

CHAPTER XI PARTY GROWTH

I. REPUBLICAN COCKADES

IN spite of domestic affliction, of bewildering finances, of educational dogmas, Burr hewed vigorously to the line of his chosen profession — politics.

The Third Congress opened in Philadelphia on December 2, 1793, amidst scenes of domestic passion and foreign muddlements. The French Revolution had been hailed by those of the budding Republican persuasion with ardent sympathy and unexampled enthusiasm. Burr from the very first thought it the beginning of a new era in the history of the world's enlightenment. The Federalists viewed the hysteria, however, with jaundiced eyes. They had triumphed over certain tendencies to radicalism in the United States, and the unfettered forces that rode the Revolution were seemingly oblivious to all settled property rights. The Federalists much preferred the British system, and turned naturally to England as the haven of all sound conservatism. It was to be pro-French against pro-English as much as South against North, agrarian against industrialist.

The shipping interests of New England had built up a flourishing trade with England, and the war which broke out between France and Great Britain in 1793 brought the United States headlong into the welter of European politics. For one thing, American commerce was bound to suffer as a result of the war. For another, the United States was still formally the ally of France, and had guaranteed the independence of the French West Indies, now subject to imminent attack by the English Navy.

Washington desired no war and proclaimed neutrality in the European struggle on April 22, 1793. Meanwhile Citizen Genêt had landed in America as the representative of the Revolutionary French Government. He was without doubt the worst possible diplomat that the French could have accredited to the United States. It was his duty, he thought, to dragoon the laggard country into war immediately on the side of his beloved France, and he proceeded to effect it by the most violent and open propaganda,

by vicious attacks on the American government, by incendiary speeches and open appeals to popular passions.

At first he seemed eminently successful. The Republicans received him with open arms and continuous ovations. It turned his head completely. He insulted Washington openly for his stand on neutrality, organized Jacobin clubs, and boasted of his ability to overthrow the existing American government.

Burr had at first welcomed Genêt along with the others. Then disturbing rumors reached him, and he wrote John Nicholson to inquire whether they had any foundation in fact. "We have a rumor here, (very grateful to the Tories)," he said, "that Genêt has come to an open rupture with the President — That he has publicly threatened to appeal to the people, that as preparatory to this Step he goes about visiting the Mechanics and the lower orders of people, leaving cards at their houses when they are not at home! And the rumors add that it is in Contemplation of the President and his Ministers to dismiss the French Plenipo."¹

His information was correct. In August, 1793, Genêt's recall was demanded, and early in 1794 he was removed and his arrest ordered by Robespierre and the Directory. But Genêt had no taste for the guillotine. Instead, he married the daughter of Governor Clinton of New York and settled into the peaceful pursuits of a country gentleman.

Burr took his seat promptly in the opening days of the session. Matters of considerable importance were in the offing. The Senate was pretty closely divided between the adherents of the Administration and the Opposition. Burr was a member of the Opposition. The first matter that engaged their attention was an assault on the Bank of the United States, Hamilton's pet creation, and an anathema to the agrarians. On January 16, 1794, bills were introduced to bar the personnel of the Bank from membership in Congress, and to divorce the United States from stockholding in the Bank and all political connection therewith. Both bills were defeated by a narrow majority of one, Burr voting yea.²

On February 20th, Burr won in his long struggle to force open sessions of the Senate, except where secrecy was specifically required.³

On February 28th, the question of Albert Gallatin's seat in the Senate came up for consideration. The future Secretary of the Treasury was of Swiss birth, and, arriving in the United States in 1780, had promptly risen to prominence in the radical ranks. It was maintained by those who wished to bar him from the seat to which he had been elected that he had not been sufficiently long

in the country. Burr made a very able speech in his behalf that attracted much favorable comment, but the motion to seat him was defeated 12 to 14.⁴

Meanwhile, foreign affairs had been moving steadily to the foreground. England, as mistress of the seas, had been ruthless in her disregard of American interests. France seized the opportunity to attach the new nation to herself. She opened her colonies in the French West Indies, hitherto tight shut within the walls of a rigid mercantilist system, to the ships of neutrals. That meant largely the United States. England countered by declaring all neutral vessels engaged in such trade liable to seizure. Hundreds of American ships were seized under this ruling, and under an additional order declaring contraband all vessels carrying the goods of French citizens. It was a deadly blow to the American shipping interests. Hitherto Federalist, they began to listen with attention to Republican doctrines. The Southern planters were also deeply interested in the controversy. They still owed large sums to English merchants on pre-Revolutionary debts, and war with England might involve the abrogation of the Treaty of 1783 whereby the government warranted that there would be "no lawful impediment to the recovery of the full value in sterling money of all bona fide debts heretofore contracted."

President Washington laid down a temporary embargo, but it was ineffective. On March 28, 1794, he sent a message to Congress calling for measures to put teeth in the embargo. The message was referred to a committee of which Burr was chairman. He was heartily in favor of an airtight embargo directed against England alone, but the bill he reported out, though it passed the Senate, was defeated in the House, and a less stringent measure was adopted in its stead.⁵

The Republicans persisted. On April 28th a new bill was introduced, which recited the injuries sustained by the United States by reason of British violation of their rights as neutrals, and resolving to forbid all importations from that country. On this measure the two factions in the Senate split in clearcut fashion. The Federalists, in spite of the losses sustained by their mercantile adherents, determined that such a course would bring about considerably greater losses and must eventually lead to war with England. Accordingly they voted solidly against the bill. The Republicans, Burr included, voted as solidly for it. The division was close, 13 to 13, and was decided only by the casting vote of Vice-President Adams.⁶

Meanwhile Lord Grenville, of the British Ministry, had made

a conciliatory gesture, and Washington hastened to take advantage of it. On April 16th, Washington nominated to the Senate Chief Justice John Jay as envoy extraordinary to Great Britain to negotiate for a redress of the existing grievances.

Burr was up in arms. John Jay, though personally his friend, represented everything against which he was fighting. He was a Federalist, a conservative of the deepest dye, an Anglophile. American interests could not safely be entrusted to such hands. It was almost a one-man battle to prevent confirmation. He argued that the present minister, Pinckney, could handle the negotiations sufficiently well, and that it was inadvisable for a judge of the Supreme Court to hold an additional office at the pleasure of the executive. Nevertheless the nomination was confirmed by a vote of 18 to 8.

Jay wrote his wife with some bitterness that "yesterday the Senate approved of the nomination by a great majority. Mr. Burr was among the few who opposed it."⁷

Meanwhile, more local measures were also engaging his attention. Hamilton's program of internal taxation met his steady resistance, usually futile. He opposed taxes on snuff and sugar, and labored mightily against the obnoxious carriage tax, comparable in its scope to the present Federal taxation of automobiles.⁸

The Ohio Company, a huge land grab and settlement venture, petitioned Congress to be relieved of the terms of its contract with the government and for an outright donation of the lands north of the Ohio River. The bill was turned over to a committee of which Burr was chairman. Senator George Cabot told Manasseh Cutler, the Company's active lobbyist, that Burr was very bitter against the Company, and warm in favor of the French, whose interests were involved.⁹ But, as a result of extensive bribery, and a shady deal with William Duer of New York, land speculator extraordinary and a man of weight in Federalist councils, the petition was granted in its essential terms over Burr's opposition.

The Session terminated in June. Burr emerged with a national reputation. He had been the active, able leader of the forces of the Opposition. He was generally recognized as such by Federalists and Republicans alike, though not without some inward qualms on the part of the Southern Republicans, who placed their sectional interests above everything else.

Oliver Wolcott, Secretary of the Treasury, cited the opinion of an unnamed Virginia politician, obviously well acquainted with the Senate, on Burr.

"The two most efficient actors on the political theatre of our

country," he quotes, "are Mr. Hamilton and Mr. Burr . . . I have watched the movements of Mr. Burr with attention, and have discovered traits of character which sooner or later will give us much trouble. He has an unequalled talent of attaching men to his views, and forming combinations of which he is always the centre. He is determined to play a first part; he acts strenuously with us in public, but it is remarkable that in all private conversations he more frequently agrees with us in principle than in the mode of giving them effect. . . . I shall not be surprised if Mr. Burr is found, in a few years, the leader of a popular party in the northern states; and if this event ever happens, this party will subvert the influence of the southern states."¹⁰

In this private communication lies the key to the political situation that developed later. The Virginia group viewed with alarm the rapid rise of Aaron Burr to leadership and power. They represented a closed corporation, seeking chiefly the special interests of their own territory, which to them meant the interests of the planter aristocracy. Already the Virginia dynasty was in the process of formation. Burr represented a real threat to its continued leadership. They had not bargained for this when the compact with New York had been made. The Clintons could be handled — they were rather provincial in their ambitions — but not Burr. He had talents and energies that could not readily be overlooked. It is possible that already, in 1794, the Virginians had determined to sidetrack this formidable Northerner.

2. ALMOST MINISTER TO FRANCE

Meanwhile Gouverneur Morris was arousing the ire equally of the French Republic to which he was accredited and of the Republicans at home. France considered him a monarchist and opposed to the Revolution, and demanded that he be recalled. Inasmuch as Washington had just made a similar demand for the return of Citizen Genêt, he could do no other than acquiesce. The Republican faction in Congress insisted on, and received, Washington's informal consent to the appointment of a member of their party as Minister to France.

The Republicans of the Senate and many of those in the House met in caucus, and decided to propose Burr's name. Madison, Monroe and a House Representative waited on the President to communicate their party's wishes. Washington hesitated (aside from his recollection of Burr as a supremely self-confident, impertinent youngster during the Revolution, his mind had been

thoroughly poisoned by the secret whisperings of Hamilton), then remarked "that he had made it a rule of life never to recommend or nominate any person for a high and responsible situation in whose integrity he had not confidence; that, wanting confidence in Colonel Burr, he could not nominate him; but that it would give him great pleasure to meet their wishes if they would designate an individual in whom he could confide."¹¹

One detects in his very phrasing the characteristic syllables of Alexander Hamilton. The committee reported to the caucus, and found the Republicans unanimous in their insistence on Burr. They so reported back to Washington, who grew warm and declared angrily that his decision was unalterable. He would accept Madison or Monroe, but never Burr. Both of these gentlemen declined the office, the Senatorial caucus waxed equally warm, and would make no other recommendation. On the committee's third visit, Washington refused to receive them, and Randolph, the Secretary of State, shunted them off with soft words. Later, on May 27, 1794, James Monroe was nominated by Washington and confirmed by the disgruntled opposition. Later, much later, in the famous X Y Z dispatches of 1798, the then American envoys to France narrated that they had been told by Talleyrand's agents that "intelligence had been received from the United States, that if Col. Burr and Mr. Madison had constituted the mission, the differences between the two countries would have been accommodated before that time."¹²

3. THE JAY TREATY

The second Session of the Third Congress opened on November 3, 1794, but the Senate had no quorum until Burr appeared on November 18th. He found Washington's message on the Whiskey Insurrection in Pennsylvania waiting for consideration. Senator King, his colleague, in a committee report that heartily endorsed Washington's stand, could not resist the opportunity to include certain political animadversions. Burr rose to demand the expungement of these remarks, but the Federalists forced their retention.¹³

Burr was particularly active this session. He sponsored numerous motions and amendments, usually meeting with defeat at the hands of the Federalist majority, and he was given many important committee assignments. He fought vigorously, though in vain, against proposed modifications of the redemption provisions of the public debt, calculated to raise the price of existing

government securities and make bond issues demand instruments at the option of the subscriber.¹⁴

Then John Jay returned to the United States with the treaty he had negotiated, and Washington called a Special Session of the Senate on June 8, 1795, to consider its adoption. The Senate met behind closed doors in executive session, though Burr had insisted, in accordance with his lifelong principles, on full publicity to the debate.

At once the fireworks started, with Burr leading the opposition. The treaty was thoroughly abhorrent to the Republicans, and especially to the Virginians. It was essentially a partisan document, with certain concessions to Northern interests and not even a sop for the South. Even Washington himself was dissatisfied, but he was afraid that its rejection would plunge the nation into an immediate war. In all charity to Jay, it must be confessed that the treaty he had negotiated did prevent an outbreak of hostilities, though it must also be confessed that another envoy, abler perhaps, and less afflicted with a certain myopism in favor of Great Britain, might have gained much more substantial concessions.

In any event, the Opposition, led and skilfully marshaled by Burr, fell upon the proposed treaty hammer and tongs. Burr bore the brunt of the fray. On June 22nd he moved to postpone further consideration of the treaty and to recommend to the President that he negotiate further for certain alterations therein, notably, that the articles relating to refuge or shelter given armed vessels of States at war with either party (a direct slap at France) be expunged; that the concessions to British fur-traders and settlers over the border from Canada be eliminated; that the citizens of the United States have the same rights in British North American ports and rivers that British citizens had in those of the United States; that the British settle satisfactorily for the value of negro slaves carried away by them contrary to the terms of the Treaty of 1783 (this was a long-standing grievance in the South); that damages for the illegal retention of frontier posts be also assessed; that the provisions concerning trade with the British West Indies be expunged or made much more favorable to the United States (in this instance Burr was assisting the Northern interests); and that no sections be permitted which restrained the United States from "most favored nations" clauses in their commercial arrangements with other foreign powers (this was a remarkable abnegation of American sovereignty on Jay's part, and a further direct slap at France).¹⁵

On the whole, the amendments and proposals he offered were

fair and gave only substantial justice to all sections of the United States. But doubtless it was too late to obtain any better treaty — the damage had been done — and under the existing circumstances it was perhaps wiser to accept it as it stood, halting and lame though it was.

In spite of the fact that Burr's speeches against the treaty promptly became famous — Gallatin wrote his wife "I am told that Burr made a most excellent speech"¹⁶ — the Federalists, by adroit negotiations with certain viable opponents, and the suspension of Article XII, relating to the West Indies trade, which, incidentally, was done for the benefit of their *own* constituent merchant and shipping interests, finally jammed through the treaty on June 24, 1795, by a vote of 20 to 10.¹⁷

When the news leaked out to a stunned and incredulous country, a howl of execration went up. Popular fury with the betrayers rose to fever pitch. Giant mass meetings were held to oppose the "nefarious plot against the liberties of the people," Hamilton was stoned, Jay burned in effigy, and the Republicans, as well as a goodly number of Federalists, frothed at the mouth. Burr became the hero of the hour. Nor did he lose hope to the very end. It was possible, he thought, to persuade the President not to sign the pernicious document. As late as July 5th he wrote Monroe, then in Paris, that "the Country is considerably agitated with [the treaty]. Many of the merchants who were most devoted to Mr. Jay and to the administration, express themselves decidedly and warmly against it . . . A memorial against the ratification is circulating in this Town."¹⁸ But Washington signed the treaty, and the fight was over.

4. REPUBLICAN DEFEAT

Meanwhile Burr had been keeping a wary eye on New York State politics. Slowly, but steadily, with infinite skill and resource, he was building his machine, binding to himself a little group of enthusiastic young men who expressed for him a fanatical loyalty — William P. Van Ness, Colonel John Swartwout, Matthew L. Davis, and others — utilizing certain organizations originally of vague and grandiose aspirations, and welding them into compact, irresistible political bodies.

The Republicans had had rather hard sledding in the State, in spite of Clinton's precarious triumph over Jay in the election of 1792. The Federalist Legislature had promptly taken its revenge. The real power in the State was the Council of Appointment,

whose members were appointed by and from the Legislature, with the Governor as Chairman. It was the Council that distributed the patronage, and it is an axiom of politics that the wielder of the patronage holds all power.

Hitherto the Governor had contended, and it had not been questioned, that under the Constitution it was the Governor's privilege to nominate for office, and the Council's duty to confirm or reject. But now, with a packed Federalist Council, under the leadership of Philip Schuyler, still nursing his thirst for revenge under a smiling face, the Council boldly proclaimed that nominations might be offered by any member of the Council, and that the Governor as Chairman merely held the casting vote in case of a tie. This interpretation, with a cohesive Federalist majority, meant that the Republican Governor had been shorn of all power. Clinton protested vigorously, but the Legislature backed the child of its own creation. All State offices were promptly filled with those of the Federalist persuasion, and the power of patronage cracked whiplike in preparation for the next gubernatorial election in 1795.

Angry, discomfited, and seeing the handwriting on the wall, Clinton refused to run again. Once more Burr's name was mentioned for the candidacy, but he, equally with Clinton, read aright the signs of forthcoming Federalist victory. Judge Robert Yates, who, chiefly because of his friend Burr's persuasion, had returned to the anti-Federalist fold, was thereupon nominated. John Jay, from whom the previous election had been stolen, was the obvious candidate of the Federalists. He was elected by a heavy vote, with a concomitant party majority in both Houses of the Legislature. The sun of Republicanism seemed to have set in its solitary Northern stronghold. But Burr, in the intervals of his Senatorial duties at Philadelphia, proceeded quietly with the slow solidifying of his forces in New York City, content to wait, biding his time. As a professional politician, he always took the long view, and temporary defeats could not disturb his imperturbable poise. Nor was he unduly distressed when the spring elections of 1796 continued the large majorities of the Federalists in the Legislature.

The Fourth Congress met on December 7, 1795. The stirring debates and turbulent sessions of the preceding Congress anent the Jay Treaty were but memories, but the exacerbated passions were not easily allayed. France, deeply offended at the outcome, was beginning to strike back at American commerce in retaliation. But her raids were still tentative and comparatively unimportant. Local issues absorbed the attention of embattled politicians. The

next year, 1796, was a Presidential year, and it was already known that Washington was to refuse reelection — which left the field wide open to all comers. So it was that Congress marked time to a large extent.

Tennessee was clamoring at the gates of the Union for admission as a State. Burr, whose eyes were already turning westward, and who, in spite of his aristocratic rearing and personal elegance, was fascinated by the rude and turbulent democracy of the frontier, worked for and spoke in favor of the bill. It was defeated. Yet his efforts were remembered with gratitude by the great Western Territory, and when, in June, 1796, Tennessee finally achieved Statehood, its first Representative in Congress, Andrew Jackson, sought out Aaron Burr at once for advice and guidance, and thereupon conceived a profound admiration and a vast respect for the Northerner that was to last throughout life.¹⁹

Burr also advocated and voted for a bill seeking relief for those imprisoned for debt under Federal process, so that they might claim the benefit of the bankruptcy laws of their respective States.²⁰ In both state and nation he was unwearied in his advocacy of more liberal laws on bankruptcy, and for the alleviation of the harshness of the various statutes covering imprisonment for civil debts. In view of the tangled state of his own finances at the time, his enemies whispered that his interest in the matter was purely personal. That, however, may be doubted; his own precarious affairs simply brought the barbarous provisions of the existing law more forcibly to his attention.

5. VIRGINIA BREAKS A PROMISE

By the time of the national election of 1796 the two political parties had grown to definite maturity. The confusion, the shifting of forces, the vague inchoateness of 1792 was gone from the American scene forever. Two great opposing principles locked horns in a battle to the death. Federalism and all that it implied had dominated the national government since its inception; now for the first time its control was being seriously threatened.

The two parties grew out of different conceptions of the fundamentals of government, of the opposition of conservative and radical on the political side; on the economic side it was a sectionalism based on divergent industrial conditions, a contest between the capitalist and the agrarian, the creditor and the debtor. Essentially it was South against North, with New York and Pennsylvania borderline States possessing an economy at once indus-

trial and agrarian. Jefferson had early realized that his beloved Virginia was doomed to eternal defeat without the aid of these two States. That was why he had started a newspaper in Pennsylvania under the minor poet, Philip Freneau; that was why he had gone botanizing into New York; that was why George Clinton had received Southern votes in the election of 1792, and Burr had been promised certain things for 1796.

Jefferson had finally resigned from his uneasy office in Washington's Cabinet and was prepared to make a definite bid for power in this election. The country was strongly discontented. The farmers had not obtained what Hamilton had foreshadowed under his dispensation. There had been a depression which had hit the artisan and mechanic classes of the North rather hard, and they were willing to consider the Republican gospel. Though Jefferson and his Virginia planter-aristocrats sniffed rather disdainfully at the thought of an alliance with these greasy, clamorous individuals, so discordant to the ideal agrarian civilization of which they dreamed, Aaron Burr, equally aristocratic, had no such qualms. In fact, he was the first to perceive the political value of these sweaty, turbulent artisans, and utilized them as the very basis of his organization. Thus it was that, unwillingly, the Virginians made their alliance with Burr — with secret reservations. With Clinton, and the chameleon Livingstons, they were more at home — they, too, were essentially agrarian in their viewpoint, and would always be content to act the tail to the Virginia kite.

Arrayed against them were the Federalists, entrenched in power, the followers of Hamilton, the merchant and commercial classes, the security holders, the speculators, the professions and the intellectuals, the budding industrialists. But there was secret dissension. Vice-President John Adams was necessarily their candidate for the Presidency. He could not be dislodged openly. But Adams had resented Hamilton's overwhelming influence in the councils of Washington and his own comparative impotence. He was stubborn and crabbed, and honest. Hamilton realized that with the election of Adams his own power would wane, and accordingly, with clandestine craft, he intrigued in favor of Thomas Pinckney of South Carolina, who was ostensibly the candidate for the Vice-Presidency. He urged Northern and Eastern Federalist friends of his to give an equal number of votes to both Adams and Pinckney, hoping that by some means Adams would be omitted from the Southern electoral tickets. This actually did happen in South Carolina, Pinckney's own State — and the means were obvious. Its electors divided 8 for Pinckney and 8 for Jefferson. But

the Northern Federalists, as always, while acknowledging Hamilton's intellectual leadership, paid little or no attention to his numerous exhortations and intrigues. Rhode Island, New Hampshire, Massachusetts and Connecticut voted overwhelmingly for Adams and split their second votes between Pinckney and favorite sons, with the result that Hamilton's attempt to elevate Pinckney to the Presidency collapsed utterly.

On the Republican side there was no open dissension. Jefferson was chosen by informal correspondence and various caucuses to be the standard-bearer for the Presidency, and Aaron Burr, in accordance with the understanding arrived at in 1792, was to be the candidate for the second office. But underneath the surface, even as among the Federalists, there appeared certain small signs of a rift. John Beckley was writing to Madison from Philadelphia on June 20, 1796, that "it is . . . an idea strongly urged by Swan to play off Chancellor Livingston for V. P. upon New York & Jersey, as the most likely means of a successful diversion there." But Beckley hastens to add, rather unconvincingly, that "he is however strongly in favor of Burr's election," and that "upon the whole however, if no great schism happens in Virginia, I think it morally certain that Mr. Jefferson and Col. Burr will be elected."²¹

Burr was fairly confident too. "The approaching election for President," he wrote Monroe, "will be, on both sides, urged with much activity. Jefferson & Adams will I believe be the only candidates. The prospect of success is in favor of the former."²² And, while on a flying trip to Boston, prominent men had informed him that the two candidates would be nearly equal in their votes.²³

The election was held amid scenes of great excitement and much subterranean intriguing. In those days of slow communication and travel, the results of the meeting of the various electoral bodies could not be determined for a considerable period. On November 22nd Burr was writing his uncle, Pierpont Edwards, at New Haven, for information. "Pray favor me with one line respecting your hopes from the Electors of Connect. & R. I. The Jefferson Ticket will have a large Majority in Penna. unless the votes of the three Western Counties should have been *stolen or fraudulently suppressed*, which there is some reason to apprehend."²⁴

But by December 16, 1796, Hamilton was able to write with considerable relief to Rufus King that "it is now decided that *neither Jefferson nor Burr* can be President . . . The event will not a little mortify Burr. Virginia has given him only one vote."²⁵ Hamilton evidently believed that his great opponent had been

intriguing to oust Jefferson from the Presidency, even as he himself had been feverishly engaged against Adams. But it happened that the shoe was on the other foot.

When the final results were announced, it was found that John Adams had been elected President with 71 electoral votes, Jefferson Vice-President with 68. The rest trailed — Pinckney had 59, Burr had 30, with a scattering for various favorite sons. The election had been perilously close — a slight shift would have placed Jefferson in the President's chair. But Burr had excellent reasons, aside from non-election, for being extremely disturbed at the result. His votes were scattered as follows: Tennessee, 3; Kentucky, 4; North Carolina, 6; Pennsylvania, 13; Maryland, 3; and Virginia, 1.

It was the Virginia vote that could not be explained away to his satisfaction, or to the satisfaction of any one else. Virginia was closely held by Jefferson and his friends; its electoral vote had gone solidly for Jefferson, yet but a lone vote had been cast for Burr, his running mate. Hamilton had commented gleefully on the situation, Beckley early in the campaign had expressed fears about the issue. There were other States to the South also where, strangely, Burr had been overlooked by Republican electors under the domination of Jefferson.

But he was too good a politician to show outward resentment at what he considered treachery. He had lived up to his part of the bargain with meticulous faith, and had campaigned mightily for the success of the party ticket. He realized now that the leaders of the Southern Republicans were determined that their Northern ally should not wax too powerful. Yet he said nothing, except privately and among friends. He had it in his power to wreck the party irrevocably between 1796 and the next election, but he never permitted emotion or resentment or passion to sway his decisions. He had staked his political fortunes on the eventual success of Republicanism; he must continue on the chosen path.

CHAPTER XII BURR STOOPS TO CONQUER

I. THE LOWLY ASSEMBLYMAN

BURR'S term as Senator was approaching its end. The close of the Congressional session in 1797 marked the finish of his Senatorial career. The New York Legislature, now strongly Federalist in its complexion, with John Jay in the gubernatorial chair, returned Philip Schuyler in his stead. The proud General and patron of an ancient family had nursed his spleen long enough. Now he had his revenge, and both he and his son-in-law, Hamilton, were content. They had crushed their enemy.

But Burr had not been taken by surprise. He had expected nothing else and had laid his plans accordingly. From national politics he returned to the local scene. He had neglected it too long, and a herculean task awaited him. It was nothing more nor less than to oust the triumphant and seemingly impregnable entrenched Federalists from their control of the State, and to assume definite and unquestioned leadership for himself. Burr, however, never despaired. His was an unbounded energy, controlled and channelized by a first-rate brain.

The first step in his carefully prepared campaign was to inject himself into a strategic position in State politics. The spring election of 1797 for the Assembly gave him his opportunity. He ran on the ticket from New York City and was promptly elected. So also was young De Witt Clinton, nephew to the old ex-Governor — as yet an unknown quantity in State politics. All over the State there were Republican gains, but not enough to damage substantially the Federalist majority.

It was seemingly a considerable comedown from United States Senator, national figure, aspirant for the Vice-Presidency, to the lowly condition of a local Assemblyman. Burr did not mind. He had but stooped to conquer. Nor were his opponents entirely deceived. Schuyler, recently exultant at his own triumph, wrote with considerable apprehension to Hamilton: "Mr. Burr, we are informed, will be a candidate for a seat in the Assembly; his views it is not difficult to appreciate. They alarm me, and if he prevails I apprehend a total change of politics in the next Assembly — at-