The Collaboration of Tench Coxe and Thomas Jefferson

THOMAS JEFFERSON'S accomplishments as Secretary of State, Tench Coxe once remarked, were "a monument of diplomatic knowledge and learning, judgment, decision, impartiality and independence," rivalled by no other American statesman of his day.[1] The two men first met in the late spring of 1790, shortly after Coxe arrived in New York to assume office as Assistant to Alexander Hamilton, the Secretary of the Treasury. Although doubtless prompted by a degree of self-serving, Coxe promptly fell under the spell of the courteous Virginian whose polite diffidence did not mask an uncommonly penetrating and cultivated mind. If Senator William Maclay of Pennsylvania, by no means an impressionable subject, can be credited, Jefferson's charm was indeed considerable. His "face has a sunny aspect," Maclay wrote in May 1790. "I looked for gravity, but a laxity of manner seemed shed about him. He spoke almost without ceasing. But even his discourse partook of his personal demeanor. It was loose and rambling; and yet he scattered information wherever he went, and some even brilliant sentiments sparkled from him."[2] What impressed Maclay appears to have dazzled Coxe. For his part, Jefferson, always highly susceptible to flattery, welcomed this addition to his influential coterie of admirers.

But their amiable relationship, personal as well as official, was also owing to certain affinities that overshadowed differences that otherwise might well have divided a southern Republican planter, like Jefferson, whose political creed was vigorously antistatist, and an urban Federalist merchant, like Coxe, whose political theory was consistently that of an interventionist. Both were aristocrats, sharing the manners and social standards characteristic of the Virginia

1 *Aurora-General Advertiser* (Philadelphia), Sept. 27, 1800.

2 Charles A. Beard, ed., *The Journal of William Maclay* (New York, 1927), 265–266.

gentry as well as of the Philadelphia elite. Though Jefferson was far more learned and sophisticated than Coxe, they had in common a wide-ranging interest in science and technology, in the arts and education, and in history and politics. They also shared complementary needs: Coxe's need for the type of recognition Hamilton was incapable of granting was matched by Jefferson's need for the kind of assistance Coxe was well equipped to supply. During his five years abroad as American Minister to France, Jefferson had kept abreast of economic developments at home, but he did not have the detailed information upon which Coxe could easily draw. For his part, the latter, although no sycophant, relished the esteem of famous men and it was in keeping with the Virginian's character "to err on the side of personal compliment."[3] Perhaps more important was their gradual awareness of the similarity of their views on critical aspects of American foreign policy.

Whatever the bases of their friendship, the mutual distrust of Hamilton that eventually would bind the two politically was not initially among them. In the spring of 1790, Jeffersonwas as willing to cooperate with the Secretary of the Treasury as Coxe was eager to promote Hamilton's policies. Nor were there as yet definite boundary lines between departments. The division of responsibility was vague, jurisdictions overlapped, and precedents were yet to be established. As Coxe saw it, there was no requirement that he restrict his loyalty to merely one department, no reason why—so long as he competently performed his duties at the Treasury Department—he should refrain from also assisting the Secretary of State. Such aid was to him not an impropriety but rather a display of disinterested patriotism.

Coxe's unsolicited assistance to the State Department, like his advice to the Secretary of the Treasury, predated his own appointment as a federal official. In January 1790, he had written to John Jay, Jefferson's predecessor, offering advice on the preparation of a report Jay had been instructed by Congress to submit on the subject of uniform weights and measures. Coxe recommended that the Secretary utilize the work of Robert Leslie, a watch-and-instrument maker in Philadelphia, who had invented an apparatus that would

[3] Dumas Malone, *Jefferson and His Time* (Boston, 1951), II, 353.

assist in making possible "invariable standards for weights and measures, communicable and recoverable at all times and among all Nations."[4] The inventor, though Coxe did not in his letter share the fact, was employed by Coxe to assist George Parkinson, an English emigré with whom Coxe had formed a partnership for the construction of machinery based on English industrial secrets.[5] Leslie's invention of "a single Pendulum capable of being sufficiently varied in length to answer the purposes of the two" previously necessary pendulums was, Coxe wrote to Jay, a major step in the progress of both general and applied science, appropriate particularly to the establishment of a uniform standard for weights and measures. Though Jay promised to pass on the information,[6] Coxe decided to make doubly sure by also soliciting the services of James Madison. Would Madison, with due regard to the requisite secrecy, make sure, Coxe requested in a letter written on March 21, the day Jefferson arrived in New York, that Leslie's discovery be brought to the attention of the new Secretary of State? Madison willingly agreed to do so,[7] and Leslie's proposals were subsequently incorporated in the Report on Weights and Measures Jefferson submitted to Congress in July 1790.[8] Though not adopted, the report, as Dumas Malone comments, enhanced the Virginian's "deserved fame and, if he had had the choosing, no doubt he would have preferred to be remembered by it rather than by any other paper he drafted as secretary of state."[9] Nor was he likely to forget the services of those like Coxe who had helped to make it possible.

For the latter's part, it was only a token of what he was prepared to do. Gratified by the ready acceptance of his protégé's invention, Coxe also offered, soon after he arrived in New York in May 1790, to share with the Virginian his own expert knowledge of economic

4 Coxe (hereinafter cited as TC) to Jay, Jan. 25, 1790, Julian P. Boyd, *et al.*, eds., *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson* (Princeton, N. J., 1950–), XVI, 618–619, hereinafter cited as *Jefferson Papers.*

5 See Contract between Coxe and Parkinson, January, 1790, Tench Coxe Papers, Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

6 Jay to TC, Jan. 30, 1790, Coxe Papers.

7 TC to Madison, Mar. 21, 1790; Madison to TC, Mar. 28, 1790, Madison Papers, Library of Congress.

8 "Report on Weights and Measures," *Jefferson Papers*, XVI, 602–675.

9 Malone, *Jefferson*, II, 280.

subjects. Jefferson, who some years earlier had seen Coxe's *An Address to . . . the friends of American Manufactures* and had both read and taken extensive notes on the Philadelphian's *Enquiry into a commercial system*,[10] was presumably amenable, but nothing immediately came of the proposal, largely because Coxe was preoccupied with arrangements for the removal of the federal government from New York City to Philadelphia. Soon after the Secretary of State reached the new capital in November 1790, however, Coxe repeated the offer, and Jefferson, burdened with requests from both Congress and the President for reports on a variety of subjects, readily accepted. His most pressing task was the preparation of a report on the cod and whale fisheries, a subject on which Coxe began firing off facts and figures of a kind with which he would barrage the Department of State until Jefferson's retirement some three years later.

The report on the fisheries was in response to a memorial on that subject by the Massachusetts legislature that had been referred to the Secretary of State by the House of Representatives.[11] The subject was not a new one to Jefferson, who as American representative to France had industriously examined the history and conditions of the whaling industry as preparation for his insistent attempts to persuade the French government to relax laws that crippled it. But as he wished to base his report on far more extensive and detailed information than he readily had available, the task confronting him promised to be inconveniently time-consuming, and he welcomed the aid of a talented statistician. Though as a "practical merchant" Coxe regarded himself merely a "theorist upon this subject,"[12] his industrious research quickly compensated for any lack of first-hand knowledge. From Hewes & Anthony, a Philadelphia firm, he successfully solicited a comparison of prices

[10] *An Address to an Assembly of the Friends of American Manufactures . . .* (Philadelphia 1787); *An Enquiry into the Principles on which a Commercial System for the United States of America should be Founded; to which are added Some Political Observations connected with the subject . . .* (Philadelphia, 1787). Jefferson had received copies of Coxe's pamphlets from John Browne Cutting, among others. *Jefferson Papers*, XIX, 123, 411. Jefferson's notes on Coxe's *An Enquiry* are printed in *ibid.*, 132–133.

[11] The representation of the Massachusetts General Court had reached Jefferson in mid-August. For a comprehensive survey of the background of the subject see *ibid.*, 140–172.

[12] TC to Jefferson, Nov. 23, 1790, *ibid.*, XVIII, 62.

in the major New England fishing ports before the Revolution and currently, as well as a detailed description of the differences between vessels employed in the cod and the whale fisheries;[13] he interviewed, with less success, other Philadelphia merchants active in the New England trade; he pored over statistical information available in the Treasury Department files; and he carefully studied such books and articles on the subject as he could find.[14] The result was the collection of enough material for a book. Virtually all of it was submitted to Jefferson in the form of a compilation of factual data and statistical abstracts[15] and two research reports. One of the latter was an undated paper describing the expenses and quantity of the items needed for seamen and ships and the duties imposed on such as were imported;[16] the other was a bulky essay entitled "Miscellaneous Notes on the Fisheries" that contained "every idea (though some of them are very light)" Coxe believed might be of interest.[17]

Based on thorough and careful research, his "Miscellaneous Notes" were far more than the title purported. They presented not only historical facts and comprehensive data on the present state of the fisheries but an essay on current national affairs, including a sustained argument for a revamping of commercial policy. Asserting that the American fisheries enjoyed natural advantages unrivalled by any other country, Coxe pointed to the cheapness of vessels, the superiority of seamen, and the low cost of provisions. The case for the protection of this industry, he argued, was unassailable: it was essential both to a thriving carrying trade and to national defense. Convinced that measures must be taken for its relief, he recom-

13 TC to Hewes and Anthony, Nov. 18, 1790, Coxe Papers.

14 TC to Jefferson, Nov. 23, 1790, *Jefferson Papers*, XVIII, 62.

15 In his letter to Jefferson of Nov. 23, 1790, Coxe enclosed not only an essay on the fisheries (see note 17) but reports on Dutch, Labrador, Prussian, Greenland, Davis Strait, and Hamburg fisheries, and "A Comparison of prices of fish and meat in New England and in Philadelphia markets." Coxe's "Notes on the Dutch and Prussian Fisheries" are printed in *ibid.*, XIX, 175–182.

16 Jefferson endorsed this report as received on Feb. 1, 1791. *Ibid.*, XIX, 210–211.

17 Coxe's "Miscellaneous Notes on the Fisheries," comprising forty pages, were enclosed in his letter to Jefferson of Nov. 23, 1790 (see note 15) and are printed in *ibid.*, 182–195. Coxe subsequently published a brief article based on his "Miscellaneous Notes." See "The importance of the fisheries considered as a part of the instruments of national defence and offence," signed "Columbus," *American Museum*, XI (1792), 176–177.

mended a long list of them, including an exemption from tonnage duties, a ban on the importation of fish from countries that prohibited the entry of those from the United States and the encouragement of home consumption. Although these recommendations were included in Jefferson's report, Coxe offered a number of other proposals that were not. His essay was in yet other ways a more comprehensive treatment of the subject, both descriptively and analytically, than Jefferson's Report. To cite only a few of several possible illustrations, Coxe presented a more exhaustive analysis of the national advantages derived from the industry, a more detailed description of British, Dutch, and French regulations as compared to those of the United States, and a fuller explanation of the grounds for optimism that markets for the cod and whale fisheries would increase.

The similarities between Jefferson's Report and Coxe's "Notes," however, are far more important than the differences.[18] The thesis of both was the necessity of encouraging and protecting industries so vital to the prosperity and defense of the nation. Jefferson made the point, and Coxe stressed again and again the utility of the fisheries viewed both as a branch of domestic industry and a market for related manufactures. Their recommendations emphasized that the superior position of the country's fisheries was such as to obviate direct support, but that their importance and the handicaps under which they operated were such as to justify indirect aid. If upon a casual comparison of the two documents one does not immediately detect such similarities, it is because Jefferson's Report was informed by a theme tucked into the interstices of Coxe's "Notes."

Few who read the Secretary of State's Report on the Cod and Whale Fisheries, submitted to Congress on February 1, 1791,[19] could have failed to detect its pervasive anti-British bias. The English, according to Jefferson, were as incorrigible as their policies were deplorable. As the chief competitors of the United States, they

[18] See "Jefferson's Notes and Outline for the Report on the Fisheries" in *Jefferson Papers*, XIX, 204–205, whose editor, while otherwise minimizing Coxe's contribution to Jefferson's Report, conceded that "Jefferson's Notes" were "based in part on the documents supplied by Tench Coxe." *Ibid.*, 205.

[19] Jefferson's "Report on the subject of the cod and whale fisheries . . ." is printed, along with its appendixes, in *ibid.* 206–236.

had refused to cooperate in mutually beneficial commercial policies, preferring regulations for "mounting their navigation on the ruins of ours." To Jefferson as to Coxe, such obdurateness was an invitation to retaliatory legislation of which the British could not justly complain. "Admitting their right of keeping their markets to themselves," the Secretary of State explained, "ours cannot be denied of keeping our carrying trade to ourselves. And if there be anything unfriendly in this, it was in the first example." By way of contrast, Jefferson pointed to examples of friendliness on the part of France whose continued cultivation, he said, was important, not only because the French were "cooperators against a common rival" but because they took a sizeable proportion of American exports, "nearly the whole carried in our own vessels."

But the prosperity of the fisheries, particularly the whale industry, could not, as Jefferson knew, be assured merely by maintaining amicable relations with France. What should be done about England? Her excessively high duties or prohibitions and the restrictions of trade to her own ships rendered the export of American fish and spermaceti oil to that country either impossible or unprofitable. Arguing that such "*ex parte* regulations can only be opposed by counter regulations on our part," Jefferson proposed an American navigation act to counter that of England. To him, "reciprocity" of this kind was not only equitable but imperatively dictated by the national interest. How else could American commerce flourish and the country defend itself? The alternative Jefferson presented was a parade of horribles: useless ships, an end to ship building, young men no longer answering the call of the sea, produce transported only by foreigners, and national peril in time of war.

Despite such hyperbole, Jefferson's Report retains, in the words of a recent scholar, "intrinsic value and interest," and "will be illuminating even now to most laymen."[20] Particularly striking was his manifest sympathy, perhaps heightened by Coxe, for an industry with whose hardships he personally was as unfamiliar as were Yankee sailors with tobacco cultivation. Also notable, particularly in view of his agrarian preferences, was his recognition of the indis-

[20] Malone, *Jefferson*, II, 332.

pensability of the fisheries to the American economy and to national defense, an awareness doubtless enhanced by Coxe's research report. The Americans must in this instance, Jefferson asserted, copy the otherwise reprehensible policies of the English and encourage an industry that was a spur to manufactures, an important branch of the carrying trade and a reservoir of seamen.

That Jefferson's Report was substantively the same as Coxe's "Miscellaneous Notes" is as indisputable as the exact extent of Coxe's influence is conjecturable only. The Secretary of State, unlike his presidential chief who on occasion found it convenient to sign state papers drafted by aides, would not have entertained even the possibility of accepting as his own a draft written by another. Himself a superb literary craftsman, he did not need to. And in this fact lies an explanation of the seeming qualitative disparity between his report and Coxe's notes. The former was characteristically adorned by a stylistic felicity that Coxe's writings rarely displayed. Jefferson, in other words, was a literary artist and creative thinker; although an uncommonly able journalist, Coxe's superior talent lay in the straightforward presentation of assiduously collected factual material. Such observations, far from discrediting the inference that the Secretary of State relied heavily on the research of his assistant, suggest instead how easily and effectively he could have incorporated that data into an essay bearing the unmistakable imprint of his own style. And after one takes into due account the fact that on the subject of the fisheries, as on other aspects of American commercial policy, the two men held similar ideas, it still seems reasonable to insist that the Secretary of State was significantly influenced by the work of his voluntary aide. Jefferson's own estimate of its value was demonstrated by his continued reliance on Hamilton's top assistant.[21]

Coxe gladly cooperated. While busily engaged in compiling notes on the fisheries, he signified his eagerness to take on yet additional

[21] My interpretation of the relationship between Coxe and Jefferson differs from that presented by Julian P. Boyd in *Jefferson Papers*, XIX. (See especially editorial notes on pp. 121–127, 558–579.) Boyd's viewpoint is indicated by the following sentence: "It is a mistake to suppose that Jefferson's reliance upon Coxe extended much beyond a natural desire on his part to augment and correct his own considerable body of data, which was of such range and depth that Coxe was able to make additions to it chiefly because he had access to customs records in the Treasury." *Ibid.*, 124.

assignments, tendering "any little service it may at time hereafter be in my power to render" that might promote Jefferson's "individual convenience" or lessen "the fatigues" of his office.[22] Jefferson soon found it convenient to accept the invitation, for as early as February 1791, he was busily rounding up ammunition for a manifesto of American economic independence. His Report on the Fisheries, so Coxe's friend Phineas Bond, the British consul in Philadelphia, reported to Whitehall, appeared "to have been designed as the introduction of a series of proceedings calculated to promote measures very hostile to the commercial interests of Great Britain."[23] Bond was correct. And Jefferson's report on the privileges and restrictions imposed by foreign nations on American commerce would be the culmination of his concerted campaign against Britain's commercial system.

An opportunity to bring out the big guns was conveniently provided by Congress. After pigeonholing a navigation bill that would have prohibited the importation of non-British goods in British vessels, the House on February 23, 1791, referred the whole problem of commercial policy to the Secretary of State for study and recommendations. In view of his known admiration for the French people and his alleged unfriendliness toward Britain, his critics, especially Hamilton, had no doubt of the result. If it was predetermined, however, the policies of the British were as much responsible as Jefferson's animus. If the English would "meet us fairly half way," he had written in November 1790, "I should meet them with satisfaction, because it would be for our benefit." But convinced of their "avarice of commerce," he did not consider British cooperation likely,[24] a viewpoint shared by other influential public figures, notably Madison, and by prominent publicists like Coxe whose examination of English policy had convinced him that the threat of commercial discrimination was America's only effective means of achieving a negotiated settlement.

On March 4, 1791, shortly after he learned of Congress' request

22 TC to Jefferson, Nov. 23, 1790, *ibid.*, XVIII, 62.

23 Bond to Duke of Leeds, Mar. 14, 1791, J. Franklin Jameson, ed., "Letters of Phineas Bond . . .," *Annual Report of the American Historical Association for the Year 1897* (Washington, D. C., 1898), 475.

24 Jefferson to Francis Kinlock, Nov. 6, 1790, *Jefferson Papers*, XVIII, 80.

to the Secretary of State for a report on commercial policy, Coxe once again placed himself at Jefferson's disposal, enclosing as an implicit exhibit of his usefulness "some returns of tonnage" that even in an imperfect state "exhibit interesting facts."[25] Although Jefferson needed neither this nor further evidence of Coxe's energy and encyclopedic knowledge of American commerce, he received on the following day a twenty-five page manuscript, "Thoughts on the Navigation of the United States," based on data that Coxe had compiled for a committee appointed by the House of Representatives some three months earlier to propose measures for the promotion of American trade.[26]

Coxe's manuscript was an effective argument in support of commercial policies most of which Jefferson already advocated or would champion. Starting from the premise that his countrymen were extraordinarily adept at shipbuilding and navigation, Coxe discussed the national advantages to be derived from the promotion of these and auxiliary enterprises, and to this end recommended eighteen "measures for encouraging the Navigation of the United States," among them these: the exemption of American coasting and fishing vessels from tonnage duties; the application of the surplus derived from levies on tonnage to the provision of navigational aids (such as lighthouses, beacons, and public piers) and naval facilities (such as naval hospitals and "nautical schools"); the promotion of manufactures related to American navigation or to national defense by permitting the free importation of essential raw materials; "the encouragement of manufactures in general"; and the enactment of measures "to exempt American ships in the foreign trade from the tonnage of 6 cents" and "to confine the

25 TC to Jefferson, Mar. 4, 1791, *ibid.*, XIX, 360.

26 Coxe's "Thoughts on the Navigation of the United States, and concerning further means of encouraging it," is printed in *ibid.*, 411–416. Coxe also enclosed "a little pamphlet of his written about four years ago on American commerce and another on American Manufactures which, tho not a part of the subject, has a near relation to it." The enclosures were *An Enquiry*, and *An address to . . . the friends of American Manufactures*, both written in 1787. My interpretation of the genesis and significance of Coxe's "Thoughts" differs from that in *Jefferson Papers* (XIX, 449–450), where it is conjectured that "the handwriting of the last two paragraphs of Coxe's essay "suggests they were added after the main body of the notes had been composed." *Ibid.*, 416n. My own examination of the manuscript of Coxe's "Thoughts" (Jefferson Papers, Library of Congress) does not bear out that conjecture.

importation of goods to the ships of the nation making or producing them and our own."

Although the Secretary of State presumably reacted somewhat chillily to an appeal for the fostering of manufactures by a paternalistic government, he fully shared Coxe's insistence on the imperativeness of commercial retaliation against Great Britain by the enactment of an American navigation act. A measure "confining importations to our ships and those of the nation making or producing the commodities," Coxe wrote in words that Jefferson could only have applauded, "must prove a very efficient measure." What if Great Britain complained? Coxe's reply was surely what Jefferson wanted to hear: That country should be told that such an act "*is taken from her own existing laws*—and that we are ready *to repeal our clause as it regards all our dominions, if they will repeal as generally.*"

Such ideas, however forcefully put, were addressed to one who long since had been firmly convinced that they should be the essential basis of American commercial policy. More novel, and thus to Jefferson more exciting, may have been the concluding paragraphs of Coxe's "Thoughts on Navigation." Here, in Julian P. Boyd's words, Coxe "advanced to new and bolder ground," arguing not only that the navigation act he proposed would enhance America's share of the international carrying trade but adding also this "astonishing suggestion": "Were France, Spain and Portugal to adopt the *confining regulation* the carrying trade of the world would sustain a considerable revolution, and, consequently, considerable effects would be produced upon the balance of *naval* power."[27] In "this brief, climactic paragraph" pointing to "a possible revolution in world trade," Coxe, as we shall see, also provided "an epitome of the instructions that within a fortnight Jefferson sent to American representatives abroad."[28]

But although it thus served as a spur to prompt action, Coxe's "Thoughts on Navigation" were perhaps even more important as a persuasive presentation of ideas that Jefferson would affirm in his

[27] *Jefferson Papers*, XIX, 416.

[28] *Ibid.*, 562, to which I am indebted for the insight into the importance of Coxe's proposal as well as for its connection with the instructions Jefferson sent in April to U.S. diplomats overseas.

report on American commerce some two and a half years later. The question as to who borrowed from whom is, of course, unanswerable, but Coxe's proposition "That no foreign nation can be reasonably displeased with or consider itself as improperly treated by a general regulation the tendency of which is to produce the same effect upon their navigation or commerce, which their *general* or *particular* laws produce and are avowedly intended to produce upon ours" was (the awkward phraseology excepted) the same that Jefferson would present in his famous state paper.

So, too, would the thesis of that report dovetail with the argument presented in Coxe's "A brief examination of lord Sheffield's observations on the commerce of the united states of America," a series of essays that Coxe published in rebuttal of Sheffield's defense of Britain's navigational system and derisive comments on America's economic weakness. The first installment of Coxe's exposé of the fallacies underpinning Sheffield's *Observations* was published in the March 1791 issue of the *American Museum*,[29] a month or so after Congress' request of February 23 that the Secretary of State report on foreign privileges accorded and restrictions imposed on American commerce. It was a period rendered both "interesting and critical," Coxe remarked, by the likelihood that Congress might soon determine "the policy, which the united states ought to observe, in *the legislation of commerce*,"[30] thus pointedly alluding to the possible adoption of an American navigation act such as that offered by Madison in the congressional session just ended. It was a possibility that Jefferson, like Coxe, happily entertained, and the Secretary of State was eager to use it as a weapon in his diplomatic arsenal. He thus could only have welcomed Coxe's promise to present indisputable facts that would "enable our own legislature and those of foreign nations, to discover the ground of common interest."[31]

Predictably, Coxe focused on Anglo-American relations, and he

29 Sheffield's *Observations on the Commerce of the American States* was first published in London in 1783. Coxe's "Brief examination of lord Sheffield's observations" was printed in six installments in *American Museum* in March, April, May, June and July, 1791 (IX, 121–126, 177–183, 217–226, 233–241, 289–295, X, 9–16).

30 *Ibid.*, IX, 126.

31 *Ibid.*

set forth the evidence that to him conclusively demonstrated that it was to Great Britain's advantage to encourage commercial amity with the United States.[32] The latter was not (as Sheffield had said it was) dependent either on British imports or British ships, Coxe insisted, pointing in support of his argument to the "improvement of our own resources and manufactures," trade concessions from other nations, the "discovery and attainment of new internal resources," and the evident willingness of countries other than Britain "to furnish us with credits, and sometimes in more eligible shapes."[33] But there was yet another and even more compelling reason why England should initiate rather than disdain commercial concessions to her former colonies. That reason was the same as the one he had proposed to Jefferson a month or so earlier in the last paragraph of his "Thoughts on Navigation." "It would diminish the number of British Vessels," Coxe now repeated, "if the united states and all other maritime countries should deem it expedient to enact into a law of their respective nations, the clause of the British statute, by which the importation of all foreign goods is confined to native bottoms, and to those of the nations producing the article."[34] What Coxe thus once again proposed, and at a "critical juncture" in American foreign affairs, was "in effect, a veiled but clearly discernible outline of Jefferson's policy."[35] This was tellingly revealed by the incorporation of Coxe's proposal in instructions that the Secretary of State promptly dispatched to American envoys in France, Spain, and Portugal, in which he recommended a "concert of retaliatory measures . . . founded in a desire for universal reciprocity." Jefferson underscored his championship of Coxe's argument by sending to these diplomats copies of the first three numbers of Coxe's *Brief examination*.[36]

The Secretary of State may also have contrived to use Coxe's manifesto of American commercial freedom as a ploy in Anglo-American diplomacy. Jefferson himself handed a copy of the first

32 The second number of Coxe's *Brief Examination* was first published in *Federal Gazette* on Apr. 6, 1791. It subsequently appeared in the April issue of *American Museum*, IX, 217–226.

33 *American Museum*, IX, 225.

34 *Ibid.*

35 *Jefferson Papers*, XIX, 566.

36 *Ibid.*, 568.

installment of Coxe's *Brief examination* to George Beckwith, who conveniently lodged at the same rooming house as James Madison,[37] and he also may have encouraged Coxe to send subsequent essays in the series to the Englishman, his nation's unofficial American representative.[38] Whether at Jefferson's urging or not, Coxe on April 17 called on Beckwith and presented him with the second and third of his serial assault on Sheffield's *Observations*. The British agent promptly forwarded the articles to his Foreign Office superiors in London, cryptically commenting that they were "not considered here as a private production."[39] To Beckwith, the inference to be drawn from this situation must have been pellucid: If the Assistant Secretary of the Treasury Department, presumably a bastion of pro-British sentiment, publicly advocated retaliatory legislation aimed at England's restrictive commercial system, then, in Beckwith's words, "the interests of the Empire in this country" were in a "critical condition."[40] Coxe did his best to enhance this sense of crisis by giving Beckwith "copies of each of the seven numbers for himself and his friends in Europe."[41]

The Secretary of State's more general reliance on the wealth of data Coxe set forth in his rebuttal of Lord Sheffield is, however, not so precisely determinable. But the thesis set forth by the Assistant Treasury Secretary must, at the least, have confirmed the Virginian's own viewpoint, while also affording evidential data for his report on American commerce. It provided, too, proof of the industriousness and ideological soundness of a talented political economist who freely, even importunately, offered his assistance.

Another example of Coxe's aid was his revision of the forms transmitted by the State Department to American consuls in foreign ports as guidelines for their half-yearly reports. In April 1791, Jefferson sent Coxe a sample form, asking him "for any hints

37 Coxe, "To the Public," *Aurora*, Oct. 30, 1800.

38 *Jefferson Papers*, XIX, 568–569, where it is concluded that Jefferson "may have prompted Coxe to hint in this indirect manner that the publication had the blessing of government. The fact that Coxe was a subordinate of the official who was the chief defender of the British interest in the United States made the revelation all the more pointed. Such a use of indirect means" was "characteristic of Jefferson's style of diplomacy." *Ibid.*, 569.

39 *Ibid.*, 568, citing Beckwith to Grenville, Apr. 17, 1791.

40 *Ibid.*, 569, citing Beckwith to Grenville, June 14, 1791. Although Beckwith thus shared his anxiety with Lord Grenville, he did not mention Coxe's name or official position.

41 Coxe "To the Public," *Aurora*, Oct. 30, 1800.

for its improvement either by insertions or omissions."[42] He could have found no more cooperative and qualified consultant. Although aware that the consular returns were a unique source of the information on which proposals for a sound national commercial policy might be based, Jefferson lacked Coxe's detailed knowledge of the exact kind of data to be solicited. The latter, relying on his experiences as an international merchant and his extensive research into the nature and conditions of American trade, was able quickly and easily to draw up a long list of substantive recommendations. They were calculated to provide the United States "the advantage of minute information" both on the precise nature of its own foreign trade and on the economic conditions prevailing among its chief customers or rivals.[43] The data he called for in these "Remarks on the consular return" was another instance of Coxe's emphasis on the collection of statistics on American commerce, but it also provided information of the kind urgently needed by Jefferson for his report on the privileges enjoyed and restrictions imposed on American commerce.

That report would be delayed time and again. Jefferson worked on it intermittently, initially planning to present it to the session of Congress scheduled for the fall of 1791. In the interim, however, Great Britain decided to inaugurate normal diplomatic relations with her former colonies and George Hammond, the first English Minister to the United States, arrived in August of that year. With delicate diplomatic negotiations under way in Philadelphia, Jefferson thought it imprudent to criticize Britain publicly, and accordingly postponed the submission of his Report. It was finally sent to Congress on the eve of his retirement in December 1793.[44]

In the meantime, Coxe supplied enough research material for a volume on the subject. Its nature and range is indicated by this chronological sampling: on March 4, 1791, returns of tonnage and a promise to send returns of imports; on April 15, 1791, a return of United States tonnage for the preceding year and a promise to send

42 Jefferson to TC, Apr. 20, 1791, Yale University.

43 "Remarks on the consular return," n.d., Coxe Papers. A copy was enclosed in TC to Jefferson, Apr. 23, 1791, Jefferson Papers, Library of Congress.

44 "Report on the privileges and restrictions on the commerce of the United States in foreign countries," Dec. 16, 1793, Andrew A. Lipscomb and Albert E. Bergh, eds., *The Writings of Thomas Jefferson*, III (Washington, 1903), 251–283.

out a Treasury Department circular to collectors of the customs directing them to supply additional information on exports and imports, so designed, Coxe said, that "it may be seen in what quantities we obtain the several kinds of supplies from the several foreign nations"; on July 19, 1791, two letters providing information on the commercial regulations of the United Netherlands; on December 8, 1791, an abstract showing the quantity of manufactured goods sold in the United States by selected foreign countries, followed some weeks or months later by a promise not to "fail to send the returns of Exports the moment Mr. Hamilton is finished with it"; and on February 20, 1793, information on the Danish trade and that of Holland with her West Indian islands.[45]

By February 1793, Jefferson had completed a draft of his report and, intending promptly to submit a final version to the House (a plan that miscarried because of the imminent adjournment of Congress), once again solicited the aid of the assistant on whose research his draft was largely based. Coxe was asked to check its accuracy, to indicate the requisite corrections, and to make other recommendations. This he did, noting in pencil suggested alterations—on "questions of fact" and "modes of expression"—on all but one of its nineteen pages. But instead of committing his substantive proposals to paper—both his ideas on the "subject in general" and others prompted by the "present momentous state of things"—he suggested that he communicate them in person. This was done at a conference held early on the morning of February 6.[46]

[45] Jefferson Papers, Library of Congress. These are but a few of the many letters that Coxe wrote Jefferson between 1791–1793 that contained information he believed might be useful and pertinent in drawing up Jefferson's Report on Commerce. In the Jefferson Papers, Library of Congress, there are numerous other documents in Coxe's hand, most undated and without covering letters which perhaps were carried by messengers in Coxe's office to the State Department, a short distance away. Virtually random examples include: a memorandum on ships built in Philadelphia between March 1790 and March 1791, n.d.; a memorandum on British commerce and prices current in London, Aug. 27, 1791; a note giving information on British and Swedish duties (1791); a note on duties in Holland on distilled spirits, n.d.; a report on the "Subdivisions of the carrying trade," n.d.

[46] See Jefferson to TC, Feb. 5, 1793 (Jefferson Papers, Library of Congress), acknowledging Coxe's "Notes on the Report of the Secretary of State made in consequence of the reference of the House of Representatives of the —— day of —— 1791." There is a draft of these notes in Coxe's hand in the Coxe Papers, and a clerk's copy with further instructions by Coxe in the Jefferson Papers. See also TC to Jefferson, Feb. 5, 1793, enclosing Jefferson's copy of the Report with notes in pencil by Coxe. *Ibid.*

Since neither participant kept a record of the conversation, the recommendations Coxe verbally made and Jefferson's reception of them cannot be determined. But all save a fraction of Coxe's pencilled changes were accepted and incorporated by Jefferson in the draft of his report. More important than this essentially editorial contribution was Jefferson's reliance on the information his tireless aide had supplied over the preceding two years. If fact and interpretation are inextricable (or, as Edward H. Carr has said of the writing of history, one molds one's "facts to his interpretation and his interpretation to his facts," making it "impossible to assign primacy to one over the other"),[47] then Coxe was surely Jefferson's collaborator rather than merely a research assistant. In any event, the report Jefferson submitted to Congress on December 16, 1783,[48] kindled the fire Coxe had laid both in his research reports and in essays on American commercial policy.

The "Report on the privileges and restrictions on the commerce of the United States in foreign countries" was Jefferson's carefully devised reply to Hamilton's alleged subservience to British economic rapacity, the summation of the commercial policies he unsuccessfully had tried to pursue as Secretary of State, his second declaration of national independence. Objectively, or perhaps deceptively, factual except for its last section, it was an account of the burdens imposed on the United States by those countries with whom the great bulk of its foreign trade was conducted—Spain, Portugal, France, Great Britain, and the United Netherlands. It was also a morality tale—the story of a well-intentioned young nation set down among hostile powers of the Old World, of a country eager to promote commercial freedom hemmed in by closed commercial systems. It was, more specifically, an account of the particularly sinister acts of one villain—England—among a cast of many offenders. The dismal story was relieved, however, by the entry of a character willing to aid the nation in distress. The heroine was France.

To the student of Jefferson's ideas, the most arresting aspect of the report is not so much its defense of commercial freedom as the advocacy of industrialization by the nation's most renowned ex-

47 Edward Carr, *What is History?* (New York, 1967), 34–35.
48 Lipscomb and Bergh, eds., *Writings of Jefferson*, III, 261–283.

ponent of an agricultural economy. Though its emphasis was on the just claims of the nation's commerce to particular solicitude, Jefferson also (though surely less enthusiastically than his collaborator Coxe would have done) stressed the importance of encouraging manufactures to achieve a balanced economy. Such a viewpoint plays hob, obviously, with the stereotyped view of the famous Jefferson-Hamilton duality. Where is the difference between Jefferson the advocate of "tariff duties on the protective principle"[49] and Hamilton the presumed arch protectionist, Jefferson the proponent of manufactures and Hamilton the prophet of an industrial society? The answer perhaps lies in the extent and fervor of the advocacy rather than in the program proposed. Or it may be, as Stuart Bruchey perceptively has remarked, that both men "employed the resource of government to promote development" and both "bespoke the interests and wishes of a nation anxious to root its political independence in the soil of economic development."[50] It may also be that Jefferson had caught a spark of the enthusiasm that animated Coxe's pleas for a balanced and national economy. Whether so or not, the point is at least worth airing, both because of the reams of Coxe's notes that Jefferson read during the preparation of the report on commerce and the apparent harmony of their collaboration.

Certainly the two men were in perfect agreement on the manner by which foreign restrictions on American commerce might be counteracted. It was, to repeat the words that both of them used time and again, the acceptance of the principle of "reciprocity" by the adoption of "countervailing" measures. What would be the results? Eventually, the British would be forced to modify their discriminatory navigation system while in the interim a policy of retribution might provide the occasion for "promoting arts, manufactures and population at home."[51] Although an accurate forecast of a program President Thomas Jefferson would follow some fifteen years later, it was in 1793 as persuasive as it was illusory: The English, engaged in a war they regarded as a struggle for survival,

49 Malone, *Jefferson*, III, 158.

50 Stuart Bruchey, *The Roots of American Economic Growth, 1607–1861* (New York, 1968), 122.

51 Lipscomb and Bergh, eds., *Writings of Jefferson*, III, 276, 278, 279, 280, 282.

were not likely to bow to American pressure, nor do nations often legislate economic miracles.

Coxe not only substantively contributed to Jefferson's report on America's foreign commerce but assisted the Secretary in the preparation of other state papers. When, for example, Jefferson was requested by the President in March 1791 to submit a report on unclaimed lands in the north and southwestern territories, Coxe readily furnished material on the subject. It took the form of a long research report, drafted in August 1791, on the disposition of western lands.[52] Some two years later, information on another aspect of the same subject, this time on the boundaries of lands between the Ohio and the Lakes acquired from the Indians, was supplied at Jefferson's request.[53]

Coxe did not confine himself to providing material for State Department reports but, unsolicited, assisted Jefferson in yet other ways. He forwarded newspaper clippings, political rumors, and foreign intelligence in which he believed the Secretary of State might be interested;[54] passed on requests from acquaintances, as when he relayed "an application . . . whether it will be illegal or, in any respect improper for a Citizen of the United States to accept the business . . . of an agent" for prizes sent to Philadelphia by French war ships, "public and Private";[55] and helped in finding competent personnel for the State Department.[56] Such cooperativeness was repaid by Jefferson's confidence not only in Coxe's ability

52 TC to Jefferson, Aug. 6, 1791, Coxe Papers. Jefferson's report to Washington is in Paul L. Ford, ed., *The Works of Thomas Jefferson*, VI (New York, 1904–1905), 321–322. The President's report to Congress, submitted on Nov. 10, 1791, is in *American State Papers: Lands*, I, 22–28.

53 TC to Jefferson, two letters of Mar. 7, 1793, Jefferson Papers; Jefferson to TC, Mar. 8, 1791, Yale University.

54 It was Coxe, for instance, who in 1791 supplied Jefferson with a "copious abstract" from the confidential Report of the Committee of the Privy Council which argued in favor of the rigid maintenance of the English navigational system ("To the Public," *Aurora*, Oct. 30, 1800); with information he had received in the same year on England's proposed new corn law (TC to Jefferson, Mar. 14, June 30, 1791, Jefferson Papers); and with a report from his brother, Daniel M. Coxe, on the plundering of American commerce in the West Indies (TC to Jefferson, Sept. 15, 1793; Jefferson to TC, Oct. 3, 1793, *ibid.*). See also TC to Jefferson, July 23, Aug. 27, Sept. 5, 1793, and Jefferson to TC, Sept. 10, 1793, *ibid.*

55 TC to Jefferson, May 16 and 17, 1793, *ibid.*

56 See TC to Jefferson, May 9, 10, 11, 15, 1793, *ibid.*

but in his discreetness and, as time passed, in his personal loyalty and ideological soundness.

Not that there was ever any such convergence of ideas as characterized those of Jefferson and Madison, much less any remotely similar affection and trust. Though the views of the Philadelphia capitalist and the Virginia planter did coincide on a great many public issues, Coxe stoutly supported a brand of economic nationalism—including protectionism, funding and assumption, and central banking—that, at least when advocated by Hamilton, Jefferson stridently denounced. Nor could Jefferson, despite the endorsement included in his report on commerce, have fully shared Coxe's enthusiasm for the encouragement of manufactures, redolent as it was to him of reprehensible mercantilist principles. In fact, the convergence of the ideas of Coxe and Jefferson ended at the Atlantic coastline. Far from sharing Jefferson's faith in laissez-faire—the benign operation of things that are left alone—Coxe, like Hamilton, believed that the doctrines of mercantilism should be tailored to the needs of a new nation. And, in striking contrast to the Virginian's dim view of Hamilton's program, Coxe insisted that it was "consistent with the public interest" and both "just and beneficial."[57]

But Jefferson's toleration of ideas when held by the Assistant Secretary of the Treasury was matched by his abhorrence of them when expressed by its Secretary. The seeming paradox is greater yet when one reflects that the divergence between the views of Jefferson and his friend Coxe was actually greater than that between the Secretary of State and his arch rival. Although Hamilton was "widely hailed in later years as the father of the American protective system" and the nation's most notable advocate of industrialization, Coxe was in fact a more ardent protectionist and exponent of manufactures than Hamilton.[58] Nevertheless, Jefferson overlooked in Coxe what he otherwise viewed as heresy, perhaps because his "political instincts," Hamilton excepted, "were to conciliate."[59]

57 Coxe's "Reflexions on the state of the union" was published in five parts in the *American Museum*, April through August, 1793, and republished under the same title in pamphlet form (Philadelphia, 1792). The quotation in the text is from No. 4 of this series of articles (*American Museum*, XII, 14).

58 Malone, *Jefferson*, III, 158.

59 The quotation is from Merrill D. Peterson, *Thomas Jefferson and the New Nation* (New York, 1970), 397, who does not, as I above do, make the exception.

For his part, Coxe would not have understood what students of later generations exaggeratedly have seen as the radical and irreconcilable differences between Jefferson and Hamilton. During his first years in the Treasury Department he rather believed (though his own fierce partisanship would in later years obliterate the memory) that Hamilton and Jefferson pursued many of the same goals and in some instances the same policies. So it was that he moved with ease from the company of the one to that of the other, suggesting that Philadelphia society was not as politically polarized as the stereotyped account would have it. After all (to give only two of many possible examples), Jefferson saw no difficulty in entertaining a Federalist officeholder and it is suggestive that Hamilton asked Coxe to join him at a dinner to which he had invited Joseph Priestly, arch-radical and Jefferson's friend.[60]

Nor was Coxe's endorsement of Hamiltonian finance and approval of Jefferson's commercial policy as inconsistent as it superficially appears. A good number of other Federalists, notably merchants in Philadelphia and elsewhere, similarly saw no incompatability in supporting Hamilton's fiscal program and opposing his foreign policy. To them, as to Coxe, the national as well as their own interest dictated commercial freedom, and this they believed could best be attained by resistance to the restrictions of English mercantilism and by an expansion of trade with other countries. The proponents of economic nationalism, in sum, shared a belief in the necessity of national self-sufficiency but were divided on the means of achieving it. And this, no matter how seemingly contradictory his behavior, eventually prompted Coxe to march into Jefferson's camp flying a Hamiltonian flag.

Nevertheless, what initially were on Coxe's part gestures of friendship for a man he admired soon turned into behavior that was imprudent to the point of rashness. As the personal and political animosity between his superior in the Treasury Department and the Secretary of State mounted, his continued assistance to Jefferson committed him to a course of action that in the end would besmirch his reputation and cripple his public career. No doubt he justified his behavior by reminding himself that he was half-

[60] Hamilton to TC, June 27, 1794, Coxe Papers.

Hamiltonian and half-Jeffersonian, and it is true, in Merrill Peterson's words, that Coxe, a fervent economic nationalist, "worked both sides of the street . . . not only because he had an eye for the main chance politically, but also because there were two distinct sides of economic nationalism, one basically fiscal, the other basically commercial . . . one British-centered, the other non-British and mainly French."[61] But Coxe should have realized, nevertheless, that in a government increasingly characterized by ardent partisanship and keen departmental antagonism he could not, so long as he continued the subordinate of a principal partisan who was head of one of the two rival departments, remain neutral by serving both Hamilton and Jefferson. At least his behavior had a measure of consistency—in the political duel between Hamilton and Jefferson, as during the contest between America and Great Britain some decade and a half earlier, he believed that the middle ground was tenable. In neither case would the combatants have agreed.

What began as disagreements between Hamilton and Jefferson over commercial policy and constitutional interpretation soon broadened to include other aspects of public policy, domestic and foreign. By the early spring of 1791, Jefferson was beginning to talk of "a sect" who believed the British constitution "to contain whatever is perfect in human institutions," and to imply to confidants that Hamilton was its ringleader.[62] And he soon convinced himself both that Hamilton was "not only a monarchist, but for a monarchy bottomed on corruption," and that measures such as assumption and the bank had been put through Congress by the Treasury Secretary's sycophants, a "phalanx" of stock jobbers bent on enriching themselves."[63]

Jefferson's attribution of sinister motives to his colleague in the Treasury was matched by Hamilton's growing mistrust of the Secretary of State. To Hamilton, demagoguery as personified by Jefferson, not monarchism, was the real threat to American republicanism. Jefferson, so Hamilton believed, was driven by an insatiable ambition to dominate the entire government. He was a visionary philosopher whose ignorance of economics was matched

61 Peterson, *Jefferson*, 429.
62 Ford, ed., *Works of Jefferson*, VI, 186.
63 "Anas," *ibid.*, I, 177–179.

by his idealized view of man. Consumed by a raging fever of anglophobia, he was an apostate to French principles. Above all, Hamilton was convinced that his rival was actuated by personal rancor. However great the differences between these great antagonists, at least they shared the capacity to inspire great personal loyalty, and Coxe, attracted though he was by some principles espoused by each, was by temperament and background conditioned to feel a greater affinity with Jefferson.

The problem was that he obstinately clung to the conviction that he could express the affinity while continuing to work for Hamilton. In sum, even if Coxe had trouble in deciding which of the principals in this political duel was hero and which villain, he should have known that in trying to serve both he was likely to jeopardize his relationship with each. And so, in fact, he did. Neither Hamilton nor Jefferson hesitated to jettison him once he had outlived his usefulness. For Hamilton that time soon arrived; for Jefferson it would not come until a decade later, hard upon Coxe's instrumental role in electing him president.

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