Two Americans in Two Dutch Republics

The Adamses, Father and Son

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ON April 19, 1782, the States General formally received John Adams as minister plenipotentiary from the United States. A reception by the Stadtholder, William V, soon followed, and a treaty between these two "powers of the earth," to use a phrase from the American Declaration of Independence, was signed the following October. It is not a treaty of military alliance, such as the United States signed with France in 1778. It is what diplomats call a treaty of amity and commerce. It is a long document, in twenty-nine articles. All the articles but one pertain to trade, merchant shipping, guarantees to seamen, and such matters. But the first article states that "there shall be a stable, inviolable and universal peace and sincere friendship between their High Mightinesses the States General of the United Provinces and the United States of America." Time has rendered many of the commercial provisions obsolete, and their High Mightinesses long ago disappeared, but the friendship remains; it has indeed been one of the least troubled of any between two peoples, and we hope and expect that it will continue to be so.

Except for France, the Dutch government was the first in the world to recognize the United States. Last year, on a brief visit to Morocco, I learned that this honor is claimed for the Sultan of Morocco, but a little research has assured me that the priority of the Dutch treaty cannot be successfully challenged, for one article of the Dutch-American agreement provided for Dutch assistance to the Americans in negotiations with Morocco and the Barbary states, and the American treaty with Morocco was signed in 1787.

It is still a question whether the Dutch were a little slow in not extending recognition until six years after the Declaration of Independence. Why did they wait until after the battle of Yorktown and

the surrender of Cornwallis' army? Was it simply Dutch prudence? The Amsterdam merchants had given surreptitious aid to the American insurgents throughout the war, passing a stream of munitions and other goods through the Dutch island of St. Eustatius in the West Indies. But the point is that this aid was surreptitious and illegal, for the Stadtholder and the highest authorities in the Netherlands favored the British. A further cause of delay was that the French tried to prevent or postpone Dutch recognition of the United States, in the belief that the Dutch wealth and merchant marine were more useful in the war against England if the Dutch government remained neutral. And another cause, as John Adams so painfully learned, was the slow and cumbersome operation of the various provinces, towns, assemblies, admiralties, councils, boards, and committees of which the United Provinces were composed.

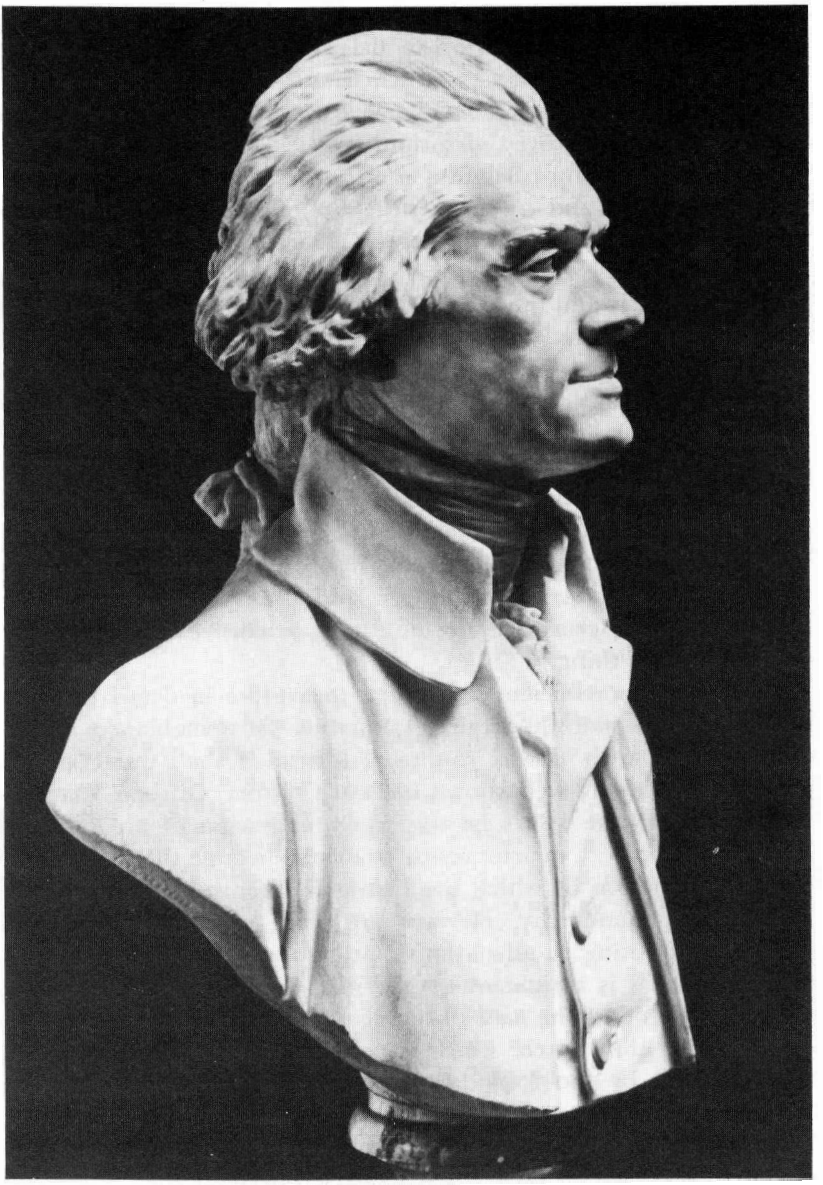
The fact is that it took a small Dutch revolution, or quasi revolution, or the beginhing of what is called the Patriot Movement in the Netherlands, to bring about the recognition of the United States. And this brings me to my real purpose, which is not to dweil on diplomacy and treaties, but to speak in general of the revolutionary era in Europe and America at the end of the eighteenth century, drawing somewhat distantly on a book I wrote twenty years ago. More particularly, I should like to venture some ideas about two Americans in two Dutch republics. The two Americans are John Adams and his son John Quincy Adams. They later became the second and the sixth Presidents of the United States. The two Dutch republics are the old United Provinces at the time of the abortive Patriot Movement in the 1780's and the Batavian Republic that emerged in 1795 in the course of the war between Revolutionary France and the conservative powers of Europe. John Adams was American minister to the United Provinces from 1780 to 1788, though mostly absent in London after 1782. John Quincy Adams was American minister to the Batavian Republic from 1794 to 1797. They were strikingly different in their attitude toward the Dutch scene. My main purpose is to examine these differences and the reasons for them.

Both the United Provinces and the United States were small countries in terms of population at the end of the eighteenth century, each having hardly more people, if we exclude the American slaves, than one of the larger French provinces. Both nevertheless played an important part in the revolutionary movement that swept over the area of Western civilization at that time. In this movement the French Revolution was unquestionably by far the largest and most decisive component. On the vicissitudes of France everything else depended. The French Revolution was preceded by the American Revolution, in which the French monarchy effectively intervened, by the Dutch

Patriot Movement, which the French monarchy favored, though ineffectively, and by revolution in Belgium, or what was then called the Austrian Netherlands, by which time the French monarchy was impotent and collapsing. The French Revolution was followed, after the French armies proved victorious in the war that began in 1792, by the incorporation of Belgium and the German Rhineland into the French Republic and by the setting up of nominally independent republics on the French Revolutionary model elsewhere—the Batavian in 1795, followed by the Cisalpine, Ligurian, Roman, and Neapolitan republics in Italy and the Helvetic in Switzerland. It is not enough to see these annexations and dependent republics as mere consequences of French conquest, for in each case the French worked with local persons who had long been dissatisfied with their respective old regimes. To round out the picture, it may be noted that revolutionary attempts were made in Poland in 1794 and in Ireland in 1798, but that they were quickly suppressed, in part because the French could not or did not support them. In general, what we see in the last quarter of the eighteenth century is what some have called the Atlantic revolution, some the democratie revolution, and some the bourgeois revolution, but these terms are not mutually exclusive, and may even denote the same thing.[1]

There is not sufficiënt space here to explore in detail the issues in this transnational upheaval or to analyze the resemblances and the differences between various countries. Instead, I shall quote at some length from a figure well known in Dutch history, Gijsbert Karel van Hogendorp. In the 1780's he was the young scion of an important Rotterdam family; a quarter century later he became the main author of the constitution by which the House of Orange was restored as a constitutional monarchy. He was an acute observer. "Two great parties are forming in all nations," he wrote at Rotterdam in 1791. "For one, there is a right of government to be exercised by one or several persons over the mass of the people, of divine origin and to be supported by the church, which is protected by it. These principles are expressed by the formula: Church and State." Note that van Hogendorp makes no distinction here between the established Protestant churches and Roman Catholicism, or between absolute monarchies, aristocracies of birth, and self-perpetuating oligarchies; all are forms of an old regime. "To this," he goes on, "is opposed the new system, which admits no right of government except that arising from the free consent of those who submit to it, and which maintains that all persons who take part in government are accountable for their actions. These principles go under the formula: Sovereignty of the People, or Democracy."[2]

When John Adams arrived at The Hague in 1780 this proto-



Thomas Jefferson, 1789, by Jean-Antoine Houdon

democratic disturbance was barely beginning in the United Provinces. The Dutch Patriots, as they called themselves, were a miscellaneous grouping, including a few of the governing families, many substantial Amsterdam merchants who had been trading illicitly with the Americans, and some leisured gentlemen and impatient youth who had caught the new ideas of the European Enlightenment. They objected to the semi-royal pretensions of William V and the House of Orange and to the persistent Anglophilism of the Orange establishment even at a time when Britain was assailing the Dutch commerce and colonies. The Patriots were therefore pro-American and pro-French. Adams found his warmest reception and made his best Dutch friends among them. He was delighted at the signs of incipient revolution, praised the Patriots lavishly, plunged into the agitation by helping to organize a wave of petitions—in short, took sides in the affairs of a foreign country in a way that in later years he would consider shocking. He got what he wanted: recognition of the United States and then a loan of five million guilders, after which he left for Paris to take part in the negotiation of a peace treaty with England. He soon became the first American minister to the former mother country, on which his opinions remained highly ambiguous. As for the Patriots, their movement went on to new heights, only to be crushed in 1787 by the diplomatic skills of England and intervention by the Prussian army. Several thousands of the Patriots fled to France, where they were welcomed and financially assisted by the monarchy of Louis XVI while awaiting their chance to return and complete their republican revolution.

John Adams, at first on the ground in Holland, then in Paris and London, remained sympathetic to the Dutch Patriots but was disappointed at the confusion of their objectives, their weakness, and their lack of success. He tried to inform himself by industrious reading on Dutch history and affairs, but the complexities of the Dutch political system continued to baffle him. The United Provinces were in fact an assemblage of local elements that had originated in the medieval Holy Roman Empire, then combined in the Union of Utrecht in the sixteenth century to carry on the revolt against Spain, with elaborate provisions to guard against any central authority by confirming the liberties of provinces, towns, burgomasters, estate assemblies, and the Dutch Reformed Church. The result was indecision, procrastination, and everlasting absorption in vested rights. In London, Adams wrote a large book on the comparative anatomy of republics, to support his belief that the best government must be a mixture of monarchy, aristocracy, and democracy. He found it hard to classify the United Provinces in his system. The trouble with the Dutch was that they did not have the right mixture. In discussing "democratical republics" he noted in

passing "certain remnants of democratical powers' in Overijssel and Friesland. Mainly he classified this strange country under "aristocratical republics." The Hollanders, he said, were preserved from tyranny—that is, from an excess of the monarchical principle—"partly by the stadholder, partly by the people in mobs, but more especially by the number of independent cities and sovereignties associated together, and the great number of persons concerned in the government and composing the sovereignty, four or five thousand, and finally, by the unanimity that is required in all transactions." In his feelings he continued to side with the Patriots, and in his theory to believe that what the Dutch needed was more of the democratic principle. When the Patriots were suppressed he thought that their weakness had been, apart from relying too much on France, to be "too inattentive to the common people of their own country."[3]

At this very time, in 1787, back in the United States, certain Americans were attempting to devise a new federal constitution in which a central government should have more authority. The Dutch example was often cited in their arguments. Some Americans, clinging to the original Articles of Confederation, praised the Dutch for their careful preservation of all manner of local liberties. Those wanting a stronger United States, the Federalists, and especially James Madison, took a more negative and more realistic view. Not only were the United Provinces a mere confederation of aristocracies, said Madison, "where the legislature consists of men who hold their offices for life, who fill up offices and appoint their salaries themselves," but the Dutch could not even maintain their political independence. The Prussian military intervention presented "the awful spectacle" of invasion by foreign armies. The Dutch system was completely unworkable. Its worst fault was its weakness. "The important truth," said Madison, "is that a sovereignty over sovereigns, a government over governments, a legislation over communities as contradistinguished from individuals . . . is subversive of the order and ends of civil polity." And Madison also expressed the hope, writing in 1788, that the troubles then afflicting the Netherlands would "issue in such a revolution as will establish their union."[4]

Such a revolution came seven years later with the proclamation of the Batavian Republic. It was again made possible by foreign intervention, this time by the invading French, since the restored government of William V had the misfortune of belonging to the coalition with which the French Revolutionaries were at war. The Dutch exiles of 1787 accompanied the French army as it entered Holland. Exiles and French republicans were alike welcomed by old Patriots and their sympathizers. William V fled to England. Their High Mightinesses the States General faded away. A Dutch National

Convention assembled and after much difficulty produced a constitution resembling the French constitution of 1795.

The new Batavian constitution began with a declaration of the rights of man. The republic took the mystic triad of Liberty, Equality and Fraternity as its motto. As in France, an Executive Directory of five persons came into being, with a two-chamber legislature elected by individual voters. The Reformed Church was disestablished, and Roman Catholics, minority Protestants, and Jews, who together made up 40 percent of the population, for the first time were given equality of political rights. The old provinces and towns were abolished as corporate entities, replaced, as in France, by new departments and municipalities. Group representation yielded to the principles of individual citizenship. The new Dutch government also declared war on England, which thereupon occupied the Dutch colonies, notably Ceylon and the Cape of Good Hope.

The Batavian Republic was the first of the satellite republics, or sister republics as they were also called, that emerged in connection with the Wars of the French Revolution. Although many Batavians soon became disillusioned with the demands of the French, especially the financial demands, the Batavian Republic was an object of admiration for French sympathizers in other countries. For these reformers and potential revolutionaries it was more satisfactory to have their own republic, however dependent, than to remain as an occupied area or to be annexed to France like the Belgians. Along the German left bank of the Rhine, before annexation to France was decided on, a group of pro-French Germans launched a short-lived Cisrhenane movement, in the hope of founding a Cisrhenane Republic on the model of the Batavian. In Italy, in the Cisalpine and other new republics, the main features of the Batavian were repeated. The Irish revolutionary Wolfe Tone, while in Paris hoping to induce the French to invade Ireland, believed that if successful they would sponsor an Irish Republic on the Batavian model.

The Batavian Republic sought to correct the very evils and weaknesses that John Adams and James Madison had condemned in the old United Provinces. The main issue in the new republic, especially from 1795 to 1798, the very time when John Quincy Adams was stationed at The Hague, was the dispute between unitarists and federalists. "Federalism" in the Netherlands, as in France in 1793, had the opposite meaning from what the same word then meant in America. American federalists worked for a stronger national government, which was precisely what Dutch federalists tried to prevent. Dutch federalists, during the debates on the new constitution, wished to maintain the separate identity and autonomy of the old provinces and towns, which meant preserving the position of men already important

Wilhelm V and Wilhelmina on a visit to Amsterdam on May 30, 1768—detail of an engraving of Reinier Vinkeles

under the old order. Federalists therefore were denounced as aristocrats. Persons of more democratic opinions were unitarists. In the provinces and towns they saw, rightly enough, the strongholds of the traditionally privileged and ruling elements of the population. They therefore insisted on abolishing the old provincial and town organizations, with their ancient and disparate charters and liberties, and replacing them with a uniform system of departmental and municipal administration, in which all citizens could hope to participate on a more equal basis. The struggle between unitarists and federalists was so fierce that even the French envoys, with memories of their own French Revolution, were amazed by it. The unitarists won out in the constitution of 1798. Despite subsequent modifications, the unitary principle prevailed permanently. A real transformation occurred. Where the United Provinces, modern though they were in commercial and financial matters, had been in their political and legal arrangements a bundle of medieval survivals, the Batavian Republic and the constitutional monarchy that ensued in 1814 were modern states.

It was at the height of agitation in the Netherlands, on October 31, 1794, that John Quincy Adams arrived at The Hague. Revolutionary committees in the Dutch cities were preparing to welcome the French army, which arrived a few weeks later. Dutch patriots put on tricolor cockades, planted trees of liberty, and sang the "Marseillaise" in the streets. The Adams who saw all this was a young man, only twenty-eight years old, but well qualified for a diplomatic appointment. He had been brought as a boy by his father to Europe years before, had gone to school in Paris and become fluent in French, and had even been enrolled for a few months in 1781 as a student at the University of Leyden, where he acquired some knowledge of Dutch. He was even a Harvard graduate. As the son of John Adams, he had met and spoken with many personages of international consequence. He had traveled widely. His father had trained him to make careful observations, on which he reported at length in long letters to his father, his famous mother, Abigail, and the American Secretary of State. He also kept a diary with assiduous faithfulness, day by day, for many years. There is therefore no shortage of evidence for what John Quincy Adams thought and said. He remained in the Netherlands until June 1797, except for a few months on a mission to London, during which he was married to an American girl.

The extraordinary thing is that John'. Quincy Adams, while in the Netherlands, showed so little perception, understanding, or sympathy for what was happening around him. Where his father had praised and fraternized with the Patripts, John Quincy held aloof. It was not that he underestimated the strength of the Dutch revolutionary movement. Half the nation, he reported to the American Secretary of State, was

"panting for the success of the invaders." Patriotic clubs had sprung up everywhere. He had been invited to join one, but had declined. "I was not sent here," he wrote to his father, who had been so enamored of the Dutch Patriots fifteen years before and who was now Vice-President of the United States, "to make myself a partisan of Dutch factions." Or as he wrote to his mother: "I have therefore invariably avoided every act that could be charged with partiality to the Patriots."[5]

He was indeed under orders from the Secretary of State to remain neutral. And neutral he was on the larger issues in the struggle between England and France. As for England, he confessed to "a dislike both of the government and the national character, perhaps amounting even to a prejudice," and as for France, "the unsettled revolutionary state of that country" offset any sentiments he might otherwise entertain in its favor. For England he said he felt an aversion, and for France indifference.[6] It was from France, however, at this time, that he saw the greatest threat to the internal peace and even the territorial integrity of the United States. The French were in truth interfering in American domestic politics. Their minister in Philadelphia sponsored the emerging Jeffersonian or Democratic-Republican party. The French, believing that the United States government had turned pro-British by signing a treaty with England in 1794, and even declaring that the administration of George Washington 110 longer represented the American people, openly took sides in the presidential election of 1796, preferring the election of Jefferson to that of John Adams, John Quincy's own father, who did in fact become the second President and attempted to carry on the policy of neutrality which the French considered to be hostile. The French therefore stopped American shipping bound for England; an undeclared naval war with the United States actually followed. They rebuffed the American agents sent to negotiate with them. There was even talk in the French Foreign Office of supporting a movement for an independent republic west of the Alleghenies. Working with dissident Americans, it might be possible to create something like a Batavian Republic in the region between the Alleghenies and the Mississippi, a region that had been French within living memory and where the scattered Americans, as yet few in number, felt little attachment to the new government east of the mountains.

There was therefore every reason why John Quincy Adams should lack enthusiasm for a Batavian Republic which, however real its Dutch roots, did in truth represent an extension of French power and of the French Revolution. There was every reason why in his long letters to the State Department, to his parents, and to other correspondents he mainly dealt with the international situation and the dangers

presented to the United States by the war in Europe. On these matters his reports were diligent and detailed. But we may still ask why he paid so little attention to internal Dutch affairs, the intense controversy between unitarists and federalists, the significance of the Dutch factions, and the nature of the Batavian revolution.

Was it that he lacked the time to inform himself, being preoccupied with more urgent problems? Or that he lacked contacts with the Dutch leaders, from whom he might have learned more of their pressing concerns? From his diary it appears that this is not the explanation. This dutiful young Puritan tells us several times how he spent his day.[7] Typically, he arose about six in the morning, then translated a few pages of Tacitus to keep up his Latin, wrote letters, breakfasted at ten, received callers or paid visits in the afternoon, often seeing Dutchmen in the Batavian government, took a three- or four-mile walk before or after dinner, and in the evening went out into society, at some hospitable house like the Danish minister's, where the company engaged in conversation (naturally in French), played cards, or indulged in parlor games such as *bouts-rimés*, an amusement which consisted of making up verses to go with a given rhyme. He found time also for lessons in Italian. When he had an evening at home he devoted it to his beloved books, occasionally reading a contemporary Dutch writer like Pieter Paulus, but more often Homer, Cicero, Ovid, Lucan, or Tasso.

John Quincy Adams can be contrasted with a young man who became his best friend at The Hague, Baron Bielfeld, who was secretary to the Prussian legation. Prussia made peace with France in 1795 and declared itself neutral, like the United States. There was no great business to transact between Prussia and the Netherlands, so that Bielfeld's position, like Adams', was mainly a listening post, and his principal duty was to make observations and submit reports to his home government, which he did, addressing them directly to King Frederick William II. The two young men saw much of each other. They took their Italian lessons together, attended the theater together, and met at evening parties. They also went on long walks to Scheveningen and other nearby places, during which they talked about the Batavian and French revolutions. Bielfeld, says Adams in his diary, "appears to be no enemy of the principles of equality." Or again, he calls him "my democratic baron." They talked about "the rights of man, the origin and foundation of human society, and the proper principles of government,' on all of which Baron Bielfeld held a more tolerant view than John Quincy Adams. Bielfeld even thought that the "smothered flame of democracy" was burning in Germany.[8]

Every week or two Bielfeld sent a long report to the King of Prussia.[9] His letters were factual, with no sign of ideological prefer-

John Quincy Adams, 1796, by John Singleton Copley
(Courtesy of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. Gift of Mrs. Charles Francis Adams)

ences. They were full of information about internal Dutch affairs. They explained the issues between the federalists and the unitarists, distinguished between moderates and radicals in each camp, gave reasons why each party felt as strongly as it did, and offered particulars, noting for example that the people of Holland, with half the population of the Dutch territory and paying most of the taxes, objected to a federalist plan that would give the smaller provinces more than their proportionate share of power. There is almost nothing of this in the reports of John Quincy Adams. Perhaps the nearest he comes to it is in a letter to his brother in which he notes that in the Netherlands the more positive democrats favored a unitary central government while the so-called aristocrats favored sovereignty for the provinces, whereas the opposite was true in America, where democrats clamored for states' rights and denounced the centralizing Federalists as aristocrats. He said he was "amazed but not surprised" at this inversion of roles.[10] He made no effort to analyze its causes. It was enough to make a joke on the Jeffersonian democrats, by intimating that they knew nothing of Europe. And the American Secretary of State, reading Adams' messages, would certainly understand less of what was happening in the Netherlands than the King of Prussia.

The truth seems to be that Adams was not very much interested in the Batavian Republic. His attention was focused on France and the French Revolution and their impact on party controversies in the United States. On this matter he was by no means neutral. He saw both the Batavians and the American democrats as the dupes and tools of France. He complained to his mother that both the French and Batavian governments showed personal malice toward his father and toward himself for merely upholding the neutrality of the United States.[11] He was so personally involved as to be blind, indifferent, annoyed, or sardonically amused by the spectacle of revolution in Europe. "These people, French and Dutch," he wrote in his diary, "cannot on either side carry through their farce of equality, of independence or of republicanism."[12] He had no patience for a country that proclaimed the rights of man and yet arrested enemies of the revolution, or touted the freedom of the press while suppressing some of the newspapers.[13] He made no allowance for the war or for the counterrevolution by which any revolution is threatened. He could not teil the difference between moderates and extremists. It was not enough that the French wanted to defeat Great Britain and Austria; they must be bent on "revolutionizing *the whole world.*"[14] The mildest French partisans of the Revolution seemed to him to be raging radicals. For example, when Benjamin Constant, the famous liberal, opened his political career with a pamphlet in 1796 calling for support of the French Directory against the resurgence of royalism, and was

joined by Talleyrand and Madame de Staël in his efforts, Adams dismissed Constant's work as a piece of "depravity," and the new French government as sunk in "desperation."[15] The French Revolution of the last six years, he wrote to his father in 1795, had "contributed more to the restoration of Vandalic ignorance than whole centuries can retrieve. . . . Whether the arts, the sciences, and the civilization of Europe will not perish with it, must yet remain a problem."[16] This was written at the very moment when the French government was installing the Institut de France, the Ecole Polytechnique, and other learned bodies of a kind unknown in America. And where Adams feared that the "myrmidons of Robespierre" would burn libraries as the Moslem hordes had burned the library at Alexandria, what happened was that the myrmidons of the French Republic, when Bonaparte went to Egypt, founded the science of Egyptology.

Perhaps we should conclude that John Adams was after all a revolutionary in his younger days, whereas John Quincy Adams, as the son of a founder of the Republic, was fast becoming a founder of the American Eastern Establishment. Yet with all their differences they were alike. Both made the interests of their own country, or of an independent American republic, foremost. For John Adams in 1780, the enemy of American independence was England, and he favored the Dutch Patriots because they were anti-English. For John Quincy Adams for a few years in the 1790's, the greater danger came undoubtedly from France, and he could feel no enthusiasm for a Batavian Republic that was allied to and subordinated to that hotbed of revolution. The American democrats with their predilection for France were as obnoxious to him as the American Loyalists with their attachment to England had been to his father.

There is another resemblance also. J. W. Schulte Nordholt has published an article, which I first heard him give as a lecture at the University of Michigan some years ago, in which he showed how thoroughly the Americans of the 1780's studied the history of the Dutch republic when debating on how best to organize the United States. To simplify his message, he found that the Americans were nevertheless not really very much interested in Dutch history, in why it was what it was, or in the forces and pressures and real problems that had shaped its course, but that they used it only as a storehouse of practical examples, as was usual in the eighteenth century in Europe as well as America. In the Dutch storehouse the Americans mostly found examples of what was to be avoided. In the history of the United Provinces they saw an exhibit of weakness, confusion, party strife, foreign influence, and interminable delay. Much the same can be said of John Quincy Adams, and indeed of Americans generally, as they viewed the Batavian Republic in the setting of contemporary

affairs.[17] It offered an example of what was to be avoided. The Americans did not go either to history or to a contemporary political science in a search for new knowledge or to explore the inner dynamics of faraway foreign countries. They already knew what they wanted; they had their own goals and purposes and their own stresses and strains. For those of us for whom history and social science are a profession, this is surely an inadequate basis of knowledge. But we do not judge statesmen for their qualities as historians or social scientists. We judge them for what they do, not for what they know, except as their knowledge or the lack of it may affect the consequences of their actions. The consequences of the actions of John Adams and John Quincy Adams were advantageous to the United States. They seem to have been at least harmless for the Dutch.

It is possible to conclude on a somewhat more positive note. With all due respect to both Adamses, I believe that there is more sophistication today, in America as elsewhere, in the perception of events in other countries. The Americans in the 1790's divided into two rather simple groups for and against the French Revolution, expressing either admiration or horror. These views shaped their attitude toward the Batavian Republic. We have since then seen many revolutions, Russian, Chinese, Cuban, Iranian, and nameless others, but on the whole, thanks to historians and social scientists, to journalists who are more informed and responsible than those of the eighteenth century, and to persons in government who have thought about the world, we do not divide into two simple camps with respect to such upheavals. The most extreme spokesmen for either side tend to be fewer. There is a larger middle ground, where we find those who are genuinely interested in the internal problems of other peoples, who do not seize upon them simply as examples or use them as talking points, who can see events in a long perspective, judge actions by circumstances, weigh the arguments of contending parties, distinguish moderates from extremists, acknbwjedge that not all revolution is purely destructive and yet know that all revolutions may run to dangerous extremes. In the present state of the world, if we have any more wisdom than our predecessors we shall surely need it.

NOTES

1 See R. R. Palmer, *The Age of the Democratic Revolution: A Political History of Europe and America, 1760-1800* (2 vols.; Princeton, N.J., 1959 and 1964); and a paper I presented in 1979 at a conference in Bamberg, Germany, soon to be published, "La Revolution Atlantique, vingt ans après." On the theme of the present paper see also Herbert H. Rowen, "The Union of Utrecht and the Articles of Confederation, the Batavian

Constitution and the American Constitution: A Doublé Parallel," in R. Vierhaus, ed., *Herrschaflsverträge, Wahlkapitulalionen, Fundamentalgezetze* (Göttingen, 1977), PP- 281-93. I am glad to find myself in agreement with Professor Rowen's views.

2 These thoughts of van Hogendorp's, written in French, may be found in his *Brieven en Gedenkschriften* (The Hague, 1876), III, 60-61.

3 John Adams, *Defense of the Constitution of the United States* (3 vols.; London, 1794 [written in 1786-87]), I, 22, 69, and III, 355; and Charles F. Adams, ed., *The Works of John Adams* (10 vols.; Boston, 1850-56), VIII, 462. See also his letters and diary for the time spent in the Netherlands, 1780-82.

4 J. W. Schulte Nordholt, "The Example of the Dutch Republic for American Federalism," in *Federalism: History and Current Significance of a Form of Government* (The Hague, 1980), pp. 65-77; and Madison in the *Federalist* (any cd.), No. 20.

5 *Wrilings of John Quincy Adams* (7 vols.; New York, 1913-17). To Secretary of State, I, 338; to John Adams, I, 372; to Abigail Adams, I, 333.

6 *Writings,* I, 424. To John Adams, October 31, 1795, expressing his unwillingness to become American minister at either London or Paris.

7 *Memoirs of John Quincy Adams, Comprising Portions of His Diary from 1795 to 1848* (12 vols.; Philadelphia, 1874-77), I, 183, 187, and *passim.*

8 *Memoirs* (i.e., diary), I, 75, 79, 88, 109, 169, 179.

9 Bielfeld's reports to the King, written in French, may be found in H. T. Colenbrander, ed., *Gedenkstukken der Algemeene Geschiednis van Nederland van* 1795 *tot 1840* (22 vols.; The Hague, 1906-22), I, 247-356.

10 *Writings,* I, 426. There is passing reference to the unitarist-federalist issue at II, 51, and *Memoirs,* I, 185-86, but without significant comment. Since the published *Writings* and *Memoirs* are both selective, it is conceivable that Adams offered more analysis of Dutch affairs in papers hitherto unpublished, which are currenlly being edited by The Adams Papers at the Massachusetts Historical Society in Boston. These papers are available on microfilm at various libraries, including Yale University, where a hasty exploration suggests that the same views of the Netherlands are expressed in the unpublished as in the published material. On the "inversion" that amused John Quincy Adams, see also my contribution to *Ideas in History: Essays Presented to Louis Gottschalk,* ed. R. Herr and H. T. Parker (Durham, N.C., 1965), pp. 3-19: "The Great Inversion: America and Europe in the Eighteenth Century Revolution."

11 *Writings,* II, 254.

12 *Memoirs,* I, 96.

13 *Writings,* II, 51-53.

14 *Writings,* II, 25; Adams' italics.

15 *Writings,* II, 213.

16 *Writings,* I, 389.

17 For the Schulte Nordholt article, see note 4 above. Indexes to the writings of Washington, Hamilton, Madison, Jefferson, Monroe, and John Adams himself for the 1790's show almost nothing under "Netherlands" or "Batavian Republic."

John Adams and the Birth of Dutch-American Friendship, 1780-82

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SINCE John Adams, the first American minister to the Netherlands, often called political contemporaries rope dancers, I hope you will indulge me if I go to the circus for a beginning metaphor. Historians of Dutch-American relations during the period of the American Revolution remind me of trapeze artists. The scène begins with American historians poised on their pedestals, Dutch historians on theirs. They propel themselves forward. But they do not clasp hands in midair. They pass and land on the spot the other has just vacated. To be specific and, for the moment, simplistic: American historians formerly contended that John Adams heroically won Dutch acknowledgment of their country's independence; now they claim that France contrived that event. Dutch historians formerly contended that France arranged their country's acknowledgment of American independence; now they claim that John Adams contrived that event.

From this comparative perspective, historical progress seems illusory indeed, for what the American historian regards as an advance in understanding the Dutch historian regards as a retreat and vice versa. Revision in *one* country is reaction in the other. Paradoxes in historiography are not unusual and in this case they seem appropriate, for John Adams found that the Dutch savored them: "every one has his prophecy, and every prophecy is a paradox," he reported to Benjamin Franklin from Amsterdam in 1780.[1] I hope that the present audience retains its ancestors' taste for paradox, because I intend to develop at some length the curious story of how Dutch and American historians have treated the period 1780-82.

First, the American historians. I think it fair to say that they have