FRANCE

AND THE

AMERICAN REVOLUTION

1763-1778

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PREFACE.

In this study of the circumstances which led to the Franco–American alliance of 1778, without hoping to attain minuteness of analysis, I have tried to show the principal motives of France, and to suggest how they were modified by the influence of Spain. In dealing with the American side of the story, no attempt has been made to do more than hint at the political complications which, beginning in this early period, produced their most important results in the later stages of the war.

The most helpful documents easily accessible for the study of this topic are: on the American side, Wharton's Revolutionary Diplomatic Correspondence, the Journals of Congress, and the writings of the statesmen concerned; on the French, Mr. B. F. Stevens' great collection of Facsimiles, and the original material contained in M. Doniol's important but biased history. These may be supplemented by the manuscript collections of Mr. Jared Sparks and Mr. George Bancroft. The letters published by DeWitt in his study of Jefferson may also be found among the Sparks manuscripts. The Spanish documents have been consulted in English and French translations.

I wish to acknowledge my indebtedness to Mr. Thomas J. Kiernan of the Harvard Library, Mr. Wilberforce Eames of the Lenox Library, and Mr. Robbins Little, formerly of the Astor Library, for their kindness in giving me access to valuable collections; and also to thank the officers of the Cornell Library for favors continued during the revision of this thesis.

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I.

FORECASTS OF REVOLUTION.

The agreement made between France and the United States in 1778, though a welcome relief to struggling patriots in America and a source of joy to Republican enthusiasts in France, did not, in either country, lack critics to condemn it as an unnatural alliance. In view of the wars which had sundered Frenchmen and Englishmen for nearly a century, the feeling was inevitable; yet those who deliberately called this union of enemies a natural alliance had wiser political insight. They saw that the transfer of Canada to England in 1763 had opened the way for a friendship between English America and France.

Early in the series of contests, here and there an onlooker had dimly seen that the relation between England and her thirteen Colonies depended on whether France or England held Canada. Two opposite predictions were made: one, that England, if she should conquer Canada, would follow up the victory by tightening her grasp on her own Colonies; the other, that she would soon lose them altogether. Toward the close of Queen Anne's War, an enterprising French officer formed a plan for winning the English Colonists to the side of France: namely, to persuade them that the troops which England was sending to their shores were designed, not for the conquest of their enemy, but for their own subjugation; and that, if New France should fall into the hands of England, their liberties would be destroyed. The French colonial minister approved of the scheme. "It is much to be wished," he wrote, "that the Council at Boston could be informed of the designs of the English Court, and shown how important it is for that province to remain in the state of a republic. The King would even approve our helping it to do so." In furtherance of this policy, an emissary was sent to Boston in 1711, to treat with the Colonies as an inde-

pendent people and arrange a mutual cessation of hostilities, on condition that they should give England no more aid; but when he arrived on the enemy's coast, his vessel was seized, and his mission came to an ignominious end.[1]

At about this time another Frenchman, with wiser foresight, was predicting the actual results of the British policy. "Old England," he said, alluding to the possible conquest of Canada and its influence on the thirteen Colonies, "will not imagine that these various provinces will then unite, shake off the yoke of the English monarchy, and erect themselves into a democracy."[2] A generation later, in 1748, the Swedish traveller, Kalm, believed that the presence of the French in Canada was the main security for England's retention of her Colonies.[3] Before the close of the Seven Years' War, French and English statesmen alike were predicting that the transfer of Canada to England would be followed by the revolt of the British Provinces; for their inhabitants, released from constant dread of a hostile neighbor and no longer in need of support from England, would be free to nurse their grievances against her. The Count de Vergennes, who was to direct the foreign affairs of France during the American Revolution, foretold the crisis in which he afterward found his opportunity. "England," he said, "will ere long repent of having removed the only check that could keep her colonies in awe. They stand no longer in need of her protection. She will call on them to contribute toward supporting the burdens they have helped to bring on her, and they will answer by striking off all dependence."[4]

In 1763, the long contest for empire ended in the triumph of England and the expulsion of France from the North American continent. With her chief colonial possessions torn away, her army weakened, and her navy almost destroyed, France suddenly found herself in the position of a minor power. Her humiliation brought with it not even

[1] Parkman, A Half-Century of Conflict, I, pp. 150 ff.

[2] Ibid. I, p. 155. Quoted from an anonymous memorial of 1710, 1711.

[3] Lecky, England in the Eighteenth Century, III, p. 291.

[4] Bancroft, History of the United States, II, p. 564.

the poor comfort of security : for England was, in the eyes of the French Ministry, a treacherous opponent, disposed to take every advantage of a conquered enemy ; ready, for any hope of gain, to reopen the war, under her own precedent, without the formality of a declaration. If Choiseul, at this time the most influential minister of France, not only tried to strengthen his country by forming alliances and building up a new navy, but watched for an opportunity to strike an underhand blow at England through her Colonies ; if Vergennes, a few years later, built up for her discomfiture a consistent policy of deception, their excuse must be sought in the desperate plight of France and in previous wanderings from the path of international virtue on the part of England. "Power can never render honorable that which is not honorable,"—so wrote a contemporary of these men—"and in politics, everything which is not avowed, everything which is not clothed with a public character, is intrigue. . . . Separate morals from politics, and politics have no longer any support, but lose themselves in a bottomless abyss."[1] Choiseul and Vergennes employed their power without too keen an eye to international honor ; used means, to avow which would have been insanity ; and, in their dealings with England, sunk moral considerations to a fathomless depth.

The treaty of 1763 was a disgrace, to be wiped out. Choiseul lost no time and took no chances. He laid plans to thwart the policy of England in India, in the Mediterranean, in the Eastern islands ; he kept strict watch over the diplomacy of Europe. "There was not a single point," says the biographer of one of his secret emissaries, "where the wary and alert minister had not his agents, spies, and instruments for the aggrandizement of France and the injury of England."[2] From time to time, his animosity broke out freely in his official correspondence. "We are in no haste, as you may well imagine," he wrote in 1767 to a member of the embassy at London, "to see a firm ministry

[1] Ségur, Le Politique de Tous les Cabinets de l'Europe, I, p. 119, note ; p. 113, note.

[2] Kapp, Life of Kalb, p. 43.

established in England. I hope that the anarchy will not soon cease. Would that it might last a century."[1] A year later, he expressed a wish that the popular tumult on behalf of Wilkes might increase. "A rumor is abroad here," he said, "that on the fifteenth there was a sort of action in the city of London, in which many people perished. I dare not flatter myself that this report is true. The English never destroy one another so fast as we could wish."[2]

That he might the more safely hasten their destruction, Choiseul fortified his country by diplomacy. He adhered to the sharply criticized Austrian alliance; chiefly, it is said, to secure neutrality on the continent in case of war with England, and thus to avoid the disadvantage of a double conflict with the navy of Great Britain and the armies of her allies.[3] Before the close of the Seven Years' War, he had strengthened the natural bond between France and Spain by the Third Family Compact. This agreement assured France of at least one ally in case her minister should succeed in bringing on the war which he desired. Meanwhile, further negotiation, working on the easily excited passions for revenge and acquisition, aroused the Spaniard to eagerness for war. Choiseul was "as sure of Spain," we are told, "as if he had been the prime minister of Charles III."[4]

Choiseul tried to bring about a rupture with England in 1765. Three years later he made a second attempt, but his colleagues in the Council overruled him. Papers drawn up by his order are still extant, minutely describing the English coast, with a view to its facilities for landing an army of invasion.[5] The fact that no use was made of this information argues prudence on the part of the King and his advisers, rather than any sentiment of forbearance toward England. Not only the publicly recognized Council

[1] Choiseul to Durand, Aug. 4, 1767. De Witt, Jefferson, p. 420.

[2] Choiseul to du Châtelet, May 23, 1768. Ibid. p. 438.

[3] Ségur, Le Politique de Tous les Cabinets, I, p. 88, note. Capefigue, Louis XVI, II, p. 22. Flassan, Diplomatie Française, VI, p. 53.

[4] Lacretelle, Histoire de France, IV, p. 191.

[5] Mahon, History of England from the Peace of Utrecht to the Peace of Versailles, V, Appendix, pp. xix, xxii.

but the secret cabinet of Louis XV were intent on prospects of war. A plan for the invasion of England was the only paper spared when the secret correspondence was consigned to the flames by order of Louis XVI, at the opening of his reign.[1]

At the very time when England was adjusting her unstable peace with France, the British Ministry were preparing measures that could not fail to embroil them with the American Colonies and give France an opportunity for mischief. Seven months after the ratification of the treaty of 1763, the proper commissioners were instructed to prepare a bill imposing a stamp duty on the Colonists. This bill was laid aside for a year, but in the meantime laws were passed to extend the Navigation Acts and modify American imposts.[2] The news of these measures roused intense excitement in the Provinces. Tidings of the discontent reached France, and Choiseul promptly sent his first secret agent to America.

This emissary, sent out in 1764, was M. de Pontleroy, a lieutenant in the French navy.[3] On his return to Europe in 1766, he made his report to M. Durand, then chief clerk of the French embassy in London. The report comprised an account of the products, occupations, and industrial and military resources of the Provinces, the state of their defences, the character and the political aspirations of their inhabitants. Durand, in forwarding this information to Choiseul, expressed the opinion that the Colonies were too opulent, ambitious, and conscious of their strength, to remain in obedience, but that a revolution ending in American independence would be a disadvantage to France; because the Colonies in question, producing, as they did, all the necessaries of life, could absorb at will their southern neighbors, the producers of sugar, coffee, and cotton. In a word, the independence of America would endanger French rule in the West Indies. Durand was a conservative. He held

[1] Vergennes and du Muy to Louis XVI, Feb. (?) 1775; Ségur, Le Politique, I, p. 106.

[2] Bancroft, III, pp. 55, 73.

[3] De Witt, Jefferson, p. 407, note.

to the old policy of war against all the English. He spoke of the importance of injuring British commerce, and advised that Pontleroy's instructions for a second mission be framed with that object.[1]

Choiseul, replying briefly, put aside Durand's scheme for attacking the commerce of England. He said that M. de Pontleroy would be instructed, on his second tour through the Colonies, simply to verify his former report. "Our ideas on America, whether military or political," said he, "are infinitely changed within thirty years."[2]

A few months after this discussion, Benjamin Franklin's published replies to the Parliamentary inquiry on the subject of the Stamp Act supplied the French Ministry with another source of information on American affairs. M. Durand, who was acting as minister plenipotentiary at this time, zealously cultivated Franklin's acquaintance, questioning him about America, asking for all his political writings, and offering him various social attentions. Franklin suspected a hidden motive for these civilities. "I fancy," he wrote to his son, "that intriguing nation would like very well to meddle on occasion, and blow up the coals between Great Britain and her Colonies, but I hope we shall give them no opportunity."[3]

Durand gathered from Franklin's report, that the opposite commercial interests of England and America were tending to produce an outbreak of hostilities; but he thought that England, foreseeing the trouble, would take measures to ward it off. He believed that the revolution would be gradual and would lead, not to a separation of the Colonies from the mother country, but to a union such as that of Scotland with the crown of Great Britain. On this point, too, Choiseul was of a different opinion. He thought that England could hold her Colonies only by absolute control of their commerce; while, if she tried to maintain this control

[1] Durand to Choiseul, Aug. 3, 7, 20, 22, 24, 1766. De Witt, Jefferson, pp. 407, 410, 412, 413, 415.

[2] Choiseul to Durand, Aug. 11, Sept. 15, 1766. Ibid. pp. 412, 417.

[3] To William Franklin, Aug. 28, 1767. Works, IV, p. 32.

by imposts, the Colonies would rebel, and she would be unable to subdue them.[1]

Choiseul believed, then, that a revolution in America was approaching. It is clear, from his instructions to his next colonial agent, that he did not fear American independence, and that he was inclined to aid the Colonies The projected second voyage of M. de Pontleroy seems never to have taken place; but on the fourth of October, 1767, the Baron de Kalb, an officer in the French service, who had been secretly gathering American news in Holland, set sail for Philadelphia. Choiseul instructed him to find out what the American people intended to do, and what it was advisable to send them—for instance, whether they required engineers and cavalry officers;—and also to enquire into their facilities for procuring munitions and supplies, the strength of their determination to escape from English rule, their military resources and local advantages, the plan of their revolt, and the names of the leaders who would probably take command.[2]

Through the year 1768, during his stay in America and after his return, de Kalb made frequent reports. He found the country in a ferment. The excitement caused by the Stamp Act had hardly had time to die out after the repeal, before new taxes caused fresh irritation. The people were entering into non-importation agreements and setting up manufactories for themselves. De Kalb thought that if the Colonies had any easy means of communication or if they were united in their interests, they would soon become independent. Even as it was, this result would come in time. If not produced by British oppression, it would follow from the natural growth of population; for the country was too large to be governed from a distance. But the people showed no inclination to call on foreign powers for help. In fact, such aid would be an object of greater suspicion to them than the encroachments of England.

[1] Durand to Choiseul, Aug. 11, 30, Sept. 3, 1767. Choiseul to Durand, Aug. 24. De Witt, Jefferson, pp. 420, 427, 428, 425.

[2] Kapp, Life of Kalb, p. 46. Colleville, Les Missions Secrètes, p. 20.

Even if they should ask assistance, de Kalb thought it would be unwise to grant it until they had declared their independence, formed a confederation, invited all nations to share their commerce, and established an army and a navy. Premature advances, he thought, would only reconcile the Colonies to England and unite the two countries for an attack on the French territories in America.[1]

While de Kalb was carrying on his researches abroad and making his reports, the discussion at home continued. The new ambassador at London, the Count du Châtelet, showed keen interest in American affairs. In March, 1768, evidently in ignorance of the measures already taken by Choiseul, du Châtelet advised him to send agents to America to gather information while the peace lasted, and, in case a revolution seemed imminent, to form centers of union and hope, and suggest an appeal for foreign aid.[2] In a letter written in November, du Châtelet discussed the question whether a revolution in the near future was probable. The Colonists were firm in their refusal to trade with England, but many people believed that the mother country would give way under the pressure of industrial distress. Du Châtelet feared that the British Ministry, realizing how hard it would be to subdue the Americans by force, would come to an accommodation with them and then divert their minds from past grievances by operations against France and Spain. He deplored the fact that the Bourbon powers could not profit by the state of affairs in America; but, like de Kalb, he feared that any advances would lead the Colonists to make peace with England.[3] As time passed, and there was no sign of change in the British policy, he began to doubt whether a reconciliation was probable, and

[1] De Kalb to Choiseul, Philadelphia, Jan. 15, 20, 1768; New York, Feb 25 (or 21); Boston, March (or May) 2; Philadelphia, Apr. 19; Paris (?) Aug. 6; Paris, Sept. 16 (or Oct. 10); Nov. 6, 15. Kapp, Life of Kalb, pp. 53–68, *passim*, and 286 to 295. Colleville, Les Missions Secrètes, pp. 43–81. De Witt, Jefferson, pp. 458–464.

[2] Du Châtelet to Choiseul, March 12, 1768. De Witt, Jefferson, p. 433.

[3] Du Châtelet to Choiseul, Nov. 11, 18, 1768. Ibid. pp. 445, 448.

to fear a premature declaration of war. Everything depended on the action of the English Parliament, he wrote early in December, 1768. If it persisted in taxing the Colonies, the revolution would probably break out within six months. In that case, France would find herself face to face with two questions: could the union of the Colonies maintain itself against the power of England, without the support which a foreign war would lend it; and could France and Spain remain idle spectators of the struggle? The two nations would be obliged to decide whether they would run the risk involved in supporting the revolution, or leave it to the chance of dying out for want of sustenance.[1]

Choiseul agreed, in the main, with the ambassador's conclusions. He thought a revolution certain unless England changed her colonial policy.[2] But the veto of his war project, occurring at about this time, probably dampened his interest in the Provinces. De Kalb was coldly received on his return from America. For some time, the Minister refused even to grant him an audience. "It was obvious," says de Kalb, "that his system . . . . had changed, as he no longer expressed any desire to know what was passing in America."[3] "It was he," Lafayette afterwards wrote of de Kalb, in words which betray characteristic impatience of the minister's seeming apathy,—"It was he whom M. de Choiseul sent to visit the English Colonies, and who, on his return, obtained money from him, but no audience; so little did this minister think of the Revolution, the retrospective honor of which some people have assigned to him."[4]

The time for military interference in America had not yet come; but early in 1769 Choiseul and du Châtelet discussed the feasibility of binding the Colonies to France and Spain by commercial ties. Du Châtelet originated the plan. A bolder design, adapted only to a state of war, had been proposed to him in a letter of the preceding July, written prob-

[1] Du Châtelet to Choiseul, Dec. 9, 1768. De Witt, Jefferson, p. 449.

[2] Choiseul to du Châtelet, Nov. 22, Dec. 20, 1768. Ibid. pp. 449, 451.

[3] Sparks MSS. XXXII, vol. I.

[4] Ibid. LXXXVI, p. 3.

ably by his chief secretary, M. Francès.[1] This may have suggested to the ambassador his own less venturesome scheme. The writer of the letter believed that a commercial treaty with the Americans would be desirable. Such a treaty, he said, could be proposed to them only at the moment of a rupture with the mother country and, for that reason, ought to be fully discussed in advance. If offered at the critical moment, it might detach the Colonies from England. France and Spain would then profit by the lowering of the British revenues; while a stipulation of neutrality would free their colonies from the danger of being attacked by the Americans in future wars, and would naturally develop into a treaty of alliance.

About six months after the receipt of this letter, we find du Châtelet laying before the minister, evidently not for the first time, a plan of collusion with the Americans, suited to a state of peace.[2] He proposed that France and Spain should relax their commercial restrictions, even at the risk of temporary inconvenience to their own citizens. This would encourage trade between Americans and subjects of the King, enable Frenchmen to provide the Colonists with those manufactured articles which they had ceased to obtain from England, and lead to the formation of commercial habits which England, even in case of a reconciliation, would find hard to break. Besides this, France would gain an indirect advantage. The encouragement to American commerce would inspire the Provincials with a desire for independence, while giving them means to carry on the struggle for liberty. In this way, the embarrassment of England would be prolonged. Du Châtelet saw, as his correspondent of the preceding July had not seen, that, as a counterpoise to these gains, the risk to French and Spanish possessions from enterprising Americans might be increased rather than diminished by helping them to independence.

[1] De Witt assigns the letter to M. Francès, (Jefferson, p. 440;) Bancroft, to Choiseul, (III, p. 294.) The request for instructions, and the writer's ignorance of the date at which the treaty with Holland would expire, point to the clerk rather than the minister.

[2] Du Châtelet to Choiseul, Jan. 28, 1769. De Witt, Jefferson, p. 451,

France and Spain "must reflect," he said, "whether it is to their interest to second this revolution at the risk of the consequences which might result from it later for the whole new world, and whether the enfeeblement of the common enemy can compensate the risk to which such an example would expose them, from their own Colonies." But the danger was remote, and less impressive than the present advantage.

This plan was wholly at variance with the conservative policy of the Bourbons; yet Choiseul recommended it to the Council, all the members present approved of it, and it was sent by the King's order to the Court of Spain.[1] Here, it met with serious opposition. Spain feared that such concessions would lead to contraband trade with her colonies and to illicit extraction of gold and silver from their mines. She feared, too, that a republican neighbor would indulge in schemes of conquest at her expense. Choiseul was obliged to drop the project for a time, to give the Spanish Court leisure for reflection.[2] He never had an opportunity to resume it, for he was deprived of his office in 1770. The too independent zeal with which he showed his enmity toward England was one of the causes of his downfall. He was plotting with Spain at this time, for a war against the common foe; and it is said that he inspired the Spanish attack on the British settlement of Port Egmont, in the Falkland Islands. His personal enemies informed King Louis of his secret activity, and the monarch promptly ended his public career by a decree of exile.[3]

The Duke d'Aiguillon, who succeeded Choiseul, reversed his foreign policy. In order to oppose the combined powers, Prussia, Russia, and Austria, whose influence in European politics was growing at the expense of France, d'Aiguillon cultivated friendly relations with England.[4] Of

[1] Choiseul to du Châtelet, Feb. 6, 1769. De Witt, Jefferson, p. 454.

[2] D'Ossun to Choiseul, Feb. 20, 1769. Choiseul to du Châtelet, March 14. Ibid. pp. 455, 457.

[3] Lacretelle, Histoire de France, IV, pp. 243, 255.

[4] Flassan, Diplomatie Française, VII, p. 45. Soulavie, Mémoires, III, p. 340.

course he did not meddle in American affairs. It was left to the Count de Vergennes, who was promoted to the head of the foreign department in July, 1774, at a period still more critical for America than that of the Stamp Act, to take advantage of the opportunity which Choiseul had lacked, and conclude a friendly alliance with the Americans.

II.

AID FOR AMERICA.

The Council appointed by Louis XVI on his accession to the throne, was not of a character to raise expectations of a vigorous foreign policy. The King himself, without whose consent no important step could be taken, desired peace even with England. Burdened with a conscience, an awkward encumbrance under the circumstances, he had scruples against breaking a treaty without sufficient cause. His prime minister, the Count de Maurepas, was an aged courtier who, after suffering a long exile, had returned to the pleasures of the court with a desire to enjoy them undisturbed. To the pursuit of this end, he brought political skill and incredible lightness of mind, "capable," said a member of his Cabinet, "of sacrificing great interests to a witticism."[1] It could be foretold that he would not willingly make himself responsible for another war with England. Soon after his appointment, Turgot, the economist, became minister of finance. Finance ministers do not love war, nor do economists. Turgot's voice might safely be counted on the side of peace.

The policy of the Count de Vergennes, who, as head of the department of Foreign Affairs, would probably have more influence for peace or war than any other man, was less easy to predict. Vergennes had already made a reputation in diplomacy; but his name was not, like those of Choiseul and d'Aiguillon, connected with any special system, Austrian or English. Without binding himself to any theory, he had employed his skill in dealing with each problem as it arose. Yet the general direction of his course might perhaps be foreseen from certain facts of his past career. Connected since 1755 with the secret diplomatic service of Louis XV,[2] he had been trained in hostility toward

[1] St. Germain; quoted by Soulavie, III, p. 170.

[2] Ségur, Le Politique, I, p. 97.

Great Britain; and when the secret correspondence was burned, he had pleaded for leave to preserve a plan for the debarkation of troops in England.

During the three and a half years since the downfall of Choiseul, the dispute between the Americans and the mother country had reached a crisis. The Colonies were uniting. Regular communication had been established between them through committees of correspondence; and now, in response to the series of harsh measures by which the British Parliament expressed its disapproval of the Boston tea party, the Provinces were electing delegates to a Continental Congress. The lack of means of communication and the absence of any common interest, conditions which de Kalb had noted as obstacles to union, were being overcome; and the same changes which were preparing the Colonies to unite against England, were making it possible for them to welcome foreign intervention.

Vergennes moved cautiously. He received reports of the situation from Garnier, the *chargé d'affaires* in London, but at first showed no desire to interfere in the quarrel. Merely as a quarrel, whatever its outcome, it was to the interest of France; for it occupied England, and kept her from troubling her neighbors. This was an advantage; for, however busily France might plot against England, she did not at this time desire open war. Vergennes regarded the American conflict as "the surest guaranty of the pacific sentiments of His Britannic Majesty and of his ministers." Some guaranty, he believed, was needed; for he had no confidence in the peace policy of England. "Let us not deceive ourselves in this," said he: "whatever parade the English ministry make of their pacific intentions, we can count on this disposition only so long as their domestic embarrassments last."[1]

Vergennes, like many other observers on both sides of the Channel, at first considered the American Revolution the work of the Opposition party in England. "If the King of England governs his Parliament at will, the Opposition

[1] Vergennes to Garnier, Sept. 11, 1774. *Mémoire* by Vergennes, Dec. 8. Doniol, I, pp. 13, 19.

governs the Colonies no less absolutely."[1] Almost up to the date of Lexington, he believed that the interests of commerce and industry would force an accommodation. Yet he was always on the alert; and it was probably with his approval that Garnier, conversing with Franklin just before his departure from London, several weeks prior to the outbreak of the war, significantly reminded him of the aid which France had given the United Provinces in their struggle against Spain.[2]

When war had begun, Vergennes was quick to see the trend of events. Even if the grievances of America had been at first, as he suspected, a mere pretext for the quarrel, the Colonists when once aroused could not be restrained from going beyond the designs of their political abettors in England, and seeking independence. Owing to the nature of the country and the distribution of the population, he thought that England would be unable to reduce the Colonies by force of arms. The success of a negotiation seemed extremely doubtful, but he believed that England would try this way of adjusting the difficulties. Only when he heard of the British King's proclamation of August, 1775, declaring the Americans rebels, was he convinced that England had cut herself off from all hope of bringing the contest to a peaceful close.[3]

Before England had taken this decisive step, the war alarm sounded in the French Cabinet. In July, 1775, the Count de Guines, ambassador at London, reported a conversation in which Lord Rochford had said that some of the members of both political parties were advocating war against France as the surest way to stop the American conflict.[4] Ever since the time of the Stamp Act, the French authorities had feared that England would have recourse to a vigorous foreign policy in order to end her domestic troubles. Now the British foreign secretary, with singular

[1] Vergennes to de Guines, July 1, 1775. Doniol, I, p. 83.

[2] Parton, Life of Franklin, II, p. 67.

[3] Vergennes to Garnier, Jan. 15, 1775. To de Guines, July 10, 29; Aug. 20, 27; Sept. 3. Doniol, I, pp. 68, 90, 95, 171, 172, 174.

[4] De Guines to Vergennes, July 28, 1775. Ibid. I, p. 116.

indiscretion, contributed his word of warning. The hint threw France on her guard. Vergennes sent the substance of de Guines' dispatch to the ambassador in Spain, and recommended a plan of defense. At the first act of open hostility on the part of England, let France and Spain seize as many of her ships as possible. They might, however, exempt the vessels of the North American Colonists; for it would be impolitic to make them regret their war with England, and to force them back under the yoke. Circumstances might arise in which it would be advisable to treat them as an independent people, invite them to visit French and Spanish ports, and offer them freedom of commerce.[1]

Some time before this, de Guines had complained that he could not obtain reliable American news in England, and had suggested the advantage of having an agent in America. For this mission he had recommended M. de Bonvouloir, a French officer who had visited all the British colonies in America, and who desired an opportunity to return. Vergennes, with the King's approval, now authorized de Guines to send the man. His journey and correspondence were so arranged that the Ministry could not be compromised. His two chief duties were, to report the course of events and the developments of opinion in America, and to teach the people that they had no reason to fear the French. His first instructions, which contained a word of reassurance for the Americans on independence, the destiny of Canada, and commercial facilities in French ports, were considerably modified before he sailed. De Guines heard that the insurgents were proclaiming their hopes of aid from France and Spain; and, taking alarm, he forbade his emissary "even to pronounce the word French," and left him nothing to do but watch and report the progress of affairs.[2] Bonvouloir, as we shall see, ignored this prohibition; and it is hard to decide whether Vergennes was more pleased or offended by his indiscretion.

[1] Vergennes to d'Ossun, Aug. 7, 1775. Doniol, I, pp. 123–7.

[2] De Guines to Vergennes, July 1, 28, 1775. Vergennes to de Guines, Aug. 7. Doniol, I, pp. 154, 155. De Guines to Vergennes, Sept. 8. De Witt, Jefferson, p. 475.

Bonvouloir sailed early in September, 1775, arrived at Philadelphia in December, and was cordially received. A change of sentiment had gradually taken place in the Colonies since the days of Choiseul, when Franklin met the advances of the French ambassador with suspicion, and when de Kalb became convinced that the Americans would repel all foreign interference. Although the Colonists fought during the first year for redress of grievances and not for independence, there were a few radicals who saw from the beginning that independence would be the natural outcome of the contest, and that this result might be hastened by foreign alliances. In 1774, Patrick Henry predicted an alliance with France, Spain, and Holland.[1] At the opening of the Congress of 1775, Samuel and John Adams were convinced that an immediate declaration was necessary. Independence first, said John Adams; then a last attempt to treat with England; and in case of failure, overtures to foreign countries. But the conservatives carried the day, and a last petition was sent to the King. Convinced of its uselessness, Adams persisted in urging almost daily a declaration of independence and the adoption of a plan of treaties to be offered to foreign powers, especially France and Spain. In the fall of 1775, probably late in September, Mr. Chase of Maryland moved to send ambassadors to France. The effect of this motion on the nerves of Congress, says Mr. Adams, was galvanic. "The grimaces, the agitations and convulsions were very great." In the argument which followed, many substitutes for the motion were offered, and there were "twenty subtle projects to get rid of it." The debate ended, on the twenty-ninth of November, in a compromise measure: the formation of a committee to correspond with friends "in Great Britain, Ireland, and other parts of the world."[2]

A fortnight after the Committee of Secret Correspondence was formed, it sent a letter to Dr. Arthur Lee, Franklin's successor in the agency for Massachusetts in London, direct-

[1] Parton's Franklin, II, p. 111.

[2] Life and Works of John Adams, II, pp. 406 ff.; I, pp. 200–3; II, pp. 503–6. Secret Journals of Congress, II, p. 5.

ing him to find out the disposition of foreign powers toward the Colonies. A week later Franklin wrote in the name of the Committee, to his friend Charles Dumas, a Swiss resident of Holland, requesting him to take advantage of his situation at The Hague to find out whether any of the European states would probably be willing to assist the Colonies or enter into an alliance with them. Dumas was empowered to confer with ministers of state, using Franklin's letter as a credential and taking precautions for keeping the matter from the ears of the English ambassador.[1]

At this critical time the French agent, Bonvouloir, appeared in Philadelphia. Making Dr. Franklin's acquaintance, he obtained several hearings from the Committee of Secret Correspondence. The substance of these interviews may be gathered from his report to de Guines.[2] He made some indefinite offers of service, and was asked how France regarded the Colonies. He answered: he believed that France *wished them well.* Would she aid them? *Perhaps so.* On what footing? He *knew* nothing about it; but if she should do so, it would always be on just and equitable terms. Would it be prudent to send a "deputy plenipotentiary" to France? He thought it would be precipitate, even hazardous. Yet he would not advise them in any way. He was a private individual, a curious traveller; but he would be charmed to serve them through his *acquaintances.* When the committee broached the subject of a treaty, Bonvouloir refused to indicate the terms that France might be induced to grant; but he argued that France was more eligible as an ally than Spain. In consequence of these interviews, he received from the committee a written request for French engineers, leave to procure arms and ammunition in France, and the privilege of entry into French ports. He replied, also in writing, giving some encouragement as to engineers and munitions, but speaking with hesitation about commercial privileges.

While one Frenchman was telling Congress that help

[1] Franklin *et al.* to Arthur Lee, Dec. 12, 1775. Franklin to Dumas, Dec. 19. Diplomatic Correspondence, II, pp. 63, 65.

[2] De Witt, Jefferson, pp. 478 ff.

might be obtained in France, another was trying to persuade King Louis to grant it. The political and mercantile venture of Caron Beaumarchais, courtier, man of letters, and agent in the secret service,—his trials and achievements on behalf of America—form one of the most romantic episodes of the Revolution. Beaumarchais was in London in 1775, collecting news of American affairs and spying on the British Ministry. His sources of information were varied. He was on friendly terms with Lord Rochford, the English Secretary for Foreign Affairs, and also with Wilkes, the most notorious leader of the Opposition ; he had dealings with Arthur Lee, the agent for Massachusetts ; and he frequently met travellers from America. Reporting his impressions to King Louis, he repeatedly urged him, for the safety and glory of France, to aid the American insurgents. In case the King decided to grant them money, the breach of neutrality might be hidden by conveying the favors through a fictitious mercantile company. Beaumarchais expressed his willingness to personate this firm.[1] The King objected to the plan, on the ground of justice to England. Beaumarchais, in a long reply,[2] tried to reconcile his project with the "delicate conscientiousness" of the King. "The policy which maintains nations," he argued, "differs almost entirely from the moral law which governs individuals. . . . . The masterpiece of sound policy is to base your tranquillity on the divisions of your enemies." With unscrupulous plausibility, he argued that no treaty with the English monarch could justly restrain the King of France ; for it was the English people who desired war, and they would always compel their King to yield. The conscience of Louis was not entirely satisfied with this logic, for we hear that he continued to protest ; but pressure, official and unofficial, forced him to give way.[3]

For some time the Americans had been obtaining aid from citizens of France by the channels of commerce. The reports of English spies showed the existence of an active trade in

[1] Deane Papers, I, p. 110.

[2] Durand, New Materials, pp. 59, 68, 69.

[3] Soulavie, Mémoires, III, pp. 346–8.

arms and ammunition. The British Ministry, believing that the government connived at it, repeatedly called attention to the subject through their embassy. Vergennes protested innocence, saying that military stores could not be shipped from France without special orders, and that the government did not lend such countenance to men who were aiding the insurgents. He would not vouch for all the acts of unruly individuals, but whatever the Ministry could prevent should be prevented. England's trouble with her Colonies, he declared, was to nobody's interest; the consequences of it were as obvious as those of the cession of Canada. The Count de Maurepas added his professions of friendship. "Be sure," said he, "that we are not people who seek to take unfair advantage of circumstances, and to fish in troubled waters." He even hinted that the Americans had forfeited the sympathy of the French in aiming at independence. By their united efforts the two ministers convinced the suspicious ambassador, Lord Stormont, that France was desirous of peace.[1]

It was probably not far from the time of these friendly professions that Vergennes' secretary, Gérard de Rayneval, drew up an elaborate memorial discussing the interest of France in the affairs of the American Colonies.[2] His argument was based on suggestions which different persons had made to Vergennes, some at his request, others of their own initiative.[3] The writer traces the development of the quarrel between England and her Colonies in a manner which shows his sympathy with the Americans. Inquiring whether France ought to desire the independence of America, he answers that the benefit to France can be measured by the injury to England. Three specific advantages will be gained: a diminution of English power and an increase of French; loss to English and gain to French trade; and a chance to recover part of the French possessions in America. To those who fear that the Americans will try to encroach

[1] St. Paul to Rochford, Sept. 20, 1775. Stormont to Rochford, Oct. 31. Stevens Facsimiles, 1303, 1306.

[2] *Reflexions:* qy. end of 1775. Ibid. 1310.

[3] Doniol I, p. 242.

on the French and Spanish territories, he says that the people will be too much exhausted by the war to think of conquest. This fear "deserves no consideration." But it does not follow that it is best to aid them at once. It would be well to wait and see whether England can conquer them in another campaign. If she is not strong enough for this, France may safely interfere. Meanwhile, let her support the courage of the Americans and flatter them with the hope of assistance. In this way she will avoid compromising herself either with the insurgents or with the English Court. The animus with which this counsel is given is even more significant than its substance. "England is the natural enemy of France,"—so reads this official document,—"and she is a rapacious, unjust, and faithless enemy. The invariable object of her policy is, if not the destruction, at least the abasement of France. This is always the real motive of the wars which she has stirred up against her, and this State reason always prevails over any other consideration; and when it speaks, all means are lawful, provided they be efficacious. This disposition, known to all the universe, discharges France from the obligations which the right of nations has established between countries, and authorizes her to make use of reprisals in order to weaken an enemy who is constantly seeking to injure her."

While the American question was under consideration in the foreign office, Beaumarchais was urging the government to adopt a decided course. On the last day of February, 1776, he addressed to the King a memorial,[1] written to prove the necessity of assisting the Americans, as a measure of self-defense. Whether England obtained peace with her Colonies by victory, defeat, or reconciliation, war between France and England was sure to follow. The only way, then, for France to maintain peace was to keep the American conflict alive. At nearly the same time with Beaumarchais' memorial, the government received Bonvouloir's report,[2] containing an assurance that the Americans would welcome the co-operation of France. The arguments of

[1] Peace or War. Beaumarchais and his Times, III, p. 117.

[2] De Witt, Jefferson, p. 478, note.

these amateur diplomatists were reinforced by urgent messages from the Court of Spain. Bound to France by an alliance offensive and defensive, bound to her still more closely by common hatred of England, Spain was as ready for mischief as her ally, and far more eager for gain. At this period, her ambition pointed toward the conquest of Portugal, with whom rival interests in America had brought her into conflict. France had declared her unwillingness to risk a continental war by attacking Portugal in Europe, and had tried to dissuade Spain from a course which would rouse England to hostility and divert her from the American war so advantageous to the Bourbon powers. But when the aggressions of Portugal, prolonged beyond reason, suggested the connivance of England, Spain availed herself of this opportunity to persuade France that their old enemy was preparing for an attack, and that counter-measures were needed. "His Majesty understands," wrote Grimaldi, the prime minister of Spain, "that it is necessary before all else to decide whether or no we ought to prepare for war, ... whether, calmly relying on our good faith and our upright intentions, we ought to wait until England herself . . . . strikes a blow at our possessions or those of France in such a way that afterwards it may be almost impossible to recover them."[1]

Vergennes, though averse to premature aggressive measures, was keenly alive to a threatened danger. Unwilling to go to the extreme which Spain desired, he chose a course that would leave France uncommitted for the present, but able at any moment to strike at England or, better still, to provoke England into dealing the first blow. On the twelfth of March, with the approval of the King—won with difficulty, as we have seen, by Beaumarchais' arguments—he submitted his plan to his colleagues in the Council. Rayneval's *mémoire* had asserted that France was interested in favoring the insurgents, and that the previous conduct of England would justify such a policy. Vergennes went farther. Like Beaumarchais, he claimed that this course

[1] Grimaldi to d'Aranda, Feb. 26, 1776. Doniol, I, p. 336. See other documents in chapters IX and X.

was dictated by political necessity. Whatever the outcome of the American contest, war between France and England might result. In case of reconciliation, England might be tempted to use against France the troops set free in America, or the English King might wish to build up arbitrary power at home by the aid of a foreign war. In case of defeat, the ministers would have recourse to such a war, to save their official heads. On the other side was the risk that the Colonies might encroach on their neighbors; but Vergennes gave this danger only passing mention, and returned to less remote possibilities. If the two Kings did not prefer peace, he said, this would be the time to strike a blow at England, place her in the rank of secondary powers, and "deliver the universe from a rapacious tyrant." In any case, it was desirable that the present war should last a year, to keep the British forces in America, to prevent a change in the British Ministry, to weaken the British army, and to give France and Spain time for preparation. To ensure this, they must convince the English of their friendship, and at the same time encourage the Americans with vague hopes. "Continue to feed dexterously the security of the English Ministry as to the intentions of France and Spain;" aid the insurgents with money and munitions, but enter into no alliance with them; above all, increase the forces of France and Spain, and prepare for defense:—this was the sum of Vergennes' advice.[1]

This memorial drew from Turgot a reply[2] remarkable for its deviation from the political and economic views of the time. The prevailing belief was that a country reaped benefit from its colonies only so long as it monopolized their trade, and that it could secure this ascendancy only by force. The aim of the pro-American party in France, as we find it expressed in many writings of the period, was, by severing the political tie which bound the Colonies to England, to deprive her of the prestige and also of the commercial prosperity which she owed to that connection, and thus to bring

[1] Stevens Facsimiles, 1316.

[2] Oeuvres, II, p. 551.

about her ruin.[1] Turgot, while predicting wide-spread results from the success of the American revolt, threw doubt on its efficacy as a means for the abasement of England. He said that if the British Provinces became independent, the colonies of all the other European nations would demand commercial freedom and, if denied it, would fight for it until they, too, acquired independence. But he maintained that the loss of all the colonies would affect the prosperity of the European nations but little, because only a very small part of the commercial benefit derived from colonies was due to restrictions on trade. In view of the coming revolution, he advised that France should make concessions to her own colonies and thus secure them as friends and allies, instead of waiting to see them become enemies; and that she should urge Spain to take the same precautions.

Turgot saw no reason to fear an attack from England except in case of reconciliation with her Colonies. As minister of finance, he objected to beginning a war with army and navy only half prepared and with a yearly deficit of twenty million livres. Besides, he feared that an attack on England would be the signal for an accommodation with her Colonies. Aid to the Americans, he thought, should not transgress the bounds of strict neutrality. French citizens might trade with the insurgents, because the government had no reason to discriminate between them and other British subjects; but to supply them with money would be a step difficult to conceal, and in case of exposure, would incur the just resentment of England.

Vergennes' *mémoire*, attacked in part by Turgot, was adopted by the majority of the Council, approved by the King, and submitted to the Court of Spain. The Spanish King had already expressed his willingness to share the expense of aiding the Americans, in order to prolong the revolt and allow England and the Colonies to exhaust one another.[2] He thought, with Vergennes, that the two Courts were interested in prolonging the struggle; that the Colonists, if

[1] Fiske, American Revolution, II, pp. 5–6, 131–2.

[2] Letter of Grimaldi, March 14, 1776. Doniol, I, 371.

not aided, would probably soon succumb; and that, while it was best not to make common cause with them, it would be well to furnish them with what they needed.[1]

In the meantime, the commercial facilities granted to American traders in French ports continued to arouse indignation in England. Vergennes had more than once issued orders forbidding the exportation of arms by Americans; but they were sham orders, and the practice continued. In April, 1776, the English discovered through the treacherous mate of an American ship, that several vessels from the Colonies, consigned to merchants of Nantes, were on their way to France to procure arms and ammunition. Beaumarchais, then in London, was questioned by Lord Rochford, and answered with all the nonchalance of an irresponsible private citizen: "Why would you wish our administration to take proceedings against the Nantes merchants? Are we at war with anyone? . . . are not our ports open to all the merchants in the world? . . . On account of a quarrel special to England, and in which we do not, nor do we want to, take part, has England the right to restrict our commerce?" "But, Sir," Lord Rochford answered, "the Americans are rebels and are declared enemies!" "My Lord, they are not ours. . . . Who prevents you from taking measures against them? Cruise on all sides, seize them everywhere; except under the cannon of our forts, however; we have nothing to do with it." Vergennes, forced by his official position to be more complaisant, ordered that the vessels should not be allowed to take powder and arms on board; but he conveyed to Beaumarchais the King's approval of his reply to Lord Rochford. Powder and arms were objects of commerce, he said; and it was out of friendship for England that the King had forbidden their exportation. Lord Rochford's tone implied that France was bound to make England's interest her own. "I do not know of this agreement," said Vergennes; and, calling to mind the aid which England had given to the Corsicans in their recent struggle against France, he added: "It does not

[1] D'Ossun to Vergennes, Apr. 1, 1776. Doniol, I, p. 341.

exist in the example which England gave us at the time when she thought she could injure us."[1]

Dissatisfied with Vergennes' assumption of neutrality, Beaumarchais urged him to lend the insurgents one or two million livres, and thus gather all the fruits of victory without a battle. Vergennes began his reply by contrasting the responsibilities of practical statesmen like himself with the freedom of theorists like Beaumarchais, but concluded by assuring him that his advice was not necessarily rejected because not seized with avidity: "Consider the matter well, and you will find me nearer to you than you think." "You were certainly near me," replied Beaumarchais, quick to take the hint, "when I thought you far away." His confidence was justified. On the very day of the reassuring letter, Vergennes submitted to the King for his signature an order for a million livres, to be used in aiding the English Colonies.[2] The conduct of the enterprise was entrusted to Beaumarchais, who assumed, for the sake of concealment, the style of a commercial firm,—Rodrique Hortalez and Company.

During the next few weeks, between the decision of the Cabinet and the completion of Beaumarchais' plans, an agent of the Americans, without proper credentials but with a goodly supply of zeal, was laboring on behalf of his countrymen and receiving some encouragement from the Ministry. Dr. Barbeu Dubourg, a friend of Franklin, had been entrusted by an agent of the Committee of Secret Correspondence with the charge of American interests at Paris and Versailles. Having learned in conversation with the ministers and their friends, that they were devising means of aiding the insurgents, he tried to procure a supply of ammunition. By official connivance, he was allowed to borrow muskets and cannon from the King's arsenals, for sale

[1] Beaumarchais to Vergennes, Apr. 16, 1776. St. Paul to Weymouth, Apr. 17. Vergennes to Beaumarchais, Apr. 26. Stevens Facsimiles, 1322, 1324, 1330.

[2] Beaumarchais to Vergennes, Apr. 26, May 11, 1776. Vergennes to Beaumarchais, May 2. Ibid. 1328, 1334, 861. Diplomatic Correspondence, II, p. 89.

to the Americans. Knowing that the American army needed engineers, Dubourg tried to procure them. He also "ventured promises" to one or two officers of artillery, though he doubted the wisdom of employing foreign officers. "I believe this is what you have the least need of," he wrote to Franklin, "as it may disgust your valiant countrymen." He set on foot arrangements with the Farmers General for the reception of American tobacco, and obtained a promise from the Minister of the Navy that his department would purchase supplies from America. He reported that the Ministry in general seemed to be favorably disposed toward the insurgents, but were not inclined to assume any responsibility for their fortunes. Indeed, these gentlemen were much absorbed in their own concerns. Turgot had just received his dismissal, "and all the others," wrote Dubourg, "are so teased at this time by the extraordinary cabals of the court," that no one wishes to go outside his own immediate department.[1]

The change in the ministry of finance did not, of course, affect the decision already reached with regard to the insurgents. On the tenth of June, Beaumarchais received a million livres from the treasury, and he began without delay to collect supplies for shipment to America.

It is natural to ask, while considering the first acts of France in support of the American cause, whether her plea of self-defense was genuine, or whether she was influenced wholly by a wish to humiliate her rival. Vergennes, in his *mémoire* of March 12, gave prominence to the aggressive motive,—the desire to strike a blow at England and restore the former glory of France. As we see him, ostensibly in fear of British designs, draw gradually nearer to an alliance with America, the suspicion recurs again and again that he saw danger ahead because he wished to see it, and that his eye for peril grew keener as France became better prepared for defense. But this suspicion is misleading. No one who reads the letters that passed between the French and Span-

[1] Dubourg to Franklin, June 12–July 2, 1776. Sparks MSS. LII, vol. I, p. 1. Stevens Facsimiles, 566, 567, 568, 570, 884. Diplomatic Correspondence, II, p. 113.

ish Courts during the early years of the Revolution can fail to see that they were watching England as men watch some dangerous animal crouching for a spring. Every increase in the British naval forces, every movement of a British fleet, was jealously noted. Spain, especially, was uncomfortably conscious that her own colonies were near the revolted Provinces, and that the destination of an English fleet need be changed but little to menace her possessions. Early in 1776 she had special cruisers on the American coast to watch the movements of British ships, and was urging France to co-operate with her in the defense of her colonies.[1]

Though considerations of safety set the pace of the Bourbon Courts from week to week, as they made haste to anticipate a dreaded attack or held back from provoking an encounter for which they were not quite prepared, we cannot doubt that, without regard to the intentions of England, they desired war, provided they might have it in their own good time. They were eager to wipe out the treaty of 1763, and to regain their lost prestige. Very early in the discussion, Spain freely hinted her desire for territorial acquisitions. With France, the chief ambition was to humiliate England and destroy her influence among nations. Vergennes has left a clear statement of his own leading motive, and of the means which he intended to employ. A memorial written by him at the end of his career, contains the following passage: "A nation may experience reverses and may yield to the imperious law of necessity and of her own preservation; but when these reverses and the humiliation which has resulted from them are unjust, when they have had for their principle and their end the pride of an influential rival, she ought, for her honor, her dignity, and her reputation, to recover herself whenever she finds the opportunity. If she neglects it, if fear overpowers duty, she adds abasement to humiliation; she becomes the object of scorn of her century and of future races.

"These important truths, Sire, have never left my thoughts. They were already deeply graven in my heart

[1] Grimaldi to d'Aranda, Feb. 26, 1776. D'Ossun to Vergennes, Apr. 29. Doniol, I, 333, 350.

when Your Majesty summoned me to your Council ; and I waited with lively impatience an opportunity to follow their impulse. It was these truths that fixed my attention on the Americans, that caused me to watch for and to seize the moment when Your Majesty could assist this oppressed nation with the well-founded hope of effecting their deliverance. If I had held other sentiments, Sire, other principles, other views, I should have betrayed your confidence and the interests of the State ; I should regard myself as unworthy to serve Your Majesty ; I should regard myself as unworthy to bear the name of Frenchman.'' [1]

[1] Doniol, I, p. 3.

III

THE BEGINNING OF DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS.

We have seen that the Committee of Secret Correspondence wrote in December, 1775, to Arthur Lee and Charles Dumas, requesting them to find out whether any of the European powers were willing to assist the Americans. Lee held several interviews with the French ambassador at London, and indirectly heard from him that aid would be furnished to the Colonies. Dumas obtained an interview with the French minister at The Hague,[1] and enquired whether the King of France would offer his mediation to end the war; and, in case of failure to reach an agreement, whether France and Spain would form an alliance with the Colonies. He received the impression that the minister was pleased with the idea of mediation and would not have objected to a treaty except for the danger of a European war. But a few weeks later the same official told Dumas that the King could not mediate while the Colonies were subject to Great Britain, nor ally himself with them nor furnish them aids while he was at peace with England. "The King is a true knight," said the minister; "his word is sacred." But he promised that strict neutrality should be maintained, and that the Americans should have the same right as "all the other English," to export merchandise, arms, and munitions of war from France.[2]

Early in March, 1776, while Franklin's letter was on its way to Dumas, the Committee of Secret Correspondence appointed Silas Deane, an ex-member of Congress and of the Secret Committee for procuring supplies, commercial agent to France, giving him at the same time an important political

[1] Dumas to Franklin, Apr. 30, 1776. Diplomatic Correspondence, II, p. 86.

[1] Dumas to Committee of Secret Correspondence, May 21, 1776. Ibid. II, p. 91.

errand. They instructed him to introduce himself to the Count de Vergennes as a merchant, ask for a supply of arms and ammunition on the credit of Congress and, in case of refusal, request permission to buy in France as large a quantity of these articles as he could pay for or obtain on credit. If received with favor, he was to ask whether the Colonies might hope for an alliance, commercial or defensive, with France; and at what time she would be ready to recognize them.[1] He was given no power, however, to conclude a treaty.

On his arrival in France, in June, 1776, Deane was told that he could probably accomplish nothing, as a new reign had lately begun; several departments of the government, notably that of finance, were deranged; and the King and his ministers wished to keep the peace. Yet Deane easily obtained an audience with Vergennes, and was partly successful in the commercial half of his errand. Vergennes told him that the Court could not openly encourage the shipping of warlike stores to America, but would place no obstacles in the way. He invited Deane to avail himself of the privilege, open to all American merchants, of carrying on every kind of commerce allowed to the traders of any nation. He refused to discuss the feasibility of a treaty while events were so uncertain, but he questioned Deane about the resources of the Colonies and the strength of their union.[2]

This interview was an auspicious beginning, and Deane soon detected further evidence of ministerial good-will, in an offer of Beaumarchais to procure on credit the supplies which the Colonies had ordered. Deane suspected that Beaumarchais was supported by the government, because he did not, like other merchants, require securities endorsed by a banker or a well-known man of business; and M. Gérard, Vergennes' first secretary, confirmed the suspicion by telling Deane that he could safely rely on Beaumarchais'

[1] Committee of Secret Correspondence to Deane, March 3, 1776. Diplomatic Correspondence, II, p. 78.

[2] Deane to Committee of Secret Correspondence, Aug. 18, 1776. Ibid. II, p. 112.

commercial engagements. The two agents soon came to an agreement, Beaumarchais promising to furnish supplies, and Deane pledging the credit of Congress to pay for them in tobacco or other American products.[1]

Beaumarchais knew how to obtain powder and arms from the state arsenals. Because the exportation of this merchandise was forbidden, and because it could not even be carried to the sea-coast without publicity, he suggested to Deane the advantage of having influential friends at court. With this in view, he advised him to send officers to America with the stores, "and, by fixing on such as should be recommended by persons at court, or of influence by their connections, to procure . . . friends and patrons." It is due to Beaumarchais to state that he also believed the Americans too inexperienced in the art of war to manage artillery without the aid of foreign officers. Deane listened to his advice, and the crowd of officers, "all brave as their swords," who besieged the American agents in Paris, perplexed Congress, and harassed Washington, was a direct result of this ingenious scheme.[2]

The Ministry winked at the little emigration, but was careful to avoid responsibility. Of all the officers who crossed the water, four engineers were the only ones sent by the government.[3]

Even with the aid of influential friends, the work of supplying the American army was not easy. Beaumarchais informed Congress in August that he had procured two hundred brass cannon, a large amount of ammunition, and a quantity of clothing for the troops. Everything promised well, and Deane hoped that the troops would sail in October.[4]

[1] Diplomatic Correspondence, II, pp. 116 ff. Beaumarchais to Deane, July 18, 1776. Deane to Beaumarchais, July 20, 24. Ibid. II, pp. 99, 102, 105.

[2] Deane's Address to Congress, Dec. 1778. Sparks MSS., LII, vol. I, p. 104. Beaumarchais to Deane, July 26, 1776. Deane to Beaumarchais, July 27. Deane Papers, I, pp. 164, 166.

[3] Memoirs of Lafayette, I, p. 70.

[4] Roderique Hortalez and Co. to Committee of Secret Correspondence, Aug. 18, 1776. Deane to R. Morris, Sept. 17. Diplomatic Correspondence, II, pp. 129, 148.

But the British ambassador spread a report that Congress was treating with General Howe, and at once the supply of government stores was checked. Soon after this a native of Maryland, in the service of France, insinuated that Deane was trying to bring about a reconciliation with Great Britain and planning to use the supplies against France. These rumors, annoying as they were, caused little delay. A far more serious obstacle was the indifference produced in the Ministry by news of the serious defeat on Long Island. This disaster threatened to wreck American hopes, in France as well as at home. Another reason for ministerial coldness was the delay in receiving news from America. The British were so active at sea that it was November before an official announcement of the Declaration of Independence arrived in France.[1] In the meantime the English were on the watch for suspicious shipments, and, in order to escape the notice of their spies, the government hindered the loading and despatching of Beaumarchais' vessels almost as persistently as if it had disapproved the enterprise. At last, "after orders and counter-orders and manœuvers the very history of which," Deane said, "would fill a volume," the *Amphitrite* set sail on the fourteenth of December, laden with military stores and carrying a number of officers for the American service. She had been loaded at night,—over a hundred men working together in confusion, crowding in stores picked up by lighters from the nearest points of the shore, with little regard to the invoice.[2] The cause of this haste was an indiscretion on the part of Beaumarchais. While superintending the affairs of his mercantile house he had called attention to himself by directing the rehearsals of one of his comedies. The English ambassador had learned where he was, and why; and the Ministry had been forced to take notice of his doings. A government embargo caught his other ships and detained them in port. Unfortunately,

[1] Deane to Committee of Secret Correspondence, Oct. 1, 17, 25, 1776. Diplomatic Correspondence, II, pp. 153, 173, 183. Deane to Vergennes, about Nov. 8. Stevens Facsimiles, 592.

[2] Beaumarchais to Deane, Dec. 17, 1776. Deane Papers, I, p. 424.

through the selfish caprice of an officer on board the *Amphitrite*, that ship was brought back to L'Orient, and there detained. For several weeks the enterprise remained at a standstill. It was not until the last of January, 1777, that Beaumarchais received the welcome news that three of his vessels had sailed. In February, he despatched a fourth; early in March, he reported eight ships at sea and one loading; in the first week of May, the ninth ship sailed, and Beaumarchais heard that three of his cargoes had arrived in America. These supplies came just in time for the campaign of 1777, and were especially welcome by reason of an alarming scarcity of guns, due to the fact that many of the soldiers, at the end of their short terms of service, not only refused to re-enlist, but carried home the government property.[1]

It must not be supposed that Beaumarchais' first nine cargoes, to say nothing of later ones, were paid for out of the million livres which he obtained from the French treasury in June, 1776. In August of the same year, he received an equal amount from Spain, and over a million livres were contributed by France during 1777.[2] Besides this, he borrowed money, like an ordinary merchant, from wealthy individuals. During one year, he shipped to America stores to the value of five million livres.

The terms on which the French government advanced the money, especially the first million, have been and are still the subject of much discussion. The disputed question is whether the money was intended as a gift to the Americans or as a loan to Beaumarchais, capable of being converted into a gift if his losses were so great as to call for some recompense. On the former supposition, the amount ought to have been deducted from the bill which Beaumarchais presented to the United States for services rendered; on the latter, the United States had no claim on it, and Beaumarchais was responsible only to the French

[1] Deane to Gérard, Jan. 7, 1777. Beaumarchais to Vergennes, Jan. 7, 30; Feb. 4, Mar. 7, May 4. Vergennes to Gérard, Jan. 7. Stevens Facsimiles, 617, 912, 916, 1424, 1445, 1526, 618. Deane's Address to Congress, Dec., 1778. Sparks MSS., LII, Vol. I, p. 92.

[2] Beaumarchais and his Times, III, pp. 130, 165.

Ministry. The doubt on this point caused dissensions among the American Commissioners in Europe, and factional disputes in Congress ; deprived Beaumarchais of the remittances from America, which he claimed in return for his outlay ; and gave rise to a law-suit half a century long, which ended in a compromise between the United States and the heir of Beaumarchais, to the great disadvantage of the claimant. To decide this question, on which congressional committees and attorneys general of the United States have disagreed, is exceedingly difficult, even with the aid of the documents, both private and official, now open to the public ; but a few facts may be given on either side.

Against the claim of Beaumarchais we may place, first, the statements of Arthur Lee. Lee said that Beaumarchais told him in 1775 that France would furnish the United States with £200,000, to be sent by way of the West Indies. He claimed that, after the plan of direct remittance had been changed to that of utilizing a commercial company, the appearance of commerce was only a blind, and no pay was expected in return for the supplies. An entry in Lee's Journal, for October 3, 1777, tells us that M. Grand, a banker with whom the Americans had dealings, coming direct from Vergennes, brought word that Congress "need give themselves no trouble about making returns ; that nothing which we had received or were to receive was lent, but to be considered as given." [1] In line with this testimony is a letter written by Vergennes to the ambassador in Spain, May 3, 1776, in which the following words occur :— "All will be done in the name of a commercial society directed by a merchant of one of our maritime towns, who will take securities—not very binding, to be sure ; but will color his zeal with the motive, plausible enough on the part of a merchant, of desiring to attract to himself the largest part of the American commissions when the commerce of the Colonies shall be rendered free by the declaration of their independence." [2] The fact that Beaumarchais, in pressing his claim, falsely stated that the supplies were

[1] Life of Arthur Lee, I, p. 336.

[2] Vergennes to d'Ossun, May 3, 1776. Doniol, I, p. 375.

bought with his own money,[1] would seem almost conclusive evidence against him, if it had not been impossible for him to explain the matter truthfully without divulging government secrets.

One of the strongest arguments in favor of Beaumarchais may be drawn from his own plan of operations, submitted to the King in the fall of 1775.[2] He asked the French government to entrust him with a million livres, half of which he would send to America in the form of coin, and the rest in powder. He asked leave to buy the powder from the state magazines, at the government rate of from four to six sols a pound; intending to sell it to the insurgents at the market price of from twenty to thirty sols, and invest the difference in more supplies for the Americans. By a clever calculation, whose weakest point was reliance on remittances that never arrived, he proved that the King, by advancing one million livres, could make enough money to invest three million in the second venture and nine in the third.[3] If it were certain that this plan was adopted, Beaumarchais' reputation would be cleared.

One of the most baffling elements in the puzzle is, that most of the evidence seems to be of little value. Nothing could be more positive than the assertions of Arthur Lee, that all the supplies advanced by the French Court were intended as a gift; but, after repeating this declaration again and again, Lee finally owned that he did not know whether they were so intended or not. If, as Lee recorded, Vergennes told M. Grand in October, 1777, that no return was expected for the supplies, he also wrote to Gérard in September, 1778: The Commissioners "insinuate that all, or at least a large portion, of what has been sent is on account of His Majesty. I am about to reply that the King has not furnished anything; that he has simply allowed M. de Beaumarchais to provide himself with what he wanted in the arsenals, on condition of replacing what he took."[4] Again, in 1779, he

[1] Journal of Arthur Lee, Dec. 24, 1777. Life, I, 369.

[2] Possibly in February, 1776.

[3] Deane Papers, I, p. 108.

[4] A Vindication of Arthur Lee, p. 36.

declared through Gérard that Beaumarchais was "the creditor of the United States, and at the same time debtor to the King."[1] These statements might be taken as conclusive if diplomats always spoke the truth. When the United States government, learning by accident that a million livres had been advanced by France, requested an explanation, Vergennes merely kept silence and refused to name the person to whom the money had been paid. His successors, unable to conceal the agency of Beaumarchais, stoutly and falsely averred that the money "was for an object of secret political services, the knowledge of which the King had reserved to himself," and that it was unjust "to confound this political object with the mercantile operations of the same individual with Congress."[2] While a witness who perverts the truth ordinarily throws discredit on the cause which he represents, the attempts of the French government, repeated through a period of fifty years, to secure attention to the claim of Beaumarchais, may be regarded as a strong point in his favor. It is hard to imagine why a succession of ministers should have devoted so much effort and prevarication to the support of a groundless demand.

While Deane, with the aid of Beaumarchais, was obtaining supplies for the Americans, he did not neglect the political side of his mission. He promptly announced to the French Court the Congressional resolution of May 15, the forerunner of the Declaration of Independence; and, predicting that this resolution would soon be followed by important instructions with regard to France, he asked aid for his country. A month later he submitted an elaborate memorial on American trade, in the hope of persuading France to abandon her restrictive system and open her own ports and those of her colonies to American commerce.[3] He did not obtain all the concessions which he desired for his countrymen, but they were liberally treated. The authorities allowed them to import certain prohibited articles and to con-

[1] Claim of Beaumarchais' Heir, p. 4.

[2] Ibid., p. 8.

[3] July 18, Aug. 15, 1776. Stevens Facsimiles, 572, 577. See Diplomatic Correspondence, II, p. 126.

tinue to export arms and ammunition. "The registers must not contain any item nor any indication of this connivance, entire liberty being left to the Americans to load and export as they please the articles in question:"—such were Vergennes' significant orders.[1]

Not all the commercial privileges which France gave to the Americans were necessarily violations of international law. The French theory of the rights of neutral trade was broader than the English. It embraced the principle that free ships make free goods; while England claimed that an enemy's goods, even in a neutral ship, were liable to confiscation. If the Americans could be considered a separate power at war with England, France, according to her own doctrine, had the right to trade with them. England, of course, denied both the premise and the conclusion. If, on the contrary, the Americans were colonies, France admitted that England, if powerful enough, might prevent them from trading with French citizens, but denied her right to forbid French citizens to trade with them:—a distinction which the Bourbon monarch would hardly have maintained if his own colonies had been the ones concerned. There are two kinds of commerce, said the French authorities: that which confines its dealings to ordinary merchandise, and that which includes contraband articles. Even if our citizens indulge in contraband trade, this constitutes no breach of neutrality, but merely renders the goods subject to confiscation.[2] With this careful definition of the rights in question France veiled her connivance at prohibited trade.

While playing fast and loose with international obligations, the Ministry assumed a defiant attitude in the face of British protest. An unofficial agent of the English government having called the French *chargé d'affaires* to account, for the presence of Deane in Paris, Vergennes made this comment: "He surely knows that the King is master in his own house, that he has no account to render to any one concerning the strangers whom he thinks proper to admit into his States, and that His Majesty does all that Great Britain

[1] Vergennes to Clugny, Sept. 22. Stevens Facsimiles, 1365.

[2] Sparks' translation and abridgment of Rayneval's *Observations sur le Mémoire Justicatif de la Cour de Londres.* Sparks' MSS., LI.

could demand as a favor, in not receiving openly a representative on the part of the English Colonies.''[1]

The expression, even in a private letter, of a sentiment so uncompromising, indicated the approach of a crisis. At this time, France and Spain were seriously considering a declaration of war against England. Spain, on the eve of a contest with Portugal, in which England might be expected to take part with her ally, had one more reason than usual for desiring the co-operation of France. Late in August, the Spanish ambassador d'Aranda tried, in an unofficial interview with Maurepas, to persuade him that the time for an attack on England had come. It was believed in Spain that no effort to keep the peace would long be successful; and that it would be wise to take the offensive and anticipate the dreaded attack. There was no proposal to form an alliance with the Americans. The reason or pretext for hesitation was the advantage of waiting until another campaign had shown how much aid the Colonists could give to an ally.[2]

In a *mémoire* laid before the King and Council as a result of the Spanish overtures, Vergennes reviewed the arguments in favor of war, but gave the proposals of France a turn which might easily prove obnoxious to Spain, and so defer the critical moment. Once more, he declared that a war with England could be justified as a measure of self-defense; for England was so jealous of the increasing naval power of France that only the necessity of concentrating her forces in America restrained her from giving vent to her enmity. He gave the impression that France would welcome a war with Great Britain, if it could be waged without the intervention of other European powers; and that, unlike Spain, she saw advantage in an alliance with America. In order to avoid the danger of arousing jealousy of the increasing power of France, he suggested that Spain might begin the war, and allow France to enter as her auxiliary.[3]

[1] Vergennes to Garnier, Aug. 31, 1776. Doniol, I, p. 583.

[2] Grimaldi to d'Aranda, Aug. 26, 1776. Bancroft MSS., *Archives Françaises, Espagne*, 1768–1776, p. 267.

[3] Considerations read to the King in Committee, on the course to be taken with regard to England, Aug. 31, 1776. Stevens Facsimiles, 897.

Thus called on to act as principal, Spain beat a prompt retreat. Maintaining still that war could not long be avoided, her minister developed a doubt whether the proper moment had arrived. He feared that, while France and Spain were attacking England, she might make peace with America and turn her forces against them. Another reason for objecting to hasty action, a reason ominous of future disagreement between Spain and her ally, was the necessity of deciding beforehand on some plan of operations. Incidentally, d'Aranda expressed a desire to drive the English from Jamaica and Minorca.[1]

Before this reply reached the French Court, Vergennes heard news that made him even less desirous of war than before,—that of the American defeat on Long Island. The fate of New York was not known ; but, in its bearing on the foreign policy of France, it was considered immaterial. Even if New York was in the hands of the British there would no longer be any reason for haste in attacking England or declaring for the Americans. They were not likely to submit after one defeat ; and the occupation of their strongholds would keep the common enemy busy. Besides, delay would give France and Spain time for further preparation, and at the same time exhaust the resources of England. Meanwhile, it would be possible "to direct the furnishing of aid to the Colonies in such a way as to force the English into becoming the aggressors themselves ; in this capacity," said Vergennes, with his eye on the danger of a continental war, "they would lose their right to the interest which several powers might take in not seeing them crushed." [2]

In this way the military disasters in America fixed, for the time being, the hesitating course of the two European powers. "After all," said a French noble,[3] "France was not fool enough to play such a silly game as Spain did in the last war, when she got so soundly drubbed for espousing a ruined cause."

[1] Grimaldi to d'Aranda, Oct. 8, 1776, Doniol, I, pp. 608–612.

[2] Garnier to Vergennes, Oct. 11, 1776. Vergennes to the King, Oct. 17, 26. Vergennes to d'Aranda, Nov. 5. Ibid., I, pp. 615, 618, 620, 682–4.

[3] The Duke de Chartres.

In the midst of the discussion between the French and Spanish Cabinets, Deane called attention to the Declaration of Independence,—the adoption of which was a well-known fact, although it had not been officially announced,—and asked for an answer to the questions, whether France would recognize the United States and receive an ambassador from them, and whether they might hope for an alliance. "The moment approaches," wrote Beaumarchais to Vergennes, "when you will have to say *yes* or *no*. I would go and hang myself immediately if it were the latter." Beaumarchais was mistaken. The moment was receding. Deane continued to wait for an answer to his questions. He waited, too, in a state of distress "beyond the power of language to paint," for official news of the Declaration of Independence, and power to negotiate a treaty. He attributed the failure of his efforts to the negligence of Congress, not knowing that, since the tidings from Long Island, the Americans could hope for only enough aid to keep them from succumbing.[1]

At the moment when the fortune of America was lowest in official circles, the powerful force of public opinion began to make itself felt in our favor. "It is difficult," says a French historian of this period, "for governments, even absolute ones, to resist a movement of public opinion when it extends to all classes, from the summit of society to its lowest foundations."[2] It is more difficult when, in addition to this, the king lacks strength and is desirous of winning popular favor. It is hardest of all when the general cry is for war, and when a popular war-minister in exile has a strong party of friends at court. Choiseul is said to have disapproved of the alliance with the United States, and to have wished merely to use the Americans for the exhaustion of England;[3] but, however persistently he opposed the measures of Vergennes, every influence in favor of war was pushing the country with almost irresistible logic toward an American alliance.

[1] *Mémoire* of Deane, Sept. 24, 1776. Stevens Facsimiles, 585. Beaumarchais to Vergennes, Sept. 25. Ibid., 898.

[2] Capefigue, Louis XVI, II, p. 34.

[3] Soulavie, *Mémoires*, III, p. 412.

During the first months of our Revolution, the French public knew little of the incidents or the merits of the struggle; but Deane's attempt to gain friends at court by conferring favors on military officers, soon made the insurgent cause popular among the young nobility; and they, in turn, enlisted the enthusiastic sympathy of the Queen. At the same time the admission of American traders to French ports engaged the interest, less conspicuous but equally important, of the mercantile class; and the struggle of the insurgents for republican self-government won the support of the philosophers and their followers, who formed a large and influential body, and who appreciated American political ambitions all the more because they took it for granted that these aspirations were borrowed from their own writings.[1] Radical theories had spread through the entire younger generation of French society. The military nobility were attracted toward the American cause, not only through ambition, desire of adventure, weariness of peace, and hatred of England, but through their recently acquired admiration for republican and democratic institutions. Under the influence of such motives, Lafayette, among others, determined to offer his services to Washington. Finding that the disaster of Long Island had placed a serious obstacle in the way of the shipments directed by Deane and Beaumarchais, and that he could not hope to reach America soon on one of their vessels, he offered to buy and equip a ship on his own account; and, eluding the vigilance of the Ministry, he made his way to the scene of action. The escapade of Lafayette greatly increased the popularity of the American cause. As time passed and news of the battles in which he and his companions figured, reached France, the court and even the ministers felt their interest quicken. With the army, "desertion became a fashion." A friend of Lafayette[2] has recorded that Maurepas said more than once "that it was the impetuous ardor of the young courtiers and the French warriors which had cried down the wisdom of the Council

[1] Ségur, *Mémoires*, I, pp. 74, 80; II, p. 43.

[2] Ibid., I, p. 80.

and, so to speak, forced the government into war." Accepting this statement as true of Maurepas and the King, we may believe that Vergennes, though he sometimes vacillated, followed a consistent policy in the main, and advised the recognition of America for reasons of state.

The desirability of an alliance had been debated in America as well as in France. The question was closely bound up with that of independence. The more radical element in Congress had asserted that the Colonies could hope for no European assistance until they declared their independence; the more cautious members had feared that such a declaration would place them in the power of foreign nations. "France," they said, "will take advantage of us when they see we cannot recede, and demand severe terms of us; . . . . she and Spain, too, will rejoice to see Britain and America wasting each other." In spite of these fears, a committee had been appointed on the twelfth of June, 1776, to draw up a plan of treaties for presentation to foreign powers.[1] Dr. Franklin and John Adams were the most distinguished members. Adams, with all his enthusiasm for independence, saw the threatening danger, and always insisted that any connection established with foreign powers should be purely commercial. In his work on the committee, he held his colleagues rigidly to this principle. On the supposition that France would not accept a distinctly commercial treaty, many motions were offered to insert "articles of entangling alliance, of exclusive privileges, and of warranties of possessions;" but they were all defeated,[2] and the draft submitted to Congress for debate was that of a perpetual treaty of amity and commerce, drawn up with special reference to France. It contained a stipulation that if England should attack France in consequence of the treaty, the United States would not aid England. As some of the members of Congress feared that France would not be satisfied with a mere promise of neutrality, the plan was reconsidered. John Adams was absent at the time; but in spite of the withdrawal of his restrain-

[1] Secret Journals of Congress, II, pp. 475–7.

[2] Life and Works of John Adams, II, pp. 516–7; IX, p. 409.

ing influence, the concessions which were made did not greatly alter the spirit of the treaty. The Commissioners were instructed to promise, if necessary, that the United States would never acknowledge allegiance to Great Britain nor grant more commercial privileges to her than to France; and also to stipulate that no treaty for ending the war between the United States and Great Britain or between Great Britain and France should take effect until six months after the allies had notified each other. Thus modified, the plan of treaty was agreed to by Congress, September 17, 1776. Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Jefferson, and Silas Deane were chosen Commissioners to treat with France; but Jefferson declined to serve, and Arthur Lee was appointed in his place.[1]

Early in November, Deane's painful suspense was relieved by an official announcement of the Declaration of Independence, and news that Congress had a plan of treaty under consideration. On notifying the Ministry, Deane was met by the question: What would the United States gain from the acknowledgement of their independence, unless this were followed by a war against Great Britain; since they already enjoyed all the other advantages which would accrue to them from such an acknowledgment? It was intimated that in one respect the change would be a disadvantage: it would place the United States under additional obligations to France.[2]

Though the Declaration of Independence had no immediate effect on the policy of the government, it justified itself, in France as in America, by its influence on public opinion. Expressing, as it did, the English instinct for liberty in the formulas of French political philosophy, it was sure to increase the popular enthusiasm for the young republic.[3]

Soon after the Americans had taken the irrevocable step, Vergennes marked out in a tentative way the general lines

[1] Secret Journals of Congress, II, pp. 27 ff., 31, 35.

[2] Stevens Facsimiles, 592. Deane to Committee of Secret Correspondence, Nov. 28, 1776. Diplomatic Correspondence, II, p. 197.

[3] Capefigue, Louis XVI, II, p. 38.

which the French government afterward tried to follow.[1] He wished to postpone the war with England until the end of 1777, when he thought the naval and military preparations of France and Spain would be completed. Even then, they were not to take the aggressive or to call for allies: they would leave that to England. Would it be well, he asked the Spanish minister, to conclude an alliance with the Americans, offensive while the war lasted and defensive from the conclusion of peace? As Spain was betraying solicitude with regard to the objects of the war, he urged that the abasement of England and the destruction of her commerce should be made their primary aim. Thus, by the close of 1776, a fairly definite plan was shaping itself out of the fluctuating counsels of the French Ministry.

[1] Vergennes to d'Aranda, Nov. 5, 1776. Vergennes to d'Ossun, Dec. 8. Sparks MSS., LXXX, vol. I, pp. 116, 133. *Plan de mesures à concerter avec l'Espagne*, Dec. 1776. Bancroft MSS., *Archives Françaises*, *Espagne*, 1768–1776, p. 289.

IV.

THE DEMAND FOR RECOGNITION.

When the British ambassador heard that Franklin was on the way to Paris he threatened, it is said, to leave without ceremony. Vergennes told him that a message had already been sent to intercept Franklin and forbid him the country ; but that, as his route was uncertain, the courier might fail to meet him.[1] This messenger, if he existed, was conveniently unsuccessful ; for Franklin arrived in Paris in the last part of December. On the following day, he and Deane were joined by Arthur Lee. The Commissioners informed Vergennes of their powers, and asked for an audience. Vergennes received them in secret, renewed his promise of commercial facilities, and presented them to the ambassador of Spain. From this time until the revocation of their commissions, the Deputies labored to obtain aid and recognition for their country. Their success has won them fame. Their most conspicuous failure has been mercifully obscured by time ; namely, their inability to preserve harmony among themselves. The three colleagues had not been long in France when they and two other agents of Congress then in Paris became involved in a lively quarrel, which spread to their constituents in Congress, delayed and complicated the public business, and introduced personal rancor into questions of international policy which needed for their decision as clear and unbiased judgment as any problems which have ever confronted the American Congress. Fortunately, it is not necessary to enter into the petty details of these disagreements ; but whoever desires a complete picture of the life of our representatives in Paris, should remember that they were zealous in their enmities as well as in devotion to their public duties. Franklin was the only one who had self-control ; and this very quality was an added source of exasperation to his opponents.

[1] Lescure, Correspondance Secrète, I, p. 2.

The Deputies not only addressed themselves to the Ministry, but tried to enlist public opinion in favor of the American cause. A large part of their success with the people, however, was unpremeditated. The simplicity of their costumes and manners won the approval of a society enthusiastic for democratic plainness and equality. They were compared to citizens of the ancient republics of Greece and Rome. The most eminent men of the kingdom sought their acquaintance. Franklin, especially, made himself the idol of the hour. Gifted with a natural comprehension of the French character, he won his way with an adroitness which may have been unstudied, but which has been attributed to art. "He showed himself little," said a French historian, "as all men do who wish to exert a mysterious influence; but he made people speak of him a great deal. . . . . His simple air concealed extreme shrewdness; he understood that in France it is necessary to get one's self talked about, and talked about continually, if one wishes to remain master of public opinion, and he did not fail to do it."[1]

As soon as possible after their arrival in Paris, the Commissioners submitted the proposed treaty to Vergennes, and asked France to sell eight ships of the line and a supply of munitions to the United States and to provide a convoy at the expense of Congress.[2]

In his surprise at the moderate terms of the treaty, Vergennes wrote to d'Ossun, the ambassador in Spain, with some exaggeration, that the Americans really asked for nothing which they did not already enjoy. "If it is modesty," he said, "if it is fear of being a burden to powers on whose interest they think they can rely, the sentiments are very praiseworthy." But he suspected that they secretly wished to provoke England, by the loss of her commerce, into declaring war; and, at the same time, to avoid any en-

[1] Capefigue, Louis XVI, II, pp. 44, 15.

[2] American Commissioners to Vergennes, Dec. 23, 1776, Stevens Facsimiles, 606. *Mémoire*, Jan. 5, 1777. Ibid., 614. Franklin and Deane to Committee of Secret Correspondence, Jan. 17, March 12. Franklin, Deane, and Lee to Vergennes, Jan. 5. Diplomatic Correspondence, II, pp. 248, 283, 245.

gagement which would outlast the conflict. The application for ships of the line confirmed his suspicion. This favor was refused, as courteously as possible, and the request for convoy met the same fate. The question how to avoid either accepting or rejecting the proffered treaty, was more serious. At first, Vergennes thought of a declaration of commercial reciprocity, but he feared that it would be construed as a refusal, and would lead to a reconciliation between the contending parties. The reply which was finally given was, that at present France had not enough interest in an alliance with America to justify her in risking a war; and that, while future events might make an alliance desirable, it was best in the mean time not to "anticipate time and events." In a letter to d'Ossun, Vergennes went so far as to say that he did not wish an alliance with America. He put no faith in the honor of republics, and he did not see what security France could have for the fidelity of the Americans. But if England should declare war against France or Spain such an alliance might become valuable, and with this contingency in view he left an opening for future negotiations.[1]

The Spanish Ministry were still more emphatic in their objections to an American alliance, unless in case of an attack by England.[2] They granted that, if the insurgents were showing themselves capable of respectable resistance, such a connection might be necessary to prevent reconciliation with England. But, said Grimaldi, they continually retreat; the British generals are masters of entire provinces; it is probable that the Americans must soon submit. Besides, their example is to be dreaded. The King "ought to hesitate greatly to make a formal treaty with provinces which cannot yet be considered in any other light than that of rebels. . . . The rights of all sovereigns in their respective territories ought to be extremely sacred, and the example of a rebellion is too dangerous for his Majesty to wish to support it openly."

[1] Vergennes to d'Ossun, Jan. 4, 12, 1777. Doniol, II, pp. 113, 122. Minutes for the Answer of the French King. Approved. Jan. 9. Stevens Facsimiles, 622, See also 621.

[2] Grimaldi to d'Aranda, Feb. 4, Doniol, II, p. 189.

While repelling the offer of a treaty, the French Court granted the Americans a loan of two million livres.[1] This gave Congress a little respite from the anxiety which they were beginning to feel about the public credit. The evil results of indiscriminate issues of paper money were already showing themselves in America. At the close of 1776, specie was worth from two to two and a half times as much as paper; but a far greater depreciation was necessary to teach our rulers financial wisdom, and many French millions were destined to be sunk in this ever-widening gulf.

Franklin and his colleagues did not relax their efforts because of the first rebuffs. Early in February, 1777, on hearing alarming accounts of England's preparations for the next campaign, they again tried to persuade Vergennes that the Bourbon powers would find it advantageous to declare war. At the same time, the Commissioners placed on record in a private written agreement their intention, under certain circumstances, to exceed their instructions, and hazard the censure or the utmost penalty of Congress. That is, if France or Spain should conclude a commercial treaty with the United States, and be drawn into a war with Great Britain in consequence, the Commissioners resolved to stipulate that the United States would not conclude a separate peace, provided the other power concerned would give the same pledge.[2]

Until now, the Commissioners had been acting under their first instructions, without official news from America. On the fourteenth of March, they received letters containing further directions, together with an account of the retreat through the Jerseys. Discouraged by repeated misfortunes, Congress had voted to offer France a treaty of alliance. That this decision did not meet with unanimous approval is shown by a letter of John Adams, written a few months

[1] Franklin, Deane, and Lee to Gérard, Jan. 14, 1777. To Committee of Secret Correspondence, Jan. 17. Diplomatic Correspondence, II, pp. 247, 250.

[2] Franklin, Deane, and Lee to Vergennes, Feb. 1, 1777. Personal pledge of Commissioners, Feb. 2. Diplomatic Correspondence, II, pp. 257, 260.

later.[1] "I must confess," said he, "that I am at a loss to determine whether it is good policy in us to wish for a war between France and Britain, unless we could be sure that no other powers would engage in it. But if France engages, Spain will, and then all Europe will arrange themselves on one side and the other, and what consequences to us might be involved in it, I do not know. . . . I have very often been ashamed to hear so many Whigs groaning and sighing with despondency, and whining out their fears that we must be subdued, unless France should step in. Are we to be beholden to France for our liberties?" The irritation of self-reliant patriots like Adams could not bring back the day of moderate measures. In order to induce France, if she intended war against England, to open hostilities sooner, the United States offered to join her in an attack on the British territories and a division of the conquests, and to enter into a stipulation that neither party should conclude a separate peace. As an inducement to Spain Congress offered not only to declare war against Portugal, if a report that she had insulted American commerce should prove true, but to "continue the said war for the total conquest of that kingdom to be added to the dominion of Spain." To such a subversion of their principles, discouragement over military reverses led the representatives of a people who were fighting for their own independence. They were saved from the necessity of fulfilling this promise by Spain's rejection of the overtures as premature.[2]

Besides requesting a treaty of alliance, Congress asked for a secret loan of two millions sterling, to be secured by lands on the Mississippi or the Ohio. The Commissioners made special exertions to obtain this favor, but they were told that France could not spare the money. They received permission to borrow of private capitalists, on condition that they

[1] To James Warren, Apr. 27, 1777. Life and Works, IX, p. 462.

[2] Deane to Vergennes, March 15, 1777. Deane on behalf of himself and B. Franklin, March 18. Stevens Facsimiles, 655, 659. Secret Journals of Congress, II, pp. 36 and 38 ff. Committee of Secret Correspondence to Commissioners, Dec. 30, 1776. Diplomatic Correspondence, II, p. 240. D'Ossun to Vergennes, March 24. Bancroft MSS., *Archives Françaises, Espagne*, 1777, p. 429.

should not offer more than the government rate of interest. In the existing state of American credit, this was equivalent to a prohibition. But the second quarterly installment of the two million livres promised in January was furnished promptly, and the Commissioners were told that payments would be continued even after the full amount had been contributed. Besides this, the Farmers General entered into a contract, engaging to place two million livres at their disposal, and to take American tobacco in return.[1]

At this time, the Ministry were keeping a watchful eye on the Deputies, because of certain interviews with which they were favored by agents of Great Britain. Although the Americans promptly reported these conversations to Vergennes, he feared that they might be tempted to listen to secret proposals from the British government. "We cannot conceal from ourselves," he owned, "that what we have done so far for the United Colonies is not enough to engage their gratitude."[2] Far from meditating concessions to England, the Commissioners were in good spirits over the prospect of a French war. "It is the universal opinion, "they wrote to the Committee at home, "that the peace cannot continue another year." Vergennes shared this conviction. He expected the outbreak of war within a few months, and already thought of warning the fishermen at sea.[3]

The forbearance of England was due to policy, and not to any illusion. The British not only learned through spies the details of the intercourse between France and America,

[1] Stevens Facsimiles, 660, 661. Deane to Beaumarchais, Macrh 24, 27, 1777. Beaumarchais to Maurepas, March 30. To Vergennes, March 30 and Apr. 1. Stevens Facsimiles, 1493, 1498, 1499, 1500. Franklin, Deane, and Lee to Committee of Secret Correspondence, Apr. 9. Diplomatic Correspondence, II, p. 285. Contract, March 24. Stevens Facsimiles, 251.

[2] M. Gérard, Report of information received from Mr. Deane. Stevens Facsimiles, 675. Vergennes to d'Ossun, Apr. 7, 1777. (Never sent.) Doniol, II, p. 341.

[3] Commissioners to Committee of Secret Correspondence, Apr. 9, 1777. Diplomatic Correspondence, II, p. 289. Inquiry about the precautions to be taken against England. Vergennes, Apr. Doniol, II, p. 409. Vergennes to d'Ossun, July 18. Ibid., II, p. 451.

but they penetrated the secrets of the Cabinet. It was at this time that Lord Stormont wrote : "The Courts of France and Spain have had three projects in agitation ; 1. To accede to the requisitions of the Court of London in preserving an exact neutrality ; 2. To continue the plan formed under the Ministry of the Duke of Choiseul, in seeking to detach the Colonies from the mother country, and to oppose against her a redoubtable rival in the republic formed of the thirteen Colonies . . . ; 3. To deceive equally on both sides, to promise his Britannic Majesty not to afford an asylum to his rebel subjects, and yet to do it under the pretence of humanity."[1] Lord Stormont's information was probably correct. The French and Spanish correspondence of the time abounds in discussions of the policy of active interference and that of temporizing deception. A French historian[2] informs us that neutrality also was seriously considered, and that the price to be demanded was the retrocession of Canada. This statement, surprising because at variance with repeated official declarations of intention with regard to Canada, is confirmed by a *mémoire*[3] attributed to Vergennes, written during the war. After setting forth the advantages that France would gain by the restitution of Canada and Louisiana, the writer suggests that these transfers be discussed in a general Congress of European nations at the close of the war, in case the American Colonies obtain their independence. The main reason given for this advice is the danger,—which Vergennes made light of when advocating a more vigorous policy,—that the Americans may develop a spirit of conquest.

With these three plans in view, the Ministry are said to have made their choice from necessity rather than judgment. A contemporary author[4] describes them as halting between the peace policy of the King and the warlike measures urged upon them by public opinion, until they were forced to take a middle course, deceiving England and the Colonies alter-

[1] Capefigue, II, p. 47, note.

[2] Capefigue, II, p. 46.

[3] *Mémoire Historique et Politique sur la Louisiane.*

[4] Ségur, *Mémoires*, I, p. 109.

nately, and failing to reap the advantages of either peace or war. This statement, while true to appearances, probably exaggerates the indecision of the Ministry, especially of Vergennes. He adopted the policy of double-dealing so early and maintained it so steadily that we may say with some confidence, he was not forced into this line of action, but chose it. He predicted the date of the rupture so accurately, a year ahead, that we can hardly suppose his final decision to have been due solely to a military chance. At least, we must believe the chance was welcomed. On the other hand, it would be misleading to regard Vergennes as a man of unshaken resolution. It cannot be denied that he sometimes vacillated. All that can be claimed for him is a fairly steady adherence to a policy of compromise. It was natural that men like Lafayette, impatient for results and unburdened by responsibility, should complain of the "labyrinth of precautions, of weaknesses, and of disavowals," in which the foreign department involved itself. But it would have taken a man of iron to remain unmoved in the midst of the influences which surrounded Vergennes: the King, the people, the intriguing friends of Choiseul, the calculating and obstinate Spaniard.

While Franklin and Deane labored with the French Ministry, Lee had taken a journey to Spain, in hope of procuring an alliance. He had been warned off from the capital, but had received promises of material aid, which was afterward furnished in moderation. In April, 1777, Spain, under the lead of her new minister, Florida Blanca, brought forward a new project: that Spain and France, adding to the weight of their influence by strengthening their colonial defenses, should try to influence the deliberations between the American Provinces and England, and also the relations of the Provinces among themselves.[1] France was not impressed with the wisdom of her ally. "In order to have the right to meddle in the internal deliberations of the Colonies," Vergennes wrote, "and in the negotiations which they

[1] Bancroft's note on a letter of Florida Blanca to d'Aranda, Apr. 7, 1777. Bancroft MSS., *Archives Françaises, Espagne*, 1777, p. 443. See Doniol, II, p. 264.

might have with the metropolis, it would be necessary to bind ourselves so closely to them that our respective interests would be the same. This would be, assuredly, to place ourselves in a state of open though undeclared war with England." Florida Blanca had suggested that France and Spain, while acting as mediators, might regain some of their lost territory by negotiation with England. In reply, Vergennes gave the reason for the moderate policy which France had already decided to adopt. "If the loss of Canada was felt by her," he said, "she ought to regret it the less since her forced abandonment of it has become the signal for the revolt of the English possessions on the continent. If we should think of reinstating ourselves there, we should arouse again the old uneasiness and jealousies which ensured the fidelity and submission of these same Provinces to England." These Provinces, he said, "are not striving to throw off the yoke of the mother country in order to run the risk of bowing beneath that of any other power."[1]

During July and August, 1777, the relations between France and England became so strained that it appeared doubtful whether the Bourbon powers would retain the choice between peace and war. The principal cause of irritation was the treatment accorded to American privateers in French ports. In April, 1776, Congress had authorized the capture of English vessels,[2] and by the summer of 1777, privateering enterprise was at its height. France had encouraged it by ignoring treaty stipulations and allowing the sale of prizes in her ports.[3] The Americans responded by trying with true Yankee ingenuity to force France into war. Their captains were ordered to fit out privateers in French ports, man them with French sailors, and try to provoke the English to unfair reprisals, in order that France might be involved in the claims to compensation.[4] Encouraged by

[1] Vergennes to d'Aranda, Apr. 26, 1777. Doniol, II, p. 273.

[2] Journals of Congress, I, p. 304.

[3] Deane to R. Morris, Aug. 23, 1777. Diplomatic Correspondence, II, p. 379. Beaumarchais to Vergennes, Feb. 20, March 7. Vergennes to Noailles, March 21. Stevens Facsimiles, 919, 1445, 1488.

[4] Carmichael to Bingham, June 25–July 6, 1777. Diplomatic Correspondence, II, pp. 347, 348.

the leniency of the French government privateers grew more and more daring. Ships were armed in the ports of France, and returned thither with their prizes ; an English mail packet was carried into Dunkirk ; a small fleet cruised off the coast of England and took seventeen or eighteen captured vessels to France. "For the first time," we are told, "since Britain was a maritime power, the river Thames and other of its ports were crowded with French and other ships, taking in freight, in order to avoid the risk of having British property captured."[1] The English government protested angrily against the violations of international law. Vergennes was obliged to act. He rebuked the Commissioners severely, and apologized for rebuking them ; he had a man imprisoned now and then ; he took securities for good behavior, that failed to secure it. He seriously embarrassed the privateers, but did not produce conviction in the American mind.

The English Ministry were still less convinced. The persistence with which they made their resentment known suggested the approach of an ultimatum. This danger, and the constantly recurring fear of an accommodation between England and America,[2] may have been among the reasons which led Vergennes, in July, to advise aggressive measures.[3] He declared that the insufficiency of the aid which France had given to the insurgents would lend countenance to the belief that she merely wished to see England and America wear each other out. As the military preparations of France were nearly complete, it would be well to anticipate the designs of England by setting an early date for the commencement of hostilities. "If the two Crowns allow January or February of 1778 to pass," he said, mentioning in advance the very months in which the treaty with the Americans was negotiated, "they will have only to regret the opportunity which they have neglected." The change from their late professions of friendship toward England might seem unduly

[1] Deane's Address to Congress, Dec., 1778. Sparks MSS. LII, vol. I, p. 124.

[2] Life and Works of John Adams, I, p. 311.

[3] *Mémoire*, July 23, 1777, Doniol, II, p. 460.

abrupt:—this he foresaw. But they would have a reasonable pretext for their action in England's recent encroachments on their commerce, while exercising her so-called right to search the ships of neutrals for American goods.[1] If they decided on war, they must first of all make sure of the Americans by a treaty; for "it would be inconsistent," Vergennes said, "to arm ourselves for them and to allow them to lay down their arms." In discussing the plan of sending political agents to the Americans, he suggested the expediency of persuading them that they would need the guaranty of France and Spain. This idea was seized with avidity in Spain. The proposal of a guaranty would test the sincerity of England; and if she should unexpectedly give her consent, the guarantors might be able to influence the terms of the treaty.

On every other point Spain proved intractable. She objected to the date suggested by Vergennes, because a treasure-ship and a troop-ship which she was expecting from America could not arrive so soon. She doubted the wisdom of aggression, at a time when it seemed probable that the British Ministry would welcome a foreign war as a happy release from their embarrassment. She did not wish an American alliance, and she did wish Gibraltar. In order to make sure of enough causes of complaint to justify a future attack on England, she devised a plan as cold-blooded as it was likely to be effectual. "We will treat the English with justice and dignity . . . while taking care not to give [the Ministry] just motives for complaint, and complaining ourselves with firmness but without bitterness, of those which they and their nation give us, so that the complaints, multiplying, may assume more consistence."[2]

The French Ministry consented to postpone the war in deference to the wishes of Spain, and Vergennes took up the problem of inducing the Americans to accept a guaranty. He hoped to effect this through the messengers whom the two Courts were sending to America. He despaired of

[1] Vergennes to d'Ossun, July 18, 1777. Doniol, II, p. 451.

[2] *Mémoire* of the Court of Spain, Aug. 8, 1777. Sparks MSS., LXXX, vol. I, p. 281.

gaining his point with the Deputies at Paris. They were men who would not lend themselves to interested schemes. Vergennes complained of their suspicion, their unwillingness to assume any ties unless France engaged to take part in the war, and the calculated indiscretion by which they were apparently trying to commit France in the sight of England. Still, he would have some proposals of a guaranty thrown to them. "If they do not bite at this hook," he says, he has an alternative plan: namely, to persuade them that they cannot trust to an acknowledgment of their independence by England; and that their best security would lie in commercial treaties, to be concluded with the nations most interested, at the same time with the treaty of peace.[1] For the moment, France halts in the position assumed at first by the Americans:—commercial union, but no entangling alliance.

France had no sooner declared her readiness to wait the pleasure of Spain, than a sudden threat from the British government reminded them both that they did not control the situation. Through a private agent, whose words could be disavowed, the English Ministry demanded that the King should surrender without examination all prizes brought into his ports by the Americans, publish the orders given to his admirals on the subject, and dismiss all the privateers who were then in the ports of France. Vergennes prepared an answer to these demands—a refusal, tempered by yielding some minor points. His report was approved by the King, on August twenty-third.[2] "If these concessions are not enough for England, there can be no further choice."

Vergennes expected war. He advised that all vessels be detained in port for fifteen days, and despatch boats sent to the fisheries, the French islands, and the Levant. He warned the ambassador at London: "The flame of war is to all appearance ready to burst forth, and will probably have broken out before my letter reaches you. . . . I fear much that I shall have the pleasure of seeing you sooner than I

[1] Vergennes to d'Ossun, Aug. 22, 1777. Doniol, II, p. 500.

[2] Stevens Facsimiles, 706.

wished."[1] Those Americans who wanted to drag France into war seemed sure of success. But they did not attain it. Lord Stormont, who conversed with Maurepas and Vergennes on the English demands, carefully refrained from supporting these by any official sanction.[2] The British demonstration ended in an anti-climax, and war was averted. After this, the treatment of privateers was discussed in a desultory manner, while the increase of armaments for the French and Spanish colonies became the crying grievance of England. The French Court continued to profess friendship for Great Britain, and to give "very essential aids" to the United States. "How long these two parts will continue to be acted at the same time, the Deputies said, in one of their reports, "and which will finally predominate, may be a question. As it is the true interest of France to prevent our being annexed to Britain . . . we are inclined to believe the sincerity is toward us."[3]

In September, the Commissioners found themselves embarrassed for want of funds. They had ordered a large quantity of supplies in anticipation of remittances from America and of money which Spain had promised them; but the accidents of war had cut off the remittances, and Spain, in irritation at the conduct of some American privateers, had suddenly withheld her assistance. Obeying timely orders of Congress, the Deputies appealed to France and Spain for a loan of eight million livres. News of the abandonment of Ticonderoga had recently arrived, and the Commissioners were so discouraged that Vergennes became alarmed. In order to secure their confidence, he advised giving them some compensation for the rigorous treatment to which their privateers had been subjected; and, on the ground that it was "beneath the dignity of two great powers to lend," he advocated a subsidy. France asked Spain to join her in a contribution of six million livres, on condition that the Deputies solemnly bind themselves not to begin any secret negotiation with England. But the Spanish

[1] Vergennes to Noailles, Aug. 23, 1777. Stevens Facsimiles, 1656.

[2] Vergennes to Noailles, Aug. 30, 1777. Ibid., 1666.

[3] Sept. 8, 1777. Diplomatic Correspondence, II, p. 388.

Ministry, preferring to keep the Americans in expectancy, refused to promise any definite amount. Though all attempts to change this decision were unsuccessful, France resolved to furnish three million livres during the next year.[1]

France and Spain now carried out their intention of sending emissaries to America. The French agent, M. Holker, was directed to approach the leaders of Congress, inform them of the favors and aids which France had extended to the Americans, and impress upon them her interest in their independence. It was hoped that he could persuade them that their liberties would be insecure without a guaranty from France and Spain, and the exclusion of England from all special commercial privileges. He was instructed to try cautiously to find out their sentiments on the subject of commercial treaties, and to suggest that interest would lead them to favor the powers from which they expected support. He was also to enquire into the state of American resources and the trend of opinion among the people and in the Provincial Congresses, and to find out whether there were any party divisions in Congress.[2]

Before these instructions were formulated, a decisive event had occurred in America, to convince Vergennes that favors, subsidies, and persuasions were not sufficient to bind the United States to France. During November, rumor said that the fortune of war was turning against the English ; and on December fourth, the Commissioners announced the fact of Burgoyne's capitulation.[3]

[1] *Mémoire* submitted to Vergennes and d'Aranda, Sept. 26, 1777. Vergennes to d'Ossun, Sept. 26, Nov. 7. Florida Blanca, Oct. 17. Stevens Facsimiles, 1698, 267, 1704, 1711, 1725.

[2] Nov. 25, 1777. Ibid., 1748.

[3] Ibid., 716.

V.

THE CONCLUSION OF THE TREATY.

The news of Burgoyne's defeat impelled the vacillating French Ministry to decisive action. The King authorized more definite overtures to the American Commissioners. Gérard conveyed to them the congratulations of Maurepas and Vergennes, with an intimation that the Court wished a renewal of their proposals for an alliance.[1] At the same time, M. Holker, who had not yet sailed for America, was made the bearer of an open proffer of friendship.[2] The change in the situation was explained to him, for the benefit of the Americans, as inoffensively as possible. It was said that the unwillingness of European powers to recognize them had been due chiefly to the uncertainty of their fortunes. A slight cause would have been enough to defeat them, and any nation which had declared for them would have been compromised to no purpose. Yet the value of the recent success, it was said, lay not so much in its military as in its political consequences: it would strengthen the credit of the American leaders and ensure popular support for the cause of independence. The time had come for closer contact between the United States and the European powers. "If the Congress thinks proper to address instructions to its Commissioners in France," M. Holker was directed to say, "there is every reason to be persuaded that they will speedily receive substantial proofs of the favorable disposition of the Courts of the House of Bourbon."

[1] Statement in the hand of Comte de Vergennes, Dec. 6, 1777. Stevens Facsimiles, 1762. Arthur Lee's Journal, Dec. 6. Life, I, p. 357.

[2] M. Gérard. Paper dictated to M. le Ray de Chaumont for M. Holker. Overtures of a more open policy toward America. Stevens Facsimiles, 760.

This explanation of the change in the policy of France was incomplete, and hence misleading. Nothing was said of the motive most conspicuous in the official correspondence of those critical days,—the fear that defeat would lead England to offer terms which the Americans could accept. The apprehension was not so much that they would be strong enough to wrest their independence from England, as that she would grant it and profit by the concession. Holker's instructions give no indication of the anxiety with which the French Ministry and its embassy at London were watching for the effect of the American victory on the tactics and the personnel of the British Cabinet.[1] Beaumarchais, who had the instincts of a diplomatist, was on the alert at once. "What is the real meaning of this crisis?" he wrote to Vergennes. "It is, that of two nations, English and French, the first who recognizes American independence will alone gather from it all the fruits, while that independence will be certainly fatal to the one who allows her rival to take the lead." Vergennes adopted his very words. "Let us not be mistaken," he wrote to the ambassador in Spain; "the Power which first recognizes the independence of the Americans will be the first to gather all the fruits of this war."[2]

The Deputies responded promptly to the friendly hints of the Ministry, by formally requesting an answer to their proposal of a treaty. They repeated the well-worn argument, that the Americans, uncertain with regard to the intentions of France and ignorant of the secret aids which she had furnished, might be tempted by the enemy to waver; and that a treaty concluded at this time would strengthen their resolution.[3]

The French Cabinet, convinced that the Americans could resist England with some hope of success, anxious about the future course of the British Ministry, and besieged by

[1] Garnier to (qy.) Rayneval, Dec. 5, 1777. Vergennes to Noailles, Dec. 6. Stevens Facsimiles, 1755, 1760.

[2] Beaumarchais to Vergennes, Dec. 11, 1777. Vergennes to Montmorin, Dec. 11. Ibid., 1768, 1769.

[3] Franklin, Deane, and Lee to Vergennes, Dec. 8, 1777. Diplomatic Correspondence, II, p. 444.

the military enthusiasts, had decided to conclude a treaty with the Americans; and the King, against his will, had given his approval. Vergennes granted the Deputies an audience on the twelfth of December, 1777. The day before this meeting, he wrote to supply the ambassador in Spain with arguments for an American alliance.[1] "What have we to put in the way," said he, "to prevent the Americans lending themselves to a reconciliation? We have no measures, no ties, and no means, in common with them." An accommodation would be all the more dangerous to France, since war with England now seemed inevitable. It would be best to enter on this war in alliance with the Americans; for, even if they should listen to proposals from England after they had bound themselves to France, the consequences would not be so serious as those which might be expected from a refusal of their demands. They might desert their ally, but they would hardly be so base as to attack her.

In a subsequent letter, Vergennes expressed the opinion that Spain's interest in the proposed war was ten times as great as that of France, since the French islands would offer little temptation to the British, in comparison with the Spanish treasures on the mainland. Looking for every argument that would appeal to Spain, he suggested that she might regain Florida by the war. He confessed that he did not know the sentiments of the Americans on this point; but he thought it natural to suppose that they did not specially care to possess Florida themselves.[2]

Meeting the Deputies at the appointed time, Vergennes complimented them on the prosperous state of American affairs, and on the conduct of Washington in giving battle to General Howe's army at Germantown; an unsuccessful attempt, the boldness of which had impressed him as deeply as the victory at Saratoga. Circumstances, he said, seemed favorable to an understanding between the

[1] Vergennes to Montmorin, Dec. 11, 1777. Stevens Facsimiles, 1769.

[2] Vergennes to Montmorin, Dec. 13, 1777. Ibid., 1775.

two countries; and he promised that the King would examine all the proposals of the Americans and give them as many marks of "affection and interest" as possible, reserving the right to conclude nothing without the King of Spain. In the informal conversation that followed, Vergennes enquired into the demands of Congress and indicated the terms that France would accept:—all this, with the understanding that the interview should have "no consesequences." The Americans at first proposed a mere treaty of amity and commerce; but Vergennes, reminding them that such a treaty would draw France into war with England, insisted that the agreement between them should "have all the solidity of which human institutions are capable." At the same time, he assured them that they could not be secure without the guaranty of France and Spain, as long as England retained any land on the continent. The Commissioners, in turn, renewed the offer of Congress to guarantee the American possessions of France and Spain.[1]

The reports from England confirmed the government in its policy. The party of the Administration was said to be outdoing the Opposition in proposing concessions to the Americans, while at the same time it asked for unlimited subsidies. If the attempts at conciliation were genuine, for what purpose were the subsidies demanded? The question was ominous for France. The situation was critical. Lord North might even feel sure enough of support to begin a negotiation without waiting until the measure had been discussed in Parliament. Vergennes was impatient at the length of time that must pass before he could hear from Spain. "I will not conceal from you," he wrote to the ambassador, Montmorin, "that the issue makes me tremble."[2] Next came a rumor that the King of England was making overtures to Lord Chatham; and another, that Lord Germaine was sending his secretary to Paris, to treat with the American Commissioners. "If his offers are pre-

[1] Journal of Arthur Lee. Life, I, p. 360. Statement in the hand of Vergennes, marked by the King, "*Approuvé*," Dec. 6, 1777. Stevens Facsimiles, 1762. Vergennes to Montmorin, Dec. 13. Ibid., 1774.

[2] Dec. 13, 1777. Ibid., 1774.

cise," said Vergennes, "if those who receive them have the good faith to ask our advice and decision, what shall we reply?" He did not say that France would reply by concluding a treaty with the Americans; but he hinted that if she did, Spain would have no right to complain.[1]

It was true that an agent of the British government, Wentworth by name, was busy with the Deputies. Deane reported the conferences to Vergennes. They did not threaten any serious results; but Vergennes learned from the reports, that the Ministry had instructed the brothers Howe to open a negotiation in America, and that a formal proposition had been made to unite with America against France and Spain.[2] Mr. Wentworth was not the only British agent who communicated with the Americans at this time. The Londoners showed enough interest in Franklin and his colleagues to justify some uneasiness on the part of France; and it is not strange that, when these attempts failed, Vergennes betrayed an emotion of relief. "I regard it as a special piece of good fortune," this benefactor of America wrote, "and as the effect of the happy star of the House of Bourbon, that the English Ministry in the intoxication of its hopes rather than of its successes has so circumscribed itself by the acts which it has caused Parliament to pass, that it has no power to grant this independence which it foresees that it will be obliged to let slip."[3] In order to make sure that the overtures on the other side of the water should be equally unsuccessful, a King's frigate carried to Boston despatches of the Deputies, reporting the proposals of the British emissaries, and warning Congress of the advances to be made through the Howes.

While the interviews between Deane and Wentworth were taking place, the Commissioners impressed upon Vergennes the importance of their knowing, at a time when England seemed on the point of proposing peace, what the United States might expect from France and Spain. This was the critical

[1] Vergennes to Montmorin, Evening of Dec. 13, 1777. Stevens Facsimiles, 1776.

[2] Ibid., 1778, 718, 719, 231, 1780, 1781, 1786, etc.

[3] Vergennes to Montmorin, Dec. 19, 1777. Doniol, II. p. 662.

question which Vergennes thought would justify him in proceeding without the concurrence of Spain. He informed the Commissioners through Gérard, on the seventeenth of December, that the King had resolved to acknowledge their independence and to make a treaty with them.[1] As His Majesty aimed to found a permanent alliance, advantageous to both peoples, and not to exact concessions because he was dealing with a new nation, the terms of the treaty would be liberal. In supporting the independence of the United States, the King would probably be drawn into war with England; yet he would ask no compensation, and France would seek her advantage in diminishing the power of Great Britain. The Commissioners, in their report to the Committee of Foreign Affairs,[2] represented Gérard as saying that the King would not insist on a stipulation forbidding a separate peace, and would require only that the Americans should not give up their independence. This interpretation of the King's intentions gave rise to one of the earliest debates of Congress on our duty to our ally. At the time of the discussion, Gérard denied that he had made the statement; and it seems more probable that he was misunderstood than that France contemplated any such half-way measure. Gérard did not fix a date for beginning the negotiations, but promised that the treaty should be concluded as soon as Spain was ready to join the alliance.

While the Ministry waited for the decision of the Spanish Court, important events were occurring in England. When Parliament adjourned, to meet on the twentieth of January, Lord North announced that he would propose a plan of reconciliation at the opening of the next session.[3] It seemed improbable that the North Ministry would offer America complete independence; but Vergennes feared that they would gain their point by yielding the substance while withholding the name. Granting that reconciliation on these terms might be difficult if the American government

[1] Franklin, Deane, and Lee to Committee of Foreign Affairs, Dec. 18, 1777. Diplomatic Correspondence, II, p. 452.

[2] Successor to the Committee of Secret Correspondence.

[3] Noailles to Vergennes, Dec. 23, 1777. Stevens Facsimiles, 1793.

had more influence and stability, he feared that the people, suffering for the necessaries of life, would not continue the war for a point of honor. "The Americans propose that we should conquer the English islands," said he, "and grant them free trade thither. If, on the other hand, the English make the same proposal, will it not be listened to? will it be rejected?" He confessed that the views of the French government had been too restricted; they had feared a change in the British Ministry, and had not anticipated the consequences of a change in the policy of the Ministry now in power. "England's aim being no longer doubtful," he said, "it seems that neither should our decision be so; for the question we have to decide is to know whether it is more expedient for us to have war against England and America together, than with America for us against England."[1] In writing to the ambassador at London, he spoke with more hesitancy, as if trying to draw out information. "What would be important to find out is with what view the Ministry seems to incline to peace; many people believe, and wish to make us believe, that it would be fatal to us in the present and in the future. . . . I confess to you that I am not far from that way of thinking."[2] Yielding to these apprehensions, Vergennes engaged Gérard in drawing up a plan of treaty, and Gérard began to discuss with the Deputies the several articles of the Congressional plan.[3] It was not thought worth while even to conceal their interviews. The customary precautions for ensuring secrecy were relaxed, and Franklin was observed in the company of all the ministers in turn, dining and negotiating with them.[4]

On the last day of the year, Vergennes received the answer of the Spanish Court.[5] It could hardly have been less complaisant under any circumstances, and it might

[1] Vergennes to Montmorin, Dec. 27, 1777. Stevens Facsimiles, 1805.

[2] Vergennes to Noailles, Dec. 27. Ibid., 1807.

[3] Arthur Lee's Journal, Dec. 29, 1777, and subsequent dates. Life, I, pp. 371 ff.

[4] Correspondance Secrète, I, p. 125.

[5] Florida Blanca to d'Aranda, Dec. 23, 1777. Doniol, II, p. 765.

have been more so if the Spanish authorities had not heard of the advances which the French Court had already made to the Americans. On receiving this news, Florida Blanca, a statesman characterized by extreme reserve, was betrayed into an explosion of anger. Montmorin assured him that no formal negotiation had been opened, took pains to soothe his injured vanity, and flattered himself that he had succeeded and that Spain would soon follow in the steps of France;[1] but the length of time which elapsed before Spain, on her own exorbitant terms, entered the war, bore witness that she did not easily forget an injury or yield a purpose.

In his reply to France,[2] Florida Blanca expressed a strong doubt whether an early reconciliation between Great Britain and America was probable. In conversation, just before this, he had given England four years to come to terms with her Colonies. He made allowance for the fact that the Americans had an interest in exaggerating the likelihood of an agreement. "The American Deputies are playing their game. Their aim has always been to compromise us with the English."[3] Repeating an argument often used by Spanish statesmen, he said that an alliance between America and the Bourbons would give the British Ministry the best possible excuse for ending the war,—the plea of necessity, and of perfidy on the part of France and Spain. The outcome of his argument was that Spain would engage to do nothing except fix the amount of her subsidy to the Americans, offer them her mediation in case of need, and watch the English Ministry.

On learning the Spanish decision, the advisers of the King carefully discussed the situation. Vergennes then sent the Court of Spain an elaborate reply,[4] and the King added the weight of his influence by a personal letter to his uncle. Vergennes declared the Spanish proposals in-

[1] Montmorin to Vergennes, Dec. 23, 1777. Stevens Facsimiles, 1792.

[2] Florida Blanca to d'Aranda, Dec. 23, 1777. Doniol, II, p. 765.

[3] Montmorin to Vergennes, Dec. 23. Stevens Facsimiles, 1792.

[4] Jan. 7, 1778. Ibid., 1824.

adequate. Pecuniary aid had served to keep up the hopes of the insurgents; but now that the desired end was within their reach, money would not prevent them from forming a coalition with England. Mediation would be useless and dangerous, for England would regard it as an insult. Besides, she was now offering the Colonies all that France and Spain could procure for them; for mediation based on absolute independence would amount to a declaration of war against England. To offer a guaranty would be equally useless; for both England and the Colonies, if they treated without the intervention of France and Spain, would reject their guaranty. As to watching for a change of ministry in England, Lord North was now more likely to bring about a war against France than Lord Chatham. A treaty, then, was absolutely necessary. France must begin negotiations before "the ominous date of the twentieth."

On the independence of America, Vergennes expressed his opinion plainly. "The United States are in fact independent. They have in their hands all that constitutes sovereign power. Our recognition will add nothing to the reality of that possession." Without asserting this independence, France was prepared to assume it for the purposes of the alliance. She desired a treaty consisting of two parts: the first establishing a commercial agreement; the second providing for an eventual alliance, "to procure absolute and unlimited independence to the United States." France would require that the Americans should not make peace secretly or without her guaranty; and the two powers would guarantee each other's American possessions. The King might be obliged to sign a treaty before hearing from Spain again. In that case, Vergennes promised to reserve the right of Spain to accede to it at any time. One reason for hastening the negotiation was Vergennes' suspicion that, even at this late stage, the Deputies were withdrawing their confidence. "What a humiliation . . . if after having the opportunity to attach the Americans to ourselves, we should have reason to reproach ourselves with having attached them to England. . . . I do not know," he said, "whether I

could survive the shame of signing the passport which the Deputies would ask of me to go to London."[1]

"As it is not we who will and act, but circumstances which imperiously dictate the law to us," Vergennes wrote to the ambassador in Spain, in this letter of January 8, "to-morrow will not pass without my informing the Americans of our disposition and endeavoring to penetrate theirs." He was better than his word. On the evening of the same day, Gérard held a conference with the Commissioners. Binding them to secrecy, he told them that the King had resolved to assist the United States in maintaining their independence. After warning them against the designs of England, Gérard asked them two definite questions: first, what they would regard as sufficient to ensure their rejecting all English proposals which did not include absolute independence; second, what they believed necessary to cause Congress to reject all such proposals. The Commissioners replied to the first question, that a treaty of commerce and alliance would be sufficient.[2] Gérard told them that the King, anticipating this answer, had decided to conclude a treaty; and that the formal negotiations should begin whenever they wished. At their request, he made a brief statement of the terms which would be agreeable to France, following the lines of Vergennes' despatch to the Spanish Court. The policy of the commercial treaty, he said, would not differ materially from that of the Congressional plan. He explained that the King would not require any compensation for his support; and that, since his motive was not desire for conquest, France could not co-operate with America for the reduction of Canada and the West Indies.[3] In spite of this limitation, the Deputies felt that the main object of their endeavor was gained. They "applauded this recital," Gérard reported, "with a sort of transport."

Three days later, Deane gave Gérard the answer of the Commissioners to his second question.[4] To prevent Con-

[1] Vergennes to Montmorin, Jan. 8, 1778. Doniol, II, p. 719.

[2] Stevens Facsimiles, 774.

[3] Journal of Arthur Lee. Life, I, p. 377.

[4] Jan. 11, 1778. Stevens Facsimiles, 776.

gress from making peace with England, they said it would be necessary that France should guarantee the territories then in possession of the United States and those acquired during the war, and either declare war against England or provide Congress with enough money to carry on the struggle until the British should be expelled from the continent. A fleet of six or eight ships of the line would make doubly sure, by procuring the success of the Americans. In making these requests, the Commissioners asked for more than they could hope to obtain ; for they had been told that immediate war formed no part of the King's plan. Vergennes was annoyed. "These people," he said, "show themselves infinitely more troublesome and more morose than we could have thought."[1]

After the interview just described, the negotiation went on with little delay. On the eighteenth of January, the treaties drawn up by Vergennes were submitted to the Deputies, who deliberated on them for ten days[2] and, after obtaining some changes in minor points, accepted them. The principal matter of discussion was the nature of the alliance ; the Americans wishing to make it actual, the French insisting that it must be eventual. Of course the Commissioners were obliged to yield.

While France was entering on the last stage of her negotiation with the Americans, the Spanish Ministry were preparing an elaborate set of questions for discussion. They took this step, apparently, with a double aim : to gain time ; and to give a forcible hint that Spain would not prosecute a war for the mere humiliation of England, but would insist on substantial advantages.[3] This promising document had scarcely been completed, when the French *mémoire* of January 8 arrived, to convince the Spaniards that their efforts were useless, for the measure which they were trying to delay had probably been adopted. The natural irritation of the baffled statesmen found vent in criticism of their ally. The Court of France had not performed its agreements ; it

[1] Vergennes to Montmorin, Jan. 16, 1778. Stevens Facsimiles, 1838.
[2] See Arthur Lee's Journal, Jan., 1778. Life, I, pp. 377 ff.
[3] Florida Blanca to d'Aranda, Jan. 13, 1778. Doniol, II, p. 775.

had compelled Spain to change her whole plan of war, with the result that her colonies were ill defended ; it had "observed neither secrecy, moderation nor neutrality in any respect as to the Americans. . . . In a matter of so grave importance,"—thus ran the Spanish arraignment,—"it has followed no system or plan, since at one time it worked openly and with great zeal in favor of the Colonies, and at another, had resort to condescensions by no means becoming, on the slightest complaint or insinuation of the British Cabinet."[1] In this light, the temporizing policy of France appeared to her ally. Spain was not left long in doubt of the outcome of that policy. On January 30, Vergennes wrote to Montmorin that the treaties were practically completed ; and on the sixth of February, the month which, half a year before, Vergennes had set as a limit beyond which delay would be disastrous, they were signed and sealed.

The Treaty of Amity and Commerce followed, in its main lines, the plan of Congress and the specific modifications contained in the instructions of the Commissioners. The plan provided for mutual exemption from all duties on imports except those which each state required of its own citizens. France declined to become a party to this agreement, and the privileges of the most favored nation were substituted, each party reserving liberty to admit other nations to the same advantages. An attempt was made to provide for reciprocal exemptions between the United States and the West Indies. This met with objections on the part of one member of the Commission and two of his countrymen who were admitted into the secret. After the discussion had done as much harm as possible by exciting ill feeling among the Americans, an effort was made to have the articles in question omitted. They were left untouched, with the understanding that Congress might ratify them or not, without prejudice to the rest of the treaty, and were finally rejected. France reserved her share in the Newfoundland fishery, as

[1] *Mémoire* to be read in Council of Ministers, Jan. 22, 1778. Sparks MSS., CII.

stipulated in the treaty of Paris; and each nation renounced the right to fish on the grounds belonging to the other.

More important to the world at large than the commercial privileges and fishing rights conveyed by the treaty were the rules which it laid down for the regulation of trade in time of war. The principle that "free ships make free goods" was adopted; and the term 'contraband' was restricted to arms, munitions, accoutrements, and horses.[1]

A treaty of defensive alliance[2] supplemented the commercial agreement and ensured protection to the trade thereby authorized. The alliance, eventual in its nature as long as Great Britain and France remained at peace, should become actual on the outbreak of hostilities between them, if this occurred during the American war. The aim of the alliance was declared to be, to maintain effectually the liberty, sovereignty, and independence of the United States. Each nation bound itself to attack the enemy separately and, on request, to assist its ally as much as possible. The rights of the two powers to conquests in America were defined: the United States claiming any which they might make in the northern part of America, or the Bermuda Islands; while France reserved the right to take any of the English islands in or near the Gulf of Mexico. The articles containing these reservations were expressed in general terms, although the corresponding passage in the Congressional plan named specifically the territories and islands which the United States desired to possess: among them, Florida, Newfoundland, Cape Breton, and St. Johns. This change caused the same men who protested against the reciprocity articles to suspect that France wished "to leave an opening for negotiating Florida into the possession of Spain" at a general peace, and for excluding the United States from the islands which command the Newfoundland fisheries.[3] Their obstinacy in clinging to this suspicion was a source of annoy-

[1] Secret Journals of Congress, II, p. 59.

[2] Ibid., II, p. 82.

[3] Ralph Izard to Arthur Lee, May 18, 1778. A. Lee to Izard, May 23. Izard to Henry Laurens, June 28, Sept. 12. John Adams to Izard, Oct 2. Diplomatic Correspondence, II, pp. 586, 594, 629, 713, 753.

ance to the negotiators at the time, and has since been treated by some of the ablest historians as wholly unjustified ; but the instructions given to Gérard, the first French minister to the United States, show that France preferred to see Florida, at least, in the hands of Spain.[1]

The parties to the treaty bound themselves to conclude no peace without mutual consent, and not to lay down their arms until the independence of the United States had been "formally or tacitly" assured. They renounced in advance all claim to compensation. They mutually guaranteed their American possessions ; and France guaranteed the independence of the United States from the moment of a rupture with England or, in case no such breach should occur, from the close of the American war. A separate article gave the King of Spain the right to accede to the treaties at pleasure.

Vergennes thought at the time of the negotiation that, owing to the natural difficulty of keeping such a secret, the Americans would hear of the treaty by the end of April or the beginning of May ; so he decided to announce it to England at that time.[2] But, before the date set, he began to fear that Congress would not hear of it early enough to prevent them from listening to the British propositions. As news reached America more surely and quickly by way of the English newspapers than when sent direct from France, he determined to announce the treaty to England even earlier than he had intended. Rumors of the negotiation had reached England before it was concluded, and news of the signing was promptly conveyed to the British Cabinet by agents who were always ready to carry reports across the Channel. But the existence of the treaty was positively known to only a few people ; and the doubt thrown upon it by the British Ministry indicated that concealment was desired by England and, as a natural consequence, that an announcement would be advantageous to France. So the ambassador at London received orders to declare the treaty ; and, for fear that the British govern-

[1] Gérard's Instructions, approved March 29. 1778. Vergennes to Gérard, Oct. 26. Doniol, III, pp. 155, 156.

[2] Vergennes to Montmorin, Jan. 30, 1778. Ibid., II, p. 791.

ment might conceal the facts, he was instructed to let nothing prevent him from allowing the secret to leak out in private conversation the next day.[1] The announcement was made on the thirteenth of March. The Treaty of Amity and Commerce was communicated with insolent unconcern ; and England was informed that France and the United States had also entered into an engagement for the protection of their commerce.[2] Within a week, both England and France recalled their ambassadors, and war had virtually begun.

In announcing the treaty so early, France ignored the request of Spain that it be concealed until July, to allow the return of her troops and her treasure-fleet. In this way, another cause of offense was prepared ; but one more was of little consequence, where the points of disagreement were already so many and important. Clearly, if France desired more aid than the minimum secured to her by the Family Compact, she must promote the exorbitant ambition of her ally. With the utmost frankness, d'Aranda had exposed the reason why Spain demanded so many advantages as the price of her assistance. Her statesmen feared that, if war should break out and be continued until England made overtures of peace, France would "require Spain to comply also, and to be content with the same terms;" they believed "that the explanation of the purposes of Spain having preceded, France would be obliged to sustain the undertaking until they should be carried out."[3]

By the ratification of the treaties, which took place promptly on their arrival in America, France gained two important points : she bound the United States to continue the war until their independence was achieved, and to accept her guaranty. But was it necessary that she should commit herself so decisively and, with reference to her other

[1] Vergennes to Montmorin, March 6, 10, 1778. Vergennes to Noailles, March 10. Doniol, II, pp. 810, 813, 822, 826.

[2] Ibid., II, p. 823.

[3] DAranda to Florida Blanca, Jan. 31, 1778. Sparks MSS., CII.

interests, so prematurely, in order to secure the end desired? In other words, was there imminent danger of peace between England and America?

It is generally conceded that the United States could not have carried the struggle to a successful issue without the aid of France. Submission must have come at last; but, for the immediate purpose of counteracting Lord North's Conciliatory Bills, the treaty which Vergennes rushed to a conclusion without the concurrence of Spain, was superfluous. Lord North's propositions were not so 'conciliatory' as Vergennes' fears led him to believe: they did not hold in reserve an offer of independence as a last resort. Hurried to America before their first reading in Parliament, they arrived in advance of the French treaty, only to be rejected.[1] France might have postponed her decision without serious danger.

This decision was of fatal consequence to France. The immediate results were not the most serious. The war in which France became involved, her difficult task as guardian of the conflicting interests of the United States and Spain, the restoration of her prestige at the close of the war,—trials and gains alike dwindle to incidents, beside the overthrow of her tottering finances and the impulse given to revolutionary sentiment at home. Of this result, Spain had warned her; England herself had warned her. Happily for America, most unhappily for her own interests, she was deaf to the warning. "You are arming, imprudent monarch; do you forget in what century, in what circumstances, and over what nation you reign? . . . The legislators of America are proclaiming themselves disciples of the French philosophers; they are executing what these have dreamed. Will not the French philosophers aspire to be legislators in their own country? Will principles which cannot be bent to English laws accord better with those on which your monarchy is based? How dangerous to place the flower of your officers in communication with men enthusiastic for liberty! You will take alarm, but too late, when you hear

[1] Journals of Congress, II, pp. 521 ff.

repeated in your court vague and specious axioms which they have meditated in the forests of America. . . . England will be only too well avenged for your hostile designs, when your government is examined, judged, and condemned according to the principles professed at Philadelphia and applauded in your capital.''[1]

[1] Retranslated from the French. Quoted from a pamphlet published in England toward the end of 1777, said to have been inspired by the British Ministry. Lacretelle, *Histoire de France*, V, p. 82.

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