

tance to me," he wrote his brother-in-law, Tapping Reeve, "& must therefore command a little of your attention." He had also enlisted the services of another relative, Pierpont Edwards, who had agreed to obtain signatures of approval from a half-dozen leading members of the Connecticut Bar. Reeve was to urge the matter on Trumbull, Bradley and Sedgwick, all likewise of Connecticut.¹⁸

He also solicited and obtained the support of Edmund Randolph of Virginia, of Jonathan Sergeant of Philadelphia, who had been Treasurer of Princeton in Burr's college days. He went as far afield as Paris, where James Monroe, Minister Plenipotentiary, was called upon for assistance. He enclosed the necessary papers and opinions, declaring that "those decisions, and of course my opinion, have been the subject of much animadversion and declamation; they were in short attacked with every thing but reason and law. The discontent of the friends of Mr. Jay or rather of the enemies of Mr. Clinton became clamorous and was expressed by resolutions and addresses of tumultuous meetings." In order to achieve public approbation of his course, Burr proceeded, "the persuasion must principally be wrought by the authority of great Names (for it cannot be expected that the public will reason on law points)." And if possible, Monroe was, besides rendering his own opinion, to request those of Patrick Henry and others in the South, charging all expenses to Burr.¹⁹

In short, Aaron Burr threw himself into the matter with every weapon and every resource that his powerful and agile mind could discover. Though, as he wrote Jacob De Lamater, "it would, indeed, be the extreme of weakness in me to expect friendship from Mr. Clinton. I have too many reasons to believe that he regards me with jealousy and malevolence."²⁰

This was, in a measure, true. For Clinton could not but view with considerable uneasiness the rising star of Burr. Accordingly, he determined to repeat the tactics that he had employed with Judge Yates. In an access of seeming gratitude for the timely aid of the youthful Senator, he nominated him to the Council of Appointment on October 2, 1792, as a Judge of the State Supreme Court. Burr saw through the scheme and promptly declined the honor. He had no intention of being shelved.

CHAPTER X INTERMEDIATE YEARS

1. HAMILTON CALLS NAMES

AARON BURR had, by the latter part of 1792, definitely committed himself to the Republican ranks. He had, earlier in the year, been seriously considered as a candidate by the Federalists in New York; he had held aloof from active assistance or persuasion during the campaign; his voting in the Senate had been fairly non-partisan in character; but, with the advent of the disputed election, there was no longer any question as to where he stood. The Federalists were infuriated at his decisive part in the transaction, Hamilton considered him now as his most dangerous antagonist in state and national affairs, and the repercussions spread far and wide. He was a national figure, and the Republicans of other States observed the youthful Senator with a new and more thoughtful interest. They consulted with him, and listened with respect to his opinions in the councils of the still somewhat inchoate party.

An influential Pennsylvania Republican urged that "your friends everywhere look to you to take an active part in removing the monarchical rubbish of our government. It is time to speak out, or we are undone. The association in Boston augurs well. Do feed it by a letter to Mr. Samuel Adams. My letter will serve to introduce you to him, if enclosed in one from yourself."¹

The second national election for the Presidency of the United States was then in full swing. The first had been attended with practical unanimity. George Washington had been made President by acclamation; John Adams Vice-President by an overwhelming majority.

But now, in 1792, parties had definitely emerged. There was still no opposition to the reelection of Washington, though the magic of his name had faded considerably. There were a good many underground rumblings at his seeming monarchical tendencies, and especially at the strangle-grip that Hamilton held upon his Administration.

Nevertheless the Republicans determined to move cautiously. They attacked a more vulnerable figure — John Adams, the Vice-

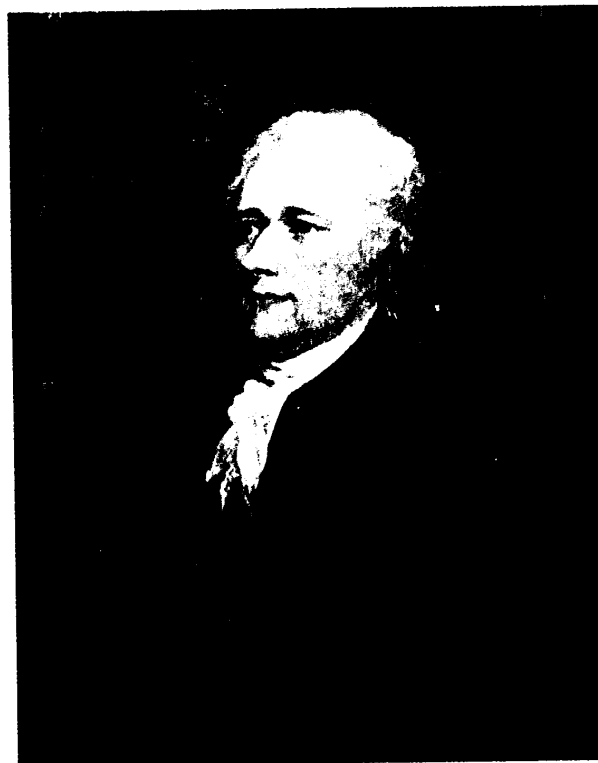
President. A serious effort was put forth to unseat him. The strategy was good. Washington must necessarily resign his office at the end of the term — he had already expressed his disinclination for further public honors — and the Vice-President would be the logical heir to the vacant throne.

Three men were mentioned by the Republicans as candidates: Governor George Clinton of New York, Thomas Jefferson, and Aaron Burr.

Burr went quietly to work to build his political fences — chiefly in Massachusetts, Connecticut, Pennsylvania and South Carolina. In New York he was already a power. It was not that he expected to achieve the Vice-Presidency in this particular election, but he took the professional, long view. There would be other campaigns and other years, and an organization was not built in a day. Already, the year before, he had been secretly busy in Massachusetts.²

But quietly and discreetly as he moved, the Federalists got wind of his doings and became alarmed. Their consternation was greater, it seems, than over the avowed candidacy of George Clinton. Rufus King sounded the tocsin. "If the enemies of the government are secret and united," he warned Hamilton, "we shall lose Mr. Adams. Burr is industrious in his canvass, and his object is well understood by our Antis. Mr. Edwards is to make interest for him in Connecticut, and Mr. Dallas, who is here and quite in the circle of the Governor and the party, informs us that Mr. Burr will be supported as Vice-President in Pennsylvania. Should Jefferson and his friends unite in the project, the votes of Mr. A. may be so reduced, that though more numerous than those of any other person, he may decline the office."³

Hamilton literally frothed at the mouth on the receipt of this startling information. He lost his head completely. Wherever he turned, the smiling, secretive figure of Burr was looming more and more in his path to thwart his plans, personal, private and political. They had begun as rivals at the New York Bar, and Burr was his only competitor to preeminence in that field. Then Burr had committed the unforgivable crime — he had wrested the senatorship from Hamilton's father-in-law. The next step had been to sow discord in the ranks of Hamilton's own party, and to create the first serious threat to his leadership in the State. It had been only by herculean efforts that the thrust had been averted. Burr had countered then by doing more than anyone else to wrench the governorship from Hamilton's candidate when Jay's election had seemed assured. In the Senate he had fought Hamilton's measures



Courtesy of The New York Historical Society

ALEXANDER HAMILTON

From a portrait by John Trumbull (?)

unnamed Federalist he wrote: "Mr. Clinton's success I should think very unfortunate; I am not for trusting the government too much in the hands of its enemies. But still, Mr. C. is a man of property, and in private life, as far as I know, of probity. I fear the other gentleman [Burr] is unprincipled, both as a public and a private man . . . He is determined, as I conceive, to make his way to be the head of the popular party, and to climb *per fas aut nefas* to the highest honors of the State, and as much higher as circumstances may permit. Embarrassed, as I understand, in his circumstances, with an extravagant family, bold, enterprising, and intriguing, I am mistaken if it be not his object to play a game of confusion, and I feel it a religious duty to oppose his career." *Religious duty*, indeed!

"I have hitherto scrupulously refrained from interference in elections," he went on with a wild disregard for the truth, "but the occasion is, in my opinion, of sufficient importance to warrant, in this instance, a departure from that rule. I, therefore, commit my opinion to you without scruple; but in perfect confidence. I pledge my character for discernment, that it is incumbent upon every good man to resist the present design."⁵

Strange language, even for those times, certain to make a deep-seated impression on men who perhaps did not know Burr personally, who looked upon Hamilton as their leader, and who knew that he was intimately acquainted with the object of his opprobrium. Loose language, too, for there is nothing definite, nothing tangible about the repeated accusations; and an examination of Burr's career, both public and private, during this period, discloses nothing on which these charges could possibly be hung.

As the letters flowed from Hamilton's facile pen he grew more and more unrestrained. To another Federal politician he repeated almost verbatim the old charges, and proceeded further: "Mr. Burr's integrity as an individual is not unimpeached. As a public man, he is one of the worst sort—a friend to nothing but as it suits his interest and ambition . . . 'Tis evident that he aims at putting himself at the head of what he calls the 'popular party,' as affording the best tools for an ambitious man to work with. Secretly turning liberty into ridicule, he knows as well as most men how to make use of that name. In a word, if we have an embryo Caesar in the United States, 'tis Burr."⁶

To Steele, however, who, as a member of Congress, was well acquainted with the victim, he writes far more cautiously, and with an inconsistency that is deliberate. "My opinion of Mr. Burr is yet to form—" he says surprisingly, "but, according to the pres-

ent state of it, he is a man whose only political principle is to *mount at all events*, to the highest legal honors." Moreover, he insinuates, "imputations, not favorable to his integrity as a man, rest upon him, but I do not vouch for their authenticity."⁷ This, almost a month after he had pledged his character and reputation for discernment to the authenticity of identical statements!

To King, his friend and lieutenant, he lets the cat out of the bag. He thanks him for his warning against Burr's activities, and promises complacently that "a good use will be made of it in this State," and in all the States to the south of New York.⁸

Yet outwardly, Hamilton was seemingly on the friendliest of personal terms with Burr. And if Burr knew of the pernicious sniping against his character, he, too, made no sign. But slowly, with the inevitability of a Greek tragedy, the mills of the gods were grinding toward a predestined end.

2. WITHDRAWAL AND A BARGAIN

An unpublished letter from John Beckley, a Pennsylvania politician, addressed to James Madison, dispels somewhat the fog that has hitherto seemed to shroud the inner mechanism of the Republican strategy in the election of 1792 and Burr's part therein. He tells of "a meeting which was had last evening between Melancton Smith, on the part of the republican interest of N. Y. (specially deputed) and the principal movers of the same interest here [Pennsylvania], to conclude *finally & definitively* as to the choice of a V. P.—the result of which was, unanimously, to exert every endeavor for Mr. Clinton, & to drop all thought of Mr. Burr." And, he proceeds, Colonel Burr had assured him "that he would cheerfully support the measure of removing Mr. A[dams] & lend every aid in his power to C[linton]'s election."⁹

Burr was as good as his word. Washington received a unanimous vote. Against him there was no open opposition. But John Adams met with difficulties. He received 77 out of a possible 132 ballots. George Clinton, with the Republican caucus behind him, obtained 50—the second votes of New York, Virginia, North Carolina and Georgia. Kentucky cast 10 for Jefferson, and Aaron Burr received a solitary salute from South Carolina. New York, chiefly because of Clinton and Burr, had marched with the agrarian South.

It is important to remember the outcome of that caucus in Philadelphia at which Burr was dropped in favor of Clinton. It is quite plausible to assume that certain assurances had been made

to him in return for his withdrawal. At any rate, Burr was to claim after the Presidential election of 1796 that there had been such a bargain, and that the South had violated its share in the agreement.

3. RICHMOND HILL AND THE ARTS

Hamilton had been correct in at least one of his many accusations against Burr. He *was* extravagant. He loved to live well, to entertain lavishly and with abounding hospitality; he sought out young, struggling talent, and helped it with unobtrusive generosity along the road to recognition and fortune.

Abraham Mortier, Commissary to the King, had leased in 1768 from Trinity Church for a period of 99 years a little hill that overlooked the Hudson in what was then the outskirts of New York City. Today it is approximately the area enclosed by Clinton Place, Varick and Van Dam Streets. On this plot of farm land he built himself a stately mansion with wide porticoes, noble rooms, and an unequalled vista of rolling country, lordly river, and pleasant meadows. The house and its little eminence became known as Richmond Hill, and its fame spread far and wide.

During the Revolutionary War General Washington had used it as his Headquarters, and Burr had then obtained his first glimpse of it. John Adams next occupied the house while Vice-President. His remarkable wife, Abigail, grew lyric over its charms. "The house in which we reside," she exclaimed to her sister, "is situated upon a hill, the avenue to which is interspersed with forest trees. . . . In front of the house, the noble Hudson rolls his majestic waves, bearing upon his bosom innumerable small vessels." And, beyond, "rises to our view the fertile country of the Jerseys, covered with a golden harvest, and pouring forth plenty like the cornucopia of Ceres. On the right hand, an extensive plain presents us with a view of fields covered with verdure, and pastures full of cattle. On the left, the city opens upon us, intercepted only by clumps of trees, and some rising ground, which serves to heighten the beauty of the scene, by appearing to conceal a part. In the back ground, is a large flower-garden, enclosed with a hedge and some very handsome trees. On one side of it, a grove of pines and oaks fit for contemplation."¹⁰

And to a friend she rhapsodized: "I have a situation here, which, for natural beauty may vie with the most delicious spot I ever saw."¹¹ When the Adamses were forced to move to Philadelphia in 1790, on the transfer of the Capital to that city, she

mourned sadly, thinking of departed glories, that "Bush Hill is a very beautiful place. But the grand and sublime I left at Richmond Hill."¹²

This was Burr's opportunity to gain possession of the coveted Paradise. He took over the lease in 1791, furnished the great mansion with splendid furnishings, landscaped the grounds, widened and dammed Minetta Brook into a pond, and proceeded to entertain visiting celebrities in princely style. No distinguished Frenchman, exile or traveler from his native land, but spent hospitable weeks as his guest. Tallyrand, Volney, Louis Philippe, Jerome Napoleon, and others remembered with pleasure Richmond Hill and its cultured host. His library was always stocked with the very latest imported volumes. He gave instructions to a London bookseller to forward him at once the very best of the newer publications. He received Gibbon's monumental work, the writings of William Godwin, of Mary Wollstonecraft, of Jeremy Bentham, volumes on history, economics, and military tactics.

As a patron of literature and the arts he was famous in his day. John Davis was gratefully to record that Burr, "cultivating literature himself, loved to encourage it in others; and . . . with a condescension little known to patrons, sought out my obscure lodgings in a populous city, and invited me to his house."¹³

The famous painter, John Vanderlyn, owed far more to Burr's far-seeing and generous patronage. Vanderlyn, born in Kingston, New York, had come to Philadelphia to study art under the tutelage of the master, Gilbert Stuart. Lacking funds to continue, he returned to Kingston, where he made some striking copies of certain portraits that Stuart had lent him. One of these was a portrait of Burr. This was sold to Peter Van Gaasbeck, of Kingston, a member of Congress and a friend of Burr. Burr learned of the young painter and expressed a desire to assist him.

He wrote Van Gaasbeck: "I understand that a young Mr. Van De Lyne, who lived a short time with Stewart the Painter, left him for want of the means of suitable support.

"You must persuade him to allow me to remove that objection. If he was personally acquainted with me, he would, I am confident, accept this proposal without hesitation. I commit to you then to overcome any delicacy which he may feel on this head. I shall never imagine that I have conferred on him the slightest obligation, but shall be infinitely flattered by an opportunity of rescuing Genius from obscurity.

"He may draw on J. B. Prevost, New York for any sum which may be necessary for his outfit. And on his arrival in this City,

where Mr. Stewart now lives, he will find a letter from me, addressed to him (Mr. Van De Lyne) pointing out the channel of his future supplies, the source of which will never be known except to himself . . . This arrangement is intended to continue as long as it may be necessary for Mr. V. D. L. to cultivate his genius to highest point of Perfection."¹⁴

Burr made this generous gesture at a time when he was head over heels in debt, when he owed substantial sums of money to the very Peter Van Gaasbeck whose aid he was enlisting on behalf of Vanderlyn. In an accompanying letter to Van Gaasbeck he replies to an evident request for funds that "something might perhaps be devised to fulfil in part your wishes. I am still however equally distressed, as when I last wrote you, in my finances . . . I have experienced . . . disappointments to a very distressing degree, and it will be six months before I shall be relieved, unless some unknown good fortune intervenes." But Burr's was an essentially buoyant and optimistic nature. He continues: "It will however give you pleasure to learn (& therefore only I mention it) that if I weather the storm, of which there can be no doubt I shall be as rich as a reasonable man need wish. I mention my distresses by way of apology for myself, in not having answered your letters in a more *effectual* and *satisfactory* way. And I mention my prospects to console you for the disappointment & to keep up your hopes & spirits."¹⁵

Nevertheless he fulfilled his assumed obligations to the young painter with a princely munificence. He had Vanderlyn study under Stuart for a year. When the master acknowledged that "you are wasting your time with me; now you are ready for Europe . . . I have taken you as far as I can," Burr brought him to Richmond Hill for the spring and summer of 1796, and diligently proceeded to advertise him as a splendid portraitist. He gained him many commissions; among them the portraits of Albert Gallatin, M. Adet, the French minister, and others. Not to speak of Burr himself and little Theodosia.

In September he sent Vanderlyn to France to continue his studies, with a liberal supply of money and letters of introduction. In two years he was back, again under Burr's tutelage. As long as Burr lived, the painter was to find in him a friend, a patron, an ardent admirer. Later, much later, when Vanderlyn had become famous, and achieved worldwide recognition, he was to remember gratefully the unselfish aid of Aaron Burr.¹⁶

4. FINANCIAL LEGERDEMAIN

It is obvious that Aaron Burr's expenses were enormous. Besides Richmond Hill, which he treated as a country estate, he retained his town house at No. 30 Partition Street. The upkeep of both establishments, the lavish entertainment, the largesse and patronage, the education of his daughter, Theodosia, imposed a drain on his resources with which not even his tremendous earning capacity could keep pace.

He was always in debt, always borrowing, always having notes falling due without the wherewithal to make payment. Throughout his life finances were to be a monotonous refrain, coloring his thoughts, engrossing his energies, weaving a pattern that was eventually to enmesh him in an impenetrable web. Yet never for a moment did he consider the possibility of reducing his expenses, of living on a less lavish scale. In the darkest days of his exile, he was to spend the last poor *sou* he possessed for some trinket that had engaged his fancy, and which, he thought, might brighten the face of far-off daughter or grandson. Then he would tighten his belt cheerfully against hunger and cold. It was something inherent, ineradicable.

As far back as 1791 there are constant references in his letters to notes of hand. He borrowed money from his friends, from usurers at exorbitant rates of interest. He paid as high as 15 percent per annum. His friends endorsed for him. And they were to rue their kindness; not because Burr was dishonest, but because his affairs had become so involved that, struggle as he might, he could never escape the nightmare multiplication of overdue notes. He had reared for himself a veritable inverted pyramid of paper, and the structure was toppling.

He borrowed from his clients too, because he could not help it. He and Hamilton had acted as joint counsel for Le Guen in a very complicated mercantile litigation against Gouverneur and Kemble. After several years' tortuous progress through the courts, the matter ended in victory for their client. On June 2, 1795, Burr received a fee of \$2500 for his services, of which \$1750 had already been assigned to two of his creditors. Both Hamilton and Burr borrowed heavily from Le Guen. Burr obtained several loans, one of which, for some \$6000, was to end in a dispute over alleged repayments, and was to drag acrimoniously for almost thirty years. Marinus Willett, General John Lamb, Le Guen, Pierpont Edwards, Colonel John Nicholson, Peter Van Gaasbeck — all friends

— appear again and again in his correspondence as endorsers who are involved in his whirlwind of extensions and renewals.

"When I took your last endorsement payable at *twenty Days*," Burr mournfully confessed to the disgusted Marinus Willett, "I expected that the Sale of my property would have been completed before the expiration of that time. It has happened otherwise and the Note becomes payable to day which obliges me to ask for a further endorsement."¹⁷

By 1796 the clouds were gathering ominously. "As to pecuniary matters," he informed a friend, involved with him by the usual endorsements, "I am very sorry both for your sake and my own that I can say nothing agreeable. I have met with the most vexatious and ruinous disappointments, and it is I assure you with extreme difficulty that I keep along."¹⁸

And in 1797 the storm was crashing about his ears. Robert Troup, his old-time personal friend and present bitter political enemy, was writing to Rufus King, now Minister to England, that Burr has "during the present session paid little or no attention to his duties in the Senate. It is whispered that his money engagements are embarrassing to him."¹⁹ The matter had become common knowledge.

It was General Lamb who bore the brunt of Burr's financial legerdemain. The correspondence between them is staggering in its proportions. Their transactions commenced back in 1795. They began modestly with a direct loan of \$3500 and by the end of 1796 had reached a total of over \$22,000, of which approximately \$5000 was still unpaid. Besides which, Lamb was endorsed on a considerable amount in outstanding notes.²⁰

By 1797 his affairs with General Lamb had reached the desperate stage. On December 9, 1796, Burr asked for "the other 2000 before three o'clock"; on December 10th, "it is with reluctance that I ask your endorsement to the enclosed"; on December 17th, he had reduced certain notes by \$2400 and was sending the renewal notes along for endorsement—this time without reluctance. Day by day the notes passed back and forth in bewildering succession.

Finally, in desperation, Burr offered to sell all his possessions at Richmond Hill to Lamb in settlement of their mutual accounts, and Lamb agreed. But another creditor pressed, and Lamb, on March 29, 1797, wrote magnanimously, "However desirable it might be to me to have your house on the terms you proposed, Yet if it will as you say enable you to settle with the holder of one of your Notes, I consent to release you from your offer. At the same

time I must intreat you to provide in some other Way for the balance due me."²¹

And, on June 17, 1797, Burr did sell to Sir John Temple, English Consul General, "all and singular the household goods furniture and things mentioned and expressed in the Inventory or Schedule hereto annexed, and now remaining in the Mansion house and on the Farm and piece of Land belonging to the said Aaron Burr."²²

The glories of Richmond Hill had departed. The place in which Theodosia Prevost Burr had spent the last years of her life, the graceful mansion over whose festal board young Theodosia had presided with dignity and astonishing aplomb, the walls that had echoed to laughter and brilliant conversation and the tread of a distinguished company, were now vacant and bare—stripped ruthlessly of mahogany armchairs, Turkey carpets, mirrors, satin haircloth sofas, Venetian blinds, fluted-post bedsteads, Dutch liquor cases—all the luxurious furnishings in which Burr had taken such pride—sold now for a pittance of \$3,500 to pay a single debt!

Nor did the empty walls of Richmond Hill last much longer. They were pawns in the desperate game he was playing with creditors. Later Burr was compelled to mortgage his leasehold, and much later, after his trial for treason, John Jacob Astor, with his hawklike eye for valuable land, took advantage of Burr's necessitous condition, and purchased the leasehold, subject to the mortgage, for the sum of \$32,000. It was this parcel that Astor was to cut up into lots, to be leased out at heavy rentals, and which contributed mightily to the foundation of his millions.²³

All these were but drops in the endless ocean of Burr's tangled finances. He would sit at home whole days in anxious expectation of promised funds, heartsick and weary. When he could write Lamb that "you perceive by the enclosed, that I am nearly through with your endorsements . . . In truth I could not see you with pleasure while these matters were unsettled,"²⁴ his volatile spirits rebounded.

But these canceled endorsements were evidently of only a single series of notes, because in 1798 Lamb was calling on him frantically for immediate aid. The creditors had tired of pressing Burr and were now concentrating on Lamb. Judgments had been obtained and executions were impending. Burr's property—whatever could be found—had also been seized.

Burr, then in Albany, felt the matter keenly. "I will return to N York," he advised by post, "and superintend the Sales of my

own property untill you shall be exonerated. That your peace of mind should be disturbed or personal safety endangered by an act of friendship and generosity to me is the most humiliating event of my life — and I shall be most wretched untill I hear the Course the business has taken. Though a writ of error can at any time be procured in an hour, yet the possibility of any inattention by which you might be for a moment exposed to indignity from people who would delight in torturing me through you, leave me no rest or peace.”²⁵

And finally, on May 6, 1799, General Lamb was actually arrested by Richard Harison, as counsel for impatient creditors, on executions primarily against Burr. Burr went frantically to work to help the innocent victim of his own difficulties. He proffered himself and David Gelston as bail; Harison insisted on additional security — certainly Burr's signature was no inducement — and suggested either Colonel Rutgers or Alexander Robertson.²⁶ Burr managed to satisfy Harison, and Lamb was released, to disappear out of the records of Burr's finances.

Eventually the whole precarious structure of notes and mortgages was to come toppling about Burr's ears, and was to be primarily responsible for that last desperate venture on the Washita and at Blennerhassett's Island which led to ruin and disgrace.

5. EXPERIMENT IN EDUCATION

Despite his financial difficulties, however, and despite his preoccupation with law and politics, Burr found time to supervise with meticulous exactitude the rearing and education of his little daughter, Theodosia.

He had very definite ideas on the subject of education, especially of female education. He resented the bland assumption of the day that women were inferior to men in mental capacity, and he was determined that *his* daughter should prove to the world that, given equal opportunities, the female brain was equally competent with the male. It became an obsession with him, almost the guiding passion of his life. He had married Theodosia Prevost because of her intellectual endowment.

“It was a knowledge of your mind,” he told her in later years, “which first inspired me with a respect for that of your sex, and with some regret, I confess, that the ideas which you have often heard me express in favour of female intellectual powers are founded on what I have imagined, more than what I have seen, except in you. I have endeavoured to trace the causes of this *rare* dis-

play of genius in women, and find them in the errors of education, of prejudice, and of habit . . . Boys and girls are generally educated much in the same way till they are eight or nine years of age, and it is admitted that girls make at least equal progress with the boys; generally, indeed, they make better. Why, then, has it never been thought worth the attempt to discover, by fair experiment, the particular age at which the male superiority becomes so evident?”²⁷

Burr determined to make the experiment. Little Theo was to be his laboratory guinea-pig, his shining example. The blood of many educators flowed in his veins. And he had just finished reading, with a mounting excitement, a certain volume he had recently received from England.

“You have heard me speak of a Miss Woolstonecraft [*sic*],” he hastened to inform his wife, “who has written something on the French revolution; she has also written a book entitled ‘Vindication of the rights of Woman.’ I had heard it spoken of with a coldness little calculated to excite attention; but as I read with avidity and prepossession every thing written by a lady, I made haste to procure it, and spent the last night, almost the whole of it, in reading it. Be assured that your sex has in *her* an able advocate. It is, in my opinion, a work of genius. She has successfully adopted the style of Rousseau's *Emilius*; and her comment on that work, especially what relates to female education, contains more good sense than all the other criticisms upon him which I have seen put together.” Astonished, he inquires, “is it owing to ignorance or prejudice that I have not yet met a single person who had discovered or would allow the merit of this work?”²⁸

But then, Aaron Burr possessed a singularly flexible and open mind, and new ideas were eagerly welcomed. Besides Mary Woolstonecraft, there had been Jeremy Bentham, and others, including Gibbon, whose monumental work had just been published, of whom he was perhaps the first in America to appreciate the importance.

So, with the theoretic background of the author of the “Vindication,” of Rousseau, of Chesterfield, of Godwin and Voltaire, he set about molding in earnest the genius of little Theo.

The course of training that he imposed was rigorous and exacting. It was Spartan in its insistence on regularity and self-discipline, yet it was compounded with ideas and methods that were far ahead of his time.

At the age of eight, he was insisting, “I hope Theo. will learn to ride on horseback. Two or three hours a day at French and

arithmetic will not injure her. Be careful of green apples, etc." 29 And Mrs. Burr was complaining in return that Theo had too many avocations to make much progress. Nevertheless "she begins to cipher" and "I take care she never omits learning her French lesson." But, she continues, "I don't think the dancing lessons do much good while the weather is so warm," and "as to music, upon the footing it now is she can never make progress, though she sacrifices two thirds of her time to it. Tis a serious check to her other requirements." 30

However, a little later she is able to report with some pride that "Theo is much better; she writes and ciphers from five in the morning until eight, and also the same hours in the evening," and that "she makes amazing progress with figures." 31

Nor was the elder Theodosia herself exempt from her husband's educational drive. "To render any reading really amusing or in any degree instructive, you should never pass a word you do not understand, or the name of a person or place of which you have not some knowledge. . . . Lempriere's Dictionary is that of which I spoke to you. Purchase also Macbeau's; this last is appropriate to ancient theocracy, fiction and geography, both of them will be useful in reading Gibbon, and still more so in reading ancient authors, or of any period of ancient history." Gibbon, Plutarch's Lives, Herodotus, Paley's Philosophy of Natural History — all these he recommends. "The reading of one book will invite you to another," he continues. "I cannot, I fear, at this distance, advise you successfully; much less can I hope to assist you in your reading. . . . I am inclined to dilate on these topics, and upon the effects of reading and study on the mind; but this would require an essay, and I have not time to write a letter." 32

As for the little girl, her education proceeded apace, in accordance with a preconceived plan. "You may recollect," Burr reminded his wife from his Senatorial duties in Philadelphia, "that I left a memorandum of what Theo was to learn. I hope it has been strictly attended to. Desire Gurney [her tutor] not to attempt to teach her anything about the 'concord.' I will show him how I choose that should be done when I return." Then suddenly he bursts out into a passion of words that give the clue to the driving purpose which not for a moment would he allow to waver. "If I could foresee that Theo would become a mere fashionable woman," he exclaims, "with all the attendant frivolity and vacuity of mind, adorned with whatever grace and allurement, I would earnestly pray God to take her forthwith hence. But I yet hope, by her, to convince the world what neither sex appear to believe — that women have souls!" 33

This was the man who too often has been portrayed as the heartless gallant, the unthinking seducer of innumerable women, the mere luster after their flesh!

He exhorted the younger Theo as well as the elder. "I received your french english Letter by Major Prevost," he told her. "It is a very good one, but not half long enough . . . How many tunes can you play? and can you play them so that any one except your Master will know one from the other?"

"Major Prevost indeed gives me a fine report of you, but in two or three weeks I shall come & see for myself, and I now tell you that I shall expect to see the most accomplished Girl for her years in the whole world. Take Care that I be not disappointed." 34

By 1793, Theo was ten, and corresponding regularly with her father in Philadelphia. She sent him a fable and a riddle, which, "if the whole performance was your own, which I am inclined to hope and believe, it indicates an improvement in style, in knowledge of French, and in your handwriting. I have therefore not only read it several times, but shown it to several persons with pride and pleasure." 35 The martinet educator was after all a very human father.

He insisted that she keep a journal, in which "you are to note the occurrences of the day as concisely as you can; and, at your pleasure, to add any short reflections or remarks that may arise." For her guidance he enclosed a sample. The sample is well worth quoting entire.

"Learned 230 lines, which finished Horace. Heigh-ho for Terence and the Greek grammar to-morrow.

"Practiced two hours less thirty-five minutes, which I have begged off.

"Hewlett (dancing master) did not come.

"Began Gibbon last evening. I find he requires as much study and attention as Horace; so I shall not rank the reading of *him* among amusements.

"Skated an hour; fell twenty times, and find the advantage of a hard head and

"Ma better — dined with us at table, and is still sitting up and free from pain." 36

All their lives, father and daughter were to maintain a felicitous bantering in their correspondence. But the sample is memorable for another reason. It outlined a pretty heavy regimen for a child of ten.

His letters continued to be preoccupied with her lessons, her journal, her spelling, the style of her writing, her progress. Even to the very slightest detail. But a new note was creeping into his

letters. The cancer was taking its last toll of his tortured wife. She was taking laudanum now, steadily, and soon even that was failing to give relief. Burr was in Philadelphia, attending the session of Congress. He consulted with the famous Dr. Benjamin Rush, with other doctors. He suggested numerous remedies, some with medical sanction, some without, hoping against hope. Mrs. Burr became bedridden; it was an event when she appeared at dinner with the family. Her nights and days were painful beyond bearing. Burr wished to leave his Senatorial duties and rush to her bedside. She forbade it. On May 18, 1794, Theodosia Prevost Burr died, suddenly, with only little Theo at her side.

They had been very happy together, though in the last years the shadow of her invalidism had fallen across their marriage. They had loved, they had admired and respected each other. He had been faithful and tender, and she had adored him. Only after her death, and it was to be long after, did Burr begin those innumerable little affairs of gallantry and mere sexual assuagement which were to become notoriously associated with his name.

6. ASPASIA

Theodosia Burr, the younger, at the age of eleven, had become the sole mistress of the great establishment at Richmond Hill. She had as companion and playmate a French girl of about her own age: Natalie de Lage, the daughter of Admiral de Lage of the French Navy. She had been separated from her mother by the exigencies of the Revolution, and brought to New York by her nurse. Burr gave the child an asylum, and adopted and educated her as his own. He had a veritable passion for adopting and rearing children. Throughout his long life they inhabited his households, and he never distinguished, in the abundance of love and generous dealing that he lavished upon them, between the children of his own blood and those of a strictly legal relation. Natalie de Lage was eventually to marry the son of General Sumter of South Carolina.

Theo made an excellent head to her father's house. She entertained his guests, even during his frequent absences, with a gentle gravity and bearing beyond her years that excited the admiration of the most distinguished. She grew swiftly to remarkable womanhood, the most brilliant of her day. She was learned in the classics, in modern languages, in history, philosophy and the sciences. She danced and sang and played the piano with taste and feeling. She had ranged widely and well in literature, and

she could quote for hours from the masterpieces of poetry. Yet she was no bluestocking, no mere pedant; even though Burr was writing in 1797, "and do you regret that you are not also a woman? That you are not numbered in that galaxy of beauty which adorns an assembly-room? Coquetting for admiration and attracting flattery? No. I answer with confidence. You feel you are maturing for solid friendship. The friends you gain you will never lose; and no one, I think, will dare to insult your understanding by such compliments as are most graciously received by too many of your sex."³⁷

The testimony of contemporaries and of her extant portraits is overwhelmingly to the contrary. She was beautiful with a proud lift of head and an aristocratic mold of features; wherever she went half the eligible young males of the town sighed fruitlessly after her — and a good many of the older, more substantial men, too. She was beloved equally by women as by men. She was "elegant without ostentation, and learned without pedantry." She danced "with more grace than any young lady of New York."³⁸ Her wit sparkled and warmed; she possessed her father's airy sense of humor. She was the living proof of the success of Aaron Burr's seemingly repellent system of education. Had he not thrown his great talents and energy into politics he could have become a great educator.

She adored her father, and he worshiped her. Which in itself was a tribute to his methods. It was a love as pure and noble and unselfish as anything in the realm of history, yet it was based on a frank and full understanding between the two. Her faith in him never wavered, even during the darkest days of his career, and in return he bared his soul to her candid gaze. He hid nothing, not even those things that most men wish to hide even from themselves. The Journal of his wanderings in exile, that astounding portrayal of a stripped human being, was written in the plainest language for her eyes alone. It was a bond that the passing years strengthened, and when it was sundered by her tragic death, something snapped in his soul too, never to mend.

"The happiness of my life," he had written, "depends on your exertions; for what else, for whom else do I live?"³⁹