CHAPTER XIX

BACKGROUNDS FOR THE CONSPIRACY

1. WESTWARD THE COURSE OF EMPIRE

THE thirteen original Colonies had been but a thin, longitudinal strip stretching precariously along the eastern seaboard of the American continent. Beyond the Alleghanies lay vast uncharted regions of forest and plains, and the remote escarpment of the Rockies; to the south and southwest the tangled swamps and barrens of the Floridas, the bayous of the Gulf coast, the farther plains of Texas and the great deserts of what are now New Mexico and Arizona.

Two other great European powers competed with England for domination of the New World. France held Canada and claimed all of the Continent from the Alleghanies to the Rockies. Spain, gorged with South America, swollen with the fabulous riches of Mexico, had pushed upward into California and the fertile plains of Texas. The Floridas, too, were Spanish by right of discovery and settlement.

England and its Colonies, however, never yielded certain vague pretensions to the land west of the Alleghanies, and bold pioneers, traders and fur-trappers pushed in ever-increasing numbers over the mountain barrier, in defiance of alleged French sovereignty. As yet the Spanish settlements were too remote for infiltration. Clashes inevitably arose between the French and the pushing colonists, which led, through a succession of stages, to the drawing of the American colonies into the vortex of the greater European war between the parent nations.

By the Treaty of Paris, England, victorious against the European coalition, took Canada and the Ohio Territory from the French, and Florida from Spain. France, to reconcile the Spanish Government to its losses in a war fought primarily for French interests, ceded to Spain the Louisiana Territory.

Once the menace of France had been removed, the colonists flocked in even greater numbers into the almost virgin Ohio Territory, only to meet with unexpected restrictions imposed on that great area by the mother country. Forced back once more to the line of the Alleghanies, resentment festered and grew, and contributed to some extent to the eventual American Revolution.

By the Treaty of 1783, after a war in which the original antagonists had all participated, the annexed territories were reshuffled. England was compelled to disgorge Florida to Spain, the Ohio Territory was turned over to the new nation, the United States, while France found herself holding the bag, at least as far as any territorial gains on the American continent were concerned. Hitherto the French had been the great antagonists of the American colonists; now, for the first time, the latter found themselves opposed along a thousand miles of vague and unsurveyed border by a new people, the Spanish.

At first there was but little friction. Only on the southeastern frontier, between sparsely populated Georgia and even more sparsely populated East Florida, were there any points of contact. But the opening of the Ohio Territory by various Ordinances of Congress soon put a different complexion on the situation. The Americans moved forward in successive waves into the land beyond the Alleghanies. First the trappers, then the Indian traders, then the pioneer settlers, seeking ever to the west new land, new resources, new freedom.

In an incredibly short period they had overrun great areas, and had formed thriving communities along the Ohio River and its tributaries. But, though there were still huge stretches in which wild animals and Indians roamed almost unmolested, already the frontiersmen were clamoring for new worlds to conquer, new territories to open to their ineradicable greed for westward expansion. It was this restless urge, to move always westward, to find new sources of fur and trade, to appease a boundless land-hunger made necessary by wasteful methods of farming, that dominated the American scene right down to the extinction of the last frontier in the latter part of the nineteenth century.

But now these hardy spirits found themselves thrusting against the enclosing wall of Spanish possessions. The trans-Mississippi country was barred to American traders as well as settlers; East and West Florida blocked access to the warm waters of the Gulf of Mexico and to the West Indian islands. The Mississippi River, in the last miles of its course, ran wholly through Spanish territory, as did every other river to which the settlers west of the Alleghanies had access. There was no way of marketing the crops and products of Ohio, Tennessee and Kentucky, except by arduous transport over the formidable barrier of the mountains to the Eastern States, or by submitting to the whims and political caprices of the Spaniards.

The Easterners, occupied with their own particular problems,

were comparatively indifferent to the plaints of the Western territories. To the Westerners, the future lay still farther west and south, along the rivers, the natural highways of the period. But Spain blocked these natural outlets. There followed then a period of complex intrigues and rival ambitions, of mutual raids and economic barriers, of illicit trade and bribery and corruption. It is difficult to unravel the tangled skein of events, to apportion with impartial hand an abstract justice between the contending factions. The Americans of the West saw their economic life, both present and future, slowly throttled by the iron grip of Spain on the mouths of the rivers which tapped their territory; they resented the peculiar alienness of the Spaniard, his ways that were not their ways — and therefore wrong; they resented fiercely the closure of the Spanish provinces to settlement and trade.

The Spaniards, on the other hand, viewed with alarm the aggressive, pushing qualities of the American frontiersmen; they noted with indignation the manifest contempt of the Westerners for Spanish regulations and laws, and they justly feared the insatiable appetite of this new nation for land, and more land. Once it would be permitted to pierce the Spanish domain at any point whatever, eventual absorption or forcible conquest would prove but a matter of time.

In the light of these obvious facts, Spain decided upon a vigorous counter-attack. The Ohio Territory was, geographically, a natural unit with Spanish possessions. There was no such barrier between them as separated the Eastern States from their Western possessions. The rivers which traversed one, emptied through the other into the Gulf. Eventually one must swallow the other. The Spaniards determined to swallow the Ohio.

But not by force. Intrigue was their natural element, as rude violence was that of the Western frontier. They sent agents up the Ohio to propagandize and foment dissension. They employed and paid well certain key Americans in Ohio, Kentucky and Tennessee to agitate for a separation from the Eastern United States, which, they insinuated, was manifestly indifferent to their special needs, and for a submission to the gracious and benevolent rule of His Majesty, the King of Spain. Gold was poured in profusion into the coveted area to bribe and corrupt the Territorial Legislatures. Of the American agents, the most prominent was James Wilkinson. Like a dark, funereal thread he appears again and again in the strands that went to make up the life of Aaron Burr. Soon it will become incorporated into the very warp and woof.

When these secret measures seemed lacking in success, the Spaniards decided on a bolder policy of coercion. They shut their frontiers completely, instigated the Indians within their borders to raid adjacent settlements, confiscated American boats and American shipments down the Mississippi, and imposed crushing imposts on American commerce through New Orleans, the chief port of exit for the West.

The frontier clamored to Congress for aid and protection against the treacherous Don; but Congress, representing the East, considered the West as merely a pawn in the diplomatic game. The West demanded war on Spain, and the conquest of Louisiana and the Floridas, so as to satisfy its two great hungers — land and access to the sea. There was talk even of secession, and a war on its own.

Finally, in 1795, after a decade of resentment, muddled politics and economic confusion, the Federal Government roused itself and negotiated a treaty whereby the Mississippi River was opened to navigation, and Americans given the right of free deposit for their goods in the port of New Orleans, pending sale or transshipment to the West Indies and Europe. Temporarily, the West and South were placated by these concessions on the part of Spain. There was a boom in the West, immigrants thronged in from the East to take advantage of the richer economic possibilities, land rose in value, commerce expanded, and the bolder and more restless spirits looked with longing eyes still farther to the west.

But new grievances soon arose. The crowded frontier was knocking already at the gates of inviolate Spanish territory, the Indian raids across the border increased in number and in violence, traders who slipped into Louisiana and West Florida in defiance of Spanish edicts were arrested and their stocks confiscated, and, to cap the climax, on October 16, 1802, Juan Ventura Morales, Spanish Intendant, or Governor, of Louisiana, without authority from his home government, took it upon himself to proclaim the right of deposit of American goods in New Orleans forfeited.

The news threw the West into a veritable frenzy of excitement. The border flamed; passion rose to fever-pitch. Economic strangulation stared the country in the face. Legislatures met to consider the prospects, men picked up their long rifles, cleaned and oiled them carefully, inspected primings and weighed their supply of bullets.

Henry Clay, a rising young Kentucky lawyer and politician, declared that " the whole country was in commotion and, at a nod of the Government, would have fallen on Baton Rouge and New

Orleans, and punished the treachery of the perfidious Government." [1]

In the end, the unauthorized action of Morales was disavowed by his home government, but the storm had been raised and passions unleashed that could not so readily be allayed. In the midst of these alarms and turmoils another report was brought to the Western country that added new clamors and new alarms. This was the news that Spain was preparing to cede, or rather to retrocede, the Louisiana Territory to France.

Napoleon was now the Man on Horseback in the European scene, and Talleyrand, subtle and tortuous in diplomacy, using speech to conceal his thought, was his Minister. Charles IV was King of Spain, and Don Manuel Godoy, nicknamed " the Prince of Peace " for his assumed leanings toward policy as a weapon of government rather than war, was his Prime Minister. Godoy was a bit tired of the constant agitation and diplomatic confusion resulting from Spanish possession of New Orleans and Louisiana. He was engaged, as the tail to the French kite, in an almost interminable war with England, and this comparatively undefended stretch was more of a liability than an asset. But he was moved by other considerations as well. He was farseeing enough to realize that Spain could not long continue to hold this precarious possession in the face of the vigorous, constantly advancing nation on which it bordered; a nation which, rightly or wrongly, considered Louisiana in foreign hands an unjust restriction of its expansive powers. Godoy had other fish to fry nearer home. Besides, should England or the United States — especially the latter — decide on a war of conquest, patriotic fervor might lead them ever closer to the alluring vision of Mexico. And Godoy very decidedly wished to retain Mexico and South America. The sinews of Spain's power, the supply of gold and metals she required, came from those enormously rich provinces.

Napoleon, on the other hand, was revolving in his head grandiose schemes of world domination. France still had not given up the dream of a vast empire on the American continent, though her possessions had been wrested from her grasp. Louisiana would be the entering wedge once more. It was a *quid pro quo.*

Godoy did *not* want Louisiana any more; furthermore, the interposition of the French between Mexico and the restless Americans to the east would enable him to sleep easier of nights. But Godoy *did* want additional territory in Italy. Accordingly, on October 1, 1800, after lengthy negotiations, a secret treaty was entered into between France and Spain at San Ildefonso, whereby Spain

agreed to retrocede to France the Territory of Louisiana and — this with considerable reluctance — the Floridas. In return, France agreed to aggrandize to the Spanish Duchy of Parma a considerable territory in Italy. So secret was this treaty, fraught as it was with enormous possibilities to the United States, that Jefferson, six months later, was still unaware of its existence.

" With respect to Spain," he wrote Claiborne, Governor of the Mississippi Territory — that area which Godoy had ceded to the United States in 1795 against the wrath of the French — " our disposition is sincerely amicable, and even affectionate. We consider her possession of the adjacent country as most favorable to our interests, and should see with an extreme pain any other nation substituted for them." [2]

Within a short time, however, " extreme pain " must have assailed him. For the news of the secret treaty gradually leaked out, first in the form of rumors, then in more tangible and definite shape. Godoy, who found Talleyrand unable or unwilling to live up to his part of the bargain, evaded as long as he could the cession of the American territories. But pressure which could not be ignored was finally brought to bear, and he promised to deliver, if, among other things, France bound herself never to alienate Louisiana to the United States. One of the chief reasons for Godoy's willingness to cede that territory in the beginning had been to set up a buffer state between Mexico and the United States. Talleyrand and Napoleon gave the necessary assurances, with tongue in cheek. A date was set for the official transfer.

If Jefferson had suffered " extreme pain," the West was almost beside itself at the news. Instead of Spain, weak and corruptible, whose officials could be brought to wink at infractions of the prohibitory laws, a strong, ruthless nation was now to encamp on its doorstep. Instead of eventual easy conquest of Louisiana, Napoleon as a neighbor would be afflicted with a fatally similar vision of expanding empire.

Jefferson was compelled to listen to the clamorous demands. The West and the South, the vitally interested sections, were strongholds of Republicanism. Burr had written vigorously of the retrocession to his son-in-law. He was keenly alive to its necessary consequences.[3] Jefferson, the pacifist, now spoke sharply — in public — of the possibility of war with Spain. For, in the meantime, to complicate the situation, Morales had closed the port of New Orleans. In private, he threatened Napoleon with a similar catastrophe. He even spoke of " marrying " the English Navy to effectuate his threats. Napoleon was not unduly alarmed, and con-

tinued to demand from Spain immediate occupation, while a bedeviled Spain was yielding on the closure of the port to the Americans.

Before the negotiations with Spain were satisfactorily ended, however, John Randolph of Roanoke, already tilting at Jefferson, moved in the House for the examination of all the documents relating to the violated right of deposit. Pichon, the French Minister, wrote to Talleyrand that " however timid Mr. Jefferson may be, and whatever price he may put on his pacific policy, one cannot foresee precisely what his answer will be. . . . If he acts feebly, he is lost among his partisans; it will be then the time for Mr. Burr to show himself with advantage." [4]

For the matter had widened. It was realized by Randolph and Burr alike that the closure of New Orleans had been instigated by the French in order that it might be considered a *fait accompli* when they came to take possession. It was a skilful attempt to place the onus of a deliberate French policy upon a scapegoat Spain. Even if Spain disavowed Morales, there was no doubt in the minds of Randolph and Burr, or in the minds of Westerners generally, that France, once in possession, would re-enact the ordinance, and close the Mississippi entirely to American shipping.

Jefferson tried to stifle the growing clamor, and succeeded in holding the House down to a conditional resolution. But the West was not so easily stilled. State Legislature after Legislature met and adopted resolutions worded in the strongest language. Demands poured in unending flood upon Washington for the seizure of New Orleans before the French troops, veterans of the campaign against Toussaint L'Ouverture, could be landed, and fortify themselves into impregnable positions.

There was but one way out for the harassed President. He emphatically did not want war with Spain and France both, and the specter of Aaron Burr, waiting grimly for an opportunity to recoup his political fortunes, goaded him on and sharpened his wits. He would purchase the port of New Orleans and the contiguous territory in order to obtain an outlet on the Mississippi, and, in addition, the Floridas, valuable both as outlets and for expansion to his beloved South.

It is not necessary here to examine the extended and weary negotiations, the sudden and surprising offer of the entire Louisiana Territory by a newly beleaguered Napoleon who had seen his dream of New World Empire fade in the smoke and ruins engendered by Toussaint L'Ouverture — that has been done many times before.

Courtesy of Estate of Dr. John E. Stillwell

AARON BURR, 1805

From an Original Drawing by Favret de Saint Mémin

Courtesy of The Corcoran Gallery of Art

GENERAL JAMES WILKINSON

From an engraving by Fevret de St. Mémin

Suffice it to say that Jefferson seized the opportunity – though there were serious doubts as to constitutionality, and New England was decidedly opposed – and the deal was consummated for $15,000,000. Napoleon, however, could not include the Floridas, which had been eliminated from his bargain with Spain. The treaty of purchase was signed on May 2, 1803.

Immediately, serious difficulties arose. Spain, when she heard of the astounding sale, was furious. She pointed out that Napoleon's title was wholly defective. He had not lived up to the Treaty of San Ildefonso, which required that he obtain for Spain the expansion of the Duchy of Parma, and, worse yet, from the point of view of the buyer, he was selling that which he had expressly agreed never to alienate without the consent of Spain. And Spain certainly did not consent.

As a matter of fact, she used strong language to Napoleon. "This alienation," d'Azara insisted to Talleyrand, "not only deranges from top to bottom the whole colonial system of Spain, and even of Europe, but is directly opposed to the compacts and formal stipulations agreed upon between France and Spain." [5]

Cevallos, Spanish Minister for Foreign Affairs, in his protest, frankly avowed the real purposes of Spain. "The intention which led the King to give his consent to the exchange of Louisiana was completely deceived. This intention had been to interpose a strong dyke between the Spanish colonies and the American possessions; now, on the contrary, the doors of Mexico are to stay open to them." [6]

Nevertheless, Napoleon drove ahead with his bargain, and Spain, being the weaker power, was compelled to acquiesce. On November 30, 1803, New Orleans was formally handed over to the French, and twenty days later, on December 20, 1803, it was formally transferred to the American commissioners in symbolic token of the entire Louisiana Territory. The commissioners were W. C. C. Claiborne, Governor of the Mississippi Territory, and General James Wilkinson, of the American Army. The United States of America had more than doubled in size.

The West went wild with joy. It had achieved the way-station to its ultimate goal. For the present, there was plenty of land, and the Mississippi was an American river from source to mouth. The South was decidedly more moderate in its rejoicing. The Floridas still belonged to Spain. Nor was Spain, resentful over what it considered sharp practice, willing to sell, even for the munificent price of $2,000,000. There were other difficulties, too. What, in fact, had the United States bought? Napoleon had no clear title, and

he had frankly given what the lawyers call a quitclaim deed. In other words, just what had been ceded to him without warranties of any kind on his part. The boundaries of the new accession even were not known, especially on the eastern frontier. Just where did Louisiana leave off and West Florida, still Spanish, begin? Talleyrand shrugged his expressive shoulders when the American envoys politely inquired on this point, and returned as politely that no doubt the Americans would be able to settle that little detail themselves.

This the resourceful Americans proceeded to do. They had been sent abroad to purchase the Floridas, not merely New Orleans. It is true that Louisiana was thrown into the bargain, but the Floridas, so vital to the South, still belonged, it seemed, to Spain. Whereupon they evolved an ingenious theory, viz., that actually the Louisiana Territory *included* the Floridas, even though Napoleon himself had not known it. The theory, in truth, was so ingenious that it made Talleyrand, veteran diplomatist that he was, stare in amazement, and wonder if, after all, he had not underestimated the cleverness of these Americans.

Livingston was so enthusiastic that he convinced himself of the justice of this stand, and wrote to Madison that " the moment is so favorable for taking possession of that country that I hope it has not been neglected, even though a little force should be necessary to effect it. Your minister must find the means to justify it." [7] The bland European chancellories had nothing to teach Americans in the way of rationalizations and cynical diplomacy.

Jefferson seized upon this interpretation with eagerness; so did a Republican Congress in which the Southern expansionists were in the saddle. Congress, under the impassioned lash of John Randolph, fire-eater extraordinary, even legislated as though West Florida were actually a part of the United States, and tried to prod Jefferson along the road of forcible possession. But there Jefferson balked, even though his words were warlike, and though he had rushed troops to Natchez.

Outwardly, however, war with Spain seemed inevitable. Spain stubbornly refused to accept Livingston's interpretation of her own treaties, and she was prepared to meet force with force if West Florida should be invaded. In retaliation for her wrongs, she closed all her borders tight against further American penetration of any kind. She resented also what she deemed the exorbitant demands of the United States in connection with the Spoliation Claims. Don Carlos Martinez de Yrujo, Marquis of Casa Yrujo, her Minister to the United States, who originally had been most

friendly to the Jeffersonian faction, even to the extent of marrying the daughter of Governor McKean, now turned vigorously hostile in behalf of his native land. So, too, did Turreau, the French Minister, and especially so did Anthony Merry, Minister from England, whose bitterness against Jefferson and Madison was all the more intense because it was bottomed primarily on social and personal reasons. All of these diplomats engaged in violent intrigues against the Government. Yrujo protested vigorously and publicly, obtained and paid for opinions of American lawyers concerning the injustice of the American claims, and engaged in downright bribery of the Press to advocate the cause of Spain. Merry went further. His home was the headquarters of all the intriguers in Washington. Pickering and the Federal disunionists received his official aid and support. In fact, the conspirators kept Merry advised of the secret aims of the American Government in the pending boundary dispute, and, reported Merry, when the day of disunion came, " they naturally look forward to Great Britain for support and assistance whenever the occasion shall arise." [8] What difference between Pickering, Griswold, Hillhouse and Company, and Aaron Burr — granting the premise that Burr actually plotted disunion?

2. Hamilton and Miranda

This, then, was the situation when Aaron Burr ended his term as Vice-President on March 4, 1805, and found all former doors irrevocably closed to him. All Europe was at war, either on the side of Napoleon or of William Pitt, his great English antagonist. The United States was on unfriendly terms with both France and England, and breathing fire and snorting thunderous words at Spain over West Florida. The Mexican Colonies had themselves become infected with the prevalent unrest. The French Revolution had unleashed noble catchwords which reverberated around the world and brought new hope and strength to the oppressed everywhere. *Liberty, Equality, Fraternity!*

In spite of the Spanish authorities, in spite of the dread chambers of the Inquisition, the unrest spread in Mexico, in South America. Insurrections were suppressed in blood and the screams of the tortured, but the movement continued underground. The United States watched the progress of plotting and insurrection alike with a keen interest, encouraged the movement with moral support. The West, however, was willing to proceed more openly. Spain was hated with a consuming hatred. It was democracy

against autocracy, liberty against oppression. And Mexico beckoned afar, fabulous, incredibly wealthy. The South wanted the Floridas. Both sections had a fierce contempt for the " treacherous Don," would welcome with eagerness filibustering expeditions, and would enlist by the thousands in an outright war.

Burr was not the first American in public life to look longingly at Mexico, and South America even. In 1798 Hamilton had listened avidly to Francesco de Miranda, a native of Venezuela and soldier of fortune *par excellence,* whose dream it was to free all South America from the rule of the Spaniard and set himself up as the Washington of his native province. He sought aid in England, but received no satisfactory assurances. He turned to Hamilton and the United States, where his welcome was warmer. Hamilton envisioned himself as the all-conquering General and entered enthusiastically upon his schemes. A plan of campaign was drawn. " Every thing is smooth," wrote Miranda, " and we wait only for the fiat of your illustrious president to depart like lightning." [9] But the " illustrious president," who happened to be John Adams, was in no hurry to encourage a wild adventure simply because Hamilton saw himself as the Man on Horseback. The scheme died under the withering blight of his disapproval, and thereby added fuel to Hamilton's hatred. For had the latter not already written to Rufus King that " with regard to the enterprise in question . . . the command in this case would very naturally fall upon me; and I hope I should disappoint no favorable anticipations." [10] He was still indignant over wasted opportunities the following year. He complained to McHenry, " It is a pity, my dear sir, and a reproach, that our administration have no general plan." At least, he thought, " we ought certainly to look to the possession of the Floridas and Louisiana, and we ought to squint at South America." [11]

Miranda, however, was not discouraged. After years more of proselytizing among the European nations without substantial success, he determined in 1805 that the United States was his final opportunity. All the signs pointed to an immediate war between the United States and Spain, and his own private plans concerning South America would fit neatly into the picture. He landed in New York in November, 1805, and became an overnight sensation. A host of adventurers flocked to his standard; even Jonathan Dayton, ex-Senator of the United States, and close friend to Burr, was involved. So, too, were John Swartwout, still United States Marshal, and William S. Smith, Surveyor of the Port of New York.

Miranda, a self-styled General, hired a ship, the *Leander,* and proceeded to purchase arms and supplies, and enlist men openly for a filibustering expedition against his native country. He did more. He went to Washington and was cordially received by Madison and dined by Jefferson. Afterwards, when Spain angrily protested against this encouragement of a warlike expedition from American soil against her territories, both Madison and Jefferson were to deny any complicity in Miranda's schemes. But Miranda loudly insisted that Madison was fully aware of his purposes, and the Secretary of State, by his own account, cannot be completely exonerated.

In any event, Miranda returned to New York, boasting of Governmental assistance, and completed his preparations. Over a month later, the ship sailed publicly from New York Harbor, armed to the teeth, making no secret of its destination. In fact, ten days before sailing time, Miranda had written to Madison bidding him a formal goodbye, adding that the matters he had communicated to him " will remain, I doubt not, in the deepest secret until the final result of this delicate affair. I have acted here on that supposition, conforming myself in everything to the intentions of the Government, which I hope I have seized and observed with exactitude and discretion." [12] This shifty transaction, and the Government's subsequent disavowal, should be remembered in connection with the almost exactly similar instance of Burr's own relations with Jefferson and Madison later on.

Miranda's expedition came to an inglorious end. The ship was captured by the Spaniards before it ever reached the mainland, and at once the inevitable repercussions commenced in Washington. Yrujo laid the damning evidence before Madison – it was bad enough without Miranda's written leave-taking of Madison, of which Spain fortunately was not aware – and under the lash of his charges, the Government was compelled to move. Swartwout was removed as Marshal, Smith as Surveyor, and Smith and Ogden, owner of the *Leander,* were formally indicted for violation of the laws. Smith's case eventually came on for trial. He was acquitted by a jury handpicked by Swartwout, and the entire incident was considered closed.

Burr had held aloof from Miranda's plans, inasmuch as they conflicted to a large extent with his own, and because, as he told Charles Biddle, " Miranda was a fool, totally unqualified for such an expedition." [13]

He had, in fact, been approached by Miranda with a view to enlisting his services. But Burr exercised his unequaled talent for

evading a forthright encounter and Miranda retired, disgruntled and nursing a resentment which was to flare up at a much later date during Burr's period of exile.[14]

Filibuster was in the air, war with Spain was imminent, while Mexico and the Spanish possessions in the Americas ever held an ineradicable attraction for American adventurers. Burr was neither the first nor the last of a long line of expansionists; though it was his fate to become the most tragical.

3. Foreign Aid

Burr had long been revolving certain plans in his mind, antedating even his duel with Hamilton. The date of their inception may perhaps be fixed with an air of certainty. On May 23, 1804, James Wilkinson, on his way back from New Orleans, where, as one of the American commissioners, he had formally taken possession of Louisiana Territory, wrote Burr that " to save time of which I need much and have but little, I propose to take a Bed with you this night, if it may be done without observation or intrusion." [15] Burr was then Vice-President. He had been recently defeated in the gubernatorial election in New York; all his former hopes of political rehabilitation had come crashing to earth. It was time to look about him. Wilkinson was in command of the American forces on the Spanish frontier. He was much more than that, but it is extremely doubtful that Burr had any inkling of his Spanish connections at the time.

What more natural than to assume that it was Wilkinson who first impregnated Burr's fertile brain with the dazzling possibilities of a career of arms and glory, of personal aggrandizement at the expense of Spain. He had first-hand knowledge of the situation, his friends and subordinates were spying out routes and Spanish defenses, he was in command of the Army, Mexico was in the throes of insurrection, and — relations between the United States and Spain pointed to the imminence of war. Note the secrecy, the insistence on freedom from " observation " in the proposed visit.

At this hasty meeting, Spain, Mexico, the Southwest, were discussed. Wilkinson — this, of course, is all pure surmise, based merely upon the logic of later events — dangled glittering bait before Burr's dazzled vision. He knew whereof he spoke, and the means seemed at hand. It is quite likely that at this stage of the affair Wilkinson was sincere — with his usual mental reservations in case matters turned out badly. They talked far into the night,

and, when Wilkinson left, a definite scheme of action had been determined on, and a cipher arranged for future communications. Wilkinson went back to his command on the border, to prepare the way. Burr went on to the tragedy of his duel with Hamilton, his flight, and return to Washington. In any event, the scheme had to wait on the end of his term in office — a Vice-President could not engage in filibusters or private wars.

In the meantime, he had seized the chance to explore Southern sentiment and to survey the East Florida terrain. When Jefferson, engrossed with the impeachment of Justice Chase, sought his favor, Burr recommended Wilkinson's appointment as Governor of Louisiana, Brown, as Secretary, and Prevost as Judge in New Orleans. Edward Livingston, his friend of former days, had left New York under a cloud, and settled in New Orleans, where he had already achieved a considerable measure of influence. The very heavens, it seemed, were smiling on the meditated enterprise. He enlisted the services of certain other chosen spirits, men of influence and then at loose ends. They eagerly associated themselves with him. Jonathan Dayton, whose term as United States Senator from New Jersey was about to expire, was one of these. He had married Matthias Ogden's sister, was himself a close friend to Burr from boyhood days. Furthermore, he was interested in a projected canal around the Ohio Falls, and held on speculation some 25,000 acres of land between Big and Little Miami Rivers. The city of Dayton, Ohio, was later to be named after him. While Burr involved him in the Spanish adventure, he in turn interested Burr in the canal project. There was a considerable fluidity about the entire business. Burr was chiefly anxious to redeem his fortunes; and land speculations, canal projects, settlement in the West, even the practice of law in that area, and subsequent re-entry into politics, revolved in his mind together with Wilkinson's scheme of warlike endeavor.

He approached others, members of Congress, men chiefly from the West, and already predisposed to engage in a venture which was certain to be extremely popular among their constituents. All of them were personal friends and imbued with a great admiration for Burr's talents and military abilities. They were Senator John Smith of Ohio, General John Adair, Senator from Kentucky, and Senator John Brown from the same state. Matthew Lyon, erstwhile Congressman from Vermont, and now Kentucky's representative in the House, seemingly had a finger in the pie. So had Andrew Jackson, Major-General of the Tennessee militia, who had admired Burr enthusiastically ever since he had been in

Congress. There were others, of lesser note: personal adherents, like young Samuel Swartwout, young Peter Ogden and Comfort Tyler of New York, who had been in the New York Legislature with Burr.

In short, it must not be considered that the scheme proposed by Wilkinson and engineered by Burr, was the ordinary filibuster, insufficiently prepared and poorly planned. Men of substance and influence were involved, featuring the East as well as the West, while the remote Territories, contiguous to Spain's dominion, were almost wholly controlled by the conspirators. Furthermore, Wilkinson had evidently assured Burr of hearty support in New Orleans, where there existed a Mexican Association with a membership of 300, dedicated, it seems, to the cause of revolution in Mexico. Daniel Clark, the most substantial merchant of the City and Territory, was interested. There was still another in the secret: a British army officer, Colonel Charles Williamson. Burr had been associated with him in the old days of the New York land boom, when Williamson had represented a group of British investors, and he had remained on terms of complete intimacy with him ever since.[16] To him would be entrusted the delicate matter of obtaining British cooperation for their schemes. Great Britain, as the Mistress of the Seas, had the power to advance or nullify any adventure relating to Spain's domain in the Americas.

But an adequate attempt on Spain's possessions required a considerable amount of money. Burr had none himself — financially he was bankrupt. The others had some, but not very much. He appealed to his son-in-law, Joseph Alston, for assistance. Alston was wealthy, probably the largest plantation owner in his State. His imagination took fire at the scheme, what with Theodosia's deft kindling, and he subscribed certain sums and went surety later for the borrowing of still greater amounts. Theo threw herself heart and soul into her father's plans. No doubt she envisioned for him a glorious future that even his own optimistic faculty could not encompass. When all was collected, and accounted for, there still was considerably less than the barest minimum required. This situation, however, had been thoroughly anticipated by Burr and Wilkinson in their original discussions. A sum beyond the resources of private individuals was indicated, and even the use of regular troops and naval forces. The United States Government could not be considered, in spite of prospective war. At this moment — June, 1804 — Burr was *persona non grata* with the Administration. There was only Great Britain. She was the logical nation to approach for funds and military assistance. She was at war with

Spain; she had nibbled at Miranda's first proposals, and she had both money and naval power.

But, the conspirators evidently argued, a bald approach based on these simple facts would lead to curt dismissal. A scheme was accordingly concocted, whether at Burr's instigation, or Williamson's, familiar as he was with the processes of the British administrative mind,[17] or Wilkinson's, there is no present possibility of assurance. But the probabilities point to Wilkinson's fine Machiavellian hand in these transactions. They indicate, by their sleight-of-hand agility, methods, and total lack of sustaining morals of any kind, his own previous career of chicanery and slipperiness as a Spanish agent and spy.

For this scheme was undoubtedly an unpardonable bit of trickery and false dealing, and represented a very definite moral obtuseness on the part of the proponents. Though it is likely that Wilkinson, with a long career of successful endeavor in similar matters behind him, had suggested the plan, Burr cannot be acquitted of complicity. He not only adopted the proposals, but conducted the negotiations. This episode, says Beveridge, "was the first thoroughly dishonorable act of Burr's career."[18] He has been accused of much, but aside from the doubtful ethics of his advocacy of the Alien Holding Bill, his record, in public as well as in private life, was considerably cleaner than that of most rival politicians. It is the ironic touch of fate that these secret dealings with the British, and later with the Spanish themselves, were not known until they were unearthed by Henry Adams in the archives of the foreign Chancellories. Here, if anywhere, was there seeming proof of Burr's traitorous intent, of his general moral obliquity. Yet he was actually hounded and persecuted and scorned for transactions in which his only fault had been perhaps a too great resistance to the temptations of accidental opportunity.

Burr had just fought his duel with Hamilton — this was in July, 1804 — and had fled to Philadelphia in consequence. There he found Anthony Merry, British Minister, summering and nursing his personal resentments against the Administration in particular and Americans in general. He had, forsooth, been slighted in the important matter of social precedence, and his petty mind was filled with spleen. A vain, irascible, weak man, as poor a diplomat and ambassador as Great Britain had ever sent from her shores. A good deal of a fool too, and easily hoodwinked. The conspirators counted on that.

At the beginning of August, Burr sent Charles Williamson to Merry with an astounding proposition. Merry listened to William-

son — who, after all, was notably connected in England — with gullible eagerness. In fact, he snatched the bait before it was well presented. Visions of himself as the dominant arbiter of American destiny, dreams of a spiteful revenge against Jefferson and Madison, dazzled his poor wits and addled his already scrambled mental processes. Without further ado he sat down and wrote a long letter to his home Government.

"I have just received an offer from Mr. Burr, the actual Vice-President of the United States (which situation he is about to resign)," he reported, "to lend his assistance to his Majesty's government in any manner in which they may think fit to employ him, particularly in endeavoring to effect a separation of the western part of the United States from that which lies between the Atlantic and the mountains, in its whole extent. His proposition on this and other subjects will be fully detailed to your Lordship by Colonel Williamson, who has been the bearer of them to me, and who will embark for England in a few days." [19]

Here, if anywhere, is treasonable intent, definite and avowed, similar to that of the New England Disunionists, even to the appeal to England for support. Jefferson would have given much to have been able to lay his hands on this communication, and the others that followed voluminously. But the situation is not as simple as all that. To obtain Merry's cooperation at all, it was necessary to bait him with the prospect of that which he most desired — the wrecking of the American Union and the downfall of Jefferson. Without him, it would be almost impossible to obtain British funds and support. He was the channel through which these must flow.

But it was on Williamson's mission that Burr relied to unfold the true state of affairs. Only recently have the details of that mission been disclosed. The discovery of Williamson's letters among the Melville Papers in the Newberry Library of Chicago by Professor I. J. Cox has placed a new interpretation on what has hitherto been shrouded in considerable mystery.[20]

Burr in the meantime had let matters rest. He had proceeded south on his exploration of Florida, and had returned to resume his Vice-Presidential duties in Washington, waiting to hear some word from his envoy to England. But no word came. Neither to himself, nor to Merry from his superiors. It was most disturbing.

Williamson, however, had been delayed by a long and perilous trip across the Atlantic, which threatened, as he wrote, to disappoint the expectations of many in America. Immediately on landing he reported to his patron, Lord Melville, First Lord of the

Admiralty, and possessed of Pitt's private ear.[21] Melville was favorably disposed to Miranda's enterprise, and Williamson urged assiduously both Burr's and Miranda's plans upon him, as mutually complementary and offering certain success. He emphasized again and again that these two schemes would effectually prevent the French from taking over the Spanish colonies, a probability that was most disturbing to English diplomacy.[22] These reports and communications extended over a period of a year, and, according to Professor Cox, nowhere in the confidential and frank exchanges between the two Englishmen, protégé and patron, is there the slightest mention of Burr in connection with Western separatism. Always it is Mexico and the Spanish possessions which Burr is represented as being ready to attack, with British help, and always it is joined with Miranda's plan to free South America, as a single grand, embracing policy for the consideration of the British Government.

Even much later, after Burr's efforts had collapsed ignominiously, and he had been tried for treason, Williamson refused to relax his efforts on behalf of his friend. For Burr, as will be seen, persisted in his schemes, in spite of exile, in spite of disgrace. In Williamson's letters of 1807–8, he mentions his further communications with the British Cabinet, in which Burr's name is invariably associated with a proposal for the reduction of Mexico. Now, it is true, Williamson mentions Western separatism, but for the first time, and as something apart from Burr's own schemes.[23] This, it must be remembered, was the period of the Chesapeake incident, Jefferson's embargo, and definitely embittered relations between Great Britain and the United States. Williamson had become definitely anti-American, in the interim. Burr, Williamson now thought, might lead a political revolt of the Northern merchant classes against the ruinous policy of the Virginia Dynasty, and thereby justify British approval, yet still not a single word linking Burr and the West. Certainly these unbuttoned communications, coupled with the classic researches of Professor Walter McCaleb, must dispel forever the rooted belief that Burr's plot, conspiracy, or whatever it may be called, was an attempt to disrupt the Union.

Williamson found himself unable to do anything. For this there were several reasons. Napoleon, at this time (1804–5), was threatening to invade England with a vast Armada, and the Government could not afford to engage in distant expeditions. Lord Melville, Williamson's patron, had come under a cloud due to alleged irregularities in his accounts, and a Commission was even then engaged in an examination of his affairs. In 1806, he was actually

impeached and removed from office, though there seems to have been no probative evidence of any guilt. His impeachment was chiefly a matter of subterranean politics. But thereby the strongest prop for the Burr scheme was removed from the Cabinet.

Early in 1805, Williamson saw the handwriting on the wall, and requested permission from Melville to return to America, and there keep alive the readiness of his friends to join any expedition which Great Britain might wish to undertake against *South America.*[24] Evidently Melville requested that he stay. For, on January 3, 1806, and again on January 6th, he was writing, this time to Lord Justice Clerk, with a new view of Burr's plan, requesting that he show it to Melville, who " will take, I dare say, Measures to give his Opinions to the only Man in the Nation [Pitt] that can, after all, act on them." England, he urged, must act without delay. With a small fleet in the Gulf of Mexico and an outlay of less than £200,000, he " would expect before next August to see 50,000 North Americans with Colonel Burr at their head, far on their March to the City of Mexico." [25]

Here, in small compass, is the entire " Conspiracy." To seize Mexico, to obtain sufficient money from England to pay all expenses and leave the bankrupt participants a tidy sum over and above for themselves. This latter was reprehensible, perhaps, but, at the risk of belaboring the point, nothing that could possibly be construed as treason to the United States.

Within a few days thereafter William Pitt, Prime Minister of England, was dead, and Lord Melville driven from office. Thereby all hopes of English participation collapsed. Williamson returned to America in disgust, landing in April, 1806, only to find that matters had gone even more badly with his friends, and the country decidedly hostile to England and Englishmen. By August of the same year he went back to his native country, to resume, a year later, his pressure on behalf of his friend Burr, and the plans dearest to his heart. But, as will be seen, the episode was ended, and not to be revived.

With the English situation in mind, it is easier to understand what was happening in the United States. Burr was seriously disturbed over the complete absence of information from his English emissary. To him he had confided far more than to the inept gullibility of Anthony Merry. But the weeks became months, and the months a year. Great Britain was far distant — and an inscrutable blank. His term of office was expiring, and all his plans were marking time.

4. Creole Grievances

Meanwhile, another situation had arisen in New Orleans, focal point for any expedition against Mexico by land or sea. The United States, under the Treaty of Session, had promised the inhabitants that they would be admitted as soon as possible to citizenship in the United States, and vested with all the rights, privileges and immunities accruing thereto. This promise had been broken, on the high ground that the mixed population, Creole, French, Spanish and American, was not fit for self-government. The sensitive habitants, Creole chiefly, resented the imputation, resented their helpless dependency, and hated their new Governor, W. C. C. Claiborne, worse than they had ever hated Spain.

Accordingly, they sent three representatives to Washington armed with a list of their grievances, and a demand that the Government live up to its pledge. On March 2, 1805, Congress yielded to the extent of granting a General Assembly and a promise of admission to the Union when and if the population reached a total of 60,000. This, however, did not content the angry Deputies, and they growled to Merry — the willing ear to all malcontents, conspirators, and plotters — that they did not think much of the Union and regretted extremely that they had ever been forced into any connection with it.[26]

Burr sympathized with the disgruntled Deputies. He was sincere in believing that they were entitled to citizenship, and he possessed a peculiar interest of his own in their mission. The Mountain had come to Mahomet. He became intimate with them, encouraged their plans, and spoke of his own. They could be of mutual assistance. New Orleans had been cut off from a lucrative trade with Mexico and Texas on its annexation to the United States. The Mexican Association, seeking Mexican independence, and composed of prominent citizens of New Orleans, was already agitating secretly in furtherance of that object. With Burr in control of Mexico, either as an independent nation or as a part of the United States, New Orleans' commerce would revive, and a new and unprecedented era of prosperity commence. The Deputies listened and were impressed.

No sooner was Burr out of office than he hastened again to Merry. Williamson, it seemed, had failed him, and Merry must once more be the vehicle of his proposals to England. He tempered his story to suit Merry's peculiar frame of mind. Merry took fire and sent forthwith another despatch to his Government — in triplicate — and marked " Most secret."

" Mr. Burr, (with whom I know that the deputies became very intimate during their residence here) has mentioned to me that the inhabitants of Louisiana seem determined to render themselves independent of the United States, and that the execution of their design is only delayed by the difficulty of obtaining previously an assurance of protection and assistance from some foreign Power, and of concerting and connecting their independence with that of the inhabitants of the western parts of the United States, who must always have a command over them by the rivers which communicate with the Mississippi. It is clear that Mr. Burr (although he has not as yet confided to me the exact nature and extent of his plan) means to endeavor to be the instrument of effecting such a connection." Again Burr was dangling Merry's pet scheme before his own eyes, yet evading — as Merry was fumblingly aware — any definite complicity of his own. Plumer, long before, had discovered somewhat ruefully that Burr could manage to give a general impression which was not at all justified by what he actually said. In return for these nebulosities, Burr merely asked the use of a British squadron at the mouth of the Mississippi and a loan of half a million dollars. Should England refuse, he insinuated artfully, he would apply to France, who, he knew, would " be eager to attend to it in the most effectual manner." This, too, Merry swallowed, in spite of the fact that France had only recently delivered the property, and been glad to get rid of it. He also duly forwarded Burr's scheme for remitting the money — a very clever method whereby it would have come at once into Burr's own hands, and no questions asked.[27]

Burr, however, did not intend to wait supinely at Washington for a reply. In those days of tedious communication, at least four months must intervene. The West, the Mississippi, New Orleans beckoned — and beyond. The West, because it was there that he expected to recruit the major part of his filibustering expedition. The Mississippi, because that was Wilkinson's stronghold, and further plans must be discussed. New Orleans, because that was the springboard for all ventures, and he wished to establish contact with the Mexican Association, Judge Prevost, Edward Livingston, and the Deputies themselves on their home ground. Beyond — meant — Mexico. Burr had an unequaled talent for topography, mapping, and the plotting of strategic routes.

With a fine audacity he applied to Yrujo, the Spanish Minister, for a passport to Mexico. Yrujo, who had once before granted him leave to enter Florida, was thoroughly suspicious this time. Perhaps Wilkinson had already commenced his remarkable campaign

of duplicity, playing both ends against the middle, and relying on his own extraordinary agility to come out on top, no matter which way the game went. Yrujo refused the passport, and wrote at once to Casa Calvo, one of the Spanish boundary commissioners who was still lingering in New Orleans, advising him to warn all Mexico to watch out for Burr, and to arrest him if he should set foot in Spanish territory.[28] Yrujo, at this stage of the game, was obviously under no illusions as to Burr's real purposes.

Each of the Foreign Ministers, not one of whom was friendly to the United States, had a different and bewildering version of Burr's activities. Merry had heard only of the promised Western Secession and the appendage of Louisiana to that kite; Turreau, the French Minister, was certain it involved only Louisiana, and perceived Wilkinson's connection with the affair; [29] Yrujo alone was in command of the proper information. Which leads, as has been stated, directly to the aforesaid Wilkinson. Of this gentleman, perhaps too little has been said. To follow the intricate web of plot and counterplot, the march of events and Burr's eventual entrapment, it is essential to understand the talents, character, and previous career of General James Wilkinson.

5. "The Finished Scoundrel"

James Wilkinson was born in Maryland in 1757, studied medicine as a boy, and threw it over to volunteer at the beginning of the Revolution. Rapidly achieving a Captaincy, he was in the column led by General Sullivan to reinforce Arnold at Quebec after the assault on that fortress had failed. There, at the age of 17, he met Burr, not much older than himself, and they became friends. After that their paths separated, but correspondence continued. Wilkinson became Brigade-Major on Gates' Staff, and rose to Brigadier-General after Burgoyne's campaign. His indiscreet talk, so it is claimed, resulted in the discovery by Washington of the Gates-Conway cabal. He resigned under a cloud; to return, however, eighteen months later, as Clothier-General to the army, a position at once filled with fascinating possibilities of profit and a reasonable assurance of safety. At the end of the war he went to Kentucky to seek his further fortune, as so many discharged soldiers and officers were doing.

With the money he had saved from his salary and possible perquisites as Clothier-General, he soon became a trader and person of consequence. In 1787 he journeyed by flatboat to New Orleans to extend the theater of his operations and establish a profitable

trade connection with the Spaniards. He not only disposed of his cargo of flour, tobacco, butter and bacon, but he perceived a new field for his talents. American citizens were subject to heavy restrictions and onerous duties in the trade with the Spanish provinces, and Wilkinson, who had become friendly with Governor Miro, decided to become a Spanish subject — in secret. This, however, was not enough. To obtain special privileges and a pension from the credulous officials, he boldly proposed to them that he, and he alone, could wrest the western part of the United States away from the East and place it " under the protection or vassalage of his Catholic Majesty." [30]

On August 20, 1787, he took a secret oath of allegiance to Spain, and presented a memorial to the Governor in which he described in florid language the grievances which Kentucky held against the Union, and a procedure whereby Spain could take advantage of the situation and attach Kentucky to its own dominion. This latter would require Wilkinson's return to his former home, where he would proceed to work for disunion. Naturally, it was essential that certain sums of money be placed in his hands as the sinews of warfare.[31] This document was called No. 13 in the list of official documents, which number was later transferred to Wilkinson himself in all cipher communications between the various officials of the Spanish Government. This was done at Wilkinson's own request, for reasons that are obvious.

On September 17, 1789, the new Spanish subject and secret agent presented another memorial in which he hedged a bit — he now suggested that Spain permit free and unlimited immigration of Kentuckians into Louisiana, and thereby sap the West of its boldest and hardiest citizens. A day later he acknowledged receipt of $7,000 from Miro, euphemistically called a " loan," " but must ask you," he begged that official, " that no one outside of the confidential servants of the crown shall know of this loan." [32]

Thus armed, he returned to Kentucky to initiate subterranean intrigues for the secession of the Western lands and for a submission to Spain. He managed to gather around him a certain group, but, in spite of wild rumors and alarums, and a promiscuous distribution of bribes, the conspiracy failed to gain momentum.

Whereupon Wilkinson, though still drawing funds from Spain, hastened to insinuate himself into the American armed forces once again. His secret change of citizenship was unknown. By 1799 he had labored to such good effect that he was appointed General of the newly opened Mississippi Territory. Hamilton, Washington and McHenry, Secretary of War, in a remarkable interchange of

letters, agreed that his talents were great, his character more than doubtful, his connections with Spain so open to suspicion as to cause McHenry to warn against " saying any thing to him which would induce him to imagine government had in view any hostile project, however remote, or dependent on events, against any of the possessions of Spain." [33] But, on Hamilton's recommendation, all concurred in promoting him to command of the forces on the Spanish border as Major-General, on the high ground, as Hamilton neatly put it, that " he will be apt to become disgusted, if neglected; and through disgust may be rendered really what he is now only suspected to be." [34]

Wilkinson was now in a position to be really valuable to his Spanish employers. Already, in 1796, he had cashed in on a more modest Generalship. " In the Galley the Victoria, . . . there have been sent to Don Vincente Folch nine thousand six hundred and forty dollars, which sum," ordered Baron de Carondelet of Don Tomas Portel, " you will hold at my disposal, to deliver it the moment an order may be presented to you by the American General Don James Wilkinson." [35]

The skein of his intrigues grew more and more entangled. In 1797 an American named Power was sent by Spain northward with what was said to be a mule load of gold for the American General, then stationed at Detroit. His grand opportunity came in 1804, however, immediately before he came north to spin ambitious visions for the delectation of the Vice-President of the United States. Jefferson was then considering approvingly Livingston's interpretation of what constituted the boundaries of Louisiana. Spain was apprehensive and a trifle jumpy. Don Vicente Folch, Governor of West Florida, and Casa Calvo, Spanish Boundary Commissioner, met Wilkinson, American Boundary Commissioner, secretly at New Orleans. Wilkinson upbraided them for having failed to deliver his promised pension of $2000 a year for the past ten years. He was going, he said, to Washington, and if Folch paid him what was due, he would report to him all the plans and purposes of Jefferson and his Cabinet, for, he declared, he knew " what was concealed in the heart of the President."

After some dickering, it was agreed for the present to pay Wilkinson immediately $12,000 of the $20,000 he demanded, and to forward his famous " Reflections " to Spain for consideration, together with his further demands, to wit, that he receive the balance of $8,000, and for the future, a pension of $4,000 a year.[36]

In return for these concessions, Wilkinson advised strongly against any yielding by the Spaniards in the West Florida dispute.

West Florida, he said, must act as a barrier to further western expansion by the United States, and thus help save Mexico from future conquest. Then he hastened north, to discover what was " in the heart of the President," and to use his old friend, Aaron Burr, as a tool for the furtherance of his own secret ambitions. For this is a consideration which requires some thought. To Burr he unfolded a dazzling scheme of Mexican conquest, with West Florida as a subsidiary lure. But this occurred just after he had received $12,000 from Spain, with prospects of more in the near future, and to whom he had hinted darkly of aggression against West Florida and Mexico.

Is it possible, therefore, that Burr's Conspiracy was merely a potent threat to be employed by Wilkinson in proving the enormous value of his services to Spain, and as a means of extracting much larger sums of money from his frightened employer? It may be that thus early, at the very inception, Wilkinson already envisaged his course of action. Later events seem to justify this view. Of course, in the event that the United States declared war, and Burr *had* managed to achieve British help and the use of a modest half million of dollars, it would then have been more profitable to jettison his former connections, and reap gold, glory and a possible empire for himself. There is this also to be said. Burr was Vice-President; as such, he could be useful as a medium for the passage of secrets of State, the direct channel into " the heart of the President." Certainly it was through Burr that Wilkinson received his additional promotion to the Governorship of Louisiana, thereby making him the most powerful personage in all America in the eyes of Spain. Burr, it seems, for all his perspicuity and remarkable talents, was not a good judge of human character. He was easily taken in. Wilkinson was but one of the many in whom he was deceived.

Later on, when the lid blew off, and Daniel Clark of New Orleans, furious at certain imputations directed against himself, openly accused Wilkinson of being in the Spanish pay, Folch came to his spy's rescue with a solemn affidavit that Wilkinson's relations with Spain had been of a highly honorable nature and in no way detrimental to the United States; and that, in the archives under his control, there existed no document showing Wilkinson ever to have received a pension or gratuity of any sort from Spain. Largely on the strength of this affidavit, Wilkinson was whitewashed by a Congressional Committee.[37]

But, a few months later, on January 26, 1809, the honorable Spaniard wrote Wilkinson privately, " My dear friend: I believe that you are already well convinced that I have acted as is befitting

a faithful servant of the noble Spanish Monarchy, and that I have sincerely fulfilled the obligations which friendship imposes upon me. I have done even more, for I have sent to the archives of Havana all that pertains to the ancient History, persuaded that before the United States are in a situation to conquer that capital you and I, Jefferson, Madison, with all the Secretaries of the different departments, and even the prophet Daniel [Clark] himself will have made many days journey into the other world." [38] James Wilkinson, whom John Randolph was truly to call " the finished scoundrel "!