

DEPARTMENT OF STATE
WASHINGTON

February 24, 1936

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TRANSMISSION OF CHAPTER FROM "THE LEES
OF VIRGINIA"

To

American Diplomatic and Consular Officers.

Sirs:

There is enclosed, by permission of the publishers, a mimeographed copy of a chapter from a volume entitled "The Lees of Virginia" by Burton J. Hendrick, which appeared in the Atlantic Monthly for October, 1935. The chapter contains much of historical value that should interest every member of the Foreign Service and it is desired that it be read by all officers because of the manner in which it illustrates the necessity of exercising every precaution to protect our Government against the misuse of confidential information.

Very truly yours,

For the Secretary of State:

WILBUR J. CARR

Enclosure:

Mimeographed article.

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WORSE THAN ARNOLD

By Burton J. Hendrick

Up to August 1777, the career of Arthur Lee as the first diplomatic representative of the American nation had been successful.

His association with Beaumarchais in London in 1775-1776 had produced large war supplies from France and Spain. His winter trip to Burgos, in 1777, had brought money and munitions at a time when Washington's army tragically needed them. If his adventurous sojourn in Berlin had accomplished nothing so ponderable, it had elicited from Frederick the Great a promise to recognize American independence whenever France should take that momentous step. Perhaps Arthur imagined that these accomplishments would enhance his popularity with his colleagues in Paris; if so, he was doomed to disappointment. Few diplomats have ever met so chilly a reception as the junior member of the mission received on his return to France.

Just preceding Arthur's departure for Berlin, Franklin had been installed, by M. Le Ray de Chaumont, in a beautiful mansion at Passy, for eight years to serve as the American Embassy in France. The structure was large, luxurious, well appointed for ambassadorial work, roomy enough to provide living and working quarters for an extensive force. Franklin had invited Arthur Lee to make his home in this castle on his return from Berlin.

Lee at once reported to Passy, expecting to bestow himself in this congenial lodging. But in Arthur's absence another tenant had slipped into his place. The rooms that had been renovated for the proud Virginian were now adorned by the short and portly figure of the Connecticut Yankee, Silas Deane, whose familiar manners, general air of accommodation to his surroundings, and distant, even supercilious attitude toward the intruding, questioning Lee, presented the picture of a gentleman very much at home. Dr. Franklin proffered no explanation, but his grandson, William Temple Franklin, now serving as secretary, informed Lee that Deane had moved in at his grandfather's request.

Shoved aside, the bewildered and unquestionably very angry gentleman from the Potomac settled in a fine mansion at Chaillot, another suburb about three miles from Passy. Thus to the ever-watchful eye of Frenchmen, and the still more watchful eye of the British ambassador and his army of spies, the American diplomatic triumvirate presented a spectacle of disunion.

This process of elbowing Arthur out of any share in the Paris embassy had been under way even before the trip

to

to Berlin. Even while sojourning in Spain, Arthur had been conscious of a lack of interest on the part of his colleagues. His long detailed letters remained unanswered. On his return from Germany no account of what had happened in his absence was given him. Franklin and Deane held frequent consultations on important matters - consultations to which Arthur was not invited and on the results of which he was not informed. Critical decisions were taken without seeking the opinion of the junior Commissioner. To such records of proceedings as were made Lee had no access. His standing in the Commission was precisely the same as that of Franklin and Deane, - all three were acting under identical appointment from Congress, - yet official communications frequently bore only two signatures, and even requisitions on French bankers sometimes lacked the name of Lee. Of incoming mail, addressed to the American Commission, the Virginian seldom caught a glimpse. All his attempts to establish working relations with his associates were rebuffed. Two out of three, Franklin once replied to these protests, made a majority!

Arthur had returned from Berlin eager for work and full of ideas, but all his suggestions were ignored. That the American Embassy was in a state of disorder a preliminary inspection showed; no books were being kept, no accounts preserved, although millions of livres were being spent; all kinds of nondescript characters had free access to the building, and apparently shared the confidence of Franklin and Deane, but Arthur Lee's suggestions for something resembling a businesslike routine met a hostile reception. Despite this discouragement, the Virginian frequently forced his presence on his colleagues, addressing them at length and proposing reforms. His reports of these interviews, recorded in his journal, invariably have the same conclusion: "I received no answer". Franklin especially was irritating for his silent treatment. "No attention was paid to what I said, which was almost invariably the case". Even Arthur's not too active sense of humor was occasionally aroused; after making a long statement to the senior Commissioner on a subject of great importance, he thus records the result: "Dr. Franklin in return entertained me with some very agreeable philosophical conversation".

That there were faults in plenty on Arthur's side his best friends recognized. Of all these friends none was more honest and loyal than John Adams, and perhaps no better introduction to Arthur's career in Paris can be obtained than the references in the Adams Diary. "Our old incidental agent is an honest man", wrote Adams, "faithful and zealous in our cause. But there is an acrimony in his temper, there is a jealousy, there is an obstinacy, and a want of candor at times, and an affectation of secrecy, the fruit of jealousy, which renders him disagreeable often to his friends, makes him enemies and gives them infinite advantages over him. That he has had great provocations I have never doubted". "Virtue is not always amiable, integrity is sometimes ruined by prejudices and by passions. There are two men in the world [Lee and

Izard]

Izard] who are men of honor and integrity, I believe, but whose prejudices and violent temper would raise quarrels in the Elysian fields, if not in heaven". "Mr. McCreery insinuates to me that the Lees are selfish and that this was a family misfortune. What shall I say? What shall I think?"

These are the judgments of an admiring friend. They are the words of a man who worked in closest companionship for eight years not only with Arthur, but with the whole Lee family. The selfishness about which Adams questions himself was really family pride - an inheritance of that "baronial" conception in Virginia which implanted in the consciousness of certain families a belief in their right, even their duty, to rule; and doubtless this sense of family obligation largely explains Arthur Lee. One who fails to grasp this feeling can only faintly understand Arthur's emotions when, returning to Passy from Berlin, he found a Connecticut Yankee calmly installed in apartments originally set aside for himself. Silas Deane, son of a blacksmith, country school-teacher, tradesman, undistinguished in person and uncouth in manner, preferred to him, a Potomac Lee, descendant of a line of Virginia Councilors, schooled at Eton and Edinburgh, famous pamphleteer, friend of Chatham, Burke, and Shelburne, the sought-for guest of country houses and rising member of the English bar!

Posterity can forgive Arthur's egotism when exercised against such a person as Silas Deane, but that a great man like Benjamin Franklin should have become its object has damaged his fame. One need not regard Poor Richard as an exemplar of all virtues, public and private - for certainly he was a practical soul, not enamored of the ideal; the fact still remains that from 1777 to 1783 he was one of the greatest assets to the American cause. Bonhomme Richard's inventions, his lightning rods, his bifocal spectacles, his stove, his kite, his learned discourses before the Academy of Sciences, his pithy and commonsense writings, many of which had already appeared in French translations, his infinite curiosity about everything, human and divine - all these matters made the Philadelphian, in French eyes, an ideal champion of a young forest Republic attempting to free itself from European shackles. If the chief business of an ambassador is to make his country loved by the one to which he is accredited, probably no other envoy in history ever achieved Franklin's success. Whether he deserved all this acclaim is not the point; the fact is that he received it, and became a force in promoting the American cause almost as powerful as Washington's army.

All this was lost on Arthur Lee. He disliked Franklin, regarded his performances as overpraised, believed by some twisted method of reasoning that he was a positive deterrent to American success. Franklin's removal from Paris became the dearest purpose of Arthur's life. He wrote letters home insisting that he himself be installed in Franklin's place.

No man ever wrote more unfortunate letters than these. These proposals and subsequent troubles with Franklin have injured Arthur's reputation almost beyond repair. It was outbursts of this kind, as John Adams sadly noted, which gave advantage to Arthur's foes and have embittered against him so many American historians and biographers. They have also obscured a truth which only in recent years has become apparent - that in most of the criticisms Lee hurled against his Passy colleagues the facts were on his side. Had his charges been hearkened to, probably the American Revolution would not have lasted seven exhausting years, for the things that made matters so difficult were, above all, disloyalty and treason.

Lee's wrath against Franklin and Deane was not all jealousy and ancestral pride, but was also based upon patriotic motives. Arthur insisted that the mansion at Passy was a nest of spies and traitors, who, under the very nose of Franklin, were betraying the American cause and every day bringing it closer to disaster. The reason that he was ignored, Arthur insisted - the reason all means were taken to keep him out of the secrets of the Embassy - was plain enough: things were going on that would not bear the light of day, and his elimination was desired because his presence would make impossible schemes that endangered his country. Strange suspicions for the young man - Arthur Lee was then thirty-six - to nourish against his diplomatic colleagues; and the strangest part of all is that in large degree they were true.

II

Arthur Lee's vexation was great when it first became apparent to him that Chaumont, Dr. Bancroft, the Whartons, Thomas Walpole, and other persons whom he regarded as obnoxious characters, stood on much better footing at Passy than did he, the officially accredited representative of Congress. Startling was the disclosure that Edward Bancroft was serving as private secretary to Silas Deane, was living in the Chaumont mansion, had constant access to all its secrets, and was confidential man to Franklin. Bancroft was a shrewd and clever gentleman, - Arthur had learned this in London, - but his agility in thus gaining access to American counsels was something of a surprise. Yet the feat had been accomplished simply enough; Bancroft had not wormed himself into the ambassadorial circle, but had been invited in. Benjamin Franklin had written Deane's instructions, on his original appointment as representative in France, and these instructions had contained the following paragraph:-

"You will endeavor to procure a meeting with Mr. Bancroft, by writing a letter to him, under cover to Mr. Griffiths, at Turnham Green, near London, and desiring him to come over to you in France and Holland, on the score of old acquaintance. From him you may obtain a good deal of information of what is now going forward in England and settling a mode of continuing a correspondence. It may be well to remit a small bill to remit his expenses in coming to you."

At

At this time, August 1776, neither Franklin nor Lee was an American Commissioner; Deane was the sole American representative in France. His first act, in landing at Bordeaux, was to follow Franklin's instructions regarding Bancroft, who came over to Paris, spent several weeks with Deane, learned all about American affairs and aspirations, accompanied Deane on all his trips to Vergennes, and acted in general as his good angel. Two records exist of those first weeks of the American effort at Versailles, both historic documents of priceless value. Deane wrote a long and highly entertaining account of his experiences, the encouragement extended by the French court, the aid already promised and on its way - all of which was about the most confidential and dangerous information then concealed in Europe. Deane sent this in the most secret manner possible to the Committee of Congress, where naturally it raised high hopes. Edward Bancroft wrote his story of the same events, just as detailed, just as accurate, just as entertaining as Deane's. But Bancroft sent his lucubration to Lord Suffolk, head of the British Secret Intelligence during the American Revolution.

Of course neither Franklin nor Deane knew anything of Bancroft's literary exercises. In subsequent months Bancroft grew increasingly indispensable to Deane, who informed him of all the conversations with Vergennes, took his advice on all delicate matters, and finally persuaded him to settle in Passy as his personal secretary. And there the astonished Lee found him - astonished because Arthur and William Lee already possessed what they regarded as irrefragable proof of Bancroft's double character. Arthur informed Franklin, in his forthright way, that Bancroft was a spy in the pay of the British Government. He not only made the accusation but submitted evidence. Bancroft, William Lee had discovered, was closeted with the Privy Council on his trips to London. What else could such confabulations mean?

The only effect of Arthur's charges on Franklin was to embitter him. Amiable as he was to most men, toward Arthur, from this time forth, he adopted a manner little less than savage. Edward Bancroft, his long-time friend, his assistant in literary and scientific pursuits, to be accused by this Virginia upstart as the paid betrayer of his inmost secrets!

The indignation against Lee felt by the philosopher has been pretty generally echoed by his biographers, at least all those who antedate 1889; for Bancroft is a curious figure in the history, not only of espionage, but of literature. Naturally Franklin's biographers have found Arthur Lee's accusations against Bancroft something of a stumbling-block, especially those biographers who wrote in the time when glorification of one's hero, with corresponding abuse of his detractors, was a fixed rule of the biographic art. To admit that Bancroft was a spy, writes Francis Wharton, "would involve grave imputations on at least the sagacity and the vigilance of Franklin" - hence the labored efforts of all Franklin chroniclers,

including

including himself, to prove that the Lee imputations were slander. Dr. Wharton devotes a chapter of twenty pages to Dr. Bancroft; every available bit of evidence is scraped together to show that the suspicions entertained by the Lees of this gentleman were unfounded and to prove that he was a loyal American patriot.

Dr. Wharton's chapter on Bancroft is one of the most unfortunate bits of special pleading in all the curiosities of literature. The year selected for publication - 1889 - makes it almost a tragedy. For at this same date the famous American scholar resident in London, B. F. Stevens, began the publication of his Facsimiles of the Auckland manuscripts and other documents then reposing in the Library of Kings College, Cambridge University. Lord Auckland, as the Honorable William Eden, was assistant to Lord Suffolk in charge of the British Secret Service during the American Revolutionary War; his papers, thus finally released by the British Government to Mr. Stevens, are the reports he received from British secret agents in the course of duty. They now comprise twenty-five huge volumes, known to students of American history as the Stevens Facsimiles, and are available in most important American libraries. No one can understand the secret workings of the Revolution without a generous examination of these mighty tomes.

The first impression is one of admiration at the completeness and accuracy of the British Intelligence Service - a quality that evidently persists, for the spy system of Great Britain in the World War was similarly exhaustive. From 1776 to 1781 it is not too much to say that the English Foreign Office was better informed of American activities than was Congress itself. Franklin's Embassy at Passy, it now appears, was little more than a branch office of the British Secret Service. Not a thing happened there that did not instantaneously find its way to Downing Street and Windsor, for the man who took chief delight in reading the reports of British spies was George III himself.

The person mainly responsible for collecting this royal literary matter was that same Dr. Bancroft who so completely bamboozled Franklin and who was to find so many American apologists in the course of a century. Merely to dip into these twenty-five volumes shows that Americans have committed a great injustice in making Benedict Arnold the archtraitor of the Revolution. That eminence rightfully belongs to Dr. Bancroft. Arnold was guilty of one act of treason, which failed, and so did no harm, while Bancroft for more than eight years was daily betraying his country, and doing so successfully. The prolongation of the contest was owing, more than to any other single cause, to the information which this man was constantly supplying - for money - to the Ministry in London.

III

He was a gentle and scholarly soul, this Edward Bancroft - a man of some standing, too, especially in scientific circles. Even the British Dictionary of National Biography devotes a quarter page to "Edward Bancroft, M.D., F.R.S. (1744-1821), naturalist and chemist, a man of versatile talents, a friend of Franklin and Priestley", treating seriously his discoveries in dyeing and calico printing. He was a native of Westfield, Massachusetts, a pupil of Silas Deane in his schoolmaster days, and afterward educated as a physician in England.

Apparently Bancroft possessed social graces that made him welcome in respectable circles. One of his closest friends was Paul Wentworth, member of a distinguished New Hampshire family, also resident in London, a man of greater mental attainments than Bancroft and of higher connections. Wentworth was a cultivated gentleman; he was distantly related to the Marquis of Rockingham, and owned a sugar plantation in Surinam.

Unfortunately Wentworth's mentality was devoted to base uses, for he early became a spy de luxe in the British service, expecting as rewards financial compensation, a baronetcy, and a seat in Parliament. His reports on American affairs - all now accessible in the Stevens papers - have a certain grace and are full of literary allusions and historic parallels. They are also replete with bitterness and chagrin. Nothing set Wentworth's nerves tingling so violently as that word "spy", which he knew was frequently applied to him; and, while many midnight hours were spent penning reams of betrayal, he also filled pages with recriminations against his English employers, who showed inadequate gratitude for his services and treated him with disdain. Probably the only bright spots in Wentworth's life were his visits to France, for on these occasions he became the guest of Franklin and Deane at Passy. The fact that Arthur Lee, on Deane's arrival in France, had written him to keep away from Wentworth as a dangerous character was entirely forgotten.

According to Bancroft, the irresistible Wentworth had been the cause of his downfall. He tells the story in a written account of his misdeeds, a brochure which forms one of the most extraordinary bits of biographical literature in existence. In 1784 the British Government, the war with the former colonies having ended, evidently became weary of their old retainer; Bancroft's pension of £1000 a year was suddenly stopped, leaving him destitute. As a plea for its renewal, Bancroft wrote Lord Carmarthen, then Foreign Secretary, giving a résumé of his services to the British crown, which consisted chiefly of a long list of treasons committed against his native land. Thus over Bancroft's own signature we have a conscientious catalogue of betrayals. How, after spending two or three weeks with Deane in Paris, in June 1776, he returned to London; how there, meeting Paul Wentworth, he told the whole story of French and American negotiations;

how

how Wentworth took him to Lords Weymouth and Suffolk, Secretaries of State, before whom Bancroft unbosomed himself - all these details the learned physician sets forth. Naturally the noble lords decided to link Bancroft permanently to the British cause. The first interview and the written memorandum secured a pension of £200 for life, but that proved only the beginning of an employment that lasted until 1783.

"As an inducement for me to go over and reside in France and continue my services there, until the Revolt should terminate or an open rupture with that nation ensue, his Lordship further promised, that when either of those events should happen, my permanent pension of £200 should be increased to £500 at least. Confiding in this promise I went to Paris, and, during the first year, resided in the same house with Dr. Franklin, Mr. Deane, etc., and regularly informed this government of every transaction of the American commissioners; of every step and vessel taken to supply the American colonies, with artillery, arms, etc.; of every part of their intercourse with the French and European courts; of the Powers and instructions given by Congress to the Commissioners, and of their correspondence with the Secret committees, etc.; and when the government of France determined openly to support the Revolted Colonies, I gave notice of this determination, and of the progress made in forming the two treaties of Alliance and Commerce, and when these were signed, on the Evening of the 6th of February, I at my own Expense and of a special messenger, and with unexampled despatch, conveyed this Intelligence to this City and to the King's Ministers, within forty-two hours, from the Instant of their signature, a piece of information for which many individuals here would, for purposes of speculation, have given me more than all that I have received from Government..... To fulfil the promise made by my Lord Suffolk my permanent pension was increased to £500 per annum, and regularly entered, in Book Letter A, payable to Mr. P. Wentworth, for the use of Edw. Edwards, the name by which, for greater secrecy, it had been long before agreed to distinguish me."

IV

Amazing as this confession may seem, the contract entered into by Bancroft with the British Government is more astounding still. The document is probably unique; is there any other instance in history of such an espionage bargain - a bargain in which the party of the first part, in writing, agrees to sell his secrets, definitely stipulating what they are to consist of, and the party of the second part pledges itself to precise schedules of compensation? The handwriting in this contract - a contract now to be read in the Stevens Facsimiles - is that of Paul Wentworth, and the agreement was one to correspond with that gentleman. The subjects on which information

was

was promised appear under two heads - that intended for Wentworth and that for Lord Stormont, British Ambassador at Paris.

Since Wentworth resided, for the most part, in London, and had immediate access to the British Government, he was chiefly interested in diplomatic concerns - such as America's negotiations for alliances with France, Spain, and other powers; the details of commerce carried on between the West India Islands and the northern colonies; and banking matters. Of particular importance were American attempts to obtain foreign credits, "the channels and agents used to apply them; the secret moves about the courts of France and Spain and the Congress agents and tracing the lines from one to another." Bancroft agreed - in writing - to furnish Britain with copies of all of Franklin's and Deane's letters to and from the Continental Congress, and of all transactions and correspondence with foreign powers.

For Lord Stormont, information was to be supplied that would aid in his daily task of protesting violations of neutrality; thus Bancroft contracted to furnish details about every ship sailing from France to America - its officers and crew, its cargo, especially war munitions, its port of departure, destination, and date of sailing, its projected course, so that British warships might be most advantageously placed for interception.

The manner in which all this intelligence was to be conveyed one would hesitate to transcribe, did it not formally appear in this contract. Anyone who might accidentally discover Bancroft's letters would think that he had stumbled upon an illicit love affair; they were to be written, "in gallantry", upon white sheets of paper, with liberal spaces between the lines. The apparent writing was to comprise confidences such as one would address to his sweetheart, but in the empty spaces the real literary matter was to be inserted, containing news on the subjects listed above; but all this was to be written in "white ink", - that is, invisible ink, - "the wash to make which appear is to be given to Lord Stormont". Transmission of these letters was to be under the favoring auspices of darkness.

"Mr. Jeans will call every Tuesday evening after half past nine at the tree pointed at the south terrace of the Tuileries and take from the Hole at the root a bottle containing a letter and place under the Box-tree agreed upon a bottle containing any communication from Lord Stormont to Dr. Edwards. All letters to be numbered with white ink. The bottle to be sealed and tyed by the neck with a common twyne about a half a yard in length. The other end of which to be fastened to a peg of wood, split at the top to receive a very small piece of a card. The Bottle to be thrust under the tree and the peg into the ground on the west side."

How

How sedulously Bancroft made use of these postal facilities is evident in the collections of his literary lucubrations now available in the Stevens Facsimiles. But he was not the only one Wentworth had enticed into his syndicate of betrayal. He enlisted, indeed, a fair-sized brigade, all recruited from Americans resident in London - George Lupton; John Williams, uncle of the Jonathan Williams in charge of American shipping affairs at Nantes; Joseph Hynson, that pleasure-seeking sailor who succeeded in stealing six months' correspondence of the American Commissioners and passing it on to Downing Street; the Reverend John Vardil, once Canon of Trinity Church, New York, who, by boarding in a London sailors' resort which was little else than a house of prostitution, made Hynson's acquaintance and engaged him for this work; and William Carmichael, of Maryland, for 1776-1777 secretary of Deane and Franklin at Passy, who, if not a traitor, - his exact status has never been fixed, - was the intimate associate of men whom he must have known to be traitors.

Of all these British mercenaries - far more dangerous to the American cause than those imported from Hesse and Brunswick - the man of overshadowing importance was Bancroft. Wentworth, in London, served as a kind of clearinghouse, receiving Bancroft's missives, forwarded by Stormont from the "Box-Hole" of the Tuileries, transmitting such as seemed desirable to Lord Suffolk and William Eden, condensing others, to save his lordship the trouble of wading through repetitious memorials, and using them as the basis of "Informations" of his own.

Wentworth supplemented these documents by occasional visits to Paris, and at other times met Bancroft, for verbal communication, at Dieppe and Dover. As a result his Revolutionary writings made a complete picture of American diplomacy from 1776 to 1781. Especially insidious are Wentworth's little papers called "Port Intelligence". Probably no documents did the American cause such harm, for they conveyed details of the sailings of ships carrying supplies so sorely needed by Washington's troops. Ship after ship cleared French ports for America, only to be scooped in by the British cordon and taken to England. From May 1777 to 1778 - almost a year - Congress received no messages or correspondence of any kind from its ambassadors in France, for all ships carrying them were captured.

V

Another aspect that startles one even today is the constant use which Bancroft made of Franklin's correspondence. Arthur Lee, in his unprinted Journal, relates: "Count Vergennes had complained that everything we did was known to the English Ambassador, who was always plaguing him with the detail. No one will be surprised at this who knows that we have no time or place appropriate to our consultations, but that servants, strangers, and everyone was at liberty to enter and did constantly enter the room while we were talking about public business, and that the papers relating to it lay open in rooms of

common

common and continual resort". If the public had such free access, a confidential secretary like Bancroft would find no difficulty in purloining and copying letters. He not only sent duplicates to Wentworth, but sometimes sent originals. There are many references to them in Wentworth's essays. "Bancroft left them for my perusal", he writes, referring to a packet of letters from Passy. "I also retained originals of those of which he brought me duplicates."

Francis Wharton, the scholar who, as late as 1889, published his defense of Bancroft, says that his relation to Franklin was that of Boswell to Johnson. This perhaps explains the many Boswellian intimacies which enliven Wentworth's pages, for his facts were supplied by Bancroft. The man had a gift for portraiture and illuminating adjectives. We catch glimpses of Deane, "strutting like a cock on his dung-hill", cursing France and all Frenchmen, expanding in "his Republican pride", quoting John Winthrop as his favorite political philosopher, and outlining terms of possible peace at supper in the Café St. Honoré. An unforgettable sketch from the life is that of Franklin shedding tears at the inevitability of American separation from Britain - tears that involved no disloyalty, for it was a regret common to most intellectual Americans, even those strongly devoted to independence. Bancroft rages now and then over the free use made of his reports; he would steal a paper, pass it on to Lord Stormont, who next day would protest to Vergennes, using terms and details that were almost exact quotations from the original. If this goes on, wails Bancroft, exposure is certain!

Wentworth even gives vignettes of himself. He calls on Arthur Lee "to pay his respects", and, while waiting for the Virginian to appear, rifles Arthur's cardcase, lying on the table. His sizing up of the Commissioners is worth recording: "Franklin is taciturn, deliberate and cautious; Deane vain, desultory and subtle; A. Lee suspicious and insolent; W. Lee peevish and ignorant; Mr. Izard costive and dogmatical - all of them insidious and Bancroft vibrating between hope and fear, interest and attachment."

VI

Bancroft, in addition to his spying, had another occupation which at times seemed to absorb him even more. As is the case with most intriguers, his passion for speculation was intense. George III, strict moralist on matters of this sort, reprehended this phase of his hireling, for His Majesty abhorred stock gambling, and unimpeachable evidence that Bancroft was fond of such flings even led him to distrust the accuracy of his reports. "The man is a double-spy", the king would exclaim, meaning that, while betraying American secrets to the British, he was also revealing British plans to the Americans. Bancroft's frequent trips to England might possibly have awakened Franklin's suspicions, but the

explanation

explanation was plausible enough: the man always returned with a budget of information, - about the movement of British troops and the British navy, the plans of the ministry and the like, - news which seemed important, but which was really false or inconsequential. Bancroft even drew a salary from Congress for services of this kind, and once wrote a protesting letter when his compensation was slow in arriving. The British ministry, to lend color to the Commissioners' confidence that Bancroft was their agent, even had him arrested as an American spy.

Bancroft made these visits to London for two purposes: to confer with his employers in Downing Street, and to attend to his personal speculations in the funds, undertakings in which Wentworth was frequently a partner. In his letter to Lord Carmarthen, already quoted, Bancroft refers to his expedition in bringing news of the signing of the French treaty, adding, almost ruefully, "a piece of information for which many individuals here would, for purposes of speculation, have given me more than all that I have received from Government". In writing this the man was reminiscent. For Bancroft made tidy sums not only on this news but on many other items that necessarily came his way as confidential man at Passy.

In these speculations Bancroft's associates seem to have been the Whartons and Sir Thomas Walpole. Bancroft furnished the information, while the Whartons and Walpole supplied the cash.

"If", Joseph Wharton wrote Bancroft on November 8, 1777, "you could communicate any important news to me speedily on its arrival it might prove beneficial to me." He transmits Bancroft his "direction" - that is, the place where he could be addressed, for in those days, when letters were constantly opened by the government, "covers" for the reception of correspondence were the rule.

In a letter of November 10, 1777, addressed to his "good friend", Joseph Wharton became specific: "Your opinion may be a stimulus to much further speculation. Why may not subsequent contacts be mutual between him, you and me? [The letter does not quite indicate who him was - probably Walpole.] I will engage thus far with you, on your communicating to me the best intelligence respecting war, or any other essential matter from a relation to America, upon which you would have the insurance made, that my friend and I will advance the premium, and admit you to an equal share with us, holding you engaged for one third out of the premium".

Paul Wentworth was not ignorant of these transactions. On December 11, 1777, he writes to William Eden: "He [Bancroft], I think, is gone to London, by Dieppe and Brighthelmstone, and may be found at Mr. W-p-les Town or Country or Mr. S. W-t-n's' - hardly impenetrable disguises for Walpole and Wharton. This peregrination

concerned

concerned the greatest of Bancroft's speculative coups. The news of Burgoyne's surrender at Saratoga did not reach Paris until December 4, 1777, but rumors had reached Passy in November that the invasion from Canada was sure to prove a great disaster to British arms. So Bancroft wrote to Walpole, on November 30, telling him of Burgoyne's retreat, and there are evidences that the crowd "cleaned up" well on this advance information. One of the most conclusive is the change in Bancroft's behavior. Paul Wentworth's reference to his aid, in an undated letter (about the end of 1777), portrays a new aggressive, independent spirit:

"Bancroft is not as he should be. He offered to repay all he has received. The cursed journey to London has spoiled all. Petrie went with them and Van Zandt is left behind in confidence. He is flush with money. Has large shares in the cargoes going out and, I suppose, has been bribed by Walpole."

VII

Others besides the Lees knew that something was wrong at American headquarters. Franklin's equanimity was frequently disturbed, especially when Vergennes protested that his embassy was sheltering a traitor. Vergennes insisted that William Carmichael was the man; as a consequence of this, Carmichael was shipped home, without bringing to an end the flow of information to England. Bancroft - ready for this emergency, as for all - quickly solved the problem: the traitor, he insisted, was Beaumarchais! But the Lees, though by no means inclined to give a clean bill of health to Carmichael, and at this time entertaining no friendly opinion of Figaro, - who in their judgment was more interested in personal money-getting than in promoting American independence, - unerringly pointed an accusing finger at Edward Bancroft.

Arthur's letters contain many references, in his usual slashing fashion, to the Bancroft-Wharton alliance. "Two notorious speculators", he writes to Dr. Gordon, on September 22, 1779, "as desperate in their fortunes as in their principles, I mean Mr. Wharton and Dr. Bancroft, are the only confidants and advisers at Passy. I leave to you to judge whether they who have jobbed away the secrets of the state would make much hesitation in jobbing the state itself."

Franklin, however, could not be persuaded to abandon Bancroft. All the denunciation of the Lees only seemed to link him more closely to the man. That he sincerely trusted him is unquestioned; that all the secrets of the American Embassy at Passy were transmitted to the British Government is not attributed to any worse qualities on Franklin's part than carelessness, devotion to an old friend, and lack of perspicacity.

Benjamin Franklin went to his grave without losing faith in the associate who so successfully sold out his

country.

country. Bancroft remained his companion all through the war, and after, for Franklin even took him in a confidential service to the peace conference that ended the Revolution, Bancroft, of course, being still on the British pay roll. In 1783 the adroit creature came to Philadelphia, on a spy mission for the Foreign Office, bearing warm letters of introduction from Franklin: "I have long known him", he writes, "and esteem him highly." In 1785, after Bancroft had returned to England and Franklin had returned to America, the hospitable philosopher wrote him in most friendly terms: "My best wishes and those of my family attend you. We shall be happy to see you here when it suits you to visit us; being with sincere and great esteem, my dear friend, yours most affectionately, B. Franklin."

And so ends what was perhaps the most calamitous instance of misplaced confidence in American history.
