

Alexander Hamilton to Harrison Gray Otis, December 23, 1800

Image

Dec 23. 1800

I live no time in replying
to your letter of the 17th - this day received.

My opinion is, after mature
reflection, that if Jefferson and Burr come
with equal votes to the House of Representatives,
the former ought to be preferred by the House
of Representatives Federalists. Mr. Jefferson
is respectably known in Europe - Mr. Burr
little and that little not advantageously.
for the President of the United States - Mr. Jefferson
is a man of easy fortune - Mr. Burr,
as I believe, a bankrupt beyond redemption,
unless by some coup at the expense of the
public and his habits of expense are
just that wealth he must have at
any rate - Mr. Jefferson is a man of
fair character for probity - Very different
opinions are entertained of Mr. Burr by his
enemies and what his friends think,
you may collect from the anecdote -
A lady said to Edward Livingston ironically
"I am told Mr. Burr will be President"

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(The Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History, GLC00496.028 p.1)

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I should like it very well if I had not
~~been told~~^{heard} that he is a man without
property - "let him alone for that
replied Edward - If he is President
for four years he will remove the
objection" - Mr. Jefferson, though too
revolutionary in his notions, is yet
a lover of liberty and will be desirous
of something like orderly Government -
Mr. Burr loves nothing but himself -
thinks of nothing but his own aggran-
dizement - and will be content with
nothing short of permanent power and
in his own hands - No compact, that
he should make with any ~~the~~ person
in his ~~breast~~ except ~~his~~ Ambition,
could be relied upon by himself - How
then should we be able to rely upon
any agreement with him. Mr. Jefferson
I suspect will not ~~do~~ much Mr. Burr will
*
do every
thing in the
sanguine hope
of effecting
very things -
from his election for France to draw
the Country into war on her side -
Mr. Burr will certainly endeavour to
do it for the sake of creating the
means of personal power and wealth.

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(The Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History, GLC00496.028 p.3)

Alexander Hamilton to Harrison Gray Otis, December 23, 1800

hand, I will express some ideas to you
about the Convention with France —
I am far from approving several
of its features but I am clear
that it ought now to be ratified
having been negotiated & that the
not doing of it would ruin the Federal
party, hazard our internal tranquility
and leave the door open for a
worse arrangement under the new Ad-
ministration. One question will be
whether this Treaty is compatible with
our ~~Treaty~~ engagements to Great Britain.
I hold it to be the better opinion that
it is. It seems to me that the
annulling of our Treaty with France
is a matter between her and us by
which another power ought neither to
gain nor lose — that in terminating
these differences we might have
gone back to the status quo
ante bellum & that no power not
just in our situation than before
would have a right to complain
Yrs with great affec-
tion A Hamilton

H. G. Otis

Alexander Hamilton to Harrison Gray Otis, December 23, 1800.
(The Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History, GLC00496.028 p.4)

Transcript

[Draft] My opinion, after mature reflection, that if *Jefferson* and *Burr* come with equal votes to the House of Representatives, the former ought to be preferred by the Federalists. Mr. Jefferson is respectably known in Europe -- Mr. Burr little and that little not advantageously for a President of the U States -- Mr Jefferson is a man of easy fortune. -- Mr. Burr, as I believe, a bankrupt beyond redemption unless by some coup at the expense of the public and his habits of expense are such that Wealth he must have at any rate -- Mr. Jefferson is a man of fair character for probity -- Very different ideas are entertained of Mr. Burr by his enemies and what his friends think, you may collect from this anecdote -- A lady said to Edward Livingston ironically "I am told Mr Burr will be President. [2] I should like it very well if I had not learned that he is a man without property" - "Let him alone for that" replied Edward - If he is President four years he will remove the objection" -- Mr. Jefferson, though too revolutionary in his notions, is yet a lover of liberty and will be desirous of something like orderly Government. -- Mr. Burr loves nothing but himself -- thinks of nothing but his own aggrandizement -- and will be content with nothing short of permanent power in his own hands -- No compact, that he should make with any passion in his breast except Ambition, could be relied upon by himself -- How then should we be able to rely upon our agreement with him? Mr. Jefferson I suspect will not dare much. Mr. Burr will dare every thing in the sanguine hope of effecting every thing.

If Mr. Jefferson is likely from predilection for France to draw the Country into war on her side -- Mr. Burr will certainly endeavour to do it for the sake of creating the means of personal power and wealth. [3]

This portrait is the result of long and attentive observation on a man with whom I am personally well --[acquainted] and in respect to whose character I have had peculiar opportunities of forming a correct judgment.

By no means, my Dear Sir, let the Federalists be responsible for his Elevation. -- In a choice of Evils, let them take the least - Jefferson is in every view less dangerous than Burr.

But we ought -- still to seek some advantages from our situation. It may be advisable to make it a ground of exploration with Mr. Jefferson or his confidential friends and the means of obtaining from him some assurances of his future conduct. The three essential points for us to

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secure is. 1 The continuance of the neutral plan *bona fide* towards the belligerent powers 2 The preservation of the present System of public credit - 3 The maintenance & gradual increase of our navy. Other matters may be left to take their chance.

While I have my pen in [4] hand, I will express some ideas to you about the Convention with France - I am far from approving several of its features but I am clear that it ought now to be ratified having been negotiated & that the not doing of it would ruin the Federal party, hazard our internal tranquility, and leave the door open for a worse arrangement under the new Administration.

One question will be whether this Treaty is compatible with our ~~Federal~~ engagements to Great Britain. I hold it to be the better opinion that it is. It seems to me that the annulling of our Treaties with France is a matter between her and us by which another power ought neither to gain nor lose - that in terminating those differences we might have gone back to the Status quo antebellum & make no power not put in worse situation than before would have a right to complain.

Yrs with great affect & res

A Hamilton

H.G. Otis. Esq