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FRANCE

Her Influence and Aid in our Revolutionary Struggle.

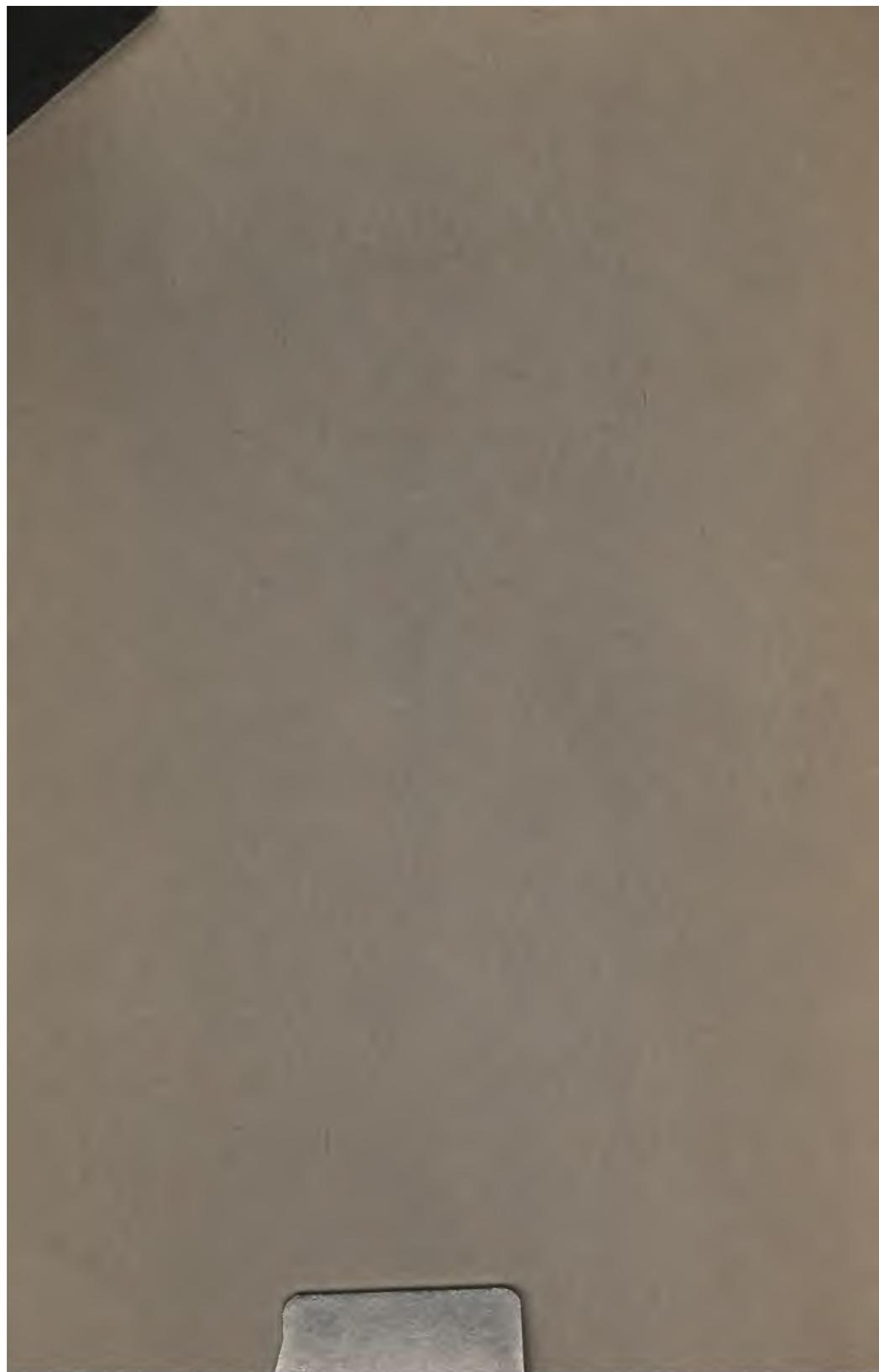
MAX B. MAY.



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FRANCE

*Her Influence and Aid in our
Revolutionary Struggle.*



MAX B. MAY
U. of C. '88. A.M. HARVARD.



This essay was awarded the prize of one hundred dollars
by the
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in 1902.



The American Revolution practically ended with the surrender of Cornwallis at Yorktown, October 19, 1781. "Nor must impartial history," says Bancroft [Bancroft's "History of United States," Vol. VI., page 429], "fail to relate that the French provided for the siege of Yorktown thirty-seven ships of the line and the Americans not one; that while the Americans supplied nine thousand troops, * * * the contingent of the French consisted of seven thousand." Fiske [Fiske — "The American Revolution," Vol. II., page 284] uses even stronger language: "The glory of conceiving and conducting the movement [*i. e.*, Yorktown campaign] undoubtedly belongs to Washington. But it should never be forgotten not only that the four thousand men of Rochambeau and the three thousand under St. Simon were necessary for the successful execution of the plans, but also that without the formidable fleet of Grasse the plan could not even have been made." The unanimous verdict of history is that the great Revolutionary struggle begun in 1775 would not have been ended in 1781 but for the influence and aid of France.

The history of the French intervention in the American Revolution is one of the most interesting chapters in all history. To grasp the full significance of the movement it is necessary to study the condition of affairs in Europe and America at the close of the Seven Years' War, 1763. During the first half of the eighteenth century France was one of the most powerful of European States. Her influence was felt at every court; her advice eagerly sought; her colonial power rapidly growing. She had already had a foothold in India, and her American possessions, notably Canada, gave great promise of future development. Within thirteen years her situation had changed materially; defeated on sea and land, in America and Europe, the fields of Rossbach, Minden, and the Plains of Abraham told the same dreary tale of French defeat and disaster.

Finally in 1763, after seven years of carnage, the Treaty of Paris was signed. By its terms France surrendered her nascent Indian Empire, Canada, and her American possessions; she was likewise compelled to reduce her fortifications at Dunkirk and submit to the presence of an English Commissioner, without whose authority no paving stone in the quay could be moved. ["Beaumarchais and His 'Times,'" Edwards's transla-

tions of Lemoine, page 259.] The French statesmen of that day and the historians of a later time characterize this peace as degrading, shameful and humiliating. Thenceforth France's policy was directed toward one object, the rehabilitation of her former glory at the expense of her greatest rival, Great Britain.

The leading Minister of Louis XV. was Choiseul, a statesman of the highest attainments, a man so far-seeing that he perceived in England's demand for Canada the seeds of her future downfall. "I am astounded," said he to the English negotiator in 1761, "that the great Pitt should attach so much importance to the acquisition of Canada, a territory too scantily peopled to even become dangerous for you, and one which in our hands would serve to keep your colonies in a state of dependence, from which they will not fail to free themselves the moment it is ceded to you." [Quoted by Guizot, "History of France," Vol. V., page 258.] Choiseul resolved to watch the progress of events and to neglect no opportunity of regaining the ground France had lost. As soon as discontent caused by Grenville's stamp act began to appear in the American colonies, Choiseul sent agents there to get information as to the true state of feeling in America for the purpose of encouraging any marked discontent on the part of the colonists.

BARON DE KALB'S WORK.

In 1768 he sent to America Johann de Kalb, afterward Baron de Kalb, a German officer in the employ of the French, to learn the intention of the inhabitants, to report upon their military condition, to ascertain what facilities they had for supplying their military wants, and to discover the plans of the leaders. [Kapp's "Life of de Kalb," quoted by Wharton; Introduction to "Diplomatic Correspondence of American Revolution."] Nothing came of Choiseul's project, for he was dismissed from office, and the discontent of the colonists had not become marked enough to attract the attention of his successors. [Tower, "Lafayette in American Revolution," Vol. I., page 64.] Louis XV. died in May, 1774, a few months before the meeting of the first Continental Congress, and was succeeded by his grandson, Louis XVI., a young and kindly sovereign, whose main ambition was to restore France to her ancient glory. His Cabinet was composed of men of varied abilities. The chief, Maurepas, was a man who, although he hated England, was still for peace, a man who had outlived his usefulness; the Controller General, Turgot, was recognized as one of the soundest economists of France; de Sartine and St. Germain, Secretaries of Navy and War, were easily influenced by the ablest man in the Cabinet, Charles Gravier. Comte de Vergennes, the Minister of Foreign Affairs.

Vergennes was a trained diplomat, and had just been recalled from the Court of Sweden to enter the Cabinet of the young king. This great statesman, through whose influence France finally aided America, hated Great Britain with an intensity now almost inconceivable. To him England was the hereditary and natural enemy of France, "an enemy at once grasping, ambitious, unjust and perfidious," whose "invariable and cherished purpose has been, if not the destruction of France, at least her overthrow, her humiliation, and her ruin." [Doniol, "Le Participation de la France a l'establishement des Unis Etats d'Amerique," Vol. I., page 243.] His whole effort was directed toward restoring France to her former position among the States of Europe, and he believed he could accomplish this best by striking a telling blow at England whenever her colonial difficulties should weaken her sufficiently. He therefore believed that France should use every opportunity possible to assist the Americans to weaken England, even though this policy should lead to war between Great Britain and France.

THE REPORT OF VERGENNES.

Shortly after Louis XVI. had ascended the throne Vergennes submitted a remarkable memoir to him, setting forth in detail the distressing situation of France. "The Cabinet of Versailles has neither credit nor influence with any court; instead of being, as she formerly had been, the center of every great undertaking, she had now become merely a silent looker-on. * * * In a word, France, the greatest power in Europe, had become absolutely inactive. * * * Such was our sad and humiliating position at the time Your Majesty succeeded to the throne. * * * We need but read the Treaty of Paris, and especially the negotiations which preceded it, to comprehend the ascendancy assumed by England over France, and to observe how greatly that arrogant nation enjoyed the pleasure of having humiliated us. * * * I do not hesitate, Sire, to declare that a people may meet with reverses, * * * but when these reverses and this humiliation are unjust, when their end and aim are to increase the pride of an arrogant rival, such a people owes it to itself, to its honor, its dignity, and its position before men, to free itself as soon as it is able." [Doniol, Vol. I., pages 2, 3.]

Vergennes saw in the 1761 family compact of France and Spain a means of carrying out his plan. Meanwhile he saw the necessity not only of obtaining accurate information of American and English conditions, but likewise of intimating to the Americans that they might look to France for some assistance. For this purpose he employed two important persons — Bonvouloir, whom he sent to America in September, 1775, and

Beaumarchais, one of the most remarkable characters in history, whom he sent to England. Pierre Augustin Caron de Beaumarchais was the son of a watchmaker, and through a clever invention gained notoriety and access to royal favor. He became famous as the author of "Le Mariage de Figaro" and "Le Barbier de Seville," and had been employed in secret diplomatic matters by Louis XV. and Louis XVI.

At this time secrecy was of the utmost importance to France. Bonvouloir was therefore to travel in America without disclosing his connection with the French Ministry; his instructions, too, were to be merely verbal and confined to two subjects: to make a faithful report of events and of public opinion in America, and to "reassure the Americans against the fright which it has been sought to stir up among them in regard to the French. Canada is the sensitive point with them; let him give them to understand that we have no thought of that whatever. * * * We admire the grandness and nobleness of their efforts; that we have no interest in putting obstacles in their way; but should be glad to have them make use of our ports." [Doniol, Vol. I., page 156.]

BONVOULOIR'S ASSURANCES.

Before Bonvouloir's arrival in America, in December, 1775, the Continental Congress, mainly through the influence of John Adams, had passed the following significant resolution: "Resolved, That a committee of five be appointed for the sole purpose of corresponding with our friends in Great Britain, Ireland, and other parts of the world, and that they lay their correspondence before Congress when directed." Harrison, Franklin, Johnson, Dickinson and Jay were appointed. ["Secret Journals of Congress," Vol. II., page 2.] This committee and Bonvouloir had many conferences, and in answer to certain specific written questions submitted to him, Bonvouloir assured the committee that France was favorably disposed toward America, but that the colonists had better make overtures to her; that the French could easily furnish good engineers, and that the Americans could, at their own risk, procure arms and munitions of war in France, and that in all probability the French Government might close its eyes to the use of French ports by American vessels. [Doniol, Vol. I., page 268.]

Shortly after Bonvouloir's departure for America, Beaumarchais presented an address to his King, in which he set forth his belief in the invincibility of the Americans and the precarious situation of the Ministry of Lord North. ["Beaumarchais and His Times," page 262.] Beaumarchais on his return to London

met Arthur Lee, who had succeeded Franklin as the London agent of the colonies. Lee maintained that Beaumarchais had represented himself as the Ambassador of France, and had promised the colonists French aid. There was absolutely no truth in this assertion. ["Beaumarchais and His Times," page 278.]

Beaumarchais now began urging Vergennes to assist the Americans, intimating that unless they were successful England and America combined might seek vengeance on France. ["Beaumarchais and His Times," page 266.] At the same time Vergennes was using all his power to persuade the King and Maurepas that it was for the best interests of France to aid the colonies to throw off the yoke of Great Britain. Toward the close of the year 1775, the year of Lexington, Concord and Bunker Hill, Vergennes submitted to the King his "Reflections" [Doniol, Vol. I., page 243], in which he set forth in detail his views of the Anglo-American struggle. He saw the following advantages for France in the event that effective aid was rendered: First, "the power of England will be reduced and that of France increased in the same degree; secondly, English commerce will suffer an irreparable loss while the French will be increased; finally, France will probably be able to recover part of her lost American possessions." "Admitting, then, the interest that France has in favoring the independence of the English colonies, it is necessary to examine first what kind of assistance she can give them; second, when this can best be brought to bear; finally, what is likely to be the result." [Doniol, Vol. I., page 243.]

He then comes to the conclusion that the colonists were most in need of munitions of war, ready money, and a good navy; that the courage and perseverance of the insurgents must be kept up by flattering them with the hope that effective aid will be given at the latest by the end of the next campaign; and, finally, whether or not aid is given, the situation will eventually lead to war between England and France. [Doniol, Vol. I., page 243.]

THE REPORT OF BEAUMARCHAIS.

During the winter months of 1775 Beaumarchais continued to memorialize the King in behalf of the Americans. On February 29, 1775, he handed Vergennes for the King alone his famous document, "Peace or War" ["Beaumarchais and His Times," page 267], in which he insisted that to preserve the West Indies and peace, "the Americans must be assisted." He advanced four reasons: First, if England triumphs she will seek to recoup herself by taking the French sugar islands;

second, if the Americans win, England will be all the more anxious to take these islands; third, if England permits peaceable separation, a conquest will be necessary to appease the English people; fourth, if a reconciliation takes place, the colonists will gladly join England to revenge themselves upon France for not having received French aid. ["Beaumarchais and His Times," page 267.]

About this time Bonvouloir reported to Vergennes that the Americans had determined to resist the English at any cost. Thereupon Vergennes submitted to the King and to each of his colleagues another State paper, known as "Considerations" [Doniol, Vol. I., page 271], in which he repeated all the arguments heretofore submitted by him, and those advanced by Beaumarchais and others. He concludes that France ought to encourage England in the belief that she will not interfere, but that, although she should aid the insurgents secretly with munitions of war and money, still the King should not enter into a treaty with them at this time. On April 6, 1776, Turgot handed the King his answer to Vergennes's "Considerations," in which he forcibly set forth his opposition to the policy of the astute Secretary of Foreign Affairs. His sole reasons were that it would inevitably lead to war between England and France, and that France in her present financial condition was unable to face such a crisis. ["Bancroft," Vol. V., pages 226-229.]

Sartine and St. Germain supported Vergennes, and thus through the influence of these and of Beaumarchais the King reluctantly yielded and agreed to assist the Americans secretly. [Bancroft, Vol. V., page 231.] The plan adopted was simple enough. A large commercial house was to be organized and supplied with money from the French treasury, and be permitted to take munitions of war from French arsenals; this house was to deal with the Americans, giving them easy terms. Beaumarchais was placed at the head of the house, which, under the name of Roderigue, Hortalez & Co., made its headquarters at the famous Hotel de Hollande. [Morse's "Life of Franklin," pages 226-228.] On May 3, 1776, the King informed his uncle, Charles III. of Spain, of his purpose to aid the Americans by donating one million livres, and requested that Spain give a like sum. [Bancroft, Vol. V., page 237.] On June 10, 1776, Beaumarchais received the French subsidy, and on August 11 the Spanish grant. ["Beaumarchais and His Times," page 275.]

SELECTION OF SILAS DEANE.

In America the Committee of Secret Correspondence at once grasped the significance of Bonvouloir's answers to its

inquiries, and resolved to send a Commissioner to France to solicit aid. Silas Deane, a graduate of Yale and a former member of Congress, was selected as the envoy. On March 3, 1776, Deane received his instructions from Congress. [Sparks, "Diplomatic Correspondence," Vol. I., page 5.] He was to seek an interview with Vergennes, and to inform him that he had been sent by Congress to apply for arms and ammunition; that France had been selected as the power to whom application should be made first, because in the event of a separation from England, France would be looked upon as the power whose friendship it would be fittest for America to cultivate. He was to ask for clothing and arms for twenty-five thousand men, one hundred field pieces, and a suitable quantity of ammunition. Deane arrived at Paris early in July, 1776, and through Dr. Dubourg, an old friend of Franklin, he secured an interview with Vergennes. Vergennes informed Deane that owing to the friendly relations between England and France, the latter could not openly aid the colonies, but that no objection would be made to shipping warlike stores, and that Deane should consider himself under the protection of Vergennes. [Sparks, "Diplomatic Correspondence," Vol. I., page 13.] Shortly thereafter Beaumarchais made overtures to Deane, but owing to Dr. Dubourg's suspicions of Beaumarchais, Deane consulted Gerard, the private secretary of Vergennes, who told him that he might rely on whatever Beaumarchais contracted to furnish in the way of supplies. [Sparks, "Diplomatic Correspondence," Vol. I., page 13.]

Deane and Beaumarchais, after some correspondence, entered into an agreement by which Beaumarchais was to furnish arms, ammunition, clothing, etc., and collect these at various ports, so as not to arouse the suspicions of the English Ambassador, and Deane was to furnish vessels for the shipment and to pay for supplies by the consignment of American products. But upon Deane's inability to furnish the vessels, Beaumarchais loaded three vessels with two hundred cannon, mortars, shells, twenty-five thousand muskets, two hundred and ninety thousand pounds of powder, clothing, and tents. ["Beaumarchais and His Times," page 290.] Deane, however, was not satisfied with procuring munitions of war, but yielding to the "rage for entering the American service" displayed by many French officers, he granted them commissions in the American Army, to the great annoyance of Congress and Washington. [Morse's "Franklin," page 238.]

Lord Stormont, the ever watchful British Ambassador at Paris, protested against the shipping of supplies and the enlistment of officers, and as Vergennes was not ready at this time to defy Great Britain, orders were given to stop Beaumarchais's

ships. However, after much difficulty, Beaumarchais succeeded in having these orders revoked, and the vessels arrived at Portsmouth, N. H., in time to furnish supplies for the campaign that was to end in Burgoyne's defeat. ["Beaumarchais and His Times," pages 290-294.]

DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE.

Independence was declared on July 4, 1776, and as soon as Deane received the official news, he communicated it to Vergennes, and requested an acknowledgment of American independence on the part of France. Meanwhile Vergennes, learning of Washington's defeat at Long Island, declined to join Spain in the declaration of war on England, and refused to acknowledge the independence of the colonies. [Tower, "Lafayette," Vol. I., page 155.] He therefore merely continued his policy of secret aid. He said to Deane: "You are known here; our ports are open and free to your commerce, and your ships are protected in them. * * * Meantime the United States can receive the same succor and assistance from France without as well as with such open acknowledgment, and perhaps more advantageously." [Sparks, "Diplomatic Correspondence," Vol. I., page 67, et seq., November 28, 1776.] Congress, learning of the favorable disposition of France, decided on September 26, 1776, to appoint three Commissioners to France, and Franklin, Deane and Jefferson were chosen; but Jefferson declining, Arthur Lee was named in his place. ["Secret Journals of Congress," Vol. II., pages 31-35.] Franklin, upon being selected, said to Dr. Rush: "I am old and good for nothing; but as storekeepers say of their remnants of cloth, 'I am but a fag-end, and you may have me for what you please.'" [Parton's "Franklin," Vol. II., page 166.]

Franklin's selection was the best that could have been made, for he was well known in France, especially among the intelligent class, who were now enthusiastically taking up the American cause. The appointment of Arthur Lee was an egregious blunder, for he was the cause of discord among the Commissioners. Franklin upon his arrival at Paris wisely decided to make his headquarters at Passy, a suburb of Paris. [Morse's "Franklin," page 232.] The Commissioners had been instructed to negotiate a treaty of amity and commerce with France, and to request her to furnish, at the expense of the United States, eight ships of the line of seventy-four and sixty-four guns. ["Secret Journals of Congress," Vol. II., pages 31-35.] On December 28, 1776, the Commissioners had an audience with Vergennes, who assured them of the protection of the court and its good-will. [Sparks, "Diplomatic Correspondence,"

Vol. I., page 250, January 17, 1777.] The Commissioners informed Congress that "the hearts of the French are universally for us, and the cry is strong for war with Britain." [Sparks, "Diplomatic Correspondence," Vol. I., page 250, January 17, 1777.] As France was not ready at this time to take any steps that might be considered a *casus belli* by England, she refused to furnish the ships, but in lieu thereof offered the Commissioners a loan of two million livres without interest, to be repaid when the United States was prosperous and at peace. [Sparks, "Diplomatic Correspondence," Vol. I., page 250, January 17, 1777.] Secret aid she did give, and was willing to continue. The Commissioners wrote to Congress "to make us easy, however, we were told that the ports of France were open to our ships as friends, and that our people might freely purchase and export as merchandise whatever our States had occasion for." [Sparks, "Diplomatic Correspondence," Vol. I., page 271, January 17, 1777.]

While Franklin was busily engaged with Vergennes, endeavoring to persuade him to form an alliance, Deane continued to conduct the affairs with Beaumarchais and Roderigue, Hortalez & Co., and during March, 1777, ten ships of Beaumarchais were on the way to America. Meanwhile the American privateers under the protection of France were playing havoc with English commerce, and at this time Wickes, Conyngnam, and later the famous Paul Jones, were terrifying Britons at home. It was stated in the House of Lords that between May, 1776, and January, 1778, seven hundred and thirty-nine British vessels had been captured by American privateers. [Wharton's "Diplomatic Correspondence," Vol. II., page 168. Note: Mahan's "Influence of Sea Power in History" puts the number at one thousand.] France, in order to humor Lord Stormont, frequently interfered with the free use of her ports for American purposes, but the Commissioners, understanding the diplomatic necessity of such action, were not at all discouraged at such orders, but continued to press for a definite and favorable reply to their offer for a treaty. [Sparks, "Diplomatic Correspondence," Vol. I., page 295, May 25, 1777.]

THE TIME TO STRIKE.

Toward the end of July, 1777, France thought herself strong enough to declare to Spain the definite time at which she intended to strike a blow at England; accordingly Vergennes informed the King of Spain that the time had come either to help the United States effectively, or to abandon them altogether, and the months of January and February, 1778, were fixed upon as the time when France and Spain must engage

in war or regret a neglected opportunity. ["Bancroft," Vol. V., page 538.] France undoubtedly hoped to persuade Spain to join her in this enterprise, and during the remainder of the year continued her efforts to induce Charles III. to make an open declaration. However, France needed only the encouragement of a decisive and brilliant American victory to act alone.

And because Burgoyne's "Capitulation to Mr. Gates," as the English were pleased to speak of Burgoyne's surrender at Saratoga, October 17, 1777, induced France to enter into the treaties of amity and commerce and of alliance, this battle is characterized as one of the decisive battles of the world's history. [Creasy, "Fifteen Decisive Battles in World's History," Chapter XIII., page 240.] No more dramatic scene can be imagined than that which took place on the evening of December 4, 1777, when Jonathan Austin's chaise rapidly drove into the courtyard at Passy and rudely interrupted Dr. Franklin's dinner party. The guests, among whom was Beaumarchais, rushed out. "Sir," exclaimed Franklin, "is Philadelphia taken?" "Yes, sir," replied Austin, and Franklin clasped his hands and turned to re-enter the house. Austin cried: "I have better and greater news; General Burgoyne and his whole army are prisoners of war." Beaumarchais set out with all speed to notify Vergennes, and he drove with such haste that his coach upset and he dislocated his arm. [Morse's "Franklin," page 267.]

Within a day or two Gerard, Vergennes's secretary, offered the Commissioners the congratulations of the Ministry, and on December 16 he informed them that the King, "after a long and full consideration of our affairs, was determined to acknowledge our independence and make a treaty with us of amity and commerce. * * * That His Majesty was fixed in his determination not only to acknowledge, but to support our independence. * * * That in doing this he might probably soon be engaged in war. * * * Yet he should not expect any compensation from us on that account, nor pretend that he acted wholly for our sakes; since besides his real good-will toward us and our cause, it was manifestly the interest of France that the power of England should be diminished by our separation from it. * * * That as soon as a courier returned from Spain the affair would be concluded." [Sparks, "Diplomatic Correspondence," Vol. I., pages 356, 357.]

THE TREATIES SIGNED.

Vergennes, however, did not wait for Spain's answer, which turned out to be unfavorable, and on February 6, 1778, the treaties of amity and commerce and of alliance were signed.

The former acknowledged the independence of America, the latter provided that in the event of war between France and England, France and the United States should become allies against England, the main purpose of the alliance being "to maintain effectually the liberty, sovereignty, and independence absolute and unlimited of the said United States in matters governmental as well as of commerce," and neither party should conclude a peace with Great Britain without formal consent of the other; and both parties mutually engaged not to lay down their arms until the independence of the United States should have been formally assured by treaties ending the war. The treaty also contained a secret article whereby Spain could join in the alliance upon the same conditions as France. ["Secret Journals of Congress," Vol. II., page 485.]

With the execution of these important treaties the first period of France's influence and aid in the American Revolution ends. While the military and financial aid of the following years was indispensable to complete success, still an impartial review of the history of the years 1775-1778 justifies Mr. Lecky's observations: "The assistance of France, however, was never more valuable than in the first period of the war, while she was still at peace with England. American vessels were admitted by the connivance of the Ministry into French ports. * * * Privateers were sheltered and equipped, prizes were secretly sold in the harbors. Experienced officers were sent to America with the permission, or even at the instigation, of the French Ministers, to organize or command the American forces. Sea officers superintended the construction of ships for use of America." [Lecky, "England in Eighteenth Century," Vol. IV., page 47.]

The Rubicon had been crossed, and it now became necessary for France to aid the Americans more effectively. From the outset the Commissioners had pleaded for naval aid, and Congress and Washington firmly believed if the French would maintain a naval superiority in American waters, the British land forces could be conquered. Accordingly a fleet of twelve ships of the line and fourteen frigates and a thousand men, under the command of Admiral D'Estaing, sailed from Toulon April 13, 1778. [Tower, "Lafayette," Vol. I., page 339.] D'Estaing was instructed to anchor in the Delaware River; he had authority to attack the enemy anywhere, and was to act either alone or in concert with the United States, as he deemed best. If the British naval force was superior, or his fleet was disabled, he was to go to Boston. [Tower, "Lafayette," Vol. I., page 399.]

After a long and dangerous voyage he reached the Delaware July 8, 1778, and found, much to his regret, that Howe

had just left for New York. ["Bancroft," Vol. VI., page 149.] After setting ashore Gerard, who came as France's accredited Minister to the United States, [Tower, "Lafayette," Vol. I., page 404,] D'Estaing put to sea, and while cruising off Sandy Hook he received a letter from Washington requesting that he co-operate with him against New York. Unfortunately, the pilots reported that the French vessels were too large to cross safely the bar of the harbor, and thus, to the great disappointment of Americans and French, this project had to be abandoned. Washington then proposed that D'Estaing attack Newport, which was garrisoned by a British force of six thousand men under Major General Pigott. General Sullivan, with whom were to co-operate Generals Lafayette and Greene, was ordered to raise a large force of militia to operate with D'Estaing.

D'ESTAING AND SULLIVAN.

The result of this Rhode Island expedition under General Sullivan and Admiral D'Estaing was most unfortunate. It was a dismal failure. Sullivan refused to allow D'Estaing to begin until the militia had been raised, and when finally action was decided upon, Sullivan did not act in accordance with the plan of campaign. An unexpected hurricane prevented a naval battle between D'Estaing and Howe, who had just arrived from New York. Much bad feeling was engendered between the Americans and French when D'Estaing sailed for Boston to repair the damage caused by the storm. Protests signed by Sullivan and others were sent him; fortunately Washington and Lafayette were able to restore good feeling, [Dawson's "Battles of the United States," Vol. I., Chapter XXXIX., page 432,] and a few months later Congress declared that D'Estaing had acted as a wise and brave officer, and that it "entertained the highest sense of his zeal and attachment." ["Journals of Congress," Vol. III., page 93.]

He proved this the following year, when he took part in the attack on Savannah, during which he was severely wounded, [Bancroft, Vol. VI., pages 259-261,] and upon his return to France the following year, when he urged that reinforcements be sent to America. Notwithstanding D'Estaing's bravery and willingness, the first active effort of France in behalf of America was a complete failure, and the colonists were greatly discouraged. During the winter of 1778-9 and the following spring the American situation was critical indeed. The credit of Congress was gone, its armies were reduced to small bodies of troops, half starved and badly clothed. The French fleet in American waters was inactive; in Europe, too, the French accomplished nothing. If France was to gain her object, it

seemed essential that she should receive the assistance of Spain. [Wharton's "Diplomatic Correspondence of Revolution," Vol. I., pages 360-361.]

The French were severely criticised for the lack of effective support given the Americans during the year following the D'Estaing expedition. An examination of the French situation in the years 1778-9 will show that France's conduct was justified. When France entered into the American alliance she had good reason to believe that England would not declare war on her, or, if she did, that Great Britain would be worsted. But within a short time the situation greatly altered, and much to the disadvantage of France. The British army in America was reinforced, the Americans met with reverses, and a reconciliation between England and her colonies seemed probable. It was therefore necessary for France to obtain an alliance with Spain before taking more active measures in behalf of America. [Pellew's "Jay," Chapter VI., pages 120-143.]

This was not accomplished until April 12, 1779, when the Treaty of Aranjuez was signed, by the terms of which France and Spain made common cause against England, and agreed not to lay down arms until Gibraltar had been restored to Spain. Spain, which during the Ministry of Grimaldi had been willing to join France against England, refused to listen to Vergennes after Floridablanca had succeeded Grimaldi. France, to gain Spain's good will, endeavored to influence Congress to yield all claims (which had theretofore been insisted upon by Congress) to the fisheries and free navigation of the Mississippi, and to make the independence of America the sole condition of peace. Gerard and his successor, Luzerne, owing to the financial and military straits in which America found herself, were able to carry out this policy. Notwithstanding all the concessions made at the behest of France, Spain refused to receive Jay, the Ambassador of Republican America, or to aid his country financially. [Wharton's "Diplomatic Correspondence of Revolution," Vol. I., pages 429, 430; Pellew's "Jay," page 121.]

FRANCE VS. ENGLAND.

The French alliance led to war between England and France. Lafayette, who, against the wishes of his family and the French court, had accepted a commission as Major General in the Continental Army, and who had served with distinction under Washington, now returned to France to agitate in behalf of America. He carried with him the best wishes of the American people, and owing to his high position at court, he was able to influence the Ministry in favor of America.

Although the D'Estaing expedition had been a failure, Lafayette believed that France should assist the colonies with a fleet and with an auxiliary force. These troops should be placed under the command of a General who could not only co-operate with Washington, but, if necessary, be subordinate to him. The French-Spanish project of attacking England in the spring and summer of 1779 prevented either naval or military aid from France.

However, after the failure of that expedition, Vergennes again resolved to assist the Americans with fleet and army. In March, 1780, Lafayette returned to America bearing the joyful tidings of substantial aid — naval, military and financial. He was to inform the United States that "the King, as a new proof of his affection and of his interest in their welfare, had decided to send out to them early in the spring a reinforcement of six ships of the line and six thousand men of regular infantry." [Tower, "Lafayette," Vol. II., page 95.] In May, 1780, about fifty-five hundred men under Comte de Rochambeau, who was ably assisted by such well-known and tried Major Generals as Baron and Count de Viomenil and Chevalier de Chastellux, sailed in a fleet in charge of Admiral de Ternay. [Balch, "The French in America," Vol. I., page 140.] As there were not sufficient transports at Brest, part of the French troops were left behind; later, owing to the British blockade of Brest, these were unable to join Rochambeau. [Stone, "Our French Allies," page 215.]

This second French expedition arrived at Newport July 10, 1780, and Rochambeau wrote to Washington: "We are now at your command. * * * It is hardly necessary for me to tell your Excellency that I bring sufficient cash for whatever is needed by the King's army." [Tower, "Lafayette," Vol. II., pages 128, 129.] Welcome words indeed. Washington now hoped that his favorite project of attacking Clinton at New York could be carried out. Unfortunately, however, the British Admiral Graves now joined Admiral Arbuthnot at New York with six ships of the line, thus giving the British again the naval superiority and enabling them to blockade the French fleet at Newport. [Tower, "Lafayette," Vol. I., page 162.]

ROCHAMBEAU'S MISSION.

On September 20, 1780, Washington, Rochambeau and de Ternay held a conference at Hartford. This conference decided that "the situation of America makes it absolutely necessary that the allies should give it their vigorous support, and that His Most Christian Majesty should add to many other proofs of his generous interest that of assisting the United States of America by sending them more ships, more men, and

more money." [Balch, "The French in America," Vol. I., pages 99-113.] Vicomte de Rochambeau, son of the French commander, was sent to France with this urgent request. Vergennes, however, was not ready to give the Americans additional aid, for the economic condition of France did not permit an increased expenditure of money or the sending of more ships or men. Congress, as well as Washington and Rochambeau, saw the extreme crisis that America was facing, and on November 29, 1780, instructed Franklin to notify the Court of France that America meant to adhere to the alliance; that the disasters at Charleston, Camden and other Southern points only spurred her on to increased efforts; that if France would assume a naval superiority in American seas and furnish arms, ammunition, clothing and money, the war would speedily end in glory. ["Secret Journals of Congress," Vol. II., pages 357-367.]

On December 11, 1780, Colonel John Laurens, of Washington's staff, was sent as a special envoy to France to urge the granting of additional aid. [Sparks, "Diplomatic Correspondence," Vol. III., page 185; "Secret Journals of Congress," Vol. II., page 35.] Late in December Congress notified Franklin of Laurens's mission and his instructions to request a loan of twenty-five million livres. [Balch, "The French in America," Vol. I., page 140.] Although Vergennes recognized the critical condition of the Americans, he did not see his way clear to grant the appeals of Washington and Rochambeau; he merely sent one million five hundred thousand livres for the expenses of the French troops. [Sparks, "Diplomatic Correspondence," Vol. III., pages 176, 177; "Secret Journals of Congress," Vol. II., page 348.]

Late in January he received letters from Luzerne and Lafayette advising him of the great distress of the country. About the middle of February Franklin, in pursuance of his instructions, urged Vergennes to grant more ships and money. The language of the venerable diplomat is pathetic as well as forceful: "I am grown old, * * * and it is probable I shall not long have any more concern in these affairs. I therefore take this occasion to express to your Excellency that the present conjuncture is critical; that there is some danger lest the Congress lose its influence over the people if it is found unable to procure the aids that are wanted, and that the whole system of the new government in America may thereby be shaken. That if the English are suffered once to recover that country, such an opportunity of effectual separation as the present may not occur again in the course of ages." [Sparks, "Diplomatic Correspondence," Vol. III., page 186.] These several appeals and the fact that France and Spain had agreed upon the future conduct of their war against England, induced

Vergennes to take effective steps for the immediate relief of America.

On March 13, 1781, Franklin reported to Congress that the King, on account of the exigency of his own affairs, can not grant the loan of twenty-five million livres, but as "a signal proof of his friendship His Majesty had resolved to grant them the sum of six million livres, not as a loan, but as a free gift." [Sparks, "Diplomatic Correspondence," Vol. III., page 192.] Besides money aid, Luzerne was informed that, although no troops could be spared, Admiral de Grasse would shortly leave Brest for the West Indies, and would be in American waters some time during the latter part of the summer to co-operate with Washington and Rochambeau. [Tower, "Lafayette," Vol. II., pages 276-279.] This had been determined before the arrival of Colonel Laurens; he, however, induced the King to guarantee a loan of ten million livres by Holland. [Tower, "Lafayette," Vol. II., pages 276-279.]

FEARS OF WASHINGTON.

The decision of the court of Versailles in March, 1781, to furnish ships and money reached America in May, 1781, and buoyed up the hopes of Washington, which in April had fallen so low that he was constrained to write Laurens: "If France delays a timely and powerful aid in the critical position of affairs, it will avail us nothing should she attempt it hereafter. * * * But why need I run into detail when it may be declared in a word, that we are at the end of our tether, and that now or never deliverance must come." [Sparks's "Writings of Washington," Vol. VIII., page 7.] As soon as Rochambeau received official information of France's intention to grant naval but not land reinforcements, he arranged a conference with Washington at Wethersfield, Conn. Here he yielded to Washington's suggestions to attack New York.

It was, however, decided that the American and French armies should assemble on the west bank of the Hudson, threaten New York, and hold themselves in readiness to await the arrival of de Grasse from the West Indies, to whom a frigate should be sent, advising him to proceed to Chesapeake Bay or New York. [Balch, "The French in America," page 145.] Meanwhile Lafayette, [the statements regarding the Yorktown campaign are based on Tower, "Lafayette," Vol. II., Chapters XXVI.-XXVIII.; "Bancroft," Vol. VI., Chapter LIV., page 40; Fiske, "American Revolution," Vol. II., Chapter XIV., page 244; Dawson, "Battles of the United States," Chapter XCIX., page 733; Balch, "French in America," pages 164-211; Stone, "Our French Allies," page 416, etc.,] who had borrowed a large sum of money from Baltimore merchants to

equip his troops, marched into Virginia to oppose Arnold. The progress of the war in the South at the same time became more favorable for the Americans. Greene, who had supplanted Gates after the latter's disaster at Camden, was holding Cornwallis in check. The British General now left the Carolinas and marched into Virginia. Here Lafayette held him.

On August 14, 1781, Rochambeau received a reply from de Grasse stating the Admiral would be in American waters shortly, but that he could not remain longer than October 15, and that he would bring with him three thousand troops under St. Simon. Washington now decided to move the allied forces to Virginia, and, fortunately for the Americans, Clinton, learning of the previous plan to attack New York, ordered Cornwallis to send north a considerable part of his force. Washington directed Lafayette to prevent Cornwallis from retreating into the Carolinas, and Cornwallis, in accordance with the orders of Clinton, established his army at Yorktown. It was now Lafayette's purpose to hold him there, but in order to do so it was necessary to have the assistance of the fleet. To this end he sent dispatches to Cape Henry, where de Grasse was expected to touch, urging him to come up Chesapeake Bay as soon as possible, to clear the James River, and blockade the York. This word was received by de Grasse, who arrived with his fleet of twenty-eight ships of the line in Chesapeake Bay on August 30, 1781.

The three thousand troops of St. Simon were landed, and were soon joined by the American troops under Lafayette and Wayne. Washington and Rochambeau, with his four thousand French, were moving south to join Lafayette. If Cornwallis could be held at Yorktown, and if relief from New York could be kept from him, a great victory could be won. As de Grasse was anxious to return to the West Indies, he urged Lafayette to attack Cornwallis without waiting for Washington and Rochambeau, but the Marquis would not consent. On September 5, 1781, de Grasse engaged the British fleet of Graves outside of the capes of the bay. While neither fleet was victorious, the British was disabled to such an extent that Graves would not risk another engagement, and permitted himself to be driven toward New York. De Grasse, compelled to guard Chesapeake Bay, could not follow him far, so on September 10, 1781, he returned to the bay, where he rejoiced to find de Barras, the successor of de Ternay, who, having eluded Graves, had safely entered the bay with the Newport squadron.

REASSURING DE GRASSE.

A few weeks later Washington and Rochambeau arrived and informed de Grasse of the arrival of British Rear Admiral

Digby with reinforcements for Graves. This news, so disconcerted de Grasse that he wished to put to sea, and only after urgent appeals from Washington and Lafayette and a council of war held by his officers, did he consent to remain and cooperate with the army. Upon receiving his decision Washington wrote him: "A great mind knows how to make personal sacrifices to secure an important general good." [Sparks, "Washington," Vol. VIII., page 167.] September 27, 1781, fifteen days after the arrival of the allied forces, successful assaults were made upon the enemy's redoubts, and on October 17 Cornwallis, after having made unsuccessful efforts to relieve his position and to escape by water, proposed a cessation of hostilities and the appointment of Commissioners to settle terms of surrender, and on October 19, in pursuance of articles of capitulation, drawn by Vicomte de Noailles and Colonel Laurens, representing the allies, and Colonel Dundas and Major Ross, representing the British, Lord Cornwallis surrendered, the English marching out to the tune, "The World's Turned Upside Down."

Well might Lafayette write to Maurepas: "The play is over, Monsieur le Comte; the fifth act has just come to an end." [Tower, "Lafayette," Vol. II., page 455.] At midnight on October 23, 1781, Philadelphia was startled by the cry, "Cornwallis is taken." And on October 24, on motion of Mr. Randolph, it was resolved "That Congress at 2 o'clock this day go in procession to the Dutch Lutheran Church and return thanks to Almighty God for crowning the allied arms of the United States and France with success by the surrender of the whole British army under the command of the Earl of Cornwallis." ["Journals of Congress," Vol. III., pages 679-682.] On October 28, 1781, Congress resolved to commemorate the great victory at Yorktown by a marble column adorned with the emblems of France and the United States, and inscribed with the succinct history of the siege. [The corner stone of this monument was not laid until October 17, 1881. On that occasion the President of the United States (Arthur) and the French Ambassador delivered addresses; Stone, "Our French Allies," page 537.]

The influence and aid of France was not merely naval and military; without her great and valuable financial aid in the early years it would have been utterly impossible to have carried on the Revolutionary struggle, and toward the end of the war the credit advanced by France alone enabled America to sustain her great burden. At the opening of the war there were twelve millions in specie in the entire country. [Bolles, "Financial History of the United States," 1774-1789, page 8.] As this would soon be exhausted, it became apparent that for-

eign loans must be made. Congress endeavored to borrow from individuals, but this attempt was unsuccessful, because the new colonies had no credit; and besides England, France, Spain and Russia were likewise borrowing, and were able to offer much more satisfactory terms to the money-lenders. [Bolles, "Financial History of United States," 1774-1789, page 231.]

It therefore became necessary to obtain financial aid directly or indirectly from some foreign government, and naturally France became America's financial as well as military supporter. In the days of Roderigue, Hortalez & Co., the United States received, either in cash or its equivalent, one million livres from France and a like sum from Spain. These sums were paid to Beaumarchais for the use of America. After Franklin's arrival in Paris in December, 1776, he succeeded in obtaining loans from the government direct. In 1777 he obtained two million livres; in 1780, four million; 1781, four million; 1782, six million, and 1783, six million. In addition to these twenty-eight millions, which include the two millions paid Beaumarchais by France and Spain, the King of France granted to the Americans a gift of six millions in 1781, and guaranteed a loan of ten millions by Holland; thus France was instrumental in securing for the United States the enormous sum of forty-four million livres. [Bolles, "Financial History," Chapter XVII., pages 229-245; Wharton, "Diplomatic Correspondence of Revolution," Vol. V., page 443.]

LORD NORTH'S EXCLAMATION.

If the decisive victory of Yorktown could not have been won without the aid of French arms on land and sea, certainly without French financial aid the American armies could not have been kept in the field during the trying years preceding that great campaign. Without the material assistance of France in arms and ammunition, taken as it were from French arsenals by French connivance, the Revolution would not have ended at Yorktown. When Lord North heard the news of the surrender of Cornwallis, he exclaimed: "It's all over now." ["Bancroft," Vol. VI., page 430.] Yorktown was the last great battle of the Revolution. George the Third, much against his will, was compelled to open negotiations with the Americans, and these negotiations continued for a period of nearly two years. [The part that France played in these negotiations has been the subject of much controversy. The several biographers of Jay believed that Vergennes wished to prevent America from gaining her complete independence. Wharton, on the other hand, believed the contrary. The limits of this paper prevent the writer from discussing this

interesting question, and the reader is referred to Winsor's "Critical and Narrative History of United States," Vol. VII.; Pellet's "Life of Jay," Morse's "Franklin," Doniol, Vol. V.; Wharton's "Introduction to Diplomatic Correspondence of Revolution," Vol. I.] Finally, in September, 1783, a general peace was concluded at Paris between England, America, France and Spain. The indomitable spirit of the Americans would have succeeded ultimately without the influence and aid of France, for the cause of the Revolutionary fathers was just and righteous. However, the French alliance shortened the struggle and lessened the expense of the war.

To-day, in the hundred and twenty-sixth year of American independence, it is probably immaterial to consider with too much nicety the motives that induced France to intervene on behalf of the struggling colonies. A careful study, however, of the history of the American Revolution in all its phases necessarily leads to the conclusion that without the military, naval and financial aid of France, the great Declaration of Independence would have been in 1783 a mere manifesto of unsuccessful rebels instead of the great charter of a free people, drafted by the ablest revolutionists the world has yet seen.

IN THE PREPARATION OF THE FOREGOING PAPER THE
FOLLOWING WORKS WERE CONSULTED:

- Doniol, "Le Participation de la France al l,Establissement des Unis
Etats d'Amerique."
"Public Journals of Congress," 1774-82.
"Secret Journals of Congress," 1775-82.
Bancroft, "History of the United States," Centenary Edition.
Balch, "The French in America During War of Independence of
United States."
Bolles, "Financial History of the United States," 1774-87.
Cooper, "Naval History of the United States."
Creasy, "Fifteen Decisive Battles of the World from Marathon to
Waterloo."
Dawson, "Battles of the United States."
Durand, New Materials for History of American Revolution."
Fiske, "The American Revolution."
Frothingham, "Rise of the Republic."
Gordon, "Independence of the United States."
E. E. Hale and E. E. Hale, Jr., "Franklin in France."
Guizot, "History of France."
Hosmer, "Life of Samuel Adams."
Lecy, "England in the Eighteenth Century."
Lodge, "The Story of the Revolution."
Lodge, "Life of Washington."
Lomenie, "Beaumarchais and His Times." (Edwards' translation.)
Marshall, "Life of Washington."
Morse, "Life of John Adams."
Morse, "Life of Thomas Jefferson."
Pitkin, "History of the United States."
Parton, "Life of Franklin."
Pellew, "Life of John Jay."
Sparks, "Diplomatic Correspondence of the American Revolution."
Sparks, "Writings of Washington."
Sloane, "The French War and the Revolution."
Stone, "Our French Allies."
Tower, "Lafayette in the American Revolution."
Prescott, "Diplomacy of the Revolution."
Tuckerman, "Life of Lafayette."
Wharton, "The Diplomatic Correspondence of the American
Revolution."
Winsor, "Narrative and Critical History of the United States." Vols.
VI.-VII.



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