For several reasons no study of John Adams's political influence in the 1790's could be complete without some treatment of his political theories. As the Washington legend had a separate existence of its own, so Adams's theories had a career apart from, but not without effect upon, that of their author. There the resemblance ceases, for while the Washington legend made whatever Washington did or whatever could be connected with his

²⁰ Pickering to Ellsworth, Sept. 13, 1799, Pickering Papers, XII, 69, MHS; Oct. 4, 1799, *ibid.*, 152; Oct. 22, 1799, *ibid.*, 259.

²¹ Samuel Eliot Morison, *The Life and Letters of Harrison Gray Otis, Federalist, 1765-1848*, 2 vols. (Boston and New York, 1913), I, 185.

²² For Adams's strength in Massachusetts, see Higginson to Pickering, Boston, Jan. 12, 1800: "In the present State of things, no man would be appointed an Elector in this State, who would not throw away his Vote, or do anything else, which shall be thought necessary to secure Mr. Adams; and on that Subject be governed by the opinion of himself or his friends." Letters of Stephen Higginson, 1783-1804, American Historical Association (hereafter, AHA), *Report for 1896*, I, 834.

name seem wise and just, the popular conception of Adams's theories caused people to put the worst possible construction upon much that was done during his Administration. Another reason for concern with his theories is that they go far toward explaining his conduct, with its apparent shifts and inconsistencies; for Adams seems to have followed his theories instead of letting them be framed by his experience.

The first phase of Adams's thought,²³ lasting until 1783, was a highly practical one in which he gave much advice on the formulation of state governments, always warning against the unicameral principle. This was, nonetheless, the most radical period of his thought. It was characterized by his belief in the necessity of annual elections; and its larger purpose was to repel the encroachments of the King and Parliament, both of whom he believed to have ignored the true principle of the British Constitution.²⁴

He showed at this time an attitude toward England which he was to retain the rest of his life. It was made up of two violently contrasting extremes. When he contemplated her institutions, "purged of their corruptions," as he usually stipulated, he was the political theorist standing in reverence before a unique creation. Neither Burke nor Blackstone had a deeper feeling for the slow evolution and organic growth of customs and precedents which had come to form a symmetrical whole. But when Britain was represented in Adams's mind, not by her ancient constitutions, but by the usual practices and policies of her eighteenth-century oligarchy, he was again a rebellious Boston colonial, not so different in attitude from his relative Samuel Adams. The attitude toward England of the men of this generation is very revealing. Hamilton thought that it was the "corruptions" of the British government which made it work; Adams, that purged of these corruptions the British government would be the best possible one; and Jefferson, that the true principles of the British Constitu-

²³ The comments on Adams's political theories have been based primarily on Adams's own comments upon them in his letters, though I have consulted Correa Moylan Walsh, *The Political Science of John Adams* (New York and London, 1915), and have carefully read Manning J. Dauer's thesis, "The Basis of the Support for John Adams in the Federalist Party" [*Editor's note*: published (Baltimore, 1953) as *The Adams Federalists*.] The latter presents Adams's ideas very concisely, and inasmuch as it is a study of more than his political ideas, it seems to be more solidly based than Walsh's work. The treatment given Adams's political theories in the present study is the conventional one; my main concern has been with the purpose that lay behind his political writings and the relation between these writings and his conduct.

²⁴ ". . . the King and Parliament committed high treason and rebellion against America," Adams, *Works*, X, 394.

tion had become so obscured and perverted that we were likely to be contaminated rather than guided by modeling ourselves upon it.²⁵

All of his life Adams thought that the only good governments were mixed ones, that excellence in government resulted from a balance of the monarchical, the aristocratic, and the democratic principle. He always rallied to the defense of whichever of these principles he thought to be most in danger at the time. The second phase of his thought, which occupied him from 1783 to 1796, was marked by a defense of the aristocratic principle in government. In the last period, from 1796 on, he was the champion of the executive or monarchical element of the government against an aristocratic faction.

If we should confine ourselves strictly to the writings of his second period, Adams might seem the perfect spokesman for Federalism, particularly if we regard that movement as an effort to keep political control of the new government for the classes who had been dominant in the various colonies before the Revolution. It was his writings of this second period, from 1783 to 1796, which were so effectively used against him later. He never ceased to protest, however, against the construction put upon them; and in 1813 he wrote to Jefferson, "Now, I will forfeit my life, if you can find one sentiment in my Defence of the Constitution, or the Discourses on Davila, which, by a fair construction can favor the introduction of hereditary monarchy or aristocracy into America."²⁶

That Adams wished to introduce monarchy into the United States was a common charge against him during the 1790's; and although the effects of this charge were not dependent upon its accuracy, it is interesting to inquire how much basis there was for it. Much of the feeling against his writings might be explained by his choice of terms. He often spoke of the monarchical and executive principles interchangeably, and because of this tendency he might easily pass for a confirmed monarchist among the literal-minded or those disposed to turn his words against him. On the other hand, as Manning J. Dauer points out, "To him democracy was always a system in which the people choose representatives to an all-powerful unicameral legislature. This he never ceased to condemn."²⁷ It should be noted that this is only a somewhat more emphatic statement of a view he

²⁵ Jefferson to Rush, Monticello, Jan. 16, 1811, Andrew A. Lipscomb and Albert E. Bergh, eds., *The Writings of Thomas Jefferson*, 20 vols. (Washington, 1903), XIII, 3-4. (Hereafter, Lipscomb and Bergh, *Jefferson's Writings*.)

²⁶ Adams to Jefferson, Quincy, Jul. 13, 1813, Adams, *Works*, X, 54.

²⁷ Dauer, *The Adams Federalists*, 50.

had held in his early, radical phase, from which he was supposed to have apostatized. Adams was sometimes more explicit and, when he was condemning this form, spoke of it as a "simple democracy."²⁸ Incidentally, a good many of the condemnations of democracy of this period arise from the fact that the men of the time used the term more precisely than we do now. They spoke of democracy as a form of government; we think of it as a spirit in which government should operate. Had they thought of it as an attitude of mind based upon self-discipline and characterized by respect for the rights and views of others, most of the conservatives of the Revolutionary generation would have felt differently toward it. They might have regarded talk of "democratic" government as visionary and utopian, but very few of them would have treated it with the contempt they so frequently show for the term as they understood it. The terminology which most conservatives of the period employed when they spoke of matters of government tends to conceal their thought from us, and that of Adams was particularly liable to misconstruction. Also, it may have been some of Adams's conversations or his speeches in the Senate upon which the charges that he was not friendly to republican government principally rested, for he was likely to say anything in the heat of the moment.

As far as Adams's political future was concerned, it was the sense in which his writings were understood that was important; but to approach the theories themselves properly, we have to understand Adams's purpose in expressing them. He believed that his mission was to reveal the true principles of government in an age of political experiment. Shays' Rebellion, the French Revolution, and other catastrophes foreseen by him could, he thought, have been or be averted if people would only apply certain principles of government which he believed almost as demonstrable as the propositions of Euclid. One of his accounts of the way in which he came to write the works of his second period may be found in a letter to Jefferson written in 1813:

. . . when Lafayette harangued you, and me, and John Quincy Adams, through a whole evening, in your hotel in the *Cul de Sac*, at Paris, and developed the plans now in operation to reform France, though I was silent as you was, I then thought I could say something new to him. In plain truth, I was astonished at the grossness of his ignorance of government and history, as I had been for years before, at that of Turgot, Rochefoucauld, Condorcet, and Franklin. This

²⁸ See below, p. 424.

gross ideology of them all first suggested to me the thought and inclination, which I afterwards executed in London, of writing something upon aristocracy. I was restrained for years by many painful considerations. . . . But, when the French assembly of notables met, and I saw that Turgot's "government in one centre, and that centre the nation," a sentence as mysterious or as contradictory as the Athanasian creed, was about to take place; and when I saw that Shays's rebellion was breaking out in Massachusetts; and when I saw that even my obscure name was often quoted in France as an advocate for simple democracy; when I saw that the sympathies in America had caught the French flame, I was determined to wash my own hands as clear as I could of all this foulness. I had then strong forebodings that I was sacrificing all the emoluments of this life; and so it has happened, but not in so great a degree as I apprehended.

In truth, my "Defence of the Constitutions" and "Discourses on Davila," were the cause of that immense unpopularity which fell like the tower of Siloam upon me. Your steady defence of democratical principles, and your invariable favorable opinion of the French revolution, laid the foundation of your unbounded popularity.²⁹

Adams always viewed the outcome of the French Revolution, which issued first in a dictatorship and then in reaction—or the renewal of the Inquisition, as he called Metternich's system—as a justification for his warnings against it and as evidence of the soundness of his views. He prided himself on having opposed the French Revolution from the very beginning, and a fair specimen of Adams's view of his importance in the intellectual history of the late eighteenth century may be found in his own estimate of the influence of his writings:

When David Hartley returned from Paris to London in 1783, after the Signature of the definitive Treaty of peace with the United States, he went home full of ideas and hopes of a great revolution approaching in France in favor of Liberty and the Rights of Mankind; Hartley introduced me to Fox and Burke, who were his Patrons to whom he was an humble friend and a great admirer, especially Burke of whom he was the most perfect Idolater I ever knew. Burke, Fox and Hartley, with all others of their party were warm enthusiasts for the French Revolution, from 1783 to 1786. When the first volume of my Defence, was printed in 1786, I gave an elegant copy of it to Hartley and the other two

²⁹ Adams to Jefferson, Quincy, Jul. 13, 1813, Adams, *Works*, X, 53-4. See also Adams to Dr. Price, New York, May 20, 1789, *ibid.*, IX, 558-59, and Adams to Adrian Van Der Kemp, Jan. 30, 1800, PHS, for substantially the same account of his reasons for writing.

volumes as they came out. Hartley lent them to Burke; and they gave him his first suspicions and diffidence in the French Revolution. They produced an entire change in his views and sentiments; for the Organization of a free Government was a subject at that time as little studied by Burke, Fox, Hartley, Price and Jebb as by Turgot, Rochefoucault, Condorcet, and Franklin. After reading those volumes, a Gentleman in company with Burke, speaking of General Washington said he was "the greatest name in the world." Burke answered him "I thought so too, till I knew John Adams."⁸⁰

Viewing the revolutionary movement in its world setting from 1789 on, we see that England, the country which took the lead in combating it, was also the one that produced both the classic attack upon it and the best known defense of it. Burke's *Reflections on the French Revolution*⁸¹ and Thomas Paine's *Rights of Man*⁸² came to symbolize the two sides of the struggle everywhere. Neither was the most defensible statement that could have been made of its author's position; but the declamation, the sweeping assumptions, and the disregard for logic which both exhibit reflected and stimulated the feeling of the period. Close reasoning would have had little appeal at that time. If Adams's writings really had the effect upon Burke which the preceding letter implies, they had a wider popular influence, even though indirect, than has been hitherto recognized.

It was upon the spread of the battle between Paine and Burke to this country that Adams's writings first became a matter for general controversy here. Burke was having a tremendous vogue, and Adams's *Discourses on Davila* had been running in installments in Fenno's *Gazette of the United States*, when in 1791 the first copy of Paine's *Rights of Man* appeared in Philadelphia.⁸³ The book had been sent over from England for John Beckley, who loaned it to Jefferson. Before the latter had finished it, Beckley requested that he give it to Smith, an editor who was to republish it. Jefferson, who did not know Smith, sent a note apologizing for its delay and "... added, *currente calamo*, that I was pleased to find it was to be reprinted here, that something was at length to be publicly said against the political heresies which had of late sprung up among us, not

⁸⁰ Adams to Van Der Kemp, Quincy, Jul. 5, 1814, PHS.

⁸¹ Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the French Revolution and Other Essays* (London and New York, 1910).

⁸² Thomas Paine, "The Rights of Man," Moncure Daniel Conway, ed., *The Writings of Thomas Paine*, 4 vols. (New York and London, 1894-1906), II.

⁸³ Claude G. Bowers, *Jefferson and Hamilton* (Boston and New York, 1930), 82-3.

doubting but that our citizens would rally again round the standard of Common Sense.”³⁴ The note, with Jefferson’s name and official title of Secretary of State, was printed with the book.

With the publication of *The Rights of Man* in Philadelphia, under the apparent auspices of Jefferson, the battle of opinion opened in earnest in this country. John Quincy Adams, as *Publicola*, condemned Paine and Jefferson in the *Columbian Centinel* in Boston, and the authorship of these articles was generally ascribed to his father. Jefferson wrote to John Adams that he had had no idea that his note to Smith would be published, and disclaimed any intention of attacking him publicly.³⁵ Although Jefferson did not intend that his note be published and John Adams did not write the *Publicola* papers, these facts did not prevent the public from viewing the two men as the American equivalents of Paine and Burke.

Adams, while he sacrificed much popular favor, did not win the approval of the Federalist leaders by his part in this controversy. Hamilton was irritated that he had openly championed opinions which were so contrary to the general current of the time.³⁶ It probably seemed to him that Adams’s contentions for the shadow of power would endanger his pursuit of its substance. Debate upon these abstract principles would only turn public opinion against Adams and those generally associated with him in the public mind. Hamilton, without revealing to the public his own views of what government should be, wished to settle each problem as it arose, in the way which would advance his construction of the Constitution and his scheme of government. He would get whatever popular support was necessary to do so by maintaining that his solution of the specific problem was essential for the maintenance of the government which had been set up and that the only alternative to his plan was the chaos of the Confederacy. He would thus be able to attack his opponents as enemies of the new government. In making his downright statements publicly, Adams exposed himself and his Administration as targets to be shot at. Hamilton, with no avowed purpose apparently except the support of the new government, had previously put his adversaries on the defen-

³⁴ Jefferson to Madison, Philadelphia, May 9, 1791, Paul Leicester Ford, ed., *The Works of Thomas Jefferson*, 12 vols. (New York, 1904), VI, 258. (Hereafter, Ford, *Jefferson’s Works*.)

³⁵ Jefferson to Adams, Philadelphia, Jul. 17, 1791, *ibid.*, 282-85.

³⁶ Jefferson to Monroe, Philadelphia, Jul. 10, 1791. “Colo Hamilton, avowing that he never made a secret of his principles yet taxes the imprudence of Mr. Adams in having stirred the question and agrees that ‘his business is done.’” *Ibid.*, 281

sive. Thus Adams's part in the controversy was dangerous to Hamilton's plans at this time when the Bank had not yet been established. The dangers to his economic program of the debate over Adams's political theories appeared in such items as the one signed *Republican* in the *Independent Chronicle* of Boston, which asked if speculators were to form our nobility. "If so 'Dukes, Lords and Earls will swarm like insects gendered by the sun,' and the worn-out soldier who had been tricked out of his paper would have the satisfaction of 'bowing most submissively to their lordships while seated in their carriages.'"³⁷ Adams's insistence upon general political principles which were obnoxious might very well lead to public discussion of the final effect upon our form of government of the economic policies being pursued. Had Adams's theories been widely disseminated before Hamilton's policies had been accepted and established, the latter would have been vulnerable to all attacks against the former.

As it was, once Hamilton's policies were established, Adams's well-known views served as the scapegoat, and the tide of popular resentment which later rose against his Administration resulted precisely from this situation. No one could have made popular the Alien and Sedition laws, the direct tax, and an army under Alexander Hamilton; but it is only when such policies as these could be represented as the logical outcome of the long-held views and sinister purposes of the chief executive that they put such effective weapons into the hands of the opposition as were presented to Jefferson and his followers for the campaign of 1800.

Until Adams broke with the High-Federalists, the latter were free to put through whatever legislation they chose in the knowledge that the popular resentment it aroused fell largely on a man that they would be glad to see disappear from public life. To the extent that the public contrasted Adams's Administration unfavorably with that of Washington, Hamilton's hand was, for the moment, strengthened. The Republicans, not daring in some cases to attack too openly measures which Washington was supposed to have favored, did their part in contrasting the two Administrations, and during much of his Presidency Adams was between two fires.

The whole story of the positions into which Adams was put as President by Hamilton's policies and of his conflicts with the Cabinet is only now becoming apparent, but it seems certain that it was these experiences which were responsible for the last phase of his political thought, in which

³⁷ As quoted in Bowers, *Jefferson and Hamilton*, 85.

he insisted upon the necessity for an independent executive who might check the aristocracy as represented by the Cabinet and the Senate. Adams had been in office only a few months when within the space of five days he wrote to two of his Cabinet members, Wolcott and Pickering,³⁸ warning them of the dangers of a divided executive. To the former, Secretary of the Treasury, he wrote in October, 1797:

The organization of the stamp tax suggests a vexation to me. The bill was worth money, and money was so much wanted for the public service, that I would not put it at risk; otherwise I would have negated that bill; not from personal feelings, for I care not a farthing for all the personal power in the world. but the office of the secretary of the treasury is, in that bill, premeditatedly set up as rival to that of the President. . . .³⁹

Adams warned that this course would be followed "till we will have a quintuple or a centuple executive directory. . . ." ⁴⁰

If, as Sedgwick stated of Adams, his "pride is in never departing from principle,"⁴¹ and if Adams from the beginning of his Presidency was forced to put up with what he regarded as the greatest abomination in government, a divided executive, why did he accept this situation until February, 1799? The answer is a complicated one. Adams was passing from one phase of his political thought to another, and that of the 1780's and early 1790's, marked by his defense of the *aristoi*, was perhaps the most congenial of all to him. For a time he was pulled in two directions; for the Republicans, French and American, irritated him much of the time even more than did the Hamilton wing of his own party. Practical considerations joined with these other factors to urge that he agree with the leaders of his party on all save the most important issues. Ultimately he did not shrink from the ordeal that awaits a President of the United States who does not have the support of his own party, but he did delay as long as possible that period in which his Administration would be disorganized and helpless.

Had he broken with the High-Federalists before the XYZ Affair put him in temporary agreement with the war party, and before the Alien

³⁸ Adams to Pickering, East Chester, Oct. 31, 1797, Adams, *Works*, VIII, 560.

³⁹ Adams to Wolcott, East Chester, Oct. 20, 1797, *ibid.*, 554-55.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹ Sedgwick to Henry Van Schaack, Philadelphia, Feb. 22, 1798, Sedgwick Papers, MHS. Sedgwick was explaining why Adams would not attend the birthday ball given in honor of Washington.

and Sedition laws and the Land Tax gave the Republicans issues with a wide national appeal, Adams and Jefferson would probably have joined forces against Hamilton. Those who regard this as impossible, who doubt that there could have been a union between the moderate Federalists and the Republicans, should remember the extent of this union after 1800, the support which both Adams and John Quincy Adams gave Jefferson after 1803-04, and the fact that the ever-present possibility of a coalition between the two was the High-Federalist nightmare from 1797 on.⁴² Thus it would appear that one of the most important phases in the process of party alignment in the late 1790's was the struggle taking place in Adams's mind as to how far he would go with the High-Federalists. This struggle, even though we know too little about it, is as important a part of the story of party formation as anything in the plans or views of Jefferson and Hamilton. That Adams did not think of his decision in the light of its effect upon politics, that he was perhaps the one important man of his time who did "rise above party" on a crucial issue, does not lessen the importance of his conduct for the formation of parties.

We can best understand Adams's conduct at this time by considering his writings. That he wished to avert popular uprisings like the French Revolution and Shays' Rebellion does not mean that he possessed the kind of conservatism that was popularly attributed to him. If we study the purpose behind his writings, it is obvious that he would not go to all lengths with any group or interest. As we emphasize his purpose in writing, rather than his specific suggestions, his true position in the Revolutionary epoch becomes clear.

The picture of John Adams trying to avert Shays' Rebellion and the French Revolution by political writings, no matter what their merit, is one which seemed as ridiculous to those who wished to put down all such movements by any means as to those who wished to see them succeed and spread. However, when we remember Adams's ideal of balance and equilibrium as necessary to the well-ordered state, we see that he was addressing himself to those fundamental problems of society which still remain after an uprising has been crushed or a revolution successfully carried through. We may not agree with his means of realizing the end; but only

⁴² Sedgwick to King, Stockbridge, Mar. 12, 1797, *ibid.* In this letter Sedgwick claims that Jefferson's letter to Madison, withdrawing his name from competition with Adams in case of a tie, was part of a plot to win Adams away from the Federalists.

those who, doubting that there are "natural" differences among men, believe in the practicability of the classless society, can logically deny the desirability of that balance, that precarious harmony between opposing groups and conflicting interests which Adams so earnestly sought. If we consider either his physical appearance or many aspects of his temperament, John Adams might seem as unlikely a vessel for the spirit of balance, order, and moderation as could be found, but these things he represented in the intellectual sphere as surely as Washington at his best did in more obvious ways. Usually frustrated and frequently ludicrous in the political world of management and intrigue, there is no reason to deny Adams the place he felt to be his on the intellectual and moral plane.

II. THOMAS JEFFERSON

Adams was hampered throughout his term by opposition both within and outside his party; and Hamilton, although he bent the twig and inclined the tree as no other single person has done, regarded his work as a mere beginning. A popular movement for which each had some measure of contempt interrupted the public services of both. This popular movement brought its own handicaps and limitations; it did not leave the man it brought to power so free to act as is generally assumed. Yet the fact remains that Jefferson did have opportunities for political self-realization greater than those of most Presidents, and that his fundamental aims and purposes have given rise to more controversies than those of any other of our great figures.

To many, there seems to be a fundamental contradiction between the aims which Jefferson and his party professed while in opposition and those which they pursued during his Presidency. This alleged contradiction serves as the basis for the charges by his detractors that Jefferson was an ambitious, unscrupulous demagogue; and even such an admirer as Herbert Agar states that "Jefferson by his failure to define his own intentions, prevented himself from winning a trial for his system."⁴³ Many who are on the whole favorably disposed toward him seem to have concluded that he was temperamentally unfitted for the executive position, and so made little attempt to defend his conduct while in office.⁴⁴ In this connection it is instructive to remember Jefferson's statement, made while Washington was President, that no man would ever carry from that office

⁴³ Herbert Agar, *The People's Choice* (Boston and New York, 1932), 55.

⁴⁴ Dumas Malone on Jefferson, Allen Johnson and Dumas Malone, eds., *Dictionary of American Biography* (New York, 1928-36). Hereafter, DAB.

the reputation he brought to it. This proved to be an accurate prophecy for Washington, Adams, Jefferson himself, and Madison. Yet, whatever the difficulties of the office, whatever may have been Jefferson's success or failure in it, the question remains whether or not he sought the same ends while in office that he appeared to seek in opposition.

Years after his retirement he continued to speak of "the Revolution of 1800," and the words would imply that he himself thought his election and Administration of some fundamental importance. Anyone, therefore, who deals with Jefferson's career as a whole must decide whether he failed to define his intentions or we have failed to understand them. Did he so far fail to meet the situation with which he was confronted as not to give his system a fair trial, or did he merely fail to solve for us, before they arose, the problems with which a representative government is constantly faced? We should keep these questions in mind while following the development of his political purposes during the years when the movement he was to lead was taking shape.

In the early 1790's Hamilton led a group of powerful men who knew precisely what they wanted and felt sure they could obtain it under the new government. The policies which they pursued seemed to Madison, Jefferson, and many others to introduce into this country the worst evils from which England suffered in a period when its government was in one of its most reactionary phases and its society highly stratified, and to threaten the republican principles which Jefferson and his colleagues believed should guide our development. Thus in the first phases of the party conflict we see a group which knew what it wanted and one which knew only what it did not want. What Jefferson did not want was a European society with its castes and artificial distinctions, its wars and hardships which made every man "either hammer or anvil." The only alternative to this, on a new continent peopled by European immigrants, was a type of society which had not existed before. Insofar as his goal was new, it was of necessity vague when compared with the concreteness of Hamilton's. Definition means limitation, and Jefferson's limitless hopes for the future of mankind are no irrefutable evidence of either the philosophical anarchy or the intellectual confusion with which he is sometimes charged. He saw a new continent of boundless resources and possibilities; he saw science opening new vistas in every direction; and he felt himself one with a new, free race of men who produced what they consumed and to whom servility and oppression were strangers. This new world, he thought, did not need to repeat the errors of the old, but he feared that it would if we

were connected too closely with any European country or if we imitated their principles of government. He would probably have said that neither he nor anyone else should try to shape the future of the country. If he could do something to level the immediate barriers, to keep open and widen the path, he would have realized his purposes. Jefferson's chief intention for this country in the 1790's was the natural, unhampered development of a free people under a genuinely representative government, and he did not fail to define his intention repeatedly. His view was like that of Franklin, who, when asked what the newly invented balloon was good for, asked in return what a newborn baby was good for.⁴⁵

Jefferson shared the basic assumption of the Enlightenment, that the great advances which science had made in the preceding century and a half were only the beginnings, and that they would better man's condition in other realms as well as in the physical. Whatever benefits science had in store which might affect society and improve human relations would, he thought, be long obstructed by the weight of tradition and inertia in Europe; but he was hopeful that here, where nothing had set and hardened, we might yet mold our institutions by reason. Conservative in some respects, Jefferson was a true revolutionär in his belief that human nature is molded by its circumstances and will reflect improvements in its conditions. Human nature is thus, man has always behaved so: these were not for him magic formulae, and the past not a prison from which escape was impossible. Our national independence, our isolation from Europe, which he would have fostered in every respect except the exchange of ideas and opinions, and the conditions and capacities of our people, which he thought favorable to the creation of a new type of society—these were to Jefferson the auspicious circumstances in which the new spirit was to work. Government might maintain or further these conditions by an abnegation of all save its minimum functions. It could do no more. The only real advances could come from science, education, philosophy, the means by which man enriches and improves himself. The temper of Jefferson's political thought is being constantly misrepresented by those who emphasize the negative role which he assigned to government, without further pointing out the forces upon which he would have depended for order and discipline in society.

Jefferson's interest in science was misunderstood by many in his own

⁴⁵ Carl Van Doren, *Benjamin Franklin* (New York, 1938), 700.

time, and its full implications still elude us. While specific achievements of his in mathematics, architecture, and invention are evidence of an amazing versatility, they are even more startling as evidence of unity and direction of purpose. His lifelong concern with science was not primarily due to breadth of interest; it was rather the measure of his centrality and integration. Jefferson was not the jack-of-all-trades or the incessant dabbler he is so often pictured as being; he was, rather, an exponent of the application of reason and common sense to problems of every sort. He thought of science as a new liberating force which had come into the world; and it was upon the revelations of science, with its attacks upon supernatural sanctions and hoary superstitions, that he based his view of government and society. His two basic concerns, the advancement of learning and the practice of good government, were devoted to the same end, to benefit mankind. They do not show any dual purpose; the latter was simply an effort to apply, in the most difficult and important field of all, the conclusions which he drew from the former.

Two letters, one written from France in 1789, the other ten days before he died, show the way in which interests usually regarded as diverse were linked together in Jefferson's mind. In the letter to President Willard of Harvard, accepting the degree of Doctor of Laws which that university had conferred upon him, Jefferson indicated the great opportunities for science in the United States, and concluded his letter:

It is for such institutions as that over which you preside so worthily, sir, to do justice to our country, its productions and its genius. It is the work to which the young men, whom you are forming, should lay their hands. We have spent the prime of our lives in procuring them the precious blessing of liberty. Let them spend theirs in showing that it is the great parent of science and of virtue; and that a nation will be great in both, always in proportion as it is free.⁴⁶

Thirty-seven years later, in the last letter of his life, he wrote:

All eyes are opened, or opening, to the rights of man. The general spread of the light of science has already laid open to every view the palpable truth, that the mass of mankind has not been born with saddles on their backs, nor a favored few booted and spurred, ready to ride them legitimately, by the grace of God.⁴⁷

⁴⁶ Jefferson to President Willard of Harvard, Mar. 24, 1789, Henry Stephens Randall, *The Life of Thomas Jefferson*, 3 vols. (New York, 1858), I, 537-38.

⁴⁷ Jefferson to Roger C. Weightman, Jun. 24, 1826, Lipscomb and Bergh, *Jefferson's Writings*, XVI, 182.

From these, as well as from many other quotations, we see that Jefferson thought of freedom as the necessary condition for intellectual and moral growth and of liberty as the true soil of science, which in turn revealed and strengthened the foundations of representative government. If it be said that science does not necessarily do so and that Jefferson's principles of government have no more validity than the optimistic eighteenth-century assumptions on which they rest, we may answer that the attacks on reason and objectivity sometimes made in the name of science, to which our own generation has been exposed, do not necessarily provide us with the last word on the problem.

Jefferson's belief in science and in reason was not the mere ornament of his learning. It was the basis of his life and conduct. Nowhere can we so clearly see the relation of his convictions on these subjects to the rest of his thought as in his view of the issues at stake when the party conflict reached its crisis in the late 1790's and the introduction of a military regime threatened to follow the Alien and Sedition laws. These circumstances confirmed Jefferson in his belief that representative government could not be crushed without a general attack on all fronts against the principles upon which he had depended to form the future of the country. He concluded a letter to one college student who had asked his advice on a course of scientific study:

I join you therefore in regarding as cowardly the idea that the human mind is incapable of further advances. This is precisely the idea which the present despots of the earth are [illegible] and their friends here reechoing & applying especially to religion and politics, that it is not probable that anything better will be discovered than what was known to our fathers. We are to look backwards then and not forwards for the improvement of science & to find it amidst feudal barbarism and the fires of Spitalfields. but thank heaven the American mind is already too much opened to listen to these impostures, and while the art of printing is left to us, science can never be retrograde; what is once acquired of real knowledge can never be lost. to preserve the freedom of the human mind then & freedom of the press, every spirit should be ready to devote itself to martyrdom; for as long as we may think as we will & speak as we think, the condition of mankind will proceed in improvement. the generation which is going off the stage hath deserved well of mankind for the struggles it has made & for having arrested that course of despotism which had overwhelmed the world for thousands & thousands of years. if there seems to

be danger that the ground they have gained will be lost again, that danger comes from the generation of your contemporaries, but that the enthusiasm which characterizes youth should lift its parricide hands against freedom & science would be such a monstrous phenomenon as I cannot find among possible things in this age and country. Your college [William and Mary] at least has shown itself incapable of it, and if the youth of any other place have seemed to rally under other banners it has been from delusions which they will soon dissipate.⁴⁸

To Elbridge Gerry he wrote in January, 1799:

I am for freedom of religion, & against all manoeuvres to bring about a legal ascendancy of one sect over another: for freedom of the press, & against all violations of the constitution to silence by force & not by reason the complaints or criticisms, just or unjust, of our citizens against the conduct of their agents. And I am for encouraging the progress of science in all it's branches; and not for raising a hue and cry against the sacred name of philosophy; for awing the human mind by stories of raw-head & bloody bones to a distrust of its own vision, & to repose implicitly on that of others; to go backwards instead of forwards to look for improvement; to believe that government, religion, morality, & every other science were in the highest perfection in ages of the darkest ignorance, and that nothing can ever be devised more perfect than what was established by our forefathers.⁴⁹

To Priestley he wrote a year later:

The Gothic idea that we are to look backwards instead of forwards for the improvement of the human mind, . . . is worthy of those bigots in religion & government, by whom it has been recommended, & whose purposes it would answer.⁵⁰

Such passages as these demand repetition, because so little weight has been put upon them in connection with the study of Jefferson's party leadership. His basic convictions were at stake in his struggle against the Federalists. His ideas on states' rights and consolidation, on the proper relation between the executive and the legislative powers, by which the last generation of historians explained his part in this struggle, or the

⁴⁸ Jefferson to William Green Mumford, 1799, Jefferson Papers, v. 105, Library of Congress (hereafter, LC).

⁴⁹ Jefferson to Elbridge Gerry, Philadelphia, Jan. 26, 1799, Ford, *Jefferson's Works*, IX, 18-19.

⁵⁰ Jefferson to Joseph Priestley, Jan. 27, 1800, *ibid.*, 104.

economic motivations of his conduct which form more recent explanations, do not go very deep. Jefferson is at his most profound and most consistent in his views on what he called in his First Inaugural Address "the contest of opinion." This phrase introduces us to the most neglected aspect of our history of the 1790's, and points out a division of American society which reflected the intellectual and social movements then convulsing Europe. But Jefferson's fundamental concern with the future of republicanism did not, during the first years of this decade, automatically make him the party leader he is commonly assumed to be.

Jefferson was a late recruit to an opposition already led by James Madison, who first seriously opposed Hamilton's program in January and February, 1790, before Jefferson reached New York after his long absence in France. During the early 1790's, and until the election of 1796, it was Madison who was regarded by many Federalists as their principal adversary; and it was Madison who was far more determined in his opposition to Hamilton and his program than Jefferson. On such issues as Assumption—passed, it should be remembered, only with Jefferson's support—the question of our Neutrality Proclamation of 1793, and Jefferson's suggested overtures to Adams, early in 1797 (which would have tended to obliterate the distinctions between Republicans and moderate Federalists), we find Madison's position one of sharper antagonism to the Federalists than that of Jefferson. Indeed, the Secretary of State's first clear-cut opposition to a Hamiltonian measure came in the form of an opinion, which Washington had requested, on the constitutionality of the bill to establish the Bank of the United States. Jefferson had had no part at all in stirring up the widespread public sentiment against Funding, Assumption, the Excise—measures already agitating opinion before the Bank was even mentioned. If we recall the alarm at Hamilton's measures felt by some of those nearest him, we need not suppose any organized group to have been behind much of the public opposition to them.

A great deal of the work usually attributed to Jefferson in organizing opposition to Federalist measures, both in the House of Representatives and among the general public, should be credited instead to John Beckley, first Clerk of the House of Representatives, 1789 to 1797, and first Librarian of Congress, 1802 to 1807. Beckley, a native of Virginia, had been sent to Eton, where he is supposed to have been a friend of the younger Fox. He returned to this country and attended William and Mary.⁵¹ In 1779

⁵¹ The best source for the facts of Beckley's life is Hugh Blair Grigsby, *The*

he became a member of the first chapter of Phi Beta Kappa to be established, and he took part in its debates upon such questions as "whether a wise state hath any interest nearer at Heart than the Education of the Youth," or "whether Commonwealths or Monarchies are most subject to Seditions and Commotions."⁵² He was enrolled in the Williamsburg Lodge of Masons,⁵³ which had a very close connection with the College at this time⁵⁴ and numbered among its members some who were to become prominent Republicans later.⁵⁵ He was Clerk of the Virginia House of Delegates from 1779 to 1789, and it was apparently with the help of Madison that he became Clerk of the House of Representatives on April 1, 1789.⁵⁶

Early in the second session of the first Congress, Senator Maclay of Pennsylvania noted of the Virginia men, "Buckley [sic] and Madison govern them."⁵⁷ Maclay's earlier note on the intimacy of Beckley with Muhlenberg of Pennsylvania,⁵⁸ the Speaker of the House, would indicate that Beckley was aware of the decisive position which the Pennsylvania delegation would have in the vote on Hamilton's measures and was trying to combine them with the Virginian as a solid nucleus of opposition. He showed throughout the 1790's great awareness of the strategic position of Pennsylvania and later devoted himself to winning that state for the new party. Madison fulfilled one function of an opposition leader in that his attacks on Administration measures were so solidly based that they served to rally support, but he did not undertake to marshal opposition forces in the way in which Sedgwick led those who supported Hamilton's measures. Beckley gradually took over work of this sort and became something of a party whip before the party division had proceeded very far. He endeavored to get members back to the sessions promptly, and by the time

History of the Virginia Federal Convention of 1788, 2 vols. (*The Collections of the Virginia Historical Society* [New Series], IX, X, Richmond, 1890), I, 63, note 74. Hereafter, Grigsby, HVFC.

⁵² "Original Records of the Phi Beta Kappa Society," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 1st ser. (April, 1896), IV, 215 ff.

⁵³ Grigsby, HVFC, I, 18.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, I, 17.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ See letter of Beckley to Madison, New York, Mar. 13, 1798, Madison Papers, LC.

⁵⁷ Edgar Stanton Maclay, ed., *Journal of William Maclay* (New York, 1890), Jan. 31, 1790.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, Jan. 17, 1790.

of the Jay Treaty he was writing letters in an attempt to put pressure through their constituents on representatives he thought shaky. He was one of those most active in organizing throughout the country the public meetings which protested against the Jay Treaty, and he appeared in the election of 1796 to have been the most energetic organizer of public opinion in support of Jefferson. It was Beckley's clerk, Lambert, who accompanied Monroe, Muhlenberg, and Venable to the conference at which Hamilton told of his connection with Mrs. Reynolds, and both Monroe⁵⁹ and Sedgwick⁶⁰ stated that it was Beckley who was responsible for making this affair public, as Sedgwick claimed, through a desire for revenge for having lost his position in the House. He appears to have been ousted from his clerkship because of his activity in the election of 1796.

In addition to organizing the opposition, Beckley may have had some importance in preparing Jefferson for the role he was to play. During the years 1792-93 Beckley was giving Jefferson information about "paper men" and other speculators, and telling him of Hamilton's special favors to them and of the latter's intimate connection with the British.⁶¹ In view of the general belief that it was Jefferson who first began to disseminate such stories and that he engaged Freneau to spread them broadcast, it is interesting to note that Jefferson appears to have been skeptical of what he heard. Of one such piece of information he wrote later, "[Hamilton] was far above that,"⁶² and he noted that Beckley was reliable concerning what he stated of his own knowledge, but that he was too credulous and suspicious.⁶³ How much Jefferson was influenced by news which Beckley brought him, it is impossible to state; but it is significant that during the years 1792-93, as far as we can learn from trustworthy material, there appears to have been considerable influence exerted upon Jefferson in the attempt to bring him into opposition to Hamilton.

If we are to form a theory of the organization of the Republican party upon the reliable evidence which remains, we shall have to abandon the view that opposition to Hamilton's measures in the early 1790's was in

⁵⁹ Monroe to Burr, Albemarle, Virginia, Dec. 1, 1797: "You know I presume that Beckley published the papers in question. By his clerk they were copied for us. It was his clerk who carried a copy to H. who asked as Venable says whether others were privy to the affair. B. told H. that he considered him self under no injunction not to publish the business." PHS.

⁶⁰ Sedgwick to King, Philadelphia, Jun. 24, 1797, Sedgwick Papers, MHS.

⁶¹ "Anas," Ford, *Jefferson's Works*, I, 265, 267, 274-77, 278-79.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 275 n.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 277.

any large degree dependent upon Jefferson. Statements such as that of Herbert Agar, that in "this year [1792] Jefferson and Madison set to work to organize the small farmers of the South and Western borders everywhere,"⁶⁴ or such accounts of the organization of the party as are given by Bowers in his chapter "Jefferson Organizes,"⁶⁵ must be regarded, in the light of extant authentic materials, as resting almost wholly on conjecture.

Bowers lumps together all those who, in their respective states, opposed the Federalists and implies, where he does not state, that their opposition was in some way due to co-operation with Jefferson. He completely disregards chronology and treats men who became active Republicans only in 1798-99 or 1800 as though they had become part of a closely integrated group which had centered around Jefferson from the early 1790's on. The men Bowers mentions by name in this connection are Samuel Adams, John Rutledge, John Taylor, Willie Jones, Charles Jervis, Ben Austin, James Sullivan, Abraham Bishop, John Pintard, Gideon Granger, Ephraim Kirby, John Langdon, Matthew Lyon, Aaron Burr, Nathaniel Macon, Timothy Bloodworthy, James Jackson, John Francis Mercer, and the Clintons and Livingstons. There are comparatively few of these men with whom Jefferson corresponded before 1797-98, and to many of them he never wrote.

Actually, during Washington's first Administration neither Jefferson nor anyone else in the United States conceived of the sort of popular party which he was later to lead.⁶⁶ By 1791 or early 1792, Jefferson began to oppose Hamilton's measures, but it was not until some years after that he assumed leadership of the opposition party. It is not until the summer of 1795, when numerous and highly successful mass meetings were being held from Georgia to New Hampshire to protest against the Jay Treaty, that we can see even the outlines of a popular party on a national basis. No evidence has yet been produced which would connect Jefferson in any way with the organization of these meetings. They represent the first general, organized protest against an Administration measure, and they

⁶⁴ Herbert Agar, *The Pursuit of Happiness: The Story of American Democracy* (Boston, 1938), 39.

⁶⁵ Bowers, *Jefferson and Hamilton*, 140-61.

⁶⁶ "Jefferson looked with favor upon the growth of the Republican party through democratic organization, but he was at a loss to suggest any methods of procedure, since he came from the South, where the township county system which was essential to the county convention, did not exist." George Daniel Luetscher, *Early Political Machinery in the United States* (Philadelphia, 1903), 3.

alarmed Federalist leaders as did few other events of the decade. The Democratic societies appear to have been the only existing opposition organized on a national basis while Jefferson was in the Cabinet, and no connection has ever been traced between them and Jefferson or Madison. In addition to this fact, it must be remembered that Jefferson was not so apprehensive then as he later became over Hamilton's plans and measures. He thought that Hamilton and his followers could not get the support of very many people and that if he ventured upon anything very dangerous to republican government he would, by losing the esteem of Washington, overreach and destroy himself politically. It was apparently the handling of the Whiskey Rebellion, Washington's denunciation of the Democratic societies, the terms of the Jay Treaty, and the means by which it was passed, which led Jefferson to believe that Hamilton would not keep within the bounds laid down by public opinion and that Washington was under his influence as he had not been in earlier years.

Jefferson's part in the setting up of Freneau's newspaper, in which, again, Madison took the lead, is frequently given as evidence of his early participation in party organization. Had Madison been under Jefferson's thumb as he is commonly represented, the question of who engaged Freneau would not be important. As it is, the fact that Madison took the lead in inducing Freneau to establish a newspaper at Philadelphia would indicate both his greater intimacy with Freneau and his more active opposition to the Administration in the early 1790's. Although Jefferson's refusal to dismiss Freneau shows his concern about the sources of information which should be open to the public, it does not show any intention of organizing a political party. Hamilton had, very early in the new government, set up Fenno's *Gazette of the United States* as an organ to further his views,⁶⁷ and he later gave it financial support. Under these circumstances, Jefferson did not see any reason why Freneau should be dismissed. He apparently believed in the early 1790's that if public opinion could only be informed, the measures of the government would reflect the views of its citizens. During the years 1798-1800, when Jefferson had become the leader of a full-fledged opposition party, he still put more emphasis upon newspapers and pamphlets than upon party organization. Although he did not, like Hamilton, write pamphlets and articles for newspapers, he was from an early date conscious of their importance, and by 1793 he was commenting in letters to Madison on political writings in

⁶⁷ See Thomas Denton McCormick on the elder Fenno, DAB.

a fashion which shows that he was analyzing them carefully. In fact, he seems to have been inclined to depend too much on pamphlets and newspapers. He apparently believed that public opinion would cause a change of Administration policies on vital points without there first being a change of the officers of the Administration. Had this been true—had our executive been as sensitive to public opinion as Jefferson thought—parties, the extra-constitutional organs so indispensable for representative government, would have been as unnecessary as they were generally believed to be. It was the great illusion of this period that permanent or “inveterate” parties had no place in the form of government which had been established here, and Jefferson seems to have been a man of his own time in this regard. When we see the way in which the first popular party in the United States came into being, with its roots in Committees of Correspondence like those of Revolutionary times and its forms shaped by the local institutions of the middle states, we shall see that it was a product of adjustment and growth, that it did not spring full-blown from the forehead of Jefferson or of anyone else. The Democratic party cannot be listed among Jefferson’s numerous inventions.

After Jefferson assumed leadership of the party in 1797, his political strategy was less active, his personal influence in the party less important than has been generally assumed. In 1791, while he was Secretary of State, the Spanish, in an effort to strengthen themselves in Florida, offered incentives for Americans to settle there, a policy which they were to follow for decades in other of their territories adjoining ours. Jefferson was convinced that this policy would work to our advantage instead of theirs and that, if it were pursued, it would give us Florida without bloodshed. He therefore suggested to Washington that “we may complain of this seduction of our inhabitants just enough to make them believe we think it very wise policy for them, & confirm them in it.”⁶⁸ Such use of an opponent’s own momentum and precipitancy to destroy him is the true pattern of Jefferson’s strategy in politics as well as in diplomacy. One indication that the Republican party under his leadership actually followed this strategy is to be found in a letter which he wrote Madison shortly after becoming Vice-President. The Federalists were already a war party in 1797, and a year before the XYZ Affair he saw in this fact the opportunity for the Republicans to win popular favor:

⁶⁸ Jefferson to Washington, Philadelphia, Apr. 2, 1791, Ford, *Jefferson’s Works*, VI, 239.

The hope however is that as the anti-Republicans take the high ground of war, and their opponents are for everything moderate that the most moderate of those who come under contrary dispositions will join them.⁶⁹

In politics, such a strategy as this followed directly not only from Jefferson's sense of expediency, but also from his faith in his countrymen and his conception of republican government. He wrote to Caesar Rodney in 1805, "he who would do his country the most good he can must go quietly with the prejudices of the majority until he can lead them into reason."⁷⁰ The leader of an opposition party could have no sounder precept, and it explains the conduct of Jefferson during the 1790's better than anything which has been written about him. The ultimate success of this strategy of Jefferson's was due at least as much to the views and policies of the Federalists as to any qualities of Jefferson. It would not have been so successful against opponents who had more regard for the main body of opinion in the country. But so far as Jefferson's strategy was responsible for the political triumph of his party, the credit is due to his statesmanship rather than to the qualities of management, influence, and intrigue to which it is generally attributed.

The Federalists and the writers who have supported them do not stress this aspect of Jefferson's leadership. To do so would be to focus attention upon those policies and views of government by which the Federalists lost public confidence. Instead, their explanation has laid great stress on Jefferson's personal influence. One of the best contemporary statements of this view was written by William Vans Murray:

I am inclined to *superstition*, but not to faith, and almost believe in the personal agency of the Devil. *His* influence . . . does I am convinced immense mischief in the Senate. I know several genteel men, with about as much of *science* as I have, that is, just enough to make them wonder that any mortal should have more, who I am sure are the dupes of his philosophizing dinners, in which the almost treasonable theories of universal benevolence and philanthropy blend themselves easily with the politics of the day, and are promoted by the satisfactions of the table. These are then connected, as they are unfolded over a generous glass, with the grand and enlightened views of France, with touches upon the brilliance of her *victories*, and her gorgeous strength, and the country gentleman who went well enough inclined to give a vote for plain measures of

⁶⁹ Jefferson to Madison, Philadelphia, May 18, 1797, *ibid.*, VIII, 289-90.

⁷⁰ Jefferson to Caesar Rodney, Washington, Oct. 23, 1805, Gratz Collection, PHS.

defence and preparation, gets his head turned, and comes away a philosopher, and would not for worlds interrupt such grand designs, or longer feel sentiments that evince low prejudice and narrow views.⁷¹

In spite of the blandishments described here, the Senate remained Federalist during the years while Jefferson presided over it. Either he did not convert many senators to his view, or they did not remain converted. As a matter of fact, Jefferson did not have, or did not use, much influence with even the Republican congressmen while he was Vice-President, as was shown by their conduct from April to July, 1798. The XYZ fever was at its highest during those months. Jefferson was convinced that the Federalists wished to get us into war with France and that if they did, they would establish a military despotism in this country. He thought that if war could be put off until the end of the session of Congress which was meeting in the spring of 1798, there would be a good chance of avoiding it. He felt that the Federalists were approaching war step by step through measures which could be defeated if the Republican members in the House would only act together. Instead, however, enough Republicans⁷² went home to leave the Federalists in a majority, the Virginia members

⁷¹ The Hague, Aug. 23, 1797, "Letters of William Vans Murray to John Quincy Adams," AHA, *Report for 1912*, 360.

⁷² Madison to Jefferson, Apr. 29, 1798. ". . . I am sorry to learn that the Naval bill is likely to be carried, and particularly that any of our friends should, by their leaving Congress, be accessory to it." *Letters and Other Writings of James Madison*, 4 vols. (Congress Edition, Philadelphia, 1865), II, 138.

Same to same, May 20, 1798. ". . . It is truly to be deplored that a standing army should be let in upon us by the absence of a few sound votes." *Ibid.*, 142.

Jefferson to Madison, Philadelphia, Mar. 29, 1798. "In fact, the question of war & peace depends now on a toss of cross & pile. If we could but gain this season, we should be saved. . . ." Ford, *Jefferson's Works*, VIII, 392.

The bill for capturing French cruisers had passed the Senate and was tabled in the House. "If these bills pass and place us in a state of war, it may truly be ascribed to the desertion of our members. Of 14 who are absent 10 are from the republican side of the house had even a single one been in his place not a single one of the dangerous measures carried or to be carried would have prevailed, even the provisional army would have been rejected for it was carried but by a majority of 11." Same to same, Philadelphia, May 24, 1798, Jefferson Papers, CIV, LC. Jefferson then gave the names of absentees. His account of Republican behavior at this time as given in 1826 (Ford, *Jefferson's Works*, XII, 445-46) is at variance with the account which he gives in his letters at the time, so I have quoted more than one of the letters. The account given in the letters seems the more trustworthy in every respect. Writing in 1826, he does not give specific dates for the period to which his remarks apply. If in the latter account he refers to some period other than Apr.-Jun., 1798, it of course does not conflict with the account given in the letters quoted here.

being the worst offenders; and it was not the Republicans but the moderate Federalists who saved the country from war with France. Whether Jefferson did not attempt to rally the Republicans, or they disregarded his efforts, there is no way of knowing, but his failure to influence them on a point which he felt to be of such vital importance as this one should make us question the legend of his personal influence.

Jefferson's correspondence has been generally regarded as a great source of strength for the new party. Some writers represent him as having been almost as bewitching through his pen, at several hundred miles' distance, as Murray pictures him across his own table. Yet the political conversion of not a single important political figure can be traced to his correspondence with Jefferson; and outside Virginia, Jefferson does not appear to have had any success in his efforts to get various men, some of them stout Republicans, to take the field against the Federalists. Many of Jefferson's letters, particularly to South Carolinians, suggest that he was willing to use his personal relationships for political purposes; but Allen Jones of North Carolina, and the various Pinckneys and Rutledges, and others to whom he wrote his most persuasive letters, all remained in, or went over to, the Federalist party.⁷³ If there were anything which should be condemned in the writing of such letters, Jefferson could not be defended against it, for he unquestionably sought to use his personal influence for political purposes. To understand party growth in this period, however, one must realize that most of Jefferson's efforts in this direction failed. As far as we can tell now, those that he tried hardest to influence went their own way politically; those who were nearest him politically were men who happened to be so because of their own views on issues as they arose.

We cannot form a final estimate of Jefferson's personal influence upon the men he knew solely on the basis of what remains of his correspondence or from the failure of Republican congressmen to act together in the spring of 1798; but such evidence as we have does justify us in questioning

⁷³ An example from a letter of this type is Jefferson's to Edward Rutledge, Aug. 25, 1791. He had been writing of the evils of speculation and concluded, "Would to God, yourself General Pinckney and Major Pinckney, would come forward and aid us with your efforts. You are all known, respected, wished for; but you refuse yourselves to everything. What is to become of us, my dear friend, if the vine and fig tree withdraw, and leave us to the bramble and thorn?" Quoted in Randall, *Life of Jefferson*, II, 13. John Harold Wolfe in his *Jeffersonian Democracy in South Carolina* (Chapel Hill, 1940), 14 n, writes, "It is of peculiar interest that these South Carolinians and most of the others who wrote to Jefferson during the 1780's later became Federalists."

the legendary view, which will be found to rest on Federalist sources when it rests on any. Federalist sources, of course, are of no more value in ascertaining the purposes and organization of the Republican party than Republican sources would be in ascertaining those of the Federalist party. The absence of more evidence than we have upon so interesting a subject is bound to lead to conjecture. Speculation, however, should be so labeled; and we should remember that if we give Jefferson too large a part in the formation of his party, we tend to overlook the political aspirations of his generation, to obscure the state of public sentiment which Federalist measures from 1790 on had produced, and to underrate the ability of Republican editors, pamphleteers, and local and state leaders. These were the errors which Jefferson's opponents made, and there is little excuse now for repeating them.

Above all, we have been misled by attributing too much to Jefferson, too little to his followers, humble or eminent. If Jeffersonian democracy were as largely the creation of one man as it is sometimes represented, it would not be democracy. The scraps of evidence we find among the letters of Jefferson and those nearest him will throw little light on our problem unless we view them in relation to everything that we can learn of both of the first national parties, of the government policies of the period, and above all, of the ideology of each of the contending groups. The development of Jeffersonian democracy is the response of the Revolutionary generation to a highly complicated set of factors; and the study of Jefferson himself, although it shows the way in which he viewed the issues, gives us little more than the most personal aspects of his relation to this movement.

It so happens that the time of Jefferson's retirement—January, 1794, to March, 1797—upon which the conventional treatment is perhaps the most misleading of all, is the period on which one very careful and scholarly work has been written. William E. Dodd's *Thomas Jeffersons Rückkehr zur Politik 1796*⁷⁴ contains material and conclusions which might have set us right on Jefferson's part in party organization during these very important years, had it been more widely used. Although it was written mainly from published sources, there is little in manuscript materials that have yet come to light which would warrant important changes in Professor Dodd's conclusions. He placed Jefferson's decision to accept the candidacy between May 2 and May 14, 1796, and stated that

⁷⁴ William Edward Dodd, *Thomas Jeffersons Rückkehr zur Politik 1796* (Leipzig, 1899).

the vote of the House of Representatives, on April 30th, to grant the money which would put the Jay Treaty into effect caused Jefferson to come to this decision.⁷⁵ He shows Jefferson's great reluctance to return to politics and the pressure which his friends put upon him to do so. His conclusions, based on a careful study of the correspondence of Jefferson and his friends, are in startling contrast to the conventional view that Jefferson spent his time in retirement organizing or directing an opposition party.

When Jefferson was about to leave Monticello for Philadelphia in 1797 to become Vice-President, he wrote to Volney:

I hope I shall see you in Georgetown, and certainly shall if the movements of the stage will permit it; for I prefer that conveyance to traveling with my own horses because it gives me what I have long been without, an opportunity of plunging into the mixed characters of my fellow-countrymen, the most useful school we can enter into and one which nothing else can supply the want of. I once intimately knew all the specimens of character which compose the aggregate mass of my fellow citizens, but age, office, & literature have too long insulated me from them. I find that either their features or my optics have considerably changed in twenty years.⁷⁶

Many specific occasions have been suggested as the beginning of the Democratic party, such as Jefferson's return to New York from France or his first serious differences with Hamilton; but these events put too much emphasis on Jefferson. If we seek to express his true relation to the movement which he came to lead, we may find it in his boarding of the coach as he returns to public life. No physical symbol can do more than indicate the nature of a gradual development: his mounting this huge, lumbering, slow-moving vehicle, which carried people from every condition of life, presents a more accurate picture than that of his calling a powerful and mysterious party into being by his personal influence. Jefferson did not create a party: a widespread popular movement recognized and claimed him as its leader. We have now followed him to the coach; how it came to be waiting for him is a story of even greater interest and importance.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 84 ff.

⁷⁶ Jefferson to Volney, Monticello, Apr. 9, 1797, Jefferson Papers, LC.

Editor's note: The third and final part of Mr. Charles's study—an account of the party implications of the Jay Treaty—will appear in the October issue of the *Quarterly*.