Chapter 7

Aftermath of the Election

The Republicans had waged a vituperative campaign against Adams. Despite this they hoped that the efforts of the Hamiltonians might have sufficiently estranged Adams from the Federalists to make possible a coalition with him on the basis of a moderate program. Jefferson drew up a letter to Adams assuring him that he would be glad to accept the vice-presidency, and that there should be no barrier between them. "The public & the papers have been much occupied lately in placing us in a point of opposition to each other. I trust with confidence that less of it has been felt by ourselves personally." He had never thought that he would win. Always he had served as Adams' junior, and would continue in this position with pleasure. Should the election go into the house, he would withdraw in favor of Adams.¹

The letter was enclosed in one written to Madison, which sets forth the aim he had in view. "If Mr. Adams can be induced to administer the government on its true principles, & to relinquish his bias to an English constitution, it is to be considered whether it would not be on the whole for the public good to come to a good understanding with him as to his future elections. He is perhaps the only sure barrier against Hamilton's getting in." ²

Madison, however, felt it would be best not to deliver the letter. He had written to Jefferson urging his acceptance of the vice-presidency, "There is reason to believe that your neighborhood to Adams may have a valuable effect on his councils, particularly in relation to our external system. You know that his feelings will not enslave him to the example of his predecessor. It is certain that his censure of our paper [money] system & the intrigues at New York for setting P. above him, have fixed an

enmity with the British faction . . . add to the whole that he is said to speak of you now in friendly terms and will no doubt be soothed by your acceptance of a place subordinate to him."³

Yet Madison thought it unwise to transmit Jefferson’s letter to Adams. He informed Jefferson that Adams had already been judiciously apprised of Jefferson’s disposition in regard to him. His ticklish temper being what it was, it would probably be best not to risk such a step as the delivery of the letter. Moreover, he was already fully aware of Hamilton’s “treachery,” which Jefferson had taken care to deplore in the letter he wrote. Another consideration was that it would be questionable wisdom to impart such material in writing when it might afford the means for future embarrassment if the policy of Adams should later be such as would require virulent denunciation. Another consideration was that many of the Republicans would not approve of depreciating the attacks made during the campaign. There was already friction on that score within Republican ranks. Such a step as this might appear as a repudiation of certain of their own friends.⁴

One of those most anxious to see the new administration divorce itself from many of the old policies was Elbridge Gerry. Soon after the election Gerry wrote to Mrs. Adams warning Adams against his cabinet, and urging cooperation with Jefferson. This letter is of considerable interest.

True it is that an ‘assemblage of fortunate circumstances’ to favor his administration ‘has been the singular lot’ of the predecessor in office, & he is in my opinion a very great & good character: but it is said nevertheless, & if true, to be lamented that by the wiles of insidious & unprincipled men, he has nominated to offices foreign as well as domestic, some characters which would not bear the public test, & are a reproach to religion morality good government & even to decency, he is likewise charged with manifesting a disposition of extending his power at the expense of the constitution, & notwithstanding the virulence of party [Gerry is inclined to accept much of this]. I must confess however, that wise & politic as it may be to mark the great

hazards which have exposed to danger this skilful pilot, I have the highest respect for him & think there are few (if any) characters who are his equals in history ancient or modern.

I have been long acquainted with Mr. Jefferson & conceiving that he & Mr. Adams have had a mutual respect for each other: conceiving also that he is a gentleman of abilities, integrity, altho not entirely free from a disposition to intrigue, yet in general a person of candor & moderation, I think it is a fortunate circumstance that he is Vice President & that great good is to be expected from the joint election.

The insidious plan to bring a third person into the presidential chair arose from a corrupt design of influencing his administration, as is generally conceived. Whether his want of experience will justify the expectation, I will not pretend to say, but sure I was from good information that the supporters of Mr. Jefferson give Mr. Adams a decided preference as well for his abilities as his independent spirit.5

Gerry also warned Adams about Timothy Pickering, Secretary of State. Pickering had prepared an answer to charges by the French Minister, Adet. In this he emphasized the importance of John Jay in the negotiations with England for the Treaty of Peace of 1783. This emphasis minimized the importance of Adams in the negotiation.6 However he was unable to make any impression upon Adams regarding the loyalty of the cabinet. Adams replied, “Pickering and his colleagues are as much attached to me as I desire. I have no jealousies from that quarter.”7 Indeed the change of any of the cabinet, particularly in view of the strained relations between Federalist factions, would have been the signal for open war. There was then no precedent for a change of officials with a new administration. In fact the cabinet officers were regarded as being in office until the choice to retire.

At one point Adams, who always recognized the danger of giving play to his natural irascibility, was willing to believe that Hamilton's attempt had only been dictated by a desire to insure the election of Pinckney over Jefferson, or at most was due to a

5 Gerry to Abigail Adams, Cambridge, Jan. 7, 1797. Gerry Mss. (Words in parentheses struck out.)
7 Adams to Gerry, Philadelphia, Feb. 13, 1797. Ibid., 522. Also Adams to Gerry in Massachusetts Historical Society Collection, Vol. 73, 331.
fear that it would not be safe to risk everything on Adams.\(^8\) Several days later, however, he received intelligence from a friend in Albany that was of such a nature as to confirm his worst suspicions about Hamilton's policy of opposing him.\(^9\)

In his effort to effect a union between Jefferson and Adams, Gerry wrote to Jefferson in the same vein as he wrote to Adams, urging cooperation. He informed Jefferson that it was with great pain that he had not voted for Jefferson in his capacity as elector. Only knowledge of the superior claims of Adams, and the realization that he would be cancelling his vote, had prevented him from voting for both.\(^10\) Jefferson replied that the result of the election was in accord with his own desires, and that he hoped there would be no friction between the two executive officers. On his part he desired to cooperate.\(^11\)

Adams indicated that he, too, wished that differences might be buried, and that he might have Republican approval. He trusted that "the party who have embarrassed the President and exerted themselves to divide the election" would not continue this policy. "I have seen," he wrote, "a disposition to acquiesce, and hope it will increase."\(^12\) With Adams as with Jefferson, Gerry continued to urge cooperation between the two as late as July. Benjamin Rush also made every effort to bring about cooperation between Adams and Jefferson.\(^13\)

Much of the material on this proposed reconciliation between Adams and the Republicans became public. The extent to which Madison exhibited the letter of Jefferson, "in confidence," has not been realized. It became known detail by detail to the Federalists.\(^14\) Moreover it was the subject of discussion in the


\(^{9}\) Adams' Works, VIII, 524.

\(^{10}\) Gerry to Jefferson, March 27, 1797. Austin, Gerry, II, 134-36.

\(^{11}\) Jefferson to Gerry, Philadelphia, May 13, 1797. Ibid., 136-42.


\(^{13}\) Gerry to Jefferson, July 6, 1797. New England Historical and Genealogical Register, XLIX, 438; Rush to Jefferson, Philadelphia, Jan. 4, 1796, Letters of Benjamin Rush, I, 784.

\(^{14}\) Theodore Sedgwick to Rufus King, Philadelphia, March 12, 1797, King's King, II, 156.
press. One correspondent in the *Centinel*, the organ of New England Federalism, declared that this would mean the acceptance of the office by Jefferson. "The event, we hope, will

'Unite the roses, red and white together . . .'

Thereupon, in the next issue, a militant Federalist, in high indignation, replied, "The correspondent who so sanguinely expects the union of 'the roses red and white,' by the election of Messrs. Adams and Jefferson, to the Executive chairs, will assuredly be disappointed. Fire and frost are not more opposite in their natures than those characters are; and the prosperity, honor, and dignity of the United States, depend on an administration *perfectly* federal. That those gentlemen differ essentially on the leading principles of government is certain; and that Adams will remain unshaken in his, cannot be questioned."

In this the issue is fairly joined. On the one hand there was a party of moderation, as represented by such as Gerry; on the other the High-Federalists, demanding complete proscription of the opposition and obedience to their own desires.

If there existed a division in the ranks of the Federalists as to how to accept the possibility of Republican cooperation, the Republicans publicly presented a united front in welcoming the change of administration. Benjamin Franklin Bache, editor of the *Aurora*, gave orders not to admit paragraphs unfavorable to Adams. "'Let us give him a fair trial,' said this editor to one of his correspondents, 'and then, if he actually does wrong, our censures will fall with the greater weight.'" In 1801 Mr. Callender expressed the matter thus with his customary purity of outlook. "Had he [Adams] attempted to steer a middle course between the two parties, and to make a moderate use of his immense official patronage in securing friends, his interest must infallibly have been supported by an overwhelming majority of

15 *Centinel*, Jan. 14, 1797.
citizens. Without competition, or disturbance, he might have enjoyed his beloved salary, to the end of his life.”

The announcement of the Republican attitude appeared in the *Aurora* on December 21, 1796. The article states that Washington seems to arrogate great merit to himself for retiring voluntarily. As a matter of fact no credit is due, for the real source of this decision is a “consciousness that he would not be re-elected, [rather] than a want of ambition or lust of power.” The Republicans would have united with the supporters of Adams in placing him above Washington. The reason for this preference is that “There can be no doubt that Adams would not be a *puppet* — that having an opinion and judgment of his own, he would act from his impulses rather than the impulses of others — that possessing great integrity, he would not sacrifice his country’s interests at the shrine of party — and that being an enemy to the corruptions which have taken place by means of funding systems, he would not lend his aid to the further prostitution of the American character.” Moreover, Adams is an aristocrat in theory only, Washington in practice. “Adams has the simplicity of a republican, but . . . Washington has the ostentation of an eastern bashaw. . . .”

In like manner the *Independent Chronicle* declared, “The republicans anxiously wish the President at Mount Vernon, and Mr. Adams in the exercise of the important office, . . . and that he may in every respect shun the pernicious example of his predecessor, is the sincere wish and fond hope of every real American.” Advice was freely tendered to Adams that his cabinet should be remade. Theirs was the responsibility of causing the neglect of the Vice-President during the preceding six years. Perhaps Pickering can explain this.

It needs no comment upon this campaign to point out that in it there is no great subtlety. It naturally was perfectly evident

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18 Callender, J. T., *Prospect Before Us*, II, Part 2 (Richmond, 1801), 34-35. This part of the *Prospect* was written from Richmond Jail. *Ibid.*, 16.

19 *Aurora*, Dec. 21, 1796.

20 *Chronicle*, March 6, 1797.

21 *Aurora*, Feb. 13, 1797; *Chronicle*, March 5, 1797.
to Adams that the chance of securing this support at the same time as retaining that of the Federalists was a manifest impossibility. Furthermore, despite the opposition of a portion of the Federalists, it was to the great mass of this party that he owed his election and his sympathies were largely with this group of the Federalists. Adams himself, in general policy, had not yet reached the position of most of the political moderates.

Be this as it may, many of the Federalists were greatly worried. Sedgwick wrote that it had been intended for all from the East of the Delaware to vote equally for Pinckney and Adams. "Had those views, and in them I concurred, prevailed," he stated, "the former would have become president and the latter continued in his former station. What effects that arrangement would have produced can now only be a subject of conjecture. The attempt, however, has afforded abundant matter for Jacobinical intrigue." He gave in detail the content of Jefferson's undelivered letter to Adams, and pointed out the sentiments expressed in Jefferson's speech on assuming the vice-presidency were of the same tenor. 22

From Boston Higginson wrote to Hamilton that he was being charged by the friends of Adams with a desire to defeat Adams, and that it was likewise stated Hamilton had opposed Adams because he would be unable to rule him. Among the special partisans of Adams there was general rejoicing over the selection of Jefferson rather than Pinckney. 23 Ames had heard of the letter written by Jefferson. He declared, "such hypocrisy may dupe very great fools, but it should alarm all other persons." He feared that this design to deceive Adams might not be without success. 24 Naturally the efforts of the Republican press were commented upon by the members of this group. 25

Hamilton was less alarmed than many of his followers. He wrote, "Our Jacobins say, they are well pleased, and that the

22 Sedgwick to R. King, Philadelphia, March 12, 1797. King's King, II, 156.
lion and lamb are to lie down together. Mr. Adams’s Personal friends talk a little in the same way.” He, however, was skeptical that there would be any such outcome and placed his trust in Adams’ integrity to the Federalist cause.26

Troup pointed out that New York and New Jersey gave all their votes to Adams and Pinckney; consequently charges by the Adams’ factions were unjust.27 As, however, it was not the purpose of Hamilton to create an open break, but to arrange matters so that it would appear that Pinckney had won by reason of a natural popularity in the South, this was beside the point.

There is an interesting side light of this period which deserves to be recorded. The Gazette ran a brief note, “Evidence of Monarchy,” “The Vice President of the United States was seen handing Buckets in one of the lanes the other morning at the Fire.” 28 This was probably the fire recorded several days before under “Melancholy and Distressing,” in which fire Mr. and Mrs. Andrew Brown and their three children were fatally burned.29

As the administration of Washington was brought to a close the cloud appeared upon the horizon which was to overspread the entire administration of his successor. C. C. Pinckney had been sent as minister plenipotentiary to France, to negotiate a treaty which would settle the differences between the two countries. Meanwhile American commerce was receiving very serious losses from the depredations of the French. The demands of the shippers that the government afford protection to them and secure redress from France became more and more insistent. Desiring to permit his successor to have a free hand in the policy which would be formulated, Washington postponed any decision. As a consequence, this question, the decision upon which would largely determine the character of the new administration’s policy, awaited the inauguration of Adams.

26 Hamilton to King, Feb. 15, 1797. Hamilton’s Works (Hamilton, ed.), VI, 206.
27 Troup to R. King, Jan. 28, 1797. King’s King, II, 135.
28 Gazette of the United States, Jan. 30, 1797.
29 Ibid., Jan. 20, 1797. It is barely possible that the fire in question was that in the malt room of Thomas Morris’s Brew House. Ibid., Jan. 20, 1797.