

THE FRENCH OBJECTIVE IN THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION¹

THE majority of authorities would to-day, I believe, concede that but for our alliance with France the War of Independence would have ended without independence; and that but for the aid which France lent us secretly in the months preceding Burgoyne's surrender at Saratoga we should hardly have become allies of His Most Christian Majesty, at least on anything like terms of equality. To emphasize the efficacy and indispensability of French aid in the Revolution is however only to throw into higher light its aspects of paradox: the oldest and most despotic monarchy of Europe making common cause with rebels against a sister monarchy; a government on the verge of bankruptcy deliberately inviting a war that, to all appearances certainly, it might have easily avoided! Ignorance of the risks involved might conceivably afford a partial explanation of the course taken by the French government in the years between 1776 and 1783, but in fact the explanation is little available. The possibility of peril in promoting rebellion, albeit in another's dominions, was clearly present to Louis's mind, while the unfitness of the royal exchequer for the burdens of war was pressed upon him by Turgot with all possible insistence.

I.

Bancroft explains French championship of American independence thus:

Many causes combined to produce the alliance of France and the American republic; but the force which brought all influences harmoniously together, overruling the timorous levity of Maurepas and the dull reluctance of Louis XVI., was the movement of intellectual freedom.²

The important element of truth in this theory is unquestionable. The direction and momentum of French popular sentiment established, to some extent certainly, the possibilities and limitations of French official action, and this sentiment was in turn to no inconsiderable extent the product of the liberalism of the age. Yet it

¹ The following article comprises the opening section of the writer's volume entitled *French Policy and the American Alliance*, which is about to be issued from the Princeton University Press.

² *History of the United States* (author's last revision), V. 256; see also pp. 264 ff.

seems clear that the idea that France ought to intervene, if opportunity offered, between England and her North American colonies, in behalf of the latter, came in the first instance not from the *salon* but from the Foreign Office. And it is not less clear that the precise policy pursued by the French government toward the United States from 1776 on was shaped not by philosophers but by professional diplomatists.³

Confining then our attention from the outset to the question of what were the *official* motives of French intervention, we have naturally to consider in the first instance the Count de Vergennes's attempt to represent his programme, which eventually became that of his government, as essentially defensive. Thus in his "Considérations" of March, 1776, which led directly to the policy of secret aid to the Americans, Vergennes urged upon the king and his associates the argument that, whether England subjugated her rebellious colonies or lost them, she would probably attack the French West Indies—in the one case in order to use the large forces she would have assembled, in the other, in order to indemnify herself.⁴ And in his "Mémoire" of July 23, 1777, urging an early alliance with the Americans, he took much the same line: The policy of secret aid had been well enough in its day, but it had not secured the Americans for France and Spain. If England could not speedily crush the American revolt she must make terms with it. Those whom she had failed to retain as subjects she would make allies, in a joint assault upon the riches of Peru and Mexico and the French Sugar Islands.⁵

That there were facts tending to give this line of argument a certain plausibility may be admitted: the known hatred of Chatham for the House of Bourbon, the supposed possibility (actually *nil*) that Chatham would be called to power by George III. if Lord North failed, the lack of scruple that had been shown by England in beginning the Seven Years' War without warning while negotiations were pending, the dissatisfaction of a section of English opinion with the terms of the peace of Paris.⁶ Also it may be admitted that the argument truly represented considerations that had measurable weight with its author. For Vergennes was a cautious, even though ambitious, statesman, and fond accordingly of that line of

³ See *infra*, §§ V. and VI.

⁴ Henri Doniol, *Histoire de la Participation de la France à l'Établissement des États-Unis d'Amérique* (Paris, 1886-1892), I. 273-275.

⁵ *Ibid.*, II. 460, 462-463.

⁶ Expressions of Vergennes's distrust of Chatham will be found in Doniol, I. 61-62, 67-72. At the same time he admits in effect the unlikelihood of George III.'s calling him to power, *ibid.*, p. 62.

persuasion to action which emphasizes the countervailing risks of inaction. When, however, the question is fairly posed whether this argument throws any considerable light upon the real *objective* of French intervention in the Revolution, the answer is "no".

To begin with, there is, to say the least, something of an inconsistency in Vergennes's building an argument for an alliance with the Americans to protect French interests in the Caribbean upon the increment of danger resulting to those interests from his own policy of secret aid. And this inconsistency affords clue to a yet more striking one. In the summer of 1776, when he thought that France could count on the active assistance of Spain, Vergennes definitely proposed war with England and the proposition was tentatively ratified by the king and council.⁷ A little later, however, came the news of the fiasco on Long Island and Vergennes beat a precipitate retreat from his own programme.⁸ In other words, it would seem that the danger which, by the argument in the "Considérations", would menace France if England should subjugate her rebellious colonies was one that could be safely awaited in quiet, but that the one threatening from the contrary contingency was one that must be met half-way. Yet it was the latter contingency precisely which the policy of secret aid was designed to make sure!⁹

But again, while a British attack upon the Caribbean possessions would, of course, have forced France to come to their defense, it may be gravely doubted whether French official opinion held these possessions after 1763 in sufficient esteem to have warranted a policy that materially increased the likelihood of a serious war of which their security would be the main objective.¹⁰ Indeed, Vergennes himself declared on one occasion that the French West Indies could

⁷ "Considérations sur le parti qu'il convient à la France de prendre vis-à-vis de l'Angleterre dans la circonstance actuelle", August 31, 1776. *Ibid.*, pp. 567-575.

⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 613-621. A parallel case is furnished by the French secretary's change of front on the question of the Englishman Forth's mission to Paris in the late summer of 1777. At first Vergennes found this episode to be portentous of war at an early date. When, however, shortly after, the news arrived of Burgoyne's capture of Ticonderoga and of other disasters to the American arms, his alarm diminished perceptibly. *Ibid.*, II. 526-529, 534-536, 539, 551-555.

⁹ See the "Réflexions", *ibid.*, I. 247-248.

¹⁰ See the remarks of M. Abeille, quoted *infra*, § V. In the same connection one should also recall the pacifist attitude of the French government early in 1777 toward the question of defending Santo Domingo, the obvious explanation of it being the fear of arousing suspicion on the part of Great Britain that would prejudice the policy of secret aid. Doniol, II. 234-241, 253, 264-265, 272-275. Still more to the point is the fact that during the peace negotiations of 1782, the French government was ready and willing to surrender two of its most valuable possessions in the West Indies, Guadeloupe and Dominica, to Great Britain in order to obtain Gibraltar for Spain. *Ibid.*, V. 220.

offer but slight temptation to English cupidity, that England already had enough such possessions.¹¹ But finally, there is every reason to believe that both France and Spain could at any time before 1778 have obtained from England, in return for a pledge of neutrality, a specific guaranty of their American holdings, and in fact the programme proposed by the Spanish government in 1777 incorporated this very idea. Nor can there be any question that England would have hesitated to violate such a guaranty so long as peace continued on the Continent of Europe. None the less, Vergennes from the first consistently repelled all such propositions.¹²

To no small extent certainly, Vergennes's attempt to give his programme a defensive mask is to be accounted for by purely propagandist reasons. He had before him from the beginning the two-fold necessity of winning his own king and the king of Spain to his side. It is, therefore, a circumstance of no little significance that in the first formulation of his position toward the American revolt, in the "Réflexions" prepared by his secretary Gérard de Rayneval in December, 1775, the notion of danger threatening from England is distinctly subordinated to what is throughout essentially a programme of aggression. But for this tone the king, despite the missionary work of Beaumarchais,¹³ was, it would seem, hardly prepared; and in the "Considérations" a few weeks later the conscientious scruples of His Most Christian Majesty and His Catholic Majesty are pointed to with some ostentation.¹⁴ Moreover, in the "Considérations" Vergennes was confronted with the task of demonstrating the superior urgency of his diplomatic programme to that of Turgot's programme of financial retrenchment, and this task could *only* be performed by representing war with England as virtually inevitable.¹⁵

And unquestionably it must be conceded that this sort of propa-

¹¹ *Doniol*, II. 643-644.

¹² Both at the end of 1776 and in the spring of 1777, the British government suggested tentatively a common disarmament on the part of England, France, and Spain. *Doniol*, II. 145-154, 232. Vergennes however had from the first been averse to seeking any sort of understanding with England, *ibid.*, I. 51-52. For Floridablanca's programme and Vergennes's attitude toward it, see *ibid.*, II. 264, 293-295. See also Vergennes's argument against accepting the offer, apparently made by Forth, in August, 1777, of a British guaranty of French and Spanish possessions, *ibid.*, pp. 528-529.

¹³ See John Durand, *New Materials for the History of the American Revolution* (New York, 1889), pp. 44-86.

¹⁴ "Si les dispositions de ces deux princes étaient guerrières, s'ils étaient disposés à se livrer à l'impulsion de leurs intérêts." *Doniol*, I. 275.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 280-284.

ganda proved, at critical junctures, extremely effective with Louis;¹⁶ but that this circumstance, on the other hand, is not to be accorded undue weight is proved by the countervailing one that the Spanish government, to whom the argument was also addressed, treated it, once the danger that had at first threatened of war with Portugal was removed, with conspicuous levity—and this notwithstanding Vergennes's insistence that Spain's empire in America furnished England tenfold the temptation that the meagre remnants of French holdings did.¹⁷ In short, while the argument that England designed to attack her Caribbean possessions assisted materially in bringing France into the Revolution by tending to minimize the weightiest argument against such a project, it does not follow that the defense of these possessions furnished the principal purpose of French action. The central core of Vergennes's programme from the first was *aid* to the Americans in the achievement of their *independence*; and the prospect of American independence necessarily brought into view objectives which far overshadowed the security of the French West Indies, either momentary or permanent.

French intervention in the Revolution was in short determined by motives of "aggression" rather than of "defense"—at any rate in what used to be the accepted significance of these terms, before the present war had obliterated so many distinctions. That is to say, France's main purpose was the upsetting of the *status quo* in certain particulars rather than its preservation in certain others. But in what particulars? That is to say, was her objective territory or commerce, or was it something less tangible than either of these?

II.

The possibility that it was territory is raised by the contention of Professor Turner that France hoped in the Revolution to replace England in Canada and Spain in Louisiana. In support of this thesis Professor Turner adduces, first, the testimony of Godoy, "the

¹⁶ Especially after Saratoga. For the data which Vergennes brought to bear upon the king to procure his decision for an alliance with the United States at this juncture, see Doniol, II. 625 ff., 717 ff. Rumors of impending negotiations between the American commissioners and the British representatives and utterances of British parliamentary orators of the Opposition (see *Parliamentary History*, XIX. 662 ff.) were the principal items. Vergennes's manipulation of this evidence is palpably disingenuous, as I shall show elsewhere. The reaction of the king to ministerial alarmism, which was effectively supplemented by the similar efforts of Beaumarchais, is indicated by Vergennes in a despatch to Montmorin dated January 8, 1778, after the alliance had been determined upon: "Ce n'est point l'influence de ses ministres qui a décidé le roi, c'est l'évidence des faits, c'est la certitude morale du péril." Doniol, II. 734.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 643. Spain's attitude is shown by her course.

Prince of Peace", that after the war was over, Vergennes, counting upon the close union between France and Spain, sought to induce the latter, "already so rich in possessions beyond the sea, to give to France her ancient colony"; secondly, the fact that during the war Vergennes appeared anxious "to protect the interests of Spain in the country between the Alleghenies and the Mississippi"; and thirdly, a document published in Paris in 1802 under the caption *Mémoire Historique et Politique sur la Louisiane par M. de Vergennes*.¹⁸

Upon closer scrutiny each item of this evidence must for one reason or other be disallowed. The reliability of the testimony of Godoy, who did not come into power until six years after Vergennes's death, is in itself dubious, but even if it be accepted at face value it says nothing of Vergennes's intentions *before* and *during* the Revolution. Vergennes's attitude *during* that period toward Spain's claims to the territory between the Alleghenies and the Mississippi is sufficiently accounted for by his feeling that it was necessary to harmonize the conflicting interests of the United States and Spain, each of whom was in alliance with France against England. The document published in 1802, though it may *possibly* date from the Revolution, was not the work of Vergennes nor of any one who spoke for him. Not only does the programme that it proposes directly traverse, in its reference to Canada, the pledge of His Most Christian Majesty in article VI. of the treaty of alliance, renouncing "forever the possession . . . of any part of the continent" that had lately belonged to Great Britain, but it materially conflicts with the policy which Professor Turner himself attributes to Vergennes of supporting Spain's claims in the region between the Alleghenies and the Mississippi. The latter policy was clearly designed to allay Spain's alarm at the prospects of American independence. The programme urged in the *Mémoire* of 1802 proposed the deliberate aggravation of this alarm as the easiest means of inducing Spain to relinquish Louisiana to the stronger hands of France.¹⁹

¹⁸ *American Historical Review*, X. 249 ff.

¹⁹ See the *Mémoire*, pp. 25-30. Other considerations that forbid the attribution of this document to Vergennes or official associates of his are the following: It is to be noted that while the anonymous editor of the *Mémoire* assumes to vouch for "the style, the thoughts" of the document as being those of the French secretary, he says nothing of a signature, nor does any appear in the published form. The *Mémoire* is also devoid of certain distinctive marks of a French official document addressed to royalty, the most obvious consisting in the failure of the writer (or compiler) ever to refer to France and Spain by the titles of their Bourbon rulers.

If we are to rely upon the silence of the *Inventaire Sommaire*, no memoir

But if France's objective was not territory, perhaps it was commerce. Unquestionably there was a wide-spread belief in France early in the Revolution, which was appealed to not only by the American envoys but by Vergennes himself on occasion, that if France assisted the United States to their independence, American

on Louisiana exists in the French archives of the date to which the *Mémoire* published in 1802 is assigned by its editor, though several are to be found there of an earlier date from which this one might have been fabricated, and to one of these the editor makes specific reference in a foot-note. Furthermore, the fact that the *Mémoire* of 1802 was, if at this point we are to follow the editor, found among Vergennes's own papers, of itself casts doubt on its ever having been presented to the king.

In connection with his statement that "both French and American bibliographers have accepted" the "genuineness" of the *Mémoire*, Professor Turner cites only the *Voyage à la Louisiane* of Baudry des Lozières. Yet Baudry, while praising the *Mémoire* for "plusieurs de ses vues qui sont très-sages", directly challenges the assertion that it was the work of Vergennes. "If", says he, "M. de Vergennes has any part in these mémoires, it is only a very small part." But perhaps the most remarkable feature of the document under consideration is (assuming it to date from before 1783) the ignorance it discloses on the part of its author that by the treaty of 1763 Florida belonged to Great Britain (see pp. 26 and 30). The Duke of Newcastle is reported to have once addressed a despatch to "the Governor of the Island of Massachusetts". But Vergennes was neither a British peer nor a spoilsman in office, but a man noted among his contemporaries for the range and accuracy of his information in the field of diplomacy. It may be safely assumed, therefore, that he was fully aware that France's closest ally had lost an extensive province by the peace of Paris and had been compensated by France herself with a still more extensive one. Besides, as is shown below, the *Mémoire* of 1802, considered as an entity, must by any assumption date from a period later than early January, 1778. Before this, however, Holker, in instructions dated November 25, 1777, was informed by the French Foreign Office that his government wished to see England left in possession of Florida, Nova Scotia, and Canada. Doniol, II. 616. Upon careful examination of it I am convinced that the *Mémoire* of 1802 comprises two earlier documents loosely joined together by the author of the short address "Au Roi", chapter I., and certain paragraphs of chapter X., of the published document. The first of these two earlier documents comprises most of chapters II.-X. of the *Mémoire* of 1802 and was written before the outbreak of the Seven Years' War, to refute Great Britain's claim to the region then in dispute between France and Great Britain. It closed with a plan of compromise in the form of a proposed treaty between the two nations, which plan is touched up at points by the compiler of the 1802 document. The second of the earlier documents was written after the events described in pages 162 to 169 of the published volume—i. e., about 1769—to protest against the then recent cession of Louisiana to Spain. The entire separateness of the two documents is attested by the words with which the second one opens ("Ce mémoire a pour but", etc., p. 115), by the vastly different styles of the two documents, and by diverse spellings of certain proper names. (In the latter connection compare pp. 57 and 150-151; also pp. 61 and 172.) When, then, was this compilation made? Dismissing the editor's assertion that the document was the work of Vergennes, but taking the document itself at face value, it was brought together after the outbreak of the War of Independence (chapters I. and X.), but before the treaty of alliance recognizing American independence was known (the United States are always referred to as "colonies")

trade would turn forthwith to French ports.²⁰ Yet squarely confronted with the theory that this belief had been material in determining his programme, Vergennes unqualifiedly rejected the notion. "They perhaps think at Madrid", he wrote after the alliance had been determined upon, "that the interest of acquiring a new trade had principally decided us." But he repelled the suggestion thus:

This motive, assessed at its true worth, can be only a very feeble accessory. American trade, *viewed in its entirety and subject to the monopoly of the mother-country, was undoubtedly a great object of interest to the latter and an important source of the growth of her industry and power.* But American trade, thrown open as it is to be henceforth to the avidity of all nations, will be for France a very petty consideration.²¹

These words of Vergennes have, however, something more than their merely negative value; they bring us in fact to the very threshold of the subject of our quest. Official thinking about trade was moulded in the eighteenth century, in vast part, by the categories of what is called "the mercantile system", and it is the significance of the words just quoted that they prove Vergennes to have been of this school. The salient features of mercantilism mark it at once as a system of *state-craft* rather than of *economics*, at least in any modern sense of these terms. In the first place, wealth was identified with that form of it in which, in a period when the machinery of public credit was rudimentary and the usual cement of international alliances was provided by cash subsidies, it was most available for political purposes. Again, the welfare of the subject was assessed for its contribution to the power of the state. Finally, the power of the state was evaluated in terms fur-

and "provinces" and on p. 180 the compiler speaks of "strengthening the peace" between France and Great Britain); also during a warlike situation on the Continent (pp. 27 and 103, by the compiler). But this last condition can be satisfied, for the period between 1775 and 1781, only by supposing the references just cited to have been to the events leading up to the so-called War of the Bavarian Succession. If, then, the *Mémoire* of 1802 is to be assigned, as a whole, to the period of the American Revolution, it must be placed between late January and the middle of March, 1778. We know that, in the months preceding France's intervention, numerous memoirs were transmitted to the Foreign Office, and the *Mémoire* of 1802 may therefore represent one from a sheaf of similar productions. Doniol, I. 242, foot-note. Mr. Paul C. Phillips, on the other hand, conjectures plausibly that the document published in 1802 owes its existence to an effort to bolster up Napoleon's then recent acquisition of Louisiana, *The West in the Diplomacy of the American Revolution* (Univ. of Ill., 1914), pp. 30-32, foot-note. For Vergennes's appreciation that France must attempt no conquests on the North American continent, see Doniol, III. 570.

²⁰ *Deane Papers* (N. Y. Hist. Soc. Colls., 1886), I. 181, 184 ff., 207; Doniol, I. 244.

²¹ Doniol, III. 140. Madrid received its impression from Aranda. Aranda to Floridablanca, January 31, 1778, the Sparks MSS., Harvard University Library.

nished by the doctrine of the "balance of power". But granting these premises and it followed, first, that the principal advantage to be sought from trade was a balance payable in coin or bullion, and secondly, that the most desirable branch of trade was that which was most susceptible of manipulation to produce such a balance—in other words, *colonial trade*. For subject as it was, within the laws of nature, to the unlimited control of the mother-country, the colony could be compelled to obtain all its manufactures from the mother-country and to return therefor raw materials and a cash balance. At the very least, by furnishing the mother-country raw materials which she would otherwise have to purchase from her political rivals, the colony could be made to contribute directly to the maintenance of a favorable *balance of trade* and, *pro tanto*, to that of a favorable *balance of power* against those rivals.²²

²² A good general account of the rise of mercantilism and of its principles is to be found in C. F. Bastable's *Commerce of Nations* (1899), ch. IV. For an admirable statement of the connection which mercantilist theory and policy established between colonies and commerce, see Professor C. M. Andrews, *Am. Hist. Rev.*, XX. 43 ff. "During the greater part of our colonial period commerce and the colonies were correlative terms, unthinkable each without the other", *ibid.*, p. 43. See also the same writer's article in *Am. Hist. Rev.*, XX. 539 ff., entitled "Anglo-French Commercial Rivalry, 1700-1750". "France and England were fairly matched rivals, in that their policies were the same, to acquire colonies in the interest of trade, shipping, and manufactures, to exclude the foreigner from the colonial market, and to make the welfare and wealth of the mother state the first and chief object of the efforts of all, colonies and mother-country alike." *Ibid.*, p. 546. It will be noted that Professor Andrews makes *welfare* the objective of the mercantile policy, but *power* would perhaps be the better word even for English mercantilism. Note the following passage quoted by Professor Andrews from Otis Little's *The State of the Trade of the Northern Colonies Considered* (1748), pp. 8-9: "As every state in Europe seems desirous of increasing its Trade, and the Acquisition of Wealth enlarges the Means of power, it is necessary, in order to preserve an Equality with them, that this Kingdom extends its Commerce in proportion; but to acquire a Superiority, due Encouragement ought to be given to such of its Branches, as will most effectually enrich its Inhabitants. As trade enables the Subject to support the Administration of Government, the lessening or destroying that of a Rival, has the same effect, as if this Kingdom had enlarged the Sources of its own Wealth. . . . But, as an Ascendancy is to be gained by checking the Growth of theirs, as well as by the Increase of our own, whenever one of these happens to be the Consequence of the other to this Nation, its Figure and Reputation will rise to a greater Height than ever." *Ibid.*, p. 543, foot-note. In other words, the mercantilist looked beyond the *welfare* of the subject to the *power* and reputation of the state, and these he measured by the standard set by the doctrine of the balance of power. The same point is also brought out by a passage from Postlethwayt's *Britain's Commercial Interest Explained and Improved* (1757): "I next enter upon the general principles, whereon the balance of trade is founded . . . the consideration of which is earnestly recommended to the public regard, in order to throw the balance of trade so effectually into the hands of Great Britain, as to put the constant balance of power in Europe into her hands." *Ibid.*, II. 551. See also the *Gentleman's Magazine*, XII. 589 (November 1742): "Now, that Money is the

Applying, however, these considerations to the case of French intervention in the American Revolution, we have at once to note that by the treaty of amity and commerce all privileges of trade were to be "mutual" and none given France but what the United States were left at liberty to grant to any other nation, while by the treaty of alliance, its "essential and direct end" was stated to be the achievement of American *independence* not only in *matters of government* but of *commerce also*.²³ In other words, we discover that the *real* commercial motive underlying the alliance was not the hope of *building up French trade*—which it was supposed could hardly be done effectively or advantageously without the machinery of monopoly—but the *breaking down of British trade at the point at which, by mercantilist premises, it most immediately supported British power*. The commercial motive merges itself with a larger political motive: the *enfeeblement of England*.

The lesson drawn by Englishmen from their magnificent triumph in the Seven Years' War is to be found in the famous lament of Chatham on the news of Saratoga: America "was, indeed, the fountain of our wealth, the nerve of our strength, the nursery and basis of our naval power".²⁴ But what should be especially noted about these words is that they refer to the part of America then in revolt, that is to *continental* America. The circumstance is one that would have been quite impossible before 1760, when the emphasis was still on colonies as sources of supply and when, consequently, British opinion, in appraising the two portions of British America, gave the invariable preference to the island and tropical portion. The treaty of Paris, however, signalizes a new point of view. Not only had

Sinews of War, is become a proverbial Expression; and, with Respect to Great Britain, it is notorious we can do nothing without it. Almost all we did in the last Struggle with the Grand Monarch, was by the Dint of Money. If we had Numbers of Allies, we were obliged to pay them all; and whereas every other Power in the Confederacy run into Arrears with their Engagements, we not only made good our Proportions, but often exceeded them. . . . But, to suppose, what is impossible, that we still roll in Riches, who is to join with us in this mighty Enterprise, of wresting the *Balance of Europe* out of the strong Hand that hath lately held it?" See further the index of this same periodical under titles, "Balance of Power" and "France", for other instructive passages along the same lines, especially in the volumes covering the years from 1737 to 1742. Naturally in France, where the dynastic principle was the exclusive basis of the state, the political aspect of mercantilism was predominant; see *infra*.

²³ Treaty of amity and commerce, preamble; treaty of alliance, art. II. See also the American commissioners' letter of February 8, 1778, to the President of Congress, Wharton (1889), II. 490-491.

²⁴ Speech of November 18, 1777, *Parliamentary History*, XIX. 365, foot-note. See to the same effect Burke's speech of November 27, 1781, *ibid.*, XXII. 721-722. See also the opening paragraph of Deane's memoir on the Commerce of America and its Importance to Europe, cited above, *Deane Papers*, I. 184.

continental America made direct contributions to the military forces of the mother-country in the course of the war just closed, but its increasing importation of British manufactures in exchange for raw materials now netted a favorable balance that quite eclipsed the calculable benefits from the West Indian trade. Furthermore, inasmuch as the colonial trade had always been regarded as the essential matrix of British naval strength, popular esteem naturally turned increasingly to that branch of this trade which promised a progressive extension. The upshot of these developments is to be seen in the decision of the British government, registered in the treaty of Paris, to retain Canada instead of Guadeloupe and Martinique from its French conquests. No doubt the decision was in part motivated by a desire to meet the demands of New England; but the discussion that attended it proves that it is also to be regarded as a deliberate re-appraisal by England of the relative value of the two sections of her western empire.²⁵

The reaction of France, in turn, to the lesson of the treaty of Paris was conditioned in the first instance by the plain impossibility of further competition with Great Britain in the field of colonization, at least so long as British naval strength remained predominant. On the other hand, however, the doctrine of the balance of power which, as I have already pointed out, was the political obverse of mercantilism, emphasized the notion that the grand desideratum for a state was not so much a certain absolute quantum of power as a certain rank of power in relation to other states, and particularly those states which it counted its usual rivals—that, in short, *power was relative*. But this premise assumed, the opportunity presented France by the American revolt was a deduction at once inevitable and irresistible. Choiseul's early perception of it, we shall note presently. At this juncture our interest is in the point of view of Vergennes, the official sponsor of French intervention. Fortunately it is attested both in his despatches and in his more formal memoirs again and again: England was France's ancient and hereditary enemy. The essential basis of English power was English commerce and English naval strength. The most important source of these, in turn, was England's colonial empire, and especially her holdings in North America. The disavowance once and for all time of the connection between England and her rebellious provinces would deprive her of the greatest single source of power and, by the same token, elevate the power of the House of Bourbon against its most dangerous and unscrupulous rival. To achieve that

²⁵ For the matter of this paragraph, see George Louis Beer, *British Colonial Policy, 1754-1765* (New York, 1907), ch. IV.

would be worth a war otherwise "somewhat disadvantageous".²⁶

Moreover there would also be certain collateral benefits. For one thing, from being an ever-available base of operations against the French West Indies, the new nation would be converted into their joint protector "forever".²⁷ Again, from being a beneficiary and so a prop to those rules of naval warfare by which Great Britain bore so hard upon the commercial interests both of her enemies and of neutrals, the new nation would be pledged to a more liberal system.²⁸ Yet again, by leaving England her non-rebellious provinces in North America, a certain portion of her strength and attention would be permanently diverted from the European balance to the maintenance of a minor balance in the Western Hemisphere.²⁹ However, these considerations too connect themselves, and rather directly, with the logic of the doctrine of the balance of power. Thus the real question raised by our search for the main objective of French intervention in the Revolution becomes the question of *the main objective, in the thinking of French statesmen of a balance of power favorable to France.* The answer to that question reveals the third dimension of French diplomacy of the Old Régime—a certain dynastic tradition.

III.

The diplomatic object of this crown has been and will always be to enjoy in Europe that rôle of leadership which accords with its antiquity, its worth, and its greatness; to abase every power which shall attempt to become superior to it, whether by endeavoring to usurp its possessions, or by arrogating to itself an unwarranted pre-eminence, or finally by seeking to diminish its influence and credit in the affairs of the world at large.³⁰

In these words of the French Foreign Office, penned in 1756 to justify the Diplomatic Revolution, is sketched the picture that dominated French diplomacy throughout the declining years of the Old Régime. In "the fair days of Louis XIV." the picture had been a reality, which, however, that monarch's later aggressions had gone far to shatter. Then Cardinal Fleury had come forward with his

²⁶ See especially the following passages: the "Réflexions" of December, 1775, Doniol, I. 243-244; the "Considérations" of November 5, 1776, *ibid.*, pp. 686-687; the "Mémoire" of January 7, 1777, referred to briefly in the text, *ibid.*, II. 118; the despatch of March 11, 1777, *ibid.*, II. 239; the despatch of May 23, 1777, *ibid.*, p. 295; the "Mémoire" of July 23, 1777, *ibid.*, p. 461; the despatch of December 13, 1777, *ibid.*, pp. 643-644.

²⁷ Treaty of alliance, art. XI.

²⁸ Treaty of amity and commerce, arts. XV. ff.

²⁹ Doniol, III. 156-158, 557; IV. 74.

³⁰ *Recueil des Instructions données aux Ambassadeurs et Ministres de France depuis les Traités de Westphalie jusqu'à la Révolution Française*, I., Autriche, p. 356; see also p. 383.

Système de Conservation by which France pledged Europe that in return for *influence* she would forego extension of *dominion* and that she would devote the influence vouchsafed her on these terms to the cause of Europe's peace.³¹

The success of the System for France's diplomatic position was astonishing. On the eve of the War of the Austrian Succession the elder branch of the House of Bourbon, the protector of Christian interests in the East, of Poland, Sweden, Turkey, Saxony, Sardinia, the German princes, of Don Carlos of Naples, of the emperor himself, and the ally of the maritime powers and of Spain, was the nodal point of every combination of powers in Europe. At the same time His Most Christian Majesty's services as mediator were sought, now by Austria and Spain, now by Russia and Turkey, now by Austria and Russia, now by Spain and Portugal, now by England and Spain.³² "Thanks to Cardinal Fleury", exclaimed the advocate Barbier, "the king is the master and arbiter of Europe".³³ The aged Fleury himself complacently compared the position of France to what it had been "at the most brilliant epoch of Louis XIV.'s reign".³⁴ Frederick II., just ascending the throne of Prussia, found "the Courts of Vienna, Madrid, and Stockholm in a sort of tutelage" to Versailles.³⁵ The Sultan's ambassador at the coronation of Charles VII. apostrophized Louis XV. as "Grand Monarque", "King of Christian Kings", "Emperor of the Franks".³⁶ The enemies of Walpole, who, in return for commercial favors to England, had willingly connived in the extension of French influence, declared that England had been made a cat's-paw of, that the House of Bourbon was at the summit of power, that the balance of power was at an end.³⁷

³¹ M. de Flassan, *Histoire Générale et Raisonnée de la Diplomatie Française depuis la Fondation de la Monarchie jusqu'à la Fin du Règne de Louis XVI.* (second ed., Paris, 1811, 7 vols.), V. 167 ff. On the general principles and outlook of French diplomacy following the death of Louis XIV. and the orientation of Vergennes's policy in these, see Albert Sorel, *L'Europe et la Révolution Française*, pt. I, *Les Mœurs Politiques et les Traditions* (third ed., Paris, 1893), pp. 331-336, 297-304. For some excellent eighteenth-century expressions of the "Tradition of Grandeur", dating from Louis XIV., see Abbé Raynal's *Philosophical and Political History of the Settlements*, etc. (trans. by Justament, London, 1777), IV. 506 ff.; V. 457 ff.; also Anquetil's *Motifs des Guerres et des Traités de Paix de la France* (Paris, 1797), pp. 187 ff.

³² For these data see Lavisse and Rambaud, *Histoire Générale*, VII. 119-160.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 158.

³⁴ *Recueil des Instructions*, I. 246.

³⁵ *Posthumous Works of Frederick II.* (trans. by Holcroft, London, 1789), I. 16.

³⁶ *Gentleman's Magazine*, XII. 54 (1742).

³⁷ See the "Debate in the Lords on Carteret's Motion for the Removal of Sir Robert Walpole", especially Carteret's own speeches. *Parl. Hist.*, XI. 1047 ff.

Nor did the War of the Austrian Succession, rising like a drama to its climax in the stage-triumph of Fontenoy,³⁸ though obviously a defeat for salient principles of Fleury's System,³⁹ signify any lessening of France's influence on the Continent in the estimate of those who then guided her destinies. Foremost of these was the Marquis d'Argenson, who became in 1744 the king's secretary of state for foreign affairs on a platform, so to say, interpreting the rôle of France among nations in the light of the rising philosophy of the age. The period of conquests, Argenson declared—though unhappily not of war—was at an end, and France especially had reason to be content with her greatness. Those therefore who spoke of perfecting the boundaries of France or forming leagues for her defense were ill advised. "Our neighbors have everything to fear from us—we nothing from them." The only alliances which France should form should be "for the purpose of repressing the ambitious", and should be made only with lesser states, "such as Portugal, Sweden, Denmark, Holland, Venice, Modena, Switzerland, Bavaria, Prussia, Saxony, etc." In brief, France was in the position to give the law to Europe, so it be a just law. Let her, then, "sustain the feeble and oppressed" and in her part as "paternal protector", "arrest disorders for many centuries".⁴⁰ In 1748 France, by the treaty of Aix-la-Chapelle, restored her conquests of the war just closed. Sinful Paris pronounced it "a beastly peace". The royal ministers, on the other hand, contrasting His Most Christian Majesty with those rulers who were forced by necessity to seek only their own aggrandizement and were ever masking selfish designs with a pretended solicitude for the balance of power, defended the treaty as marking precisely France's station and magnanimity.⁴¹

³⁸ See Voltaire's description in his "Précis du Siècle de Louis XV.", *Oeuvres Complètes* (Paris, 1792), XXI. 129-148. Note especially his words on p. 148: "Ce qui est aussi remarquable que cette victoire, c'est que le premier soin du roi de France fût de faire écrire le jour même à l'abbé de la Ville . . . qu'il ne demandait pour prix de ses conquêtes que la pacification de l'Europe."

³⁹ For the policy of a friendly understanding with the maritime powers and Austria. In his instructions of December 11, 1737, to the Marquis de Mirepoix, Fleury suggests definitely a *rapprochement* between the Houses of Bourbon and Hapsburg. *Recueil des Instructions*, I. 245-246.

⁴⁰ *Journal et Mémoires du Marquis d'Argenson* (ed. Ratheray, Paris, 1859), I. 325-326, 371-372; IV. 131 ff. See also Sainte-Beuve, "Argenson", *Causeries du Lundi*. The idealistic, not to say sentimental, character of Argenson's point of view is illustrated by his "maxim", "le roi aime mieux être trompé que de tromper".

⁴¹ For the Parisian estimate of the peace, see Lavissee and Rambaud, *op. cit.*, VII. 204. Argenson testifies to the popular criticism evoked by the peace, thus: "Le français aime la gloire et l'honneur, de sorte qu'après les premiers moments

And thus much for the successful aspect of Fleury's System: it gave France for the time being the preponderance in Europe and it accustomed her statesmen to claim for her in relation to the minor states of the Continent in general the rôle which the treaty of Westphalia had conferred upon her in terms, in relation to the lesser members of the Germanic body.⁴² Unfortunately the System had its Achilles's heel, to wit, its indifference to the decline of French sea-power and to the rise of English sea-power. The earliest protest against an attitude so obviously defiant of the tenets of mercantilism came from Fleury's own associate, the young Count de Maurepas, who between 1730 and 1740 headed the Department of the Marine. Now in an official report on the state of the marine, now in a letter purporting to emanate from the shade of Louis XIV., now in a memoir on the condition of French commerce abroad, Maurepas reiterated again and again the favorite premises of his school and their obvious deductions for France: Commerce that kept gold at home and drew it from abroad was a source of public greatness. Foreign trade was the essential root of naval strength. Against no two states in the world could France so profitably turn her arms as against Holland and England. The latter moreover was an active menace to Bourbon interests in all parts of the world. It behooved His Most Christian Majesty "to put to flight this usurping race" and to curtail the commerce which already rendered "these ancient enemies of his crown almost the masters of the fate of Europe".⁴³ It is not impertinent to recall that at the outbreak of the American Revolution the author of these words was His Most Christian Majesty's chief minister.

The warning thus sounded was soon re-echoed by others. In a council of ministers shortly before France's entrance into the War of the Austrian Succession, the Duke de Noailles opposed this step with vigor and insight. England's system, said he, is obvious. "It is to arrive at supreme power by superiority of wealth, and America alone can make smooth the road for her." It could be predicted at the outset that His Britannic Majesty would not waste his substance in Germany, but would seize the opportunity afforded by a war on the Continent to wage war for his own purposes in America. France's real concern should be for her colonies, and only motives of vainglory could distract her attention to the empire.⁴⁴ Two years

de joie de la paix conclue, tout le public est tombé dans la consternation de la médiocrité des conditions." For the ministerial view-point, see *Recueil des Instructions*, I. 286 ff., 310 ff.

⁴² On France's guarantee of the treaty of Westphalia, see *ibid.*, p. 208.

⁴³ Maurepas, *Mémoires* (ed. Soulavie, Paris, 1792), III. 93 ff., 161 ff., 194 ff., especially 205-206 and 241.

⁴⁴ Anquetil, *Motifs des Guerres*, p. 376.

later Deslandes's *Essai sur la Marine et le Commerce* appeared, addressed to "those at the Helm". In these pages one will find proclaimed the theory to be made familiar to us a hundred and fifty years later through Admiral Mahan's famous work, that from the beginnings of history the marine has been a decisive factor in the rise and fall of states. And particularly, Deslandes went on to argue, had the greatness of France always rested on a strong navy. The restoration of the marine was therefore the first duty of French statesmen. Its neglect could lead only to calamity.⁴⁵

The mercantilist propaganda, aptly confirmed by the events of the War of the Austrian Succession, began moreover in time to show promise of fruition. Even Argenson, despite his general complacency, yet gave warning that English ambition, fraud, and aggressiveness in the way of trade, and the prosperity of the English colonies, menaced Europe with the prospect of British dominion "of the seas and of all the commerce in the world".⁴⁶ Saint-Contest, who became secretary of state for foreign affairs in 1751, was of like opinion, holding that, on account of her naval strength, England even then exerted a greater influence in European concerns than France. At the same time he contended that naval strength was a highly vulnerable sort of strength, and that, with prudent measures, it would be easy for France to reduce Great Britain to her proper rank.⁴⁷ Meantime in 1749 Rouillé had become minister of the marine. Under his administration and that of his successor Machault the navy was brought to comparative efficiency, as was attested by the capture of Minorca in June, 1756.

Unfortunately the Seven Years' War, thus auspiciously begun for France, was not long to remain predominantly a war with England, to be waged on the sea for commerce and colonies. The simple fact is that with the *haute noblesse* the army was popular and the navy, for all the zeal of the mercantilists, was not. The prejudices of the nobles moreover fell in with the pique of the king at what he considered the ingratitude and faithlessness of his *protégé*, the King of Prussia, in making a defensive alliance with England. In vain was it urged upon Louis that the treaty of Westminster, far from implying hostility on Frederick's part toward His Most Christian Majesty, was really a matter for thanksgiving, in that it guaranteed peace on the Continent and, by the same sign, a

⁴⁵ *Op. cit.*, *passim*. See also the same writer's *Essai sur la Marine des Anciens et Particulièrement sur leurs Vaisseaux de Guerre* (Paris, 1748). Curiously enough Admiral Mahan seems not to have been aware of Deslandes's works.

⁴⁶ *Journal et Mémoires*, I. 372.

⁴⁷ Flassan, *op. cit.*, VI. 14-16; *Recueil des Instructions*, XII.² (*Espagne*, pt. III.), pp. 298 ff.

free hand for France in India and America. By the first treaty of Versailles, of May 1, 1756, the famous Diplomatic Revolution was effected by a defensive alliance between France and Austria. Even so, the general opinion at first was that this arrangement also was calculated to conserve the peace of Europe. On August 29, 1756, however, Frederick invaded Saxony and the war thus precipitated speedily became general. By the second treaty of Versailles, May 1, 1757, the resources of France were placed at the disposal of the House of Austria.⁴⁸

IV.

The fortunes of the ensuing war it is, of course, unnecessary for us to follow further than to note that for France they were *misfortunes*. These were the days when Mme. du Deffand rechristened France "Madame Job". Cardinal Bernis, minister of foreign affairs and so official sponsor for the Austrian alliance, was soon in the depths. "Everything is going to pieces", he wrote. "No sooner does one succeed in propping the building at one corner than it crumbles at another." France "touches the very last period of decay". She "has neither generals nor ministers". "Ah that God would send us a directing will or some one who had one! I would be his valet if he wished it, and gladly!"⁴⁹

In Choiseul, who succeeded Bernis in November, 1758, the directing will was found and the mercantilist point of view again assured utterance in the royal council. It is true that Choiseul's first official act was to renew with the empress the onerous engagements of his predecessor, but to this he was fairly committed by the circumstances in which he had taken office.⁵⁰ Presently we find him declaring to the Austrian court with entire candor that the war with England involved French power and honor more directly than did the struggle on the Continent. Indeed, he proceeded, the interest of Austria herself demanded the preservation of France's sea-power. For "this it is", said he, "which enables His Majesty to sustain numerous armies for the defense of his allies, as it is the maritime power of England which to-day arms so many enemies against them and against France".⁵¹ And the same point of view again found expression in his despatch of March 21, 1759, to Havrin-court, the king's ambassador at Stockholm.

⁴⁸ Lavissee and Rambaud, *op. cit.*, VII. 217-220; Richard Waddington, *Louis XV. et le Renversement des Alliances* (Paris, 1896), pp. 249-262, 358-517.

⁴⁹ Lavissee and Rambaud, *op. cit.*, VII. 244-245; Richard Waddington, *La Guerre de Sept Ans*, II. 432-433; Sainte-Beuve, "Bernis", *Causeries du Lundi*.

⁵⁰ Waddington, *op. cit.*, vol. II., ch. VIII., and III. 452-454.

⁵¹ "Instructions to the Count de Choiseul", June, 1759, *Recueil des Instructions*, I. 386.

We must not deceive ourselves. *The true balance of power really resides in commerce and in America.* The war in Germany, even though it should be waged with better success than at present, will not prevent the evils that are to be feared from the great superiority of the English on the sea. The king will take up arms in vain. For if he does not have a care, he will see his allies forced to become, not the paid auxiliaries of England, but her tributaries, and France will need many a Richelieu and Colbert to recover, in the face of her enemies, the equality which she is in peril of losing.⁵²

In October came the news of the fall of Quebec. "The balance of power", wrote Choiseul to Ossun, the king's ambassador at Madrid, "is destroyed in America, and we shall presently possess there only Santo Domingo. France, in the actual posture of affairs, cannot be regarded as a commercial power, which is to say that she cannot be regarded as a power of the first order."⁵³

Choiseul now set himself the task, failing a peace with England on reasonable terms, of restoring to the war its original character of a contest with that power for commerce, colonies, and naval supremacy. Auspiciously for his purpose, Don Carlos, a much better Bourbon than Ferdinand VI. had ever been, was now Charles III. of Spain. In negotiations during the summer of 1761 between France and England Choiseul seized the opportunity of championing certain claims of Spain against His Britannic Majesty, which however were rejected by Pitt in terms that aroused not only Charles's indignation but positive apprehensions for his own colonial empire.⁵⁴ The result was that on August 15, 1761, the second Family Compact, making France and Spain practically one power for all warlike purposes, was signed at Paris.

The intention [runs the preamble of this document] of His Most Christian Majesty and of His Catholic Majesty, in contracting the engagements which they assume by this treaty, is to perpetuate in their descendants the sentiments of Louis XIV. of glorious memory, their common august ancestor, and to establish forever a solemn monument of reciprocal interest which should be the basis of the desires of their courts and of the prosperity of their royal families.

The treaty itself announced its basic principle to be that "whoever attacked one crown, attacked the other". Thus, when at war against the same enemy, both crowns were to act in concert. When either was at war, offensively or defensively, it was to call upon the other for certain forces—Spain, upon France for 18,000 infantry, 6000 cavalry, 20 ships of the line, and 6 frigates; France

⁵² Flassan, *op. cit.*, VI. 160.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 279.

⁵⁴ Waddington, *op. cit.*, III. 427-442, and IV. 428-437, 555-572. See also *Recueil des Instructions*, XII.² (*Espagne*, pt. III.), p. 338.

upon Spain, for the same naval forces, 10,000 infantry, and 2000 cavalry. The Bourbon holdings in Italy were guaranteed absolutely. On the other hand, Spain was excused from assisting France in the guaranty of the peace of Westphalia unless a maritime power should take arms against the latter. Each power extended to the subjects of the other the commercial privileges of its own subjects in its European dominions.⁵⁵

The renewal of the Family Compact was Choiseul's greatest achievement and is to be regarded, moreover, as the starting point of the restoration of France's position in Europe. At the outset, however, it brought only fresh calamities and new losses. In October Pitt fell from power for urging a declaration of war upon Spain. None the less, the declaration followed in January. The English and provincial forces now turned from the capture of France's West Indian islands to that of Havana, which fell in July. But Choiseul, his eyes fixed on remoter developments, was determined that Spain should not suffer for her devotion to the Bourbon cause. On November 3, 1762, accordingly, France ceded to Spain New Orleans and all of Louisiana west of the Mississippi, an arrangement which permitted the latter to exchange the Floridas for Havana. The ensuing February 10 the peace of Paris was signed. By it France ceded to England the vast part territorially of what was still left of her colonies. Of the great empire that had once comprised half of North America and the richest of the American islands, and that had given fair promise to include eventually India and the West African coast, she retained Goree on the African coast; Santo Domingo, which, thanks to English diversion against Havana, her forces still held; Guiana, Martinique, Guadeloupe, Saint Lucia, and their dependencies; the small fishing islands St. Pierre and Miquelon, off Newfoundland; and a few factories in India, together with the islands of France and Bourbon, which she must not fortify, as also she must not the fishing stations.⁵⁶

Nevertheless, we must be on our guard against exaggerating the merely material aspect of the losses wrought France by the Seven Years' War. On the map, no doubt, Canada and Louisiana comprised an impressive domain, but regarded from the point of view of commerce and trade balances they were essentially worthless, Louisiana being practically uninhabited and Canada hardly returning the cost of administration. On the other hand, Guadeloupe and Martinique, in place of which England had finally and somewhat

⁵⁵ G. F. de Martens, *Recueil de Traités . . . des Puissances et États de l'Europe . . . depuis 1761 jusqu'à Présent* (Göttingen, 1817), I. 16-28.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 104-120; Lavissee and Rambaud, *op. cit.*, VII. 256-257.

reluctantly consented to take Canada, were commercially of great value.⁵⁷ France's real loss, apart from the enormous outlay of the war, was in prestige. Her armies had been defeated, her fleets annihilated, her allies disappointed and disgruntled. The treaty of peace itself signalized her humiliation most graphically by renewing the defunct provisions of the treaty of Utrecht against the fortification of Dunkirk, to which was later added provision for an English commissioner at that port, "without whose consent not a pier could be erected, not a stone turned". And not less ominous was the sort of demand that now began to be made by His Britannic Majesty's diplomatic representatives at various courts, that in view of the outcome of the war they were entitled to the precedence over His Most Christian Majesty's representatives. French pride could not have been more directly flouted.⁵⁸

How then was France to recover her prestige and the influence that this assured her upon Continental affairs? This was the question that addressed itself, and in terms ever more poignant, to the guardians of her diplomacy in the period between the treaty of Paris and the death of Louis XV. And the answers returned to this question by all schools of opinion on questions diplomatic carried with them the implication at least that before France could hope to regain her station in Europe, English power must be diminished. The story however is one that should be told in more detail, and in connection with it I desire to draw particular attention to two highly important documents: Choiseul's *Mémoire* of February, 1765, which comprises a general defense of his policy,⁵⁹ and Broglie's *Conjectures Raisonnées* of 1773, which voices the views at that date of an adherent of the more narrowly Continental point of view.⁶⁰

V.

Choiseul begins his exposition of the fundamentals of French diplomacy by tracing the calamities of the late war to one cause: the fact that the Austrian alliance was allowed to convert "the war on the sea and in America, which was the true war", to a purely

⁵⁷ On these points, see Flassan, *op. cit.*, VI. 480 ff.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, VI. 183-187; VII. 26-27.

⁵⁹ Soulange-Bodin, *La Diplomatie de Louis XV. et le Pacte de Famille* (Paris, 1894), pp. 236-253.

⁶⁰ "Conjectures Raisonnées sur la Situation actuelle de la France dans le Système Politique", etc., "Oeuvre dirigé par De Broglie et exécuté par M. Favier", dated April 16, 1773, and comprising the latter third of volume I. and all of volume II. of Ségur's *Politique de Tous les Cabinets* (third ed., Paris, 1801, 3 vols.). "C'est Favier critiqué par un disciple de Vergennes", Sorel, I. 308, foot-note. The "Conjectures" are also to be found in Boutaric's *Correspondance Secrète de Louis XV.* (Paris, 1866).

land war. Also it is admitted that the Austrian connection was always bound to be a precarious one. Nevertheless, it is insisted, it was of value as tending to conserve the peace on the Continent, for which reason it should be continued so long as it exacted no further material sacrifices by France. And the historical connections with the princes of the Empire should be viewed in the same light. The old policy of paying subsidies in advance should be discontinued. The English system was to pay for services rendered and this had proved much more effectual. But the one indispensable alliance of His Most Christian Majesty was with His Catholic Majesty. The foremost precept of His Majesty's policy henceforth must be, accordingly, "to manage with the most scrupulous attention his system of alliance with Spain, to regard the Spanish power as a power necessary to France". Nor would this be difficult, for the King of Spain was "just, firm, and one upon whom you can count even beyond the point at which France herself would fail you". The *Mémoire* concludes thus: "It remains for me to speak to Your Majesty of the maritime powers. England is the declared enemy of your power and of your state, and she will be so always." Many ages must elapse "before a durable peace can be established with this state, which looks forward to the supremacy in the four quarters of the globe. *Only the revolution which will occur some day in America, though we shall probably not see it, will put England back to that state of weakness in which Europe will have no more to fear of her.*"

Thus the *Mémoire* closed on something like a note of despair. Despair, however, was not Choiseul's normal attitude. Even a year before this, he had sent an agent named Pontleroy to British North America to report upon its resources and the strength of the lines connecting it with the mother-country,⁶¹ and now in 1766, with the news of the American outbreak against the Stamp Act at hand, the results of Pontleroy's investigation and their significance for France became the subject of active correspondence between Choiseul and His Most Christian Majesty's representatives at the court of St. James.

Judging from the small number of arrangements with reference to colonial possessions in America [Durand wrote Choiseul in August, 1767], Europe has only lately begun to sense their importance. England herself has discovered with surprise that they are the sources of the power which she enjoys and that these great objects of power and am-

⁶¹ C. De Witt, *Thomas Jefferson: Étude Historique sur la Démocratie Américaine* (third ed., Paris, 1861), p. 407. Most of the citations to this work are to the documents in the appendixes, pp. 393-559. See also F. Kapp, *Life of Kalb* (New York, 1870), pp. 43-44.

bition draw in their wake the balance of power in Europe. In brief, money has become so necessary to the sustenance of a government that without commerce no state has the wherewithal to uphold its dignity and independence; and commerce would dry up if it were not sustained by that branch of it which traffics in the products of America. It is there that England finds the outlet for her manufactures, and to what dimensions would these be reduced if they supplied only the markets of Europe at a time when every nation is endeavoring to make its own resources suffice and to prevent the departure of specie from its territory.⁶²

This, of course, is all in the best strain of the extremest mercantilism. Nevertheless, professing to fear the American colonies more than England herself, Durand advised against fomenting revolution among them, since to do so "might have the result of handing over the other colonies of Europe to those who by their excessive energy and strength had detached themselves from the parent stem".⁶³ Durand's successor, Châtelet, on the other hand, was strongly of the opinion that France ought to seize the first opportunity of intervening in America.

In the case of a rupture [he inquired of Choiseul early in December, 1767], even were it an open and premature one, between the colonies and Great Britain, could France and Spain remain idle spectators of an opportunity which in probability would never occur again? . . . Before six months have elapsed America will be on fire at every point. The question then is whether the colonists have the means of feeding it without the aid of a foreign war, and whether France and Spain should run the risk of taking an active part in fomenting the conflict and making it inextinguishable or whether it would be more their policy to leave it to itself at the risk of its going out for want of fuel and the means of spreading.⁶⁴

As a matter of fact, Choiseul had already taken a definite step toward interesting his government in the American situation. On April 22, 1767, he had despatched Kalb, who was later to distinguish himself as a major-general in Washington's army, to Amsterdam, there to inquire into "the rumors in circulation about the English colonies" and, should these be well founded, to "make preparations for a journey to America". In conformity with these and further instructions, Kalb finally sailed for America from Gravesend on October 4, arriving in Philadelphia January 2, 1768.⁶⁵ In essence, the deductions he arrived at from his inquiries into the

⁶² De Witt, pp. 420-421. See also to same effect pp. 427-428. Choiseul's viewpoint was precisely the same, *ibid.*, pp. 47-51.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 52. See also, to same effect, pp. 432-433.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 56-57, foot-note. Choiseul regarded these views as "profound", *ibid.* For further correspondence to the same effect, see *ibid.*, pp. 433-455.

⁶⁵ F. Kapp, *Life of Kalb*, pp. 45-51.

American situation were: that the moment had not yet arrived for France to embroil herself with her neighbors; that while the remoteness of the American population from their central government made them "free and enterprising", at bottom they were "but little inclined to shake off the English supremacy with the aid of foreign powers"; that "such an alliance would appear to them to be fraught with danger to their liberties"; that "a war with us would only hasten their reconciliation", so that "on the footing of restored privileges, the English court could even direct all the troops, resources and ships of this part of the world against our islands and the Spanish Main".⁶⁶

There can be little doubt that these observations, in the general assessment they made of American sentiment, squared with the facts, but that was small consolation to Choiseul, who in his disappointment petulantly charged Kalb with superficiality and pronounced his labors useless.⁶⁷ The result however was that now, abandoning any idea of actually interfering in America, the French minister began to formulate a plan whereby France and Spain should indirectly foster discontent in the English colonies by throwing open the ports of their own colonies to the products of North America.⁶⁸ This was on the basis of the theory that while the English colonies augmented the strength of England, those of France weakened her. "The thing to be aimed at", therefore, in the words of M. Abeille, Choiseul's secretary-general of commerce, was "to diminish the artificial strength of England and to relieve France of the burdens that obstruct the development of her native strength".⁶⁹ Indeed M. Abeille was for granting the French colonies their independence. But these views naturally encountered some opposition at Madrid; and in 1770 Choiseul fell from power.

VI.

Two years later occurred the first partition of Poland, all things considered, the most humiliating episode from the French point of view in the history of French diplomacy. Poland had been for centuries, with a fair degree of constancy, the ally and protégé of France. Since 1745 moreover Louis himself had been endeavoring, through the subterranean channels of the *Secret du Roi*, which indeed he had created for the purpose, to secure the succession of the House of Conti to the Polish throne.⁷⁰ The project of the

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 53-70 *passim*.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 71.

⁶⁸ De Witt, *op. cit.*, pp. 60-63.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 61-62.

⁷⁰ Lavissee and Rambaud, *op. cit.*, VII. 212-214.

royal brigands however was never known to His Most Christian Majesty's agents till it was *fait accompli*, and thus the most important transfer of territory since the peace of Westphalia, involving ultimately the extinction of the greatest state territorially in western Europe, was effected not only without the consent but without the knowledge of France. But worst of all, France's own ally Austria was *particeps criminis* to the act, even though a reluctant one at first. "She wept but she took", was the adequate account that Frederick gave of the empress's part in the transaction. Her course published to the world at large, in a way that tears more copious and more sincere than hers could not obliterate, that the desires of France no longer greatly counted in Europe.⁷¹

"The Tragedy of the North" it was that incited Broglie, the principal agent of the *Secret du Roi*, to the composition, in collaboration with the versatile Favier, of his elaborate *Conjectures Raisonnées*, referred to above.

"One would wish in vain", this document begins, "to conceal the rapid degradation of the credit of France in the courts of Europe, not only in consideration but even in dignity. From the primacy among great powers she has been forced to descend to a passive rôle or that of an inferior."⁷² Putting then the question as to the cause or causes of this unhappy transformation, Broglie first assailed "the change of system produced by the treaty of Versailles".⁷³ The preponderance in Europe was the rightful patrimony of the French crown: this was a dogma consecrated by a thousand years.⁷⁴ But the treaty of Versailles had accustomed Europe "to regard France as . . . subject to orders from Austria". To the same cause was it due that France had abandoned her ancient allies Sweden, Poland, Turkey, and the German princes; and worse still, that she had been made to fill the rôle of dupe in the recent developments in Poland and Turkey, the result of which was her own reduction to the fourth grade of powers.⁷⁵ The Family Compact of 1762, too, had had the worst possible effect upon European opinion, since by it Spain was admitted to virtual equality with France. "France for the first time admitted the equality of another power."⁷⁶

Thus far spoke the critic and rival of Choiseul. The longest section of the *Conjectures* however deals with England and the tone

⁷¹ Lavissee and Rambaud, VII. 503-511.

⁷² Ségur, *Politique de Tous les Cabinets*, I. 212.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, pp. 212-213.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 229.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 213, 258-264, 303-304; II. 33-34, 64, 88-92.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, I. 229-230.

here is significantly harmonious with that of Choiseul's *Mémoire*. The attitude of England toward France was that of ancient Rome toward Carthage. England of course did not expect to wipe out the French monarchy; her inferiority on land forbade the idea. But she had adopted the principle of keeping the French marine reduced, "of watching our ports, of surveying our dockyards and arsenals, of spoiling our projects, our preparations, our least movements". Her policy in this respect was to be explained in part by that spirit of rapine native to the English people, but also in part by the knowledge of the English ministers that the edifice of English power was still supported by factitious resources and forced means and that its natural tendency, in face of the approaching danger of a schism between the mother-country and her colonies, would be to crumble and dissolve. In short, it was *fear* that determined England's policy toward France, though a fear that knew how to choose its weapons. In view of this fact, France should know her real strength, should know that her industry, resources, patriotism, and intelligence were sufficient to overturn "the colossus of English power", could she once restore her marine. She should know too that the feeble line of conduct taken with England in the immediate past had but nourished English pride and disdain and that what was needed was a firm line of conduct. France's military system and her diplomatic policy alike must sustain the dignity and pre-eminence of the crown of France on sea as well as on land.⁷⁷

The influence of the *Conjectures Raisonnées* upon those who were interested in France's diplomatic position is beyond all question, and the same is true of Abbé Raynal's contemporaneous *Histoire des Indes*.⁷⁸ "The marine", declared this writer, "is a new kind of power which has given, in some sort, the universe to Europe. This part of the globe, which is so limited, has acquired, by means of its fleet, an unlimited empire over the rest so extended." Yet the benefit of this control had passed, in effect, to one nation alone, England, and with it had passed the balance of power. Such had not always been the case. In the days of Louis XIV. France had given the law to Europe, and the basis of her greatness had been her marine. Unfortunately, the excesses of this monarch, while cementing the alliance of the maritime states against France, had also turned the martial energies of the latter from the fleet to the army; and so French power had been doubly undermined.⁷⁹ The

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 165-197.

⁷⁸ Sorel, *op. cit.*, I. 304-310. "La doctrine de Favier se ramène à une proposition essentielle: l'anéantissement de l'Angleterre", *ibid.*, p. 306.

⁷⁹ *Histoire des Indes* (Paris edition, 1781), V. 203; VII. 208 ff.; IX. 88 ff., 219 ff.; and especially, X. 136 ff.

connection between England's greatness as a colonial power and her influence among the states of the world and the memory of France's greatness under Louis XIV. are constantly reiterated thoughts in Raynal's pages, and the course to which they incited French sentiment, both official and unofficial, is plain. "Favier", writes Sorel, "made disciples and Raynal proselytes."⁸⁰

Finally, we recur once more to the point of view of the real architect of French intervention in the American Revolution. Able, ambitious, conservative, of vast experience, yet not a little pedantic, Vergennes was thoroughly indoctrinated in the traditional objectives of French diplomacy and thoroughly trained in its traditional methods. Needless to say, he shared the resentment of all Frenchmen at the position of France in 1774.

Condescend, Sire, [he wrote the king in 1782] to consider the situation of France relative to the other powers of Europe when Your Majesty took the reins of government and did me the honor of putting me in charge of the Department of Foreign Affairs. The deplorable peace of 1763, the partition of Poland, and yet other causes equally unfortunate had impaired the consideration due Your Crown most deeply. France, but lately the object of the fear and jealousy of other powers, excited now quite the opposite sentiment: reputed the first power in Europe, one could scarcely assign her a place even among the second-rate.⁸¹

But these words are valuable not only as reminiscence but because they indicate Vergennes's appraisal of the results of the Revolution from the point of view of the French crown; for the inference is clear that the hour of humiliation was now regarded as having passed. Vergennes's theory of the rightful position of the French crown in Europe is stated in the *Mémoire* which he presented to Louis in April, 1778, on the approach of the emperor's visit to Paris, with a view to instructing the young king as to his proper demeanor on the occasion.

"France, placed in the centre of Europe", he wrote, "has the right to influence all great affairs. Her King, comparable to a supreme judge, is entitled to regard his throne as a tribunal set up by Providence in order to make respected the rights and properties of sovereigns."⁸²

⁸⁰ Sorel, *op. cit.*, I. 309.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p. 300. To like effect but couched in somewhat stronger terms is the minute on which the *Mémoire* of 1782 is based, Doniol, I. 2-3. See also Vergennes's *Mémoire* of March, 1784, Ségur, *La Politique de Tous les Cabinets*, III. 196 ff. "La France . . . n'a besoin ni d'agrandissement, ni de conquêtes. Toutes ses vues et toute son influence doivent donc être dirigées au maintien de l'ordre public et à prévenir que les différens pouvoirs qui composent l'équilibre de l'Europe, ne soient point détruits." *Ibid.*, pp. 200-201.

⁸² Flassan, *op. cit.*, VII. 140.

His more systematic expositions of his system at the outset of his taking office show Vergennes to have been something of an eclectic. From the *Système de Conservation* he inherited the idea that France had no need of further expansion but could well remain content with her existing resources of wealth and population. From Argenson he derived, by way of Broglie and Favier, the idea that France's Continental rôle was primarily that of defender of the smaller fry. From Choiseul he derived the belief that the Austrian alliance was to be cherished as making for Continental peace so long as it exacted no further sacrifices on the part of France and that the Family Compact with Spain was France's most valuable asset abroad. From all sources he took the conviction that the greatest menace to France's dignity and even security was English sea-power.⁸³ From the very beginning of his tenure Vergennes exerted an ever increasing influence over the king, who, ignorant and at bottom indifferent to France's internal condition, was well informed and intensely interested in diplomatic affairs, which, he judged, touched the honor of his house. Nor was this attitude without some justification in fact. Among a people so fond of glory as the French the very security of the Crown demanded that the dishonor which it had suffered abroad in the detested latter years of Louis XV. should be wiped away as speedily as possible.⁸⁴

France's intervention in the American Revolution is often described as an act of revenge. The description is less erroneous than incomplete, for while it calls to mind the fact that France had humiliations to be redressed, it fails to indicate the even more important fact that she had also a rôle to be retrieved. Furthermore it leaves entirely out of account the logic by which, in an Age of Reason, the purpose of either revenge or restoration was brought into relation with a concrete situation. The line of reasoning by which France was brought into the American Revolution comprised for the most part the following ideas: that France was en-

⁸³ The documents supporting these deductions are Vergennes's "Exposé succinct sur la Situation Politique de la France", etc., of 1774, Doniol, I. 14-21, and his elaborate "Instructions" to Baron de Breteuil of December 28 of the same year, *Recueil des Instructions*, I., *Autriche*, pp. 456-522. See also note 81.

⁸⁴ "Or la France, passionnée comme elle était pour la gloire, et qui aurait excusé bien des fautes du gouvernement intérieur, ne pardonna pas au Roi . . . son humiliation." Lavissee, *Histoire de France*, VIII.² 411. It is interesting to note that as early as November, 1775, Burke had predicted French intervention. "He observed, that from being the first, she was, with regard to effective military power, only the fifth state in Europe. That she was fallen below her former rank solely from the advantages we had obtained over her; and that if she could humble us, she would certainly recover her situation." *Parl. Hist.*, XVIII. 967.

titled by her wealth, power, and history, to the preponderating influence in Continental affairs; that she had lost this position of influence largely on account of Great Britain's intermeddling; that Great Britain had been enabled to mingle in Continental concerns by virtue of her great naval strength, her commercial prosperity, and her preparedness to maintain Continental subsidiaries; that these in turn were due in great part to her American colonial empire and especially to the policies controlling her trade therewith; that America, become independent, would be an almost total loss from the point of view of British interests; that this loss would mean a corresponding diminution of British power; that since the two were rivals, whatever abased the power of Great Britain would elevate the power of France. This, from the point of view of France's chief objective in intervening in the Revolution, from the point of view of the greatest advantage which she hoped to obtain from such a course, was the main chain of reasoning, but there were also supporting ideas that should not be lost to view. For one thing, it was by no means impossible that whether she intervened or not in behalf of the American rebels, France would find herself, sooner or later, at war with Great Britain in defense of the French West Indies. Again, it had for centuries been France's rôle to back the smaller fry against her greater rivals. Again, it was generally felt that, formidable as it was at the moment, British power was in reality more or less spurious. Yet again, recent diplomatic developments had most miraculously paved the way for French intervention in North America. The withdrawal of France from Canada had left America no reason to fear her; the Family Compact guaranteed the assistance of the Spanish marine; the Austrian alliance constituted a reasonable guaranty of peace on the Continent. Finally, it was felt to be not only allowable but right for France to seize so auspicious an opportunity to tear down a power that had been used so outrageously as England had used her power on the sea. In the end, the project did not lack some of the aspects of a crusade.

The primary requisite to a real understanding of Louis XVI.'s espousal of the cause of American independence is that due weight be given the fact that Europe was still organized on the dynastic principle, and to the further fact, especially noteworthy in the case of the elder branch of the House of Bourbon, that position and influence were the essential objectives of diplomacy, even in the age of "Benevolent Monarchy". To-day, with the voice of the common man dominant in the direction of society, historical investi-

gators are apt to give too slighting attention to all but bread-and-butter interests as interpretative of the conduct of states. But this is plain anachronism. The doctrine of the equality of men was indeed a tenet of the schools in 1776, but it had made little headway among the professional diplomatists, who still assessed the general welfare in terms furnished by the competition for station of rival reigning houses.

EDWARD S. CORWIN

THE EARLIER RELATIONS OF ENGLAND AND BELGIUM¹

I do not know whether the speeches of Charles Sumner are still read in the United States with the admiration which they inspired fifty years ago. In fact I do not know whether they are read at all. But from early boyhood I have recalled, at intervals, the purple patch with which Sumner closes his oration on *The True Grandeur of Nations*:

It is a beautiful picture in Grecian story, that there was at least one spot, the small island of Delos, dedicated to the gods, and kept at all times sacred from War. No hostile foot ever pressed this kindly soil, and citizens met here in common worship, beneath the aegis of inviolable Peace. So let us dedicate our beloved country. . . . The Temple of Honor shall be enclosed by the Temple of Concord; that it may never more be entered through any portal of War; the horn of Abundance shall overflow at its gates; the angel of Religion shall be the guide over its steps of flashing adamant; while within . . . Justice, returned to the earth from long exile in the skies . . . shall rear her serene and majestic front.

It is now rather more than two generations since the great powers of Europe tried the experiment of converting the old Austrian Netherlands into a modern Delos. To transform this cockpit into the neutralized Belgium was an ambitious effort, involving the recognition of public law as a real force in modern life. Apparently mankind is less virtuous than it was assumed to be, or else new doctrines regarding the nature of the state have consigned to the scrap-heap ideas which were deemed fundamental in 1831. At any rate we have been witnesses of a grim fiasco. The Belgian Delos has been destroyed, and it follows that the Swiss Delos exists on sufferance. Henceforth the Happy Island of the Aegean must be classed with the Happy Valley of Abyssinia among the figments of the imagination. In fact Delos would be forgotten were it not for the American Historical Association. Here its memory, its ideal survives, and far be it from me to disturb this haven of peace by introducing matters of controversy. The present subject would not have occurred to me but for the fact that I was asked to treat of English history in recent times. Then came events which brought Belgium into the centre of the stage. Hence it seemed that a few remarks

¹A paper read at the meeting of the American Historical Association in Chicago, December 30, 1914.