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The Myth of the Essex Junto

David H. Fischer*

MANY years ago, when the Republic was young and republicanism itself was still experimental, American statesmen were rarely able to accept the idea of a loyal opposition. There was an unhappy tendency to conceive of critics as conspirators, to confuse dissent with disaffection. The Federalists persuaded themselves, in 1798, that their Jeffersonian antagonists were a subversive "sect" of Jacobins, plotters against the Constitution and the common good. After the "Revolution of 1800" the Jeffersonians in turn attributed New England's stubborn hostility to a tiny clique of malcontents called the Essex Junto, a handful of wealthy "mercantile gentlemen," firmly in control of their party and their section, who sought to destroy the Union when they were no longer able to dominate it.[1]

Today, the Federalist theory of a Jacobin plot is only significant to students of the Federalists. As an interpretation of the Jeffersonian movement it is dead and disregarded, as indeed it ought to be. But Jefferson's belief that the Essex Junto was the mainspring of latter-day Federalism has become a historiographical cliché. Only a few scholars have disagreed. James Duncan Phillips, the Essex County antiquarian, flatly declared that "there wasn't any such organization." Henry Cabot Lodge, lineal descendant and laudatory biographer of the Federalist "mysteriarch" George Cabot, disparaged its political importance. But the judgments of these historians have been discounted in proportion to their Federalist sym-

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[1] Jefferson to Levi Lincoln, July 11, 1801, to Thomas Mann Randolph, Jan. 31, Feb. 7, 1809, to William Short, Jan. 8, 1825, all in A. A. Lipscomb and A. E. Bergh, eds., *The Writings of Thomas Jefferson* (Washington, 1903), XVIII, 262-264; X, 263-266; XII, 248; XVI, 92-97; James Sullivan to Henry Dearborn, Apr. 20, 1808, Miscellaneous Bound Collection, Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston; Gallatin to Jefferson, Mar. 10, 1812, in Henry Adams, ed., *The Writings of Albert Gallatin* (Philadelphia, 1879), I, 517. See also Samuel Eliot Morison, "The Henry-Crillon Affair of 1812," in Mass. Hist. Soc., *Proceedings,* LXIX (Boston, 1956), 207-231.

pathies. Nearly every other student of early American politics has endorsed the classic interpretation.[2]

This standard view of the Essex Junto rests heavily upon the work of a great New England historian, Henry Adams. Four generations of Adamses publicly discussed the Junto, always in the same spirit. Unwilling to forgive Federalist opposition to John Adams in the 1790's and to John Quincy Adams in 1808, they bitterly blamed both upon the Essexmen. Indeed the idea of the Essex Junto was first popularized by John Adams himself, who believed that it had been intriguing against him in the presidential election of 1796. Henry Adams tells us that even as a child he was taught "to love the pleasure of hating"—and in the Adams house nobody was more hateful than an Essexman. When he began to write history, he was unable to emancipate himself from the accumulated antipathy of his father, grandfather, and great-grandfather, not to mention great-grandmother Abigail, perhaps the best hater of them all.[3]

Henry Adams's first major historical project was his *Documents relating to New-England Federalism*. In its Preface, he insisted that his purpose was not to quicken an ancient controversy, but merely to make useful materials more generally accessible. His disclaimer is not convincing. The documents, as selected and arranged by him, relate less to New England Federalism than to the public quarrels between certain Federal-

[2] James D. Phillips, "Hamilton Hall, the Hall of the Federalists," *Essex Institute Historical Collections*, LXXXIII (1947), 300; Henry Cabot Lodge, *Life and Letters of George Cabot* (Boston, 1877), 17-22. Recent examples of the standard interpretation may be found in the following: Samuel F. Bemis, *John Quincy Adams and the Foundations of American Foreign Policy* (New York, 1949); Irving Brant, *James Madison, Secretary of State, 1800-1809* (Indianapolis, 1953); Manning J. Dauer, *The Adams Federalists* (Baltimore, 1953); Norman Jacobson, "Class and Ideology in the American Revolution," in Reinhard Bendix and Seymour M. Lipset, eds., *Class, Status and Power* (Glencoe, 1953), 547-554; Stephen G. Kurtz, *The Presidency of John Adams* (Philadelphia, 1957); Benjamin W. Labaree, *Patriots and Partisans: The Merchants of Newburyport, 1764-1815* (Cambridge, Mass., 1962); and Lynn W. Turner, *William Plumer of New Hampshire, 1759-1850* (Chapel Hill, 1962).

[3] Henry Adams, *The Education of Henry Adams* (New York, 1931), 7, 9, 24. For a continuity of interpretation, see Adams to Jefferson, May 3, 1812, in Lester J. Cappon, ed., *The Adams-Jefferson Letters . . .* (Chapel Hill, 1959), II, 302-303; J. Q. Adams, "To the Citizens of the United States," in Henry Adams, *Documents relating to New-England Federalism, 1800-1815* (Boston, 1877), 149-152, 184-185, 224; C. F. Adams, ed., *The Works of John Adams . . .* (Boston, 1850-56), I, 510, 534, 609.

ists and the Adamses. Most of the manuscripts had been published by Henry Cabot Lodge a few months earlier, except those which sustained the Adamses. It is difficult to avoid the conclusion that Henry Adams's purpose was directly and centrally controversial—to answer Lodge, and to impeach the Essex Junto. Despite the fact that *Documents relating to New-England Federalism* is ex parte and even inaccurate, it has shaped and colored all subsequent investigations.[4]

Henry Adams's judgment of the Junto, implicit in his collection of documents, is made explicit in his *History of the United States*. The Essexmen are introduced in volume one as "conservatives of the English type." By volume four they have become a "British faction in secret league with George Canning." Despite their small number, they are assigned great power. "According to Ames," Adams wrote, "not more than five hundred men fully shared their opinions; but Massachusetts society was so organized as to make their influence great, and experience foretold that as the liberal Federalists should one by one wander to the Democratic camp where they belonged, the conservatism of those who remained would become more bitter and more absolute as the Essex Junto represented a larger and larger proportion of their numbers."[5]

The most important Federalist in the work is Timothy Pickering. The most important purposes of the Essexmen, as Adams conceived them, were antidemocracy and disunion, moderated only by a certain "inert perversity." Altogether, Henry Adams's interpretation of the Essex Junto is best summarized by the heads of chapters in which he discussed them—Conspiracy, The Rise of a British Party, General Factiousness, Subsidence of Faction, Discord, Massachusetts Decides, The Hartford Convention, and The Decline of Massachusetts.[6]

As literature, Adams's *History* deserves its splendid reputation. Its style gains power from simplicity, and elegance from restraint. Within a plot as intricate as a Spanish tragedy its author brilliantly develops his double theme, the progress of an epochal experiment in self-government

[4] H. Adams, *Documents,* v. See Adams's review of *George Cabot* in the *Nation,* XXV (1877), 12-13; and Adams to Lodge, May 15, 1876, Dec. 2, 1877, in W. C. Ford, ed., *Letters of Henry Adams (1858-1891)* (Boston, 1930), 284, 302-303.

[5] Henry Adams, *History of the United States* . . . (New York, 1889-91), I, 87, 89; IV, 243. See Edwin C. Rozwenc, "Henry Adams and the Federalists," *Teachers of History: Essays in Honor of Lawrence Henry Packard* (Ithaca, 1954), 122-146.

[6] Adams, *History,* VIII, 1; II, chap. 8; IV, chaps. 10, 18; V, chap.1; VI, chap. 18; VIII, chaps. 1, 11; IX, chap. 4.

and the emergence of an American character. The dark figures of the Essex Junto, antidemocratic and antinational, provide a perfect and deeply satisfying antithesis. It *is* magnificent—but is it history?

Another New England scholar, Samuel Eliot Morison, presents a similar view of the Essex Junto in *The Life and Letters of Harrison Gray Otis*. Morison is a descendant of Otis, four generations removed; his biography, despite its many merits, is essentially a vindication of Otis, an apology for the principal acts of his career. Seven chapters are devoted to the Hartford Convention, with which Otis was closely identified. Enlarging upon his ancestor's defense, Morison contends that the Convention served as a safety valve—even the metaphor originated with Otis—which prevented a serious explosion of secessionism in New England. He describes its report as "on the whole, the most temperate and statesmanlike document that ever issued from a sectional movement in the United States."[7]

In all of this, the Essex Junto appears as "the ultra-conservative and ultra-sectional" wing of the party, which "guided the destinies of New England Federalism from its birth to its dissolution." Morison suggests that the measure of Otis's statesmanship was his moderation, his skill in keeping New England off the reef of Essex Junto extremism. To demonstrate more clearly his ancestor's proficiency in political navigation, Morison attempts to show that the reef was treacherous, and the current strong. The more powerful and reactionary the Junto appears, the more moderate and statesmanlike seems Otis. Henry Adams tempered his interpretation of the Essexmen by touching upon their "inert perversity." But in the works of Samuel Eliot Morison even this qualification is dropped, and the Junto appears as an active and powerful body. "All Massachusetts scurried to furl topsails when the Essex Junto roared the command," he wrote.[8]

Other interpretations of the Essex Junto are even more extreme than those of Adams and Morison. The only monographic study of the subject ties many threads into the "Essex knot," including Federalist opposition against Adams in 1796 and 1800, the Burr intrigue of 1801, the

[7] S. E. Morison, *The Life and Letters of Harrison Gray Otis* . . . (Boston, 1913), II, 111, 159.

[8] Quotations are from *ibid.*, I, 48; *Maritime History of Massachusetts, 1783-1860* (Boston, 1921), 167. See also, Morison's "The First National Nominating Convention, 1808," *American Historical Review*, XVII (1911-12), 749*n*.

northern confederacy scheme in 1804, and the Hartford Convention ten years later. Its author, Charles R. Brown, neglected to examine unpublished manuscripts, failed to read the most important Federalist newspapers, ignored the pamphlet literature, and seemed unable even to keep abreast of secondary literature. Nonetheless, this account of the "inner ring" of New England Federalism has gradually worked its way into bibliographies and standard texts. The most recent survey of the Jeffersonian era describes the Essex Junto as "a machine similar to Burr's in New York," and recommends Brown's monograph as "outdated but still useful."[9]

No historian has carefully investigated the Essex Junto since the researches of Morison fifty years ago. But every historian of politics in the new republic has been obliged to discuss it. The Essex Junto, myth or reality, is central to any consideration of nationalism and sectionalism in the most critical years of the nation's existence. It is highly pertinent to an examination of political and social structure in the Revolutionary era. The relationship of myth to reality is relevant to an evaluation of the prejudices and principles of the Adamses, Jefferson, Madison, and Gallatin, all of whom sincerely believed in its existence. For all of these reasons, and more, the Essex Junto deserves our close attention.

I

There is no dispute about the identity of the Essexmen. A dozen names are involved, all of them well known to students of early American politics. In alphabetical order, the list includes Fisher Ames, George Cabot, Francis Dana, Nathan Dane, Benjamin Goodhue, Stephen Higginson, Jonathan Jackson, John Lowell, Theophilus Parsons, Timothy Pickering, Israel Thorndike, and Nathaniel Tracy.[10] The origins and

[9] Charles R. Brown, *The Northern Confederacy According to the Plans of the "Essex Junto," 1796-1814* (Princeton, 1915), passim; Charles M. Wiltse, *The New Nation, 1800-1845* (New York, 1961), 104-217. See Morison's review of Brown's book, *Amer. Hist. Rev.*, XXI (1915-16), 634.

[10] Other men who have been identified with the Essex Junto—Tristram Dalton, Christopher Gore, Benjamin Greenleaf, Stephen Hooper, Rufus King, John Lowell, Jr., Harrison Gray Otis, Theodore Sedgwick, and Caleb Strong—are excluded here for the following reasons: Dalton was vigorously opposed by the "wise men of Essex" in the election of United States Senator from eastern Massachusetts in 1788. Although Gore was on good terms with Ames, Cabot, and Higginson, he spoke of the group as if it were external to him. (Gore to King, Nov. 26, Dec. 14, 21, 1788,

political attitudes of these men, the degree of their influence in state and national politics, the directions in which that influence was exerted, and their relationship to the disunionist movement in New England, are objects of the following investigation.

All of these twelve men possessed vital personalities and talents in high degree. Contemporaries who knew them well were aware of their essential individuality. There could be but one Fisher Ames, "the recognized literary champion of Boston," whose brilliant flow of conversation made him the center of any group which he happened to join. There was only one George Cabot, who, according to an acquaintance, stood out among other Federalists as Mount Blanc towered over other mountains. Timothy Pickering, his angular personality all edges and corners, was clearly *sui generis*—at times, even his friends were grateful that there was only one of him![11]

But despite a superficial heterogeneity, the backgrounds and beliefs of the Essex leaders were basically similar. For the purposes of this paper a group portrait will suffice. They were born in the decade between 1743 and 1752, except Fisher Ames (1758) and Israel Thorndike (1755). All were natives of Essex County, Massachusetts, except Ames, Dana, and Jackson, who hailed from towns near Boston. Their families were respectable, relatively prosperous, and deeply rooted in New England. From the earliest beginnings of the Bay Colony their forebears had been prominent ministers and magistrates, merchants and lawyers—the "visible elect," in more senses than one. Before the Revolution, the Tracys had

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King Papers, New-York Historical Society, New York, partly printed in C. R. King, *The Life and Correspondence of Rufus King* . . . [New York, 1894-1900], I, 346-349.) King parted ways with his preceptor, Parsons, in 1788, and never regained his confidence. (Gore to King, Oct. 4, Nov. 23, 1788, *ibid.*, 345; Richard E. Welch, Jr., "Rufus King of Newburyport: The Formative Years (1767-1788)," *Essex Inst. Hist. Colls.*, XCVI [1960], 241-276, esp. 273.) There is no evidence that Greenleaf or Hooper was intimate with the Essex clique or closely associated with it after 1780. The younger Federalists, Lowell and Otis, were, as we shall see, Federalists of an altogether different stripe. Sedgwick and Strong, from the western counties, were rivals of the Essexmen—not always friendly ones. (Welch, "The Parsons-Sedgwick Feud and the Reform of the Massachusetts Judiciary," *ibid.*, XCII [1956], 171-187.) For Strong, see below.

[11] Adams, *History*, I, 82; James A. Hamilton, *Reminiscences* . . . (New York, 1869), 12-13; Harrison Gray Otis, *Biographical Sketch of the Late Judge Lowell* (Boston, 1849), 4; Samuel G. Goodrich, *Recollections of a Lifetime* . . . (New York, 1856), II, 36; R. H. Dana, Jr., "Francis Dana," *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography*, I (1877), 86-95.

been Newburyport's leading mercantile family. In Salem and Beverly, the Cabots, though possessed of only "a moderate share of property," were equally prominent. The Parsons, beyond dispute, were the first family of Byfield. But notwithstanding their local importance before the Revolution, these people were overshadowed in the affairs of the colony at large by the great families of Boston.[12]

All of the Essexmen attended Harvard except Higginson and Thorndike. Six became sedentary merchants: Cabot, Goodhue, Higginson, Jackson, Thorndike, and Tracy. Five others made a career of law, handling many commercial and admiralty cases in the courts of eastern Massachusetts. The twelfth, Timothy Pickering, who spent most of his life in public service, augmented his income by farming on a modest scale. Even in his last years, Pickering performed his own labor—at the age of seventy-five he won a plowing match.[13]

Marriage bonds reinforced this union of social and economic interests. John Lowell married one of Stephen Higginson's sisters, George Cabot the other. Cabots were wed to Lowells, Lowells to Jacksons, Jacksons to Tracys. Besides such direct relationships, there were "uncles and cousins, reckoned by dozens." In the absence of political parties, this extended cousinage, this "union of political influence" as Theophilus Parsons called it, constituted an important locus of power in the narrow circle of Essex County affairs. The label "Essex Junto" would have been accurate and descriptive had it been applied before 1780.[14]

Whether or not the American Revolution was a conscious social movement, it greatly changed the social circumstances of these men. Cabot,

[12] Exceptions are the Cabot family, who did not appear in New England until 1700, and the Thorndikes, who were a family of impoverished seamen and farmers during the 18th century. Labaree, *Patriots and Partisans,* 1-41; Lloyd V. Briggs, *History and Genealogy of the Cabot Family* . . . (Boston, 1927), I, 157, 174; Robert A. East, *Business Enterprise in the American Revolutionary Era* (New York, 1938), 228; Theophilus Parsons, Jr., *Memoir of Theophilus Parsons* . . . (Boston, 1859), 14; John D. Forbes, *Israel Thorndike* . . . (New York, 1953), 15-17.

[13] Labaree, *Patriots and Partisans,* 11; Parsons, *Memoir,* 408-410; Charles W. Upham, *The Life of Timothy Pickering,* IV (Boston, 1873), 334.

[14] Parsons to Pickering [Dec. 1, 1797?], in Parsons, *Memoir,* 123. For genealogy see Kenneth W. Porter, *The Jacksons and the Lees: Two Generations of Massachusetts Merchants, 1765-1844* (Cambridge, Mass., 1937), I, 6, 18, and insert; and Briggs, *Cabot Family,* I, passim. I have not found the term "Essex Junto" in use before the 1790's, but there is indirect evidence of its usage by Hancock in the 1780's (Parsons, *Memoir,* 48) and a suggestion that it may have been known in pre-Revolutionary politics (Lodge, *Cabot,* 20).

Goodhue, and Higginson reaped their fortunes with sharp-prowed privateers. Tracy and Jackson had considerably less success in this risk-ridden business, but they appear to have enlarged the scope of their commercial activities.[15] Lawyers profited from the same opportunities that brought prosperity to the merchants. Cases in commercial law meant large retainers, and in eastern Massachusetts mercantile investment was not limited to merchants alone. The "India Ventures" from which Fisher Ames realized a modest windfall are a case in point.[16]

It was during the Revolution or shortly thereafter that the group opened ranks to admit a new man, Israel Thorndike. Son of a farmer-mariner, Thorndike was a merchant with the Midas touch, an entrepreneur of daring, skill, and great good luck. Envious neighbors said that if he put a pebble on a shingle and sent it out to sea, it would come back in the shape of a dollar. In his battered, barren Beverly counting house (the furnishings were worth seventy-five dollars), he put together one of the largest fortunes of his day.[17]

Political opportunities provided by the Revolution were fully as important as the economic. This little clique of young men dominated the Revolutionary cause in their home county during the 1770's, sat in the General Court, and were prominent in state conventions. One of their number, Timothy Pickering, went off to fight with the Continental Army. While he was away he did not correspond regularly with the group and apparently lost touch with them.[18] But the others worked closely with one another, and cemented new friendships with Fisher Ames and Francis Dana.

[15] The economic significance of privateering is an open question. Perhaps orthodox trading ventures were more significant. See Briggs, *Cabot Family,* I, 66-107; Octavius T. Howe, "Beverly Privateers in the American Revolution," in Colonial Society of Massachusetts, *Publications,* XXIV (Boston, 1923), 321, 324, 421; Gardner W. Allen, *Massachusetts Privateers of the Revolution* ([Boston], 1927), passim; Morison, *Maritime History,* 29-30; East, *Business Enterprise,* 159; Porter, *Jacksons and Lees,* I, 20-23; Thomas W. Higginson, *Life and Times of Stephen Higginson* . . . (Boston, 1907), 43.

[16] Morison, *Maritime History,* 89, and "The India Ventures of Fisher Ames, 1794-1804," in American Antiquarian Society, *Proceedings,* New Ser., XXXVII (Worcester, 1928), 14-23; Ames to Pickering, Nov. 27, 1805, Pickering Papers, Mass. Hist. Soc.

[17] Forbes, *Thorndike,* 22; Josiah Quincy, *Figures of the Past* . . . (Boston, 1888), 139. Ames was another latecomer. Otis, *Lowell,* 4.

[18] Except for scattered and inconsequential items the Pickering Papers contain no correspondence between these men and Pickering until the 1790's.

The sudden departure of Tory merchants from Boston during the Revolution left a social vacuum in Massachusetts. Members of the Essex clique were among the "new fangled gentlemen" (a Loyalist's description) who filled it by moving to the metropolis. One by one, they transferred their interests and their residence to the Boston area—Lowell and Higginson in 1777-78, Jackson in 1784, Cabot in 1794, Parsons in 1800, and Thorndike in 1810. Only Nathaniel Tracy, Nathan Dane, and Benjamin Goodhue remained in their native county. This geographic and social migration ended the existence of the Essex Junto in the most literal sense, that is, as a clique which resided in Essex County and dominated its political affairs.[19]

Although the Essexmen were scattered geographically after 1780, they continued to be united by their interests, their family relationships and, most of all, by the essential homogeneity of their thought. On most important social questions they found themselves in harmony with one another: Ames described Cabot as "the keeper of my conscience and judgment"; Cabot wrote to Parsons, "I have always had the satisfaction to find your opinions and mine essentially agree."[20] If the Essex Junto was nothing else after 1780, it was at least a mutual admiration society.

No scholar has yet compiled a satisfactory inventory of their opinions. Too often have they been caricatured as crass commercial nabobs, selfish reactionaries whose only purpose was to preserve their wealth and privileges. A different thesis will be argued here—that the men of the Essex Junto were ideological conservatives. We have been cautioned against applying these terms in the context of early American history but both are technically correct. The Essexmen were conservative in the double sense that they resisted change and sought to restrict the power of the people; their conservatism was ideological, for they defended not merely a fixed position but fixed principles.[21]

[19] J. F. Jameson, ed., "Letters of Stephen Higginson, 1783-1804," *Annual Report of the American Historical Association for the Year 1896,* I (Washington, 1897), 704; Porter, *Jacksons and Lees,* I, 24; Briggs, *Cabot Family,* I, 128; Parsons, *Memoir,* 35; Forbes, *Thorndike,* 43-44; East, *Business Enterprise,* 213-228; Oscar and Mary Handlin, *Commonwealth, A Study of the Role of Government in the American Economy: Massachusetts, 1774-1861* (New York, 1947), 9-10. The Handlins exaggerate the mobility of these men. Cf. Jacobson, "Class and Ideology in the American Revolution," 547-554.

[20] Ames to Pickering, Mar. 24, 1806, *Works of Fisher Ames . . .* (Boston, 1854), I, 373; Cabot to Parsons, Aug. 12, 1794, in Parsons, *Memoir,* 472.

[21] Oscar and Mary Handlin, "Radicals and Conservatives in Massachusetts after

The Essex gentlemen were the right wing of the Revolutionary movement. It is difficult to think of active politicians anywhere in North America who were less enthusiastic about popular participation in public affairs. But this is not to argue that they were antidemocratic, root and branch. In a world of arbitrary power and inherited privilege the Essexmen were committed, mind and heart—and pocketbook—to republicanism.[22] A republic, as John Adams said, can be anything or nothing. But to the men from Essex County it was something both familiar and precise. It meant the traditional polity of Massachusetts Bay which had horrified Englishmen—and Virginians—since the time of Oliver Cromwell. In the seventeenth century, a distinguished New England divine had neatly summarized it as "*a speaking* Aristocracy *in the face of a silent* Democracy."[23] All of the people participated in the choice of "rulers," but only the "better sort" of people were chosen. The noun "ruler" was often used by Puritans and Federalists. It was used precisely, for they expected statesmen to govern according to the whisperings of conscience rather than the wishes of constituents.[24]

The New England way was government by consent, but the people consented to men rather than to measures. It was, in John Cotton's terms, a popular state but not a democracy: "Though it be *status popularis,* where a people choose their owne governors; yet the government is not a democracy, if it be administered, not by the people, but by the governors, whether one (for then it is a monarchy, though elective) or by many, for then (as you know) it is aristocracy." By this view, society rested upon a covenant, "a social compact, reciting the reciprocal duties of rulers and ruled," as Jonathan Jackson described it.

It has recently been argued that all Americans are essentially Lockean in their political thought. But there are many ways to read Locke. The "social compact that puts an end to the state of nature" could reasonably

Independence," *New England Quarterly,* XVII (1944), 343-355. Both terms were contemporaneous with the Essexmen. Adams to Jefferson, July 3, 1813, Dec. 16, 1816, in Cappon, ed., *Adams-Jefferson Letters,* II, 355, 500-503; Jacob Wagner to Pickering, May 13, 1808, Pickering Papers.

[22] See [Theophilus Parsons], *Result of the Convention of Delegates Holden at Ipswich in the County of Essex* . . . (Newburyport, 1778), 12; and Ames, "Camillus No. II," *Works of Ames,* II, 104. But see also Lodge, *Cabot,* 68.

[23] Cotton Mather, *Magnalia Christi Americana* . . . (Hartford, 1820), I, 395.

[24] See Perry Miller, *The New England Mind, The Seventeenth Century* (Cambridge, Mass., 1954), 398-462, and *Orthodoxy in Massachusetts, 1630-1650* (Cambridge, Mass., 1933), 186, et passim.

become Jackson's "social compact, reciting the reciprocal duties of rulers and ruled." Here was an interpretation of the *Second Treatise on Government* that contrasted sharply with Jefferson's.[25]

Unlike Jefferson, the Essexmen believed that all men were created unequal, that some were fit to lead, others to "submit to that subordination necessary in the freest States." Theophilus Parsons explained the idea in terms that any citizen of Essex County could understand. "In the political ship," he wrote, "there must be common seamen as well as pilots; and a mutiny of the crew may as effectually destroy her as a division among the officers."[26]

The Essexmen hoped that their society might function in the same way that George Cabot managed his country estate. "The labor of my farm," he declared, "is performed altogether by a tenant, to whom I give specific benefits, that he may have no control over the management; and the benefits are liberal, that he may be happy, and tied to me by his interest." Equality was nothing better than a bad joke. "It was observed here," Cabot wrote to a New York City Federalist after a riot in which Alexander Hamilton reportedly was felled by a flying cobblestone, "that your Jacobins were prudent to endeavor to knock out Hamilton's brains, to reduce him to an equality with themselves."[27]

From this consciousness of inequality, the Essexmen derived their conception of society as an organism. "When men form themselves into society, and erect a body politic or State, they are to be considered as one moral whole," Theophilus Parsons wrote. The cement of society was interdependency, the natural diversity of talents, interests, and circumstances among men. Society was "one large family," Jonathan Jackson believed—and father always knew best. It was "a perfect whole, in which the general harmony may be preserved, each one learning his proper place and keeping to it." Without possessing any extended notion of egalitarianism, the Essex gentlemen were collectivists. They spoke in

[25] B. Katherine Brown, "A Note on the Puritan Concept of Aristocracy," *Mississippi Valley Historical Review,* XLI (1954-55), 106. [Jonathan Jackson], *Thoughts upon the Political Situation of the United States* . . . (Worcester, 1788), 158; Louis Hartz, *The Liberal Tradition in America* . . . (New York, 1955).

[26] *Essex Result,* 11; Parsons to Pickering [Dec. 1, 1797?], in Parsons, *Memoir,* 123; Ames, "Equality," *Works of Ames,* II, 221; [Stephen Higginson], *The Writings of Laco* (Boston, 1789), 13.

[27] Cabot to Wolcott, Aug. 3, 1801, to King, July 27, 1795, in Lodge, *Cabot,* 323, 82-83. See also Ames, "Equality," 207-228, esp. 212.

mystical terms of the "general will"—*not* the will of the majority but the "interest of the whole."[28]

Nothing is better calculated to blur our image of the Essex Federalists than two of their favorite words, contract and property. In the nineteenth century, both were forged into political weapons by antisocial individualists who believed that the survival of the strong meant the destruction of the weak, and cherished the twin ideals of inactive government and inevitable progress. "Contract" and "property" had a different connotation to the Essexmen. If society itself could be interpreted as one great contract, it might also be construed as a multiplicity of little ones. Contracts were the embodiment of interdependency, a formalization of the essential unifying element. Nathan Dane, in his great work on American law, argued that contracts and society were born together. "The obligation of contracts must have been felt in Adam's family," he theorized. "Men by nature being inclined to associate, they, no doubt, associated as soon as two or more of them existed . . . and as soon as they felt this want or inclination, agreements and contracts became necessary."[29]

Contracts were sacred only in the degree to which they served social purposes. The skeptic is invited to examine judicial decisions of Francis Dana and Theophilus Parsons upon the law of contracts. Three threads run through their opinions. First (no surprise here), they insisted that a good contract must be fairly made. Second, contracts "injurious to the public" were invalid. Thus, Francis Dana argued that a "wager" insurance policy was not a good contract, because such agreements were "injurious to the morals of the citizens, tend to encourage an extravagant and peculiarly hazardous species of gaming, and to expose their property, which ought to be reserved for the benefit of real commerce." Third, according to a dictum of Parsons, it was the duty of the courts to construe the provisions of a contract in such a way that "the existing rights of the public, or of individuals [other than the contracting parties], be not infringed." These three assertions were not empty shibboleths, as case after case revealed and many private interests learned to their sorrow.[30] Even John Quincy Adams, who did not admire Parsons's

[28] *Essex Result,* 13; Jackson, *Political Situation,* 49, 53, 58, 171; Cabot to Parsons, Aug. 12, 1794, in Lodge, *Cabot,* 79.

[29] Nathan Dane, *A General Abridgement and Digest of American Law* (Boston, 1823-29), I, 87.

[30] Bliss *et al. v.* Thompson, in Ephraim Williams, Dudley Atkins Tyng, and

political principles, was forced to acknowledge that "Mr. Parsons, in causes between man and man, was an upright and able judge."[31]

As it was with contracts, so also, with private property. "The essence, and almost the quintessence, of a good government is, to protect property and its rights," Fisher Ames declared. But property was not inviolable. Even Theophilus Parsons, in the property conscious mood that produced the Essex Result, contended that property was an *"alienable"* right which man surrendered when he entered society. Perhaps the reader would permit Alexander Hamilton, with whom the Essex gentlemen co-operated closely in economic matters, to speak for them on this point. All property rights which were "contrary to the social order and to the permanent welfare of society," Hamilton wrote, ought to be abolished: "Whenever, indeed, a right of property is infringed for the general good, if the nature of the case admits of compensation, it ought to be made; but if compensation be impracticable, that impracticability ought not to be an obstacle to a clearly essential reform." The Essex gentlemen ought not to be confused with that "False Federalist" from Virginia, John Marshall.[32]

Whenever the Essexmen were forced to choose between the rights of property and the public interest, they chose the latter. But, of course, the choice rarely presented itself in these terms. The security of property was the cement of society; a good contract was one which served social purposes. The point is simply this: even in America there have been honest and sustained idealisms which did not appear in the familiar forms of

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others, *Reports of Cases . . . In the Supreme Judicial Court of . . . Massachusetts* (Boston, 1883), IV (1808), 487-493, esp. 491; hereafter cited as *Mass. Repts.* See also First Mass. Turnpike Corp. *v.* Field *et al., ibid.,* III (1807), 201-208; Amory *v.* Gilman, *ibid.,* II (1806), 1-13, esp. 2-3; for Dana on usury, Hamilton *v.* Boiden, *ibid.,* I (1804), 50-53; Wales *v.* Stetson, *ibid.,* II (1806), 143-146, esp. 146. This collectivist interpretation of the law of contract was, of course, not original with the Essexmen. As Isaac Parker pointed out in Amory *v.* Gilman, it was rooted in "the ancient law of England and the usage in this country," *ibid.,* II (1806), 4. See Hood *v.* Proprietors of Dighton Bridge, *ibid.,* III (1807), 263-268; Coolidge *v.* Williams, *ibid.,* IV (1808), 140-146; but also see Worcester Turnpike Corp. *v.* Willard, *ibid.,* V (1809), 80-85. A wager insurance policy was one in which "the party assured has no interest in the thing assured, and could sustain no possible loss by the event insured against."

[31] J. Q. Adams, "Reply to the Appeal of the Massachusetts Federalists," in H. Adams, ed., *Documents,* 224.

[32] Ames, "Phocion," *Works of Ames,* II, 166; Jackson, *Political Situation,* 35; *Essex Result,* 15, 21-22; John C. Miller, *Alexander Hamilton . . .* (New York, 1959), 122; Ames to Gore, Dec. 18, 1798, *Works of Ames,* I, 246. See John Marshall to Greenhow, Oct. 17, 1809, Miscellaneous Manuscripts, Mass. Hist. Soc.

liberty, equality, and majoritarianism. The fact that the social ideals of the Essexmen cannot be comprehended in these terms does not necessarily mean that these men were not, in their own way, idealists.[33]

There was obviously much self-interest in the social ideals of the Essexmen, but little self-indulgence. If they believed that the rich, the wise, and the good enjoyed special privileges, they were also aware of their special responsibilities. Weakness and vice were to be expected in ordinary people, but not among their "natural leaders." Social stability was dependent on the virtuous example of the wise and good. "The bulk of the people know but little of the government under which they live," wrote Stephen Higginson, "their opinions of government are formed, principally at least, from the character and conduct of the magistrates and other executive officers, who live near them." In the same spirit, Jonathan Jackson interrupted his *Thoughts upon the Political Situation of the United States* to ask, "Are these truths obvious to the multitude?—Have they not depended—must they not always depend upon the few, more discerning and experienced than themselves, to point out wherein consists political happiness, and instruct them how it may be secured?"[34]

The burden of respectability rested heavily upon the Essexmen. Cabot held many responsible positions, yet he confessed: "You know my aversion to all sorts of responsibility, founded on an anxiety lest I should not properly acquit myself."[35]

To dismiss these men as a selfish little minority is to overlook the

[33] The Essexmen had no fear of an enlarged economic role for government, as long as it was administered by "the natural leaders of society." They favored bounties, tariffs, rebates, drawbacks, licenses, subsidies, and also prohibitions, inspection, and all manner of restrictions. Barnes *v.* First Parish of Falmouth, *Mass. Repts.,* VI (1810), 401-418, esp. 408; Handlins, *Commonwealth,* 67; Porter, *Jacksons and Lees,* I, 110-112; Higginson to John Adams, Mar. 24, 1790, in Jameson, ed., "Letters of Stephen Higginson," 776-780; Ames, "Sketches of the State of Europe," *Works of Ames,* II, 148-149; Briggs, *Cabot Family,* I, 107, 158; Cabot to Goodhue, Mar. 16, 1790, in Lodge, *Cabot,* 33-35. But when they felt that laissez-faire would help the commerce and commonwealth, they argued and voted as if free traders. John T. Kirkland, *A Discourse Delivered . . . after the Interment of the Hon. George Cabot* (Boston, 1823), 24; Lodge, *Cabot,* 15-16; Jackson, *Political Situation,* 88; Ames in debate on Madison's Resolutions, in U. S., Congress, 3d Congress, 1st Session, Jan. 3, 1794, *The Debates and Proceedings in the Congress of the United States,* IV (Washington, 1849), 158. Cf. Philip W. Buck, *The Politics of Mercantilism* (New York, 1942), 176.

[34] Higginson, *Laco,* 14; Jackson, *Political Situation,* 34.

[35] Cabot to Pickering, Feb. 17, 1808, Pickering Papers.

fact that they were an honest and devoted group of public servants. Even Timothy Pickering, despite his economic dependence on public offices, was a man of deep integrity; during the Revolution he was perhaps the only quartermaster general on the "Patriot" side who did not profit privately from his office. Jonathan Jackson, while treasurer of Massachusetts, carried honesty to the point of refusing to use public ink and paper for a private message. Even political enemies testified to their integrity. John Lowell, honest to a fault, was satirized as "Lawyer Candour." And of another Essexman, Samuel Dexter once declared, "'if Mr. George Cabot . . . should tell me, that he had seen a ghost, I should believe him—unless, perhaps,'" he added wryly, "'it was a political ghost.'"[36]

"The people are not for the Rulers, but the Rulers for the people, to minister to their welfare"; this axiom of seventeenth-century New England was echoed in the words and acts of the Essex gentlemen. They looked back with nostalgia to the colonial past as an era when their society had been in order, when the people had possessed "habits of subordination," and the best people had governed wisely and well. "No country perhaps, ever enjoyed more domestick tranquility," Jonathan Jackson fondly recalled.[37]

But after the Revolution, American society appeared to be in disequilibrium. Without regretting independence itself, the Essexmen deeply regretted its consequences. "The people," Fisher Ames wrote, "have turned against their teachers the doctrines, which were inculcated in order to effect the late revolution." As early as 1784, Stephen Higginson predicted a second American Revolution. Here, perhaps, is a new reading for the battered conception of a "critical" period: a crisis which was moral rather than economic. Jackson spoke of an "almost universal depravity, and want of moral principle" as a consequence of a political

[36] E. James Ferguson, *The Power of the Purse* . . . (Chapel Hill, 1961), 97; Porter, *Jacksons and Lees,* I, 110; Otis, *Lowell,* 5; [Lucius M. Sargent], *Reminiscences of Samuel Dexter* (Boston, 1857), 85. Higginson's escutcheon is not entirely clear. During the Franch crisis he sold arms to the state of Virginia! See Higginson to Leroy, Bayard, and McEvers, Sept. 12, 1799, and to Pickering, Sept. 20, 1799, in Jameson, ed., "Letters of Higginson," 824-827. Nevertheless, he was generally regarded as "very good and uncorrupt." James Warren to John Adams, Oct. 27, 1783, in W. C. Ford, ed., *Warren-Adams Letters* . . . , II (Boston, 1925), 231.

[37] Miller, *Seventeenth Century,* 410; Higginson, *Laco,* 20; Jackson, *Political Situation,* 7, 11.

revolution and economic growth. Not only the Essexmen, but New Englanders of many political persuasions were of one mind on this point. Samuel Adams spoke of an "Inundation of Levity Vanity Luxury Dissipation and indeed Vice of every kind." Mrs. Mercy Otis Warren wrote sadly, "A state of War has Ever been Deemed unfriendly to Virtue, but such a total Change of Manners in so short a period I believe was never known in the History of Man."[38]

These anguished observers saw many symptoms of moral sickness in their society. They spoke of "scepticism and uncertainty," of drunkenness and dissipation, of the spirit of stockjobbing and speculation. In the midst of public need, the people were frittering their money on private luxury. The brightly colored broadcloth coats and silken gowns that blossomed in Boston after the war prompted Jonathan Jackson to suggest seriously that the citizens of Massachusetts "be confined, singly to a summer and a winter dress."[39] There was talk of bad habits contracted even by the better sort of people. "'Is it not *Bon Ton,*'" a Bostonian complained, "'to rise at 10—breakfast at 11—and dine at 4 o'clock or later, and the hour for breaking up an evening visit at midnight, rattling through our paved streets in their carriages to the great annoyance of the peaceful inhabitants; especially the *sick* and *dying*?'"

New England appears to have been undergoing one of its periodic regenerative crises. The people were pursuing self-interest; the young people especially were going their own way. In the winter of 1784-85, Massachusetts was suddenly confronted with the spectacle of organized vice among its adolescents. The young bucks of Boston led by Harrison Gray Otis had decided "'to beguile the tedious evenings of December'" by establishing the "Sans Souci Club." A hall was taken, with facilities for dancing and cards. Wine, punch, negus, and lemonade were available for a price; virgins as young as fifteen were admitted without a chaperon!

[38] Ames, "Camillus No. 1," *Works of Ames,* II, 101; Higginson to——— Apr. 1784, in Jameson, ed., "Letters of Higginson," 713-719, esp. 716; Jackson, *Political Situation,* 132; Samuel Adams to Warren, Feb. 12, 1779, in Harry A. Cushing, ed., *The Writings of Samuel Adams,* IV (New York, 1908), 123; Mercy Warren to John Adams, Oct. 15, 1778, in Ford, ed., "Warren-Adams Letters," II, 54.

[39] Jackson, *Political Situation,* 48, 121-127, 132, 139; Ames, "American Literature," *Works of Ames,* II, 428-442, esp. 441, 442; Cabot to Parsons, Aug. 12, 1794, in Lodge, *Cabot,* 78-79; Higginson, *Laco,* 15, 20-22, 24; Higginson to John Adams, July 1786, in Jameson, ed., "Letters of Higginson," 733-741, esp. 740.

In a twinkling, the newspapers were crowded with commentaries upon the coming generation. Said one gentleman, "it is . . . to be hoped the citizens of a free republick will unanimously exert themselves, to give a check to so injurious an institution." Young Harry Otis, that "'arrogant stripling,'" replied to his critics in columns of heavyhanded satire. The climax of the controversy came with the publication of a farce called *Sans Souci, alias, Free and Easy:—Or, an Evening's Peep in a Polite Circle.* In act one, scene one, a character named Young Forward said to Mr. Pert, "'damn the old musty rules of decency and national character, Spartan virtues—republican principles—all your buckram of Presbyterianism.'"[40]

Looking back from our own time upon these scenes of depravity, the new republic seems virtuous even in its vices. But the Essex gentlemen were not amused. Republicanism, as these rigid republicans said over and over again, required a virtuous citizenry. And there were disturbing indications that virtue was not *Bon Ton.*[41]

Especially disturbing to the Essex gentlemen was the apparent loss of virtue among the "virtuous and wise," the natural leaders of society, from whom better things were to be expected. There was, for example, the case of Robert Morris, who used the perquisites of his office without restraint. Morris was a "commercial man," a moderate whig, a friend to "high-toned government," whose principles, in so far as he had any, were basically in harmony with those of the Essexmen. Yet they bitterly excoriated the "most scandalous conduct" of "Mr. Financier," and prayed for his retirement. And in another context, Higginson, the merchant, lamented that good public officers were "borne down by the combined weight of people in Trade."[42]

The misbehavior of Robert Morris was less distressing than another kind of corruption which was personified in a second great "commercial character," John Hancock, who had formed the disgusting habit of yield-

[40] See Charles Warren, "Samuel Adams and the Sans Souci Club in 1785," Mass. Hist. Soc., *Procs.,* LX (Boston, 1927), 318-344. Quotations from 321, 322, 331, 335.

[41] Jackson, *Political Situation,* 19-21, 51.

[42] Clarence L. Ver Steeg, *Robert Morris, Revolutionary Financier* (Philadelphia, 1954), 22-27; Ferguson, *Power of the Purse,* 70-105. See Higginson to Arthur Lee [Oct.] 1783, in Jameson, ed., "Letters of Higginson," 711-713; Robert A. East, "Massachusetts Conservatives in the Critical Period," in Richard B. Morris, ed., *The Era of the American Revolution* (New York, 1939), 349-391, esp. 368; Samuel

ing to political opinions merely because they were popular. The Essexmen made no value-distinction between the malefactions of Morris and of Hancock. To alter one's conduct for the sake of a vote was as dishonest as to change it for a dollar. Timothy Pickering, just before the last election of his public career (in which he was soundly defeated), piously declared that in every act of his public life he "did not take time to consider whether it would be popular or unpopular; but, simply, whether the measure was just and right, and calculated to promote the public good." Pickering's moral posture was stiffened by a Puritanical sense of his own rectitude. "He that doeth his will shall know whether it be of God," he wrote piously.[43]

The Essex gentlemen believed that to give way before "merely popular opinion" was doubly disagreeable, because it was usually unnecessary. What was popular was vaporous and transient, mere whipsyllabub, a puff of air. "Popular gales sometimes blow hard, but they don't blow long," George Cabot wrote. "The man who has the courage to face them will at last *out*face them." But while the gale was blowing, it was essential to the public good that the best people should face it, even at the risk of being blown over. "We have frequently seen, that the pliant Twig will, by bending, retain its situation, when, by force of the torrent, the sturdy Oak will be torn up by the roots," Stephen Higginson declared. "No man, however, will be so foolish as to say, that the former is so reputable as the latter; or that we may rest in safety our weight against one, as well as against the other."[44]

A third form of misconduct lamented by the Essexmen was the abdication of public responsibility by the natural elite—their absorption in private concerns. "Men of merit, and of the best understandings, are too much inclined to seek the shade of retirement," Jackson complained. "Our great difficulty, for some time to come, may be, that men sufficiently qualified for the important duties which some of our higher offices re-

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Osgood to Higginson, Feb. 2, 1784, in Edmund C. Burnett, ed., *Letters of Members of the Continental Congress,* VII (Washington, 1934), 430-436; Higginson to Hamilton, Nov. 11, 1789, in Harold C. Syrett, ed., *Papers of Alexander Hamilton,* V (New York, 1962), 507-511, quotation on 507.

[43] Higginson, *Laco,* 8, 14, 22; Pickering to Jacob Ashton, Oct. 29, 1816, in Upham, *Pickering,* IV, 277; Pickering to James Pindell, Jan. 27, 1814, Pickering Papers.

[44] Cabot to Wolcott, Apr. 7, 1797, in Lodge, *Cabot,* 120. I read "last" for "least." Higginson, *Laco,* 9.

quire, will not be induced to engage in them, by any prospects which the people of this country can at present afford them."[45]

When the best people were acting badly, it was not surprising that the rest were worse. The Essexmen dolefully lamented the disappearance of that moral excellence which they deemed necessary for the strength of a free government. Their dark comments on the nature of man were not detached and rational judgments, but impassioned jeremiads, in the spirit of their Puritan ancestors. "Human nature has its weaknesses, however," Theophilus Parsons wrote. "But it is our duty not to indulge, but correct them."[46]

To re-establish social harmony in these terms, it was necessary to make public service more attractive to the elite, and to make the elite more attractive to the people. Jonathan Jackson addressed himself to the first part of the problem in his *Thoughts upon the Political Situation of the United States*. To draw out an "*aristocracy* of experience," he favored high salaries for public office, long terms of office, and small legislative bodies. He proposed that the distasteful business of electioneering might be discouraged by an elaborate pyramid of electoral colleges chosen, in part, by lot. As reinforcement, he seriously suggested a legislative ban against the solicitation of votes—anyone caught indulging in this nefarious practice would be stripped of political privileges for life.[47]

The second part of the problem was, in Jackson's words, "the restoration of publick and private faith, or a confidence in rulers." The object was not merely to secure a branch of the government as a sort of sanctuary for the wise and good, but to place *all* power in their hands. The Essex gentlemen were not much interested in checks and balances. It is true that they occupied a central place in Theophilus Parsons's *Essex Result,* but Jonathan Jackson relegated them to a footnote in his *Thoughts upon the Political Situation,* and Fisher Ames spoke sarcastically of those who "consider government as a strange sort of self-moving mill, or a ship, that, while it is acted upon by one element, goes the better for the resistance of the other." It is interesting to note how little faith the Essexmen placed in constitutional restraints upon popular power. "Cobweb ties for lions," Fisher Ames sarcastically called them. This is the context in which Ames

[45] Jackson, *Political Situation,* 24.

[46] Parsons to Mrs. Gray, Dec. 15, 1783, in Parsons, *Memoir,* 10; Jackson, *Political Situation,* 94.

[47] Jackson, *Political Situation,* 57-59, 73-87, 191-209.

declared that "of our six millions of people there are scarcely six hundred who yet look for liberty any where except on paper."[48]

Unable to hit upon constitutional restraints which sustained their confidence, the Essexmen were forced to fall back upon education as a means of recovering social harmony. "The people must be *taught* to confide in and reverence their rulers," Stephen Higginson declared. Like so many other Americans with a cause, they turned to the schools for assistance. Jonathan Jackson wrote: "it is necessary to pay great attention to the education of the youth; teaching them their just rights, at the same time they are taught proper subordination." Parsons, who had taught school himself, was a confirmed and consistent friend of popular education throughout his career. Advocates of the common school have not always been driven by faith in the common man.[49]

Most education happens outside the classroom. The Essexmen hoped that institutions other than the schools might have an educational role. A "well-regulated family" was an important ally in the cause of order. The militia also had an educational function—Jackson advocated universal military training primarily as a means of inculcating "the discipline of mind—subordination" among the people. "Mankind are abundantly happier," he wrote, "when obliged to conform strictly to rules." And of course the "gentlemen in black cloth" could help, too. It was the task of the churches, Theophilus Parsons wrote, to propagate the "knowledge and practice of our moral duties, which comprehend all the social and civil obligations of man to man, and of the citizen to the state."[50]

The newspapers, properly conducted, could serve the cause, but, alas, most of them were improperly conducted. "Printers are dependent for bread, writers for popularity," Fisher Ames wrote, "neither will dare to tell any truth that readers will not want to hear." But a journal independent of its subscribers might do the trick. To this purpose, Jackson

[48] *Ibid.*, 132; Ames, "Falkland," Ames to Quincy, Dec. 11, 1806, to Pickering, Nov. 6, 1807, *Works of Ames,* II, 142, 376-377, 398. See also Parsons's liberal construction of parliamentary privilege in Coffin *v.* Coffin, *Mass. Repts.,* IV (1808), 1. Goodhue wished to sustain this elitist system by minimal salaries for officeholding. B. Goodhue to S. Goodhue, Aug. 20, 1789, Goodhue Papers.

[49] Higginson to Pickering, May 27, 1797, Pickering Papers; Jackson, *Political Situation,* 27; Ames, "Schoolbooks," *Works of Ames,* II, 405-406; Porter, *Jacksons and Lees,* I, 119; Parsons, *Memoir,* 23. See also Kendall *v.* Inhabitants of Kingston, *Mass. Repts.,* V (1809), 524-535, esp. 530-535.

[50] Higginson, *Laco,* 32-33; Barnes *v.* First Church of Falmouth, *Mass. Repts.,*

advocated the establishment of "a state paper at the publick expense."[51]

In the minds of the Essexmen there was, of course, a clear distinction between informing and inflaming the public mind, between supporting the cause of order and subverting it. Extraconstitutional machinery, innovations such as party organization, mass meetings of the people, semipermanent committees of correspondence, smacked of subversion, the spirit of faction. When the Jeffersonian movement began to develop, the Essexmen recoiled from the form, as well as substance, of its protest. "After all," George Cabot wrote, "where is the boasted advantage of a representation system . . . if the resort to popular meetings is necessary?"[52]

The Essexmen, in their consideration of the role of the people in politics, perched uncomfortably upon the horns of a dilemma. "If then the people at large are not only unfit to become legislators themselves," Jonathan Jackson asked, ". . . but if they are also unfit to choose legislators, and should never be collected in any numbers but under leaders, what can we do?" The Essexmen never answered this question, and the passage of events deepened their pessimism about the future of republican government. In a moment of despair, George Cabot wrote sadly, "The longer I live, the more I think on the nature of man and of society, the more I am convinced of the absurdity of expecting ever to see a *self-governed people*."[53]

But despair was punctuated by optimism. The Essexmen, as Fisher Ames observed, were "stubborn hopers." Ames himself hoped for a miracle. In the darkest years he wrote, "I am no royalist, Anglo-American, nor tory. I only ask how our government is to be supported;—and I answer by a miracle. The miracle of virtue, that loves others first, then one's-self."[54]

VI (1810), 401-418, esp. 404-405; Avery *v.* Inhabitants of Tyringham, *ibid.*, III (1807), 160-183, esp. 176-177; Goodhue to Nathan Read, Nov. 29, 1800, Read Papers, Essex Inst.

[51] Ames to John Rutledge, Jr., Oct. 16, 1800, Rutledge Papers, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill; Jackson, *Political Situation*, 74.

[52] Cabot to King, Aug. 14, 1795, in Lodge, *Cabot*, 85. See also B. Goodhue to S. Goodhue, Jan. 9, Apr. 9, 1796, Goodhue Papers.

[53] Jackson, *Political Situation*, 100; Cabot to King, Mar. 17, 1804, in Lodge, *Cabot*, 346.

[54] Ames to Pickering, Mar. 16, 1806, Pickering Papers; Ames to Richard Peters, Dec. 14, 1806, *Works of Ames*, I, 377-378.

There was at least one rational ground for optimism; if human nature were not perfectible, it might at least be predictable. "I imagine in like circumstances, mankind are very apt to behave alike," Jackson wrote. The Essexmen, with Madison and David Hume, hoped that politics might be reduced to a science, that men might discover the elusive secrets of self-government. "I have often thought it would be wise," wrote Jackson, "to designate a few men, scattered through the states, whose whole attention should be paid to a science, which among the moderns has obtained the name of political arithmetick."[55]

If a science of politics promised future gain, there were also more immediate grounds for hope. The Essexmen took flight to that last refuge of conservatism, the dream of American uniqueness. One of them said, "when we consider the small inequality of fortune throughout this country, compared with others which we know—that we have scarcely any of the miserable beggarly folk, with which the nations in *Europe* abound—that there is no rank of any consequence, nor hereditary titles—God be praised!" The Essexmen believed that in the New World men might grow wealthy without impoverishing and degrading others. They agreed that Americans, on the whole, were more virtuous and better informed than other mortals.[56]

The wide diffusion of property in American society was particularly reassuring to men who worried over the selfishness of their species. If all men pursued self-interest, and most Americans were propertied, and if an "orderly" society was in the interest of property holders, then it followed that Americans should be "friends of order." Jonathan Jackson made the point with a stanza from Pope:

> Forc'd into virtue thus by self defence,
> Ev'n kings learn justice and benevolence;
> Self love forsakes the path it first pursu'd,
> And finds the private in the publick good.[57]

There is a double irony here: firstly, the broad diffusion of property in America fostered an atomistic individualism which was far removed from the mood of the Essexmen. Secondly, Federalists such as the Essex

[55] Jackson, *Political Situation*, 47, 154-156.
[56] *Ibid.*, 56.
[57] *Ibid.*, 15, 54-57.

gentlemen have been set down in the history books as "realists" who carefully constructed a republic upon an accurate analysis of human nature. Nothing could be more mistaken. The Essexmen were dreamers, hopeless idealists, and in their own time they came to know it. Jackson called himself "Utopian"; Rufus King, who shared many of the social attitudes of the Essex gentlemen, declared, "We have been the visionary men."[58]

At least one Federalist did not share the vision of a speaking elite and a silent multitude. Alexander Hamilton laughed at the delusions of his New England friends. "Among Federalists," he wrote in 1802, "old errors are not cured. They also continue to dream though not so preposterously as their opponent. All will be very well (say they) when the power once more gets back into Federal hands. The people convinced by experience of their error will repose a *permanent* confidence in good men. *Risum teneatis*?"[59]

II

This investigation of the Essexmen will proceed from attitudes to acts, for such was the sequence of their own development. Throughout their period of active engagement in politics they remained inflexibly faithful to reactionary principles. Theophilus Parsons, Jr., wrote that his father's "opinions were so firmly fixed that he saw everything through them, and they gave to every object of thought their own aspect and color." Opposition deepened their devotion to the cause. Parsons's maxim, *"Crede quod possis, et potes,"* was a pleasant thought, but poor politics.[60]

In view of the rigidity of these ideologues, it is scarcely surprising that their public careers were a series of defeats, punctuated occasionally by a disaster. At no time did they dominate the political affairs of either their state or their section. But for the sake of clarity, let us follow them chronologically through the principal events of their public careers. Having opposed the proposed constitution of 1778, the Essex clique was active in the movement for a new one during the next year. They are generally credited with having co-operated with John Adams in the con-

[58] *Ibid.*, 94; Ames to Richard Peters, Dec. 14, 1806, *Works of Ames,* I, 377-378; King to Gore, May 8, 1816, in King, *Rufus King,* V, 534; B. Goodhue to S. Goodhue, Apr. 2, Dec. 31, 1796, Goodhue Papers.

[59] Hamilton to King, June 3, 1802, in King, *Rufus King,* IV, 134.

[60] Parsons, *Memoir,* 36, 20.

vention of 1779-80 which drafted the document under which Massachusetts has been governed ever since.[61]

The usual interpretation is not entirely accurate. Although there was a measure of co-operation between Adams and the Essexmen, they were working at cross-purposes. The Essex clique was seeking to "draw out the *natural aristocracy,*" in Jackson's phrase. Adams wished to shut it up in its own branch of the government, effectively balanced by other branches. Adams later claimed that the Essexmen "supported me timorously, and at last would not go with me to so high a mark as I aimed at, which was a complete negative in the governor upon all laws." The failure of the Essex clique to sustain Adams was not owing to timidity but to the fact that checks and balances were not central to their thought. The depth of Theophilus Parsons's conservatism is evident in his astonishing statement that the "governour's negative" was designed "to please the People." Parsons was explicit in his dissatisfaction with the document: "Had the Convention been wise and united, we might have had a *perfect constitution,*" he declared, *"There was no danger in proposing too perfect a constitution."*[62]

During the 1780's, the Essex clique was only a part of James Bowdoin's faction, itself a minority group in Massachusetts politics, held together mainly by a common dislike of John Hancock, who dominated the state. Bowdoin was able to gain the governorship only when Hancock temporarily retired from public life in 1785-87. Hancock's retirement was ostensibly for reasons of health. He claimed to be suffering from the gout, but we might more accurately diagnose his indisposition as Hancock's Palsy, a progressive weakening of the nerves occasioned by tremors and convulsions in the extremities. While Bowdoin was governor, the western counties rose in a rebellion (which Hancock must have foreseen) against taxes, fees, lawyers, and the inexorable obligations of contract. After Bowdoin's faction made itself unpopular by putting down the rebellion, Hancock's health suddenly improved and he returned, triumphant, to the governor's chair.[63]

[61] See Anson E. Morse, *The Federalist Party in Massachusetts to the Year 1800* (Princeton, 1909), 18.

[62] Jackson, *Political Situation,* 57; John Adams to Benjamin Rush, Apr. 12, 1809, in C. F. Adams, ed., *Works,* IX, 618; Parsons to Dana, Aug. 3, 1780, Dana Papers, Mass. Hist. Soc.

[63] Morse, *Federalist Party,* 11-39.

In the gubernatorial election of 1787, Hancock won 18,000 votes to Bowdoin's 6,000. The senatorial elections of the same year were even more striking. Of nineteen newly elected members, five had actually borne arms with Daniel Shays, six were openly sympathetic with the rebels, and seven of the remaining eight became Antifederalists. In the words of another historian, "Shays' sympathizers captured control of the Massachusetts government in 1787." The Essexmen were clearly in no position to force the Constitution upon "an unwilling people."[64]

The true strength of the Essexmen appears in the choice of delegates to the Constitutional Convention. They had hoped to win places for at least three of their number, Dana, Lowell, and Parsons. But only Dana was chosen, and he did not accept. The Essex Junto did not have a single representative in Philadelphia.[65]

The document which was drafted at Philadelphia in 1787 was not sufficiently conservative to satisfy the Essex clique. This was the occasion for Jonathan Jackson's remarkably candid pamphlet, so often quoted in the earlier pages of this essay. Jackson believed that the Constitution did not go nearly far enough "in restrictions upon the people, and towards an union of the whole," and did not permit enough latitude to an "aristocracy of experience." He felt that the House of Representatives was "much too large," that its members ought to be selected by a series of electoral colleges, that Senators also should be chosen by electoral colleges rather than state legislatures, and that the President should have the sole power of appointment, without the advice and consent of any part of the legislative branch. He also contended that the provisions for the election of the President contained "the seeds of faction" and hinted that he might prefer a President appointed for life, or at least during good behavior. Jackson's views—the views of the Essex clique—were so extreme that

[64] George R. Minot, *The History of the Insurrections in Massachusetts* (Boston, 1810), 176-192; Joseph P. Warren, "The Confederation and the Shays Rebellion," *Amer. Hist. Rev.*, XI (1905-6), 42-67; Robert J. Taylor, *Western Massachusetts in the Revolution* (Providence, 1954), 103-167; R. B. Morris, "Insurrection in Massachusetts," in Daniel Aaron, ed., *America in Crisis* (New York, 1952), 21-49; quotation in Forrest McDonald, *We the People, the Economic Origins of the Constitution* (Chicago, 1958), 182*n*. In the context of Shays' Rebellion, a contributor to the *Independent Chronicle* (Boston), July 30, Aug. 22, 1787, attacked a "junto" which included an "S.H." If this is Stephen Higginson, it is the earliest allusion to the Essex Junto which I have discovered and an isolated one.

[65] Higginson to Henry Knox, Feb. 8, 1787, in Jameson, ed., "Letters of Higginson," 748. See also Higginson to Adams, July 1786, *ibid.*, 735.

there could be no hope of success. On the title page of his work, Jackson quoted Pope:

> TRUTHS would you teach, to save a sinking Land—
> All shun, none aid you, and few understand.[66]

Although the Constitution was something less than they desired, the Essexmen threw their weight behind it, and unquestionably played a significant part in the struggle for ratification. But they were allied with many groups more powerful than themselves. The solid support of Caleb Strong's Connecticut Valley farmers, of Theodore Sedgwick's following in the Berkshires, and of the Boston mechanics who generally followed Benjamin Austin and Paul Revere, were more important than the parliamentary skill of Parsons, or the oratory of Ames.[67]

The climax of the ratification struggle in Massachusetts came in Hancock's decision to support the Federalists. It has been suggested that he was won over by a promise of the presidency if Virginia would not ratify in time. But from the obscure infighting which preceded ratification in Massachusetts, two facts clearly emerge. First, it was Hancock who approached the Federalists, not vice versa. Second, he did so immediately after the famous mass meeting of mechanics at Boston's Green Dragon Tavern. Always sensitive to the drift of opinion in his own state, Hancock could not have missed the significance of this gathering, at the end of which Samuel Adams is reputed to have said, "Well, if *they will* have it, they *must* have it."[68]

Almost immediately after the Constitution was ratified, the groups which had coalesced in order to secure it broke apart. Hancock's faction, in uneasy alliance with Samuel Adams, continued to rule the state, carrying every election from 1789 to 1796. The men who began to call them-

[66] Jackson, *Political Situation,* 57, 178-186.

[67] Parsons, *Memoir,* 58-80; Cabot to Parsons, Feb. 28, 1788, in Lodge *Cabot,* 30-34; S. B. Harding, *The Contest over the Ratification of the Federal Constitution in the State of Massachusetts* (New York, 1896), 82-104; J. Q. Adams, *Life in a New England Town: 1787, 1788; Diary of John Quincy Adams . . .* (Boston, 1903), 96; William V. Wells, *The Life and Public Service of Samuel Adams . . .* (Boston, 1865), III, 257-262; Eben F. Stone, "Parsons and the Constitutional Convention of 1788," *Essex Inst. Hist. Colls.,* XXXV (1899), 81-102.

[68] King believed that the bait was the presidency, not the vice presidency. King to Knox, Feb. 1, 1788, in King, *Rufus King,* I, 319; Higginson, *Laco,* 25-26; Edmund Quincy, *Life of Josiah Quincy* (Boston, 1867), 416.

selves "Federalists" or "Friends of Order," were, to borrow a word from the lexicon of twentieth-century politics, a combine of little cliques and personal connections, united only in common antipathy to Hancock and Adams. Together they were sometimes able to control the Senate, but not the lower house. In Congressional elections they often carried their candidates, but only with the aid of voter apathy.

A direct test of the strength of the Essex group within the Federalist "combine" was the election of a United States Senator from eastern Massachusetts in 1788. The Essex gentlemen in the General Court caucused beforehand and settled upon Nathan Dane. But another group of Federalists, including Christopher Gore, supported Tristram Dalton, who was successful. According to Gore, the "wise men of Essex" were "mortified beyond measure." Two years later, George Cabot was elected to succeed Dalton, but only after the latter had been too vigorously opposed in the lower house to be carried.[69]

During the nineties the Federalist "combine" was not a political party, except in the trivial sense of being a party to an argument. Its most prominent figures, and the Essexmen especially, were firmly opposed to extraconstitutional organization, to mass meetings, systematic canvasses, and to all the paraphernalia of popular politics.[70] An illustration is the fight over Jay's Treaty. The newly-forming Jeffersonians sought to defeat it by elaborate protest meetings, petitions, and burnings-in-effigy. Federalists sought to reply in kind and meetings were called in Boston and in Essex County. The Essexmen refused to co-operate. Higginson, Parsons, and the others, "by a tacit tho' not formal agreement abstained from the meeting, which they considered as unconstitutional and precipitate—as an improper place to discuss . . . the Treaty." Under repeated prodding from Federalists in the middle states, they finally agreed to meetings, but of a different kind, tidy gatherings of the chambers of commerce in Boston and Newburyport, in which "the most reputable class," according to Cabot, discreetly signified its approbation of the treaty and "reprobated the attempts everywhere made to excite discontent and tumult among the people."[71]

[69] Gore to King, Dec. 21, 1788, in King, *Rufus King*, I, 348. See 346-350, 389-390.

[70] For evidence of lack of organization see Thomas B. Adams to J. Q. Adams, Oct. 20, 1802, Adams Papers, Mass. Hist. Soc.; William A. Robinson, *Jeffersonian Democracy in New England* (New Haven, 1916), 55.

[71] T. Williams to Pickering, July 17, Theodore Lyman to Pickering, July 23,

The Essex gentlemen were willing to serve the "Cause of Order" in any capacity but that of party manager. And serve they did, in many important roles. Ames became a Federal pillar in the House of Representatives; Cabot, as better suited his special talents, labored in the small and secret sessions of the Senate. Higginson was naval agent in Boston and adviser to Hamilton on financial and commercial matters. Goodhue helped to draw up the first revenue laws. Pickering served as postmaster general, secretary of war, and secretary of state. It was only at this late date, during the 1790's, that he became an intimate correspondent of the other Essex gentlemen.[72]

This public service constituted the last and greatest contribution of the Essexmen. During the 1790's they gradually began to retire from politics for reasons both public and private, general and specific. Two factors in local politics must have been important. First, there was the predominance of Hancock and Adams. Many Massachusetts Federalists felt a "dread of State politics" because of this. Second, the gravitational center of Massachusetts Federalism was shifting westward into the Connecticut Valley. After 1796, Federal pluralities in the western counties were necessary to balance Republican margins in the east and even in old Essex. More important, perhaps, were pressing personal reasons. Age, illnesses, and financial trouble all played a part.[73]

One of the first to go was Theophilus Parsons, who separated himself from politics as early as 1792. His son later recalled that after this date the old gentleman "gave but little of his time or labor to politics. . . . I doubt whether he ever attended a public meeting of any kind during the last twenty years of his life [1793-1813]. . . . I cannot recall any one gathering, great or small, in the office or anywhere in the house, for political purposes. No doubt there were such meetings, but they were never frequent; and very few took place, I think, during the last ten years of his life."[74]

Higginson to Pickering, July 14, 1795, Pickering Papers; Cabot to King, Aug. 14, to Wolcott, Aug. 13, 1795, in Lodge, *Cabot,* 84, 85. See Kurtz, *John Adams,* 59-77; Joseph Charles, *The Origins of the American Party System* (Williamsburg, 1956), 91-140.

[72] Leonard D. White, *The Federalists: A Study in Administrative History* (New York, 1948), passim; Hamilton to Goodhue, Oct. 29, 1789, in Syrett, ed., *Papers of Alexander Hamilton,* V, 473-475.

[73] Gore to King, Apr. 1, 1792, in King, *Rufus King,* I, 407; Morse, *Federalist Party,* 180-185, et passim.

[74] Parsons, *Memoir,* 123, 132.

Until his dying day, Parsons continued to correspond fitfully with other Federalists and, as we shall see, worked sporadically in minor roles. In Boston, he sometimes dropped in at the office of the Suffolk Marine Insurance Company, "more noted, for its daily political harangues, than for its semi-annual dividends." But the Suffolk office was not a hotbed of junto politics; it was rather a semisocial club frequented by Revolutionary relics of differing political persuasions.[75]

Parsons's judgments always bore great weight with men who were active in public life after 1793. Cabot wrote to him in 1792, "you have withdrawn yourself from the circle of politics; but you will often be in contact with those who are within it, and will impress those whom you touch." Nevertheless, Parsons was clearly on the periphery of Massachusetts politics after 1792.[76]

Four years later, Fisher Ames also withdrew. Like Parsons a hypochondriac, he became merely "a troubled ghost of a politician," as he described himself. "It is a new post for me to be in," he wrote to a friend in 1796. "I am not a sentry, not in the ranks, not in the staff. I am thrown into the waggon, as part of the baggage. I am like an old gun, that is spiked, or the trunnions knocked off, and yet am carted off, not for the worth of the old iron, but to balk the enemy of a trophy. My political life is ended, and I am the survivor of myself."[77]

Contemporaneously with Ames, George Cabot also retired. He bought a farm in Brookline and by 1796 was "in every sense so abstracted from the political world," that he learned of the selection of the man who replaced him in the United States Senate only by reading about it in the newspapers. His only political activity was the composition of an occasional article for the gazettes. "I keep my house, but sometimes scribble for the good of others," he wrote.[78]

The heir to Cabot's seat in the Senate was another old Essex gentleman, Benjamin Goodhue. He remained in office four years, but in 1800 was forced to withdraw from politics—and from society as well—by a serious illness which may have been alcoholism. His Jeffersonian neighbor,

[75] *Reminiscences of Dexter,* 84.

[76] Cabot to Parsons, Oct. 3, 1792, in Lodge, *Cabot,* 58.

[77] "Notices of the Life and Character of Fisher Ames," *Works of Ames,* I, xviii; Ames to Dwight, Mar. 9, 1796, *ibid.,* 188.

[78] Cabot to King, July 24, 1796, in King, *Rufus King,* II, 66; Cabot to Wolcott, Jan. 19, Mar. 26, 1798, in Lodge, *Cabot,* 149, 150.

William Bentley, wrote of him that "his habits since his return [to private life] have given him no influence in society and as he rose gradually to public notice, so he insensibly passed away from all his former friendships, and notice, being habitually and publicly intemperate."[79]

Sickness and death took a heavy toll of the Essexmen. Nathaniel Tracy retired to a farm in the early nineties and died in 1796. John Lowell's health was "wretched" during the nineties; he died in 1802. Francis Dana's frail constitution kept him "out of the vortex" of public affairs after 1789. Nathan Dane was afflicted with deafness, which became nearly total by 1800—rather a serious handicap in the backstairs intrigues which were supposedly a specialty of the Essex Junto! In any case, Dane's unhappy ailment forced him to withdraw from the world and devote himself to scholarship. The remainder of his life was the hermitlike existence of a historian, a sequence of twelve-hour days among dusty archives and dreary authorities.[80]

Others were preoccupied with debts and business difficulties. Stephen Higginson had been in financial straits since the mid-1780's. Fighting to remain solvent, he had little time to spare for politics. Jonathan Jackson simultaneously engaged in the same struggle with less success. After his business failed in the 1780's, he sought to defray the expenses of a "large and interesting family" by working in a series of public and semi-public employments, as a United States collector of internal revenue (until Jefferson abolished the office), treasurer of Massachusetts, and bursar of Harvard College. Though Jackson remained in public life, there is no evidence of partisan activity after 1795. Indeed, party management had never been his forte. A contemporary who knew him well declared, "he was not a man who took a lead among those about him; at least not the first lead." Only two of the Essexmen remained politically active—Pickering and Thorndike.[81]

As a descriptive phrase, "Essex Junto" had become almost entirely

[79] *The Diary of William Bentley* . . . (Salem, Mass., 1905-11), IV, 271.

[80] *Columbian Centinel* (Boston), Sept. 21, 1796; Ames to Gore, Oct. 5, 1802, *Works of Ames,* I, 301; W. P. Cresson, *Francis Dana* . . . (New York, 1930), 377-382; Jonathan Elliot, *The Debates in the several State Conventions on the Adoption of the Federal Constitution* . . . , II (Philadelphia, 1863), 20; H. W. Howard Knott in *DAB* s.v. "Dane, Nathan."

[81] Higginson to John Adams, Mar. 1, 1790, in Jameson, ed., "Letters of Higginson," 774; Porter, *Jacksons and Lees,* I, 374-475; James Jackson, *Hon. Jonathan Jackson* . . . (Boston, 1866), 30.

devoid of meaning by 1797. Its supposed principals continued to meet in each other's homes, but their gatherings were family affairs, with the grandchildren present and the conversation ranging widely over all manner of topics. There is no evidence of political activity, other than the composition of occasional pieces for the newspapers and involvement in two intrigues on the national level, to be considered shortly.[82] Their influence appears to have been as limited as their activity. In the Massachusetts gubernatorial election of 1800, for example, the Essexmen favored Francis Dana as Federal candidate, but a caucus of Federalists in the General Court ignored them and selected Caleb Strong instead.[83]

Ironically, it was in the late 1790's, when the Essexmen were retiring from public affairs and the "Essex Junto," in any meaningful sense, had ceased to exist, that the phrase entered the vocabulary of American politics, as John Adams began to use it. In the presidential election of 1796, Adams's margin of victory was only three votes. During his administration he brooded upon this disagreeable fact until it grew into an obsession. One day in 1797, when the burdens of his office weighed heavily upon him, he summoned his Secretary of State, Timothy Pickering, and bitterly blamed the narrowness of his victory on the intrigues of the "Essex Junto." Pickering was astonished. He later noted in his commonplace book that he had "never heard the term" before.[84]

The suspicions of Adams appear to have been groundless. The Essexmen still had confidence in him in 1796. In so far as they were active at all, they were active on his behalf. Cabot spoke for the group as a whole when

[82] See the testimony of Lowell's son in Otis, *Lowell, 4n*; Parsons, *Memoir,* 114.

[83] Daniel Dewey to Sedgwick, Feb. 17, 1800, Sedgwick Papers, Mass. Hist. Soc.; Abigail Adams to Mary Cranch, Dec. 4, 1799, in Stewart Mitchell, ed., *New Letters of Abigail Adams, 1788-1801* (Boston, 1947), 219. See also Ames to Gore, Mar. 5, 1800, *Works of Ames,* I, 277-278. We might pause here to consider the only piece of direct evidence ever brought forward to support the traditional view of the Essex Junto as *the* controlling group in Massachusetts Federalism. On Mar. 26, 1798, a young Federalist, Jonathan Mason, Jr., wrote to Harrison Gray Otis, "The public part of your letters I take care to shew the Cabot, Lowell, and Higginson *crew* for without their approbation, Where will the *fat* be?" (Morison, *Otis,* I, 92) Mr. Morison comments: "A significant reference to the Essex Junto, and their control of political favors." (*Ibid.*) I would submit another interpretation of this statement. The men named here, Cabot, Lowell, and Higginson, were three of the Essexmen who happened to live in Otis's district. In itself this statement thus demonstrates nothing more than a youthful representative's—and his friend's—concern for the feelings of three wealthy and prominent constituents.

[84] Pickering's commonplace book, Pickering Papers.

he declared, "Although I took no part in the election, I do not hesitate to avow my opinion that the first and highest duty of the electors was to prevent the election of a French President; and, this being provided for, the next object would have been to secure the election of Mr. Adams."[85]

How could Adams have made such a mistake? The answer appears to be that he had lost touch with Massachusetts politics. Since 1778 he had spent ten years in Europe and seven more at the seat of the national government. In 1780, as we have seen, Adams's relations with the Essex clique were not entirely cordial; he had run against their elitism in the state constitutional convention. Having collided with another group of elitists, the followers of Hamilton in national politics, it was easy for Adams to identify the two groups. Adams knew that Hamilton wished to shave his electoral margin in 1796, and he probably knew that Higginson, Cabot, and Parsons were among Hamilton's correspondents. As mercantile men and supporters of Hamiltonian economic policy, they were suspect.[86]

Several events occurred during Adams's administration which served to strengthen his suspicions of the "Essex Junto." Much the most important was the sordid "affair of the major generals" during the quasi war with France, an ugly squabble among leading Federalists for the top ranks in the army. Washington was chosen to command with a minimum of controversy, but there was a battle between Hamilton and Henry Knox over the second rank. Before the struggle ended, nearly every important Federalist had become involved.

The Essexmen were brought into it by Pickering, who requested Cabot, Higginson, and Ames to ask Knox to step aside, and to inform Adams that they as New Englanders would not be chagrined to see Hamilton elevated to the post. Cabot and Higginson refused to approach Knox; Ames's reply is not known. But Cabot wrote to Adams, arguing candidly and correctly that Hamilton was a better man than Knox. His behavior was open and honorable, but to Adams the "Essex Junto" ap-

[85] Cabot to Wolcott, Apr. 3, 1797, in Lodge, *Cabot,* 119. See also Cabot to Parsons, Oct. 3, 1792, in Parsons, *Memoir,* 469; Ames to Theodore Dwight, May 19, 1796, *Works of Ames,* I, 122-124; and B. Goodhue to S. Goodhue, Dec. 6, 1796, Goodhue Papers.

[86] See Adams's complaint about the "incomprehensible Politicks of New England." Adams to Jefferson, Dec. 11, 1814, in Cappon, ed., *Adams-Jefferson Letters,* II, 440.

peared to be enlisted in Hamilton's conspiracy to humiliate and destroy him.[87]

At the same time that the affair of the major generals was throwing the Federalists into an uproar, Cabot emerged from his retirement to engage in a petty intrigue of his own. His object was the ruin of an old and bitter enemy, Elbridge Gerry, the Marblehead merchant who had become an "Anti" in 1787 but had preserved his friendship with Adams. At a dinner party in 1795, Cabot had denounced Gerry to Adams without effect. Three years later, after Gerry's controversial service in France, Cabot tried again. Unwilling to reopen the subject himself, he and several other Essex gentlemen sought out young Harrison Gray Otis and asked him to tell Adams that Gerry was thoroughly discredited among "friends of order" and should be abandoned. Otis, anxious to ingratiate himself with these respected constituents, agreed. But he was also anxious to ingratiate himself with the President. He probably revealed the origin of his mission and thus tainted the Essexmen further in the mind of the President.[88]

John Adams's claim to presidential greatness rests upon one courageous act, the dispatch of a peace mission to France in February 1799, which he himself called "the most disinterested, the most determined and the most successful of my whole life." But Federalist leaders, with few exceptions, emphatically disagreed. Even moderate John Steele of North Carolina wrote that "Mr. Adams has lately acted so strange a part, that many do not hesitate to assert that he is deranged in intellect. The democrats laugh, but the Federalists lament that there should be any cause for such an opinion." When a few men began to speak against his re-election the President caught wind of their statements and attributed them to the "Essex Junto," working hand-in-glove with Hamilton to undermine republicanism generally, and the Adams family in particular.[89]

[87] Pickering to Cabot, Sept. 20, 1798, Cabot to Pickering, Sept. 27, to Adams, Sept. 29, and to Wolcott, Oct. 6, 1798, all in Lodge, *Cabot,* 161-170. In his "John Adams, Knox, and Washington" (Am. Antiq. Soc., *Procs.,* LVI [Worcester, 1947], 207-238), Bernhard Knollenberg suggests that Adams was "relieved" at the appointment of Hamilton because it gave him an excuse to reject the application of the incompetent Knox; but it is difficult to reconcile this thesis with Adams's angry remark that Goodhue and other Essexmen had " 'crammed Hamilton down my throat.' " Pickering to Cabot, June 16, 1800, in Lodge, *Cabot,* 276.

[88] Lodge, *Cabot,* 168*n*; Cabot to Wolcott, Oct. 16, 1798, to Gore, Mar. 27, 1800, *ibid.,* 172, 271; Morison, *Otis,* I, 164*n*.

[89] *Correspondence between the Hon. John Adams and the Late William Cun-*

When the news of this conspiracy reached its supposed principals they were dumbfounded. Higginson wrote to Pickering, "We know that the P[resident] and his tools affect to believe, that a faction exists who aim at supplanting him, unless They are permitted to counsel and direct national measures; and they stile us the Essex Junto, with you at their head, who have drawn into their views many of the leading public men. But the P[resident] can not himself believe this, though some of his dependents may. His views in promoting such absurd calumnies are to shield himself. . . ."[90] As the newspapers began to discuss the "Essex Junto" other Federalists were equally nonplused. William Vans Murray, a moderate Marylander who had served three terms in the Federal House of Representatives and was as knowledgeable about American politics as any man in the county, was puzzled when news of the furor reached him in Europe. He immediately wrote to John Quincy Adams for an explanation: "[A] Boston captain, who spent the evening with me last night, tells me of our Essex Junto—I had never heard of this."[91]

At least one well-informed New England Republican was also surprised to learn about the "Essex Junto," and dubious of its existence. William Bentley, the Essex County clergyman noted in his diary, "Much is said in the Telegraphe of the *Essex Junto* and in the Mercury there is an address to warn the county of Essex. This is the Language of party." And thus it remained. In common usage, "Essex Junto" quickly acquired both a general and a particular meaning. It became a universal pejorative, a symbol of depravity, a synonym for sin.[92] At the same time it specifically

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ningham (Boston, 1823), 101; John Steele to Anne H. Steele, n.d., Steele Papers II, South. Hist. Coll., U. N. C. See also Steele to John Haywood, Mar. 11, 1800, Haywood Papers, South. Hist. Coll.; Ebenezer Mattoon to Thomas Dwight, Mar. 2, 1801, Dwight-Howard Papers, Mass. Hist. Soc.; Morris to John Parish, Nov. 13, 1801, Gouverneur Morris Papers, Lib. Cong.; James A. Bayard to Hamilton, Aug. 11, 1800, Bayard Papers, N.-Y. Pub. Lib.; Goodhue to Pickering, June 2, 1800, Ames to King, July 15, 1800, both in King, *Rufus King,* III, 263-265, 275-277; Pickering to Cabot, June 16, 1800, in Lodge, *Cabot,* 276.

[90] Higginson to Pickering, Jan. 12, 1800, in Jameson, ed., "Letters of Higginson," 833. See also Pickering to Higginson, Dec. 23, 1799, Pickering Papers; Ames to King, July 15, 1800, in King, *Rufus King,* III, 275-277.

[91] Murray to Adams, Aug. 20, 1800, in W. C. Ford, ed., "Letters of William Vans Murray to John Quincy Adams, 1797-1803," *Annual Report of the American Historical Association for the Year 1912* (Washington, 1914), 651. See also C. C. Pinckney to Pickering, May 19, 1800, Pickering Papers.

[92] Bentley, *Diary,* II, 332. For a specimen of Jeffersonian journalistic comment on the Essex Junto, see the ditty printed in the *Independent Chronicle,* Feb. 5,

signified the narrow clique presently under consideration. In the minds of Jeffersonians, the power of the Essexmen gradually grew until it included an iron grip upon New England politics, domination of the clergy, and effective control of Harvard College.[93]

Federalists denied these allegations. A contributor to the Boston *Columbian Centinel* explained that although there was a group of Federalists from Essex County who had been active together in Massachusetts politics during the 1780's, the "Essex Junto," conceived as the ruling council of Massachusetts politics, was "a conjured phantom." In the words of the writer, "no such combination or association ever existed." But the protests were in vain. The myth of the Essex Junto appeared to confirm so many Jeffersonian assumptions that critical examination became impossible. Had John Adams not supplied the Republicans with this useful and satisfying conception, something similar would, perhaps, have been invented.[94]

1807. See also two pamphlets [Jonathan Russell?], *The Whole Truth; or, The Essex Junto Exposed* (New York, 1809), and *The Essex Junto and the British Spy; or, Treason Detected* (Salem, Mass., 1812). Compare these with the Jeffersonian description of Boston politics in 1801 in Lincoln to Jefferson, July 28, 1801, Jefferson Papers.

[93] "Dr. Benjamin Waterhouse to James Tilton, Mar. 24, 1815," in Mass. Hist. Soc., *Procs.*, LIV (Boston, 1922), 159-165. Sweeping Jeffersonian references to the organization and influence of the Essex Junto forced John Adams to generalize his notion of it. To Waterhouse he wrote, on Sept. 17, 1810: "If the Republicans wish and expect from me a History of the Rise and Progress of The Essex Junto, they know not what they wish. I do not like the Appellation of Essex Junto. It is old Toryism, and is common to every State, City town and Village in the United States. There was not one without a Tory Junto in it, and their Heirs Executors Administrators, Sons Cousins etc. Compose at this day an Essex Junto in every one of them. An History of the Essex Junto then would require an History of the whole American Community for fifty years." "John Adams as He Lived," *Atlantic Monthly*, CXXXIX (1927), 616. J. Q. Adams, "Reply to the . . . Federalists," 108, 114, 149, 151, 152.

[94] *Columbian Centinel* (Boston), July 2, 1800. The term, however, was used seriously by one Federalist—Samuel Allyne Otis. See his letter to H. G. Otis, Jan. 18, 1800, Otis Papers, Mass. Hist. Soc., and J. Q. Adams's statement in his "Reply to the . . . Federalists," 203. But, on this, see also H. G. Otis to John Rutledge, Jr., Sept. 14, 1801, Rutledge Papers. Federalists who spoke of the "Essex Junto" did so in a satirical vein. See Gore to King, June 16, 1808, in King, *Rufus King*, V, 102; Cabot to Wolcott, Sept. 1800, to Gore, Sept. 30, 1800, in Lodge, *Cabot*, 290, 292; Pickering to George H. Rose, Mar. 22, 1808, to Charles Fenton Mercer, Feb. 22, 1827, to John Randolph of Roanoke, Mar. 14, 1828, Pickering Papers; Henry Lee to Peter Remsen and Co., July 8, 1817, in Porter, *Jacksons and Lees*, II, 1255; William Sullivan, *Familiar Letters on Public Characters and Public Events* . . . (Boston, 1834), 97.

During the presidential campaign of 1800, John Adams believed that the "Essex Junto" was trying to destroy him. But it was not so. Except for Pickering, the men whom Adams designated as the leaders of the "Essex Junto" were actively promoting his election in so far as they were active at all. The leaders of the movement to overthrow Adams were Hamilton, Pickering, Oliver Wolcott, and such southern Federalists as Robert Goodloe Harper and John Rutledge, Jr. They sought to win the support of the Essex clique but were rebuffed.[95]

Cabot, Ames, Parsons, and the other Essexmen criticized Adams in their private correspondence, as Federalists everywhere were doing. But they refused to abandon him as a candidate. Cabot bluntly told Hamilton, "it ought to be admitted that the party, from various considerations, rather prefer the election of Mr. Adams to Mr. Pinckney." Two days later he added, *"I don't think, however, we can discard Mr. Adams as a candidate, at this late period, without total derangement and defeat in this quarter."* Parsons had made the same point several months before.[96]

When Hamilton announced his intention to attack Adams, Ames, Cabot, Dana, and Parsons earnestly entreated him not to publish it, or at least not to publish it over his own name. Ames wrote peremptorily, "*you* ought not, with your name, nor, if practicable, in any way that will be traced to *you,* to execute your purpose of exposing the reasons for a change of the Executive." When Hamilton persisted, Cabot told him that he was displaying the same *"vanity"* that was objectionable in Adams.[97]

[95] John Rutledge, Jr., to Ames, Aug. 22, Oct. 15, 1800, Autograph File, Houghton Library, Harvard. See also Pickering to Higginson, Dec. 23, 1799, in Morison, *Otis,* I, 184; Wolcott to Goodhue, July 30, 1800, in George Gibbs, *Memoirs of the Administrations of Washington and John Adams* . . . (New York, 1846), II, 394-395.

[96] Higginson to Pickering, Jan. 12, 1800, in Jameson, ed., "Letters of Higginson," 833-835; Cabot to Wolcott, July 20, 1800, in Gibbs, *Washington and Adams,* II, 383-384; Ames to Rutledge, Dec. 15, Cabot to Rutledge, Oct. 22, 1800, Rutledge Papers; Cabot to Hamilton, Aug. 21, 23, 1800, in Lodge, *Cabot,* 285, 286; Parsons to Jay, May 5, 1800, in Henry P. Johnston, ed., *The Correspondence and Public Papers of John Jay,* IV (New York, 1893), 269.

[97] Ames to Hamilton, Aug. 26, 1800, *Works of Ames,* I, 280-282; Cabot to Hamilton, Nov. 29, 1800, in Lodge, *Cabot,* 298-300. See also Cabot to Wolcott, Nov. 28, 1800, *ibid.,* 297-298; and Allan Nevins, *The Evening Post* . . . (New York, 1922), 11. In the Federalist intrigue with Burr in 1801, each Essexman had his own opinion. Ames definitely preferred Burr, but Cabot inclined toward Jefferson, Parsons vacillated, and Pickering did not commit himself. Ames to Sedgwick, Dec.

After the election of 1800, the Essexmen withdrew from politics more completely than ever before. Cabot seems to have spoken for his friends when he said, "I live out of the world, and have but little communication with it. . . ." An exception, which in this instance establishes the rule, was Fisher Ames. Ames was somewhat more optimistic than his friends about the future of American politics and more willing to be active. After the defeat in 1800, he exhorted his friends to join in the struggle against democracy. But he labored in vain. "I am almost separated from my federal friends," he wrote plaintively to Christopher Gore. "I have over and over again made the offer to almost every considerable man in Connecticut and New Hampshire, as well as Massachusetts, to form a phalanx to write, etc. My offers have produced some ridicule, more disgust, no cooperation." In the end, the inertia which he hoped to conquer, conquered him. "Weary and disgusted myself," he mourned, "despairing, as well I may, of any good effect from my single efforts, I now claim the quiet repose which, like a fool, I have so long refused to enjoy."[98]

Now and again, the Essexmen dashed off articles for the gazettes; most of them kept alive their correspondence with active politicians. Theophilus Parsons helped to sponsor a new Federalist journal in 1804 (they tended to become more active in presidential election years). But Francis Dana's observations on Federalist strategy were typical: "In short," he wrote, "the least they attempt the better. Let them stand still on terra firma and see the salvation of the Lord, if it is ordained to visit our unhappy country."[99]

The despair of these men did not signify the death of New England Federalism. At the turn of the century, a new generation of political leaders was coming on the stage, young men such as Josiah Quincy who "intended *ab initio* to pursue politics as a profession." The Essexmen were appalled at the shameless way in which they pursued political power.

31, 1800, Jan. 7, 1801, Sedgwick Papers; Cabot to King, Dec. 28, 1800, Jan. 28, 1801, in King, *Rufus King,* III, 356, 378-379; Parsons to Otis, Jan. 23, 1801, in Morison, *Otis,* I, 213; Pickering to John Pickering, Jan. 31, 1801, in Upham, *Pickering,* IV, 22-23.

[98] Cabot to Wolcott, Aug. 3, 1801, in Lodge, *Cabot,* 320; Ames to Dwight Foster, Feb. 9, 1801, to Theodore Dwight, Mar. 19, 1801, to Jeremiah Smith, Dec. 14, 1802, to Gore, Feb. 24, Oct. 3, 1803, *Works of Ames,* I, 281-294, 314-316, 319-326; Ames to Rutledge, Oct. 16, 1800, July 30, 1801, Rutledge Papers. See also Higginson to Wolcott, July 11, 1798, in Gibbs, *Washington and Adams,* II, 70.

[99] Benjamin Whitwell to Parsons, Aug. 3, 1804, Columbia University Coll., Columbia; Francis Dana to [Stephen Higginson, 1804?], Pickering Papers.

Stephen Higginson believed that young Harry Otis, "for the sake of an additional vote, or a rise of one grade in the scale of promotion, would sell any and all parties or persons in succession till he reaches the top."[100]

These young men—Quincy, Otis, Timothy Bigelow, William Sullivan, Thomas Handasyd Perkins, and others, established a pyramidal structure of electioneering committees and thereby provided Massachusetts Federalism with an organizational skeleton for the first time. They sponsored newspapers, copied the electioneering techniques of their opponents, and organized chapters of the Washington Benevolent Society throughout the state, which, as one scholar has observed, offered the voters Fraternity as a substitute for Equality. These new-model Federalists neither ignored the people nor attempted to educate them, but merely sought to secure their support. They adopted popular issues for the sake of popularity. In 1812, for example, Otis and Quincy were on the verge of reversing their party's traditional foreign policy by calling for a war with England, but their counterparts in the Republican party beat them to it.[101]

The development of elaborate Federalist organization in Massachusetts was accomplished without the assistance of the Essexmen. The names Cabot, Ames, Parsons, Jackson, Higginson, Dane, Dana, Goodhue, and Pickering do not appear on the rosters of the various Federalist committees in Massachusetts, not even the exalted Central Committee. Only one Essexman—Israel Thorndike—sat in this body.[102]

The elderly gentlemen of the Essex clique remained studiously aloof from this activity. Temperament and principle combined to hold them back. The pursuit of popularity, systematic courtship of the people, constituted the abandonment of ideals long and deeply cherished. They remained loyal to their ideals even at the cost of interest. As relics of the Revolution the Essexmen were regarded with respect, even with deference, by younger Federalists. But they were not obeyed because they did not choose to command—to the disgust of younger party leaders who were struggling with problems of organization and discipline.

[100] Otis to John Phillips, 1818, in Quincy, *Josiah Quincy,* 376; Higginson to Pickering, Jan. 12, 1800, in Jameson, "Letters of Higginson," 833.

[101] See my Federalists and Democracy, 1800-1816 (unpubl. Ph.D. diss., Johns Hopkins University, 1962); Morison, *Otis,* I, 286-317, II, 53; Gore to King, Oct. 5, 1812, in King, *Rufus King,* V, 282-284.

[102] Morison, *Otis,* I, 291. See Forbes, *Thorndike,* 100; "Meeting in Salem," Mar. 25, 1800, Broadsides, Essex Inst.

We do not think of John Quincy Adams as a party politician, but in the first years of the nineteenth century he cast his lot with the Federal party and sought to strengthen it. On one occasion he expressed the bitterness of the young Federalists at the nonparticipation of the Essex gentlemen. "Many of them," Adams wrote, "are too much devoted to personal and selfish views to make any sacrifice to party purposes. Such men can never be of much use, and yet they are always heavy burdens upon the party with which they are associated. In the days of Cato and Caesar, the men who had no affections but for their gardens and their statues and their palaces were destined to be vanquished, and were so."[103]

Harrison Gray Otis felt the same way. "There is not one of these sworn brothers who is, or ever was, a politician," he complained of the Essex clique, ". . . but they are men of probity, of talent, of influence, and the Federal party may say of them, *Non possum vivere sine te nec cum te*."[104]

III

Only an emergency of alarming proportions could rouse these weary old men from their political lethargy. Such an emergency developed with the threat of New England's secession from the Union. There were two distinct disunionist movements among New England Federalists. The first reached its climax in the winter of 1803-4. Its headquarters were not Newburyport, Salem, or Boston, but Coyle's Rooming House in the District of Columbia. Its principals were neither the Essex clique nor the young Federalists who managed the party affairs in New England, but a motley crew of Federalist Congressmen, including Timothy Pickering, who were not able to win either the confidence or the support of more influential leaders. The movement was suppressed by other Federalists and never effectively revived. With the exception of Pickering, the survivors of the Essex clique were among those who helped to suppress it.[105]

The origins of Pickering's conspiracy, as we shall call it, are external

[103] J. Q. Adams to Quincy, Dec. 4, 1804, in Quincy, *Josiah Quincy*, 64.

[104] Otis to Quincy, n.d., *ibid.*, 242.

[105] Pickering to Cabot, Dec. 29, 1804, Pickering Papers; Plumer, memorandum, May 11, 1829, in William Plumer, Jr., *Life of William Plumer* (Boston, 1857), 298-300. See Turner, *Plumer*, 133-150.

to this essay. Suffice it to say that it was a cumulative result of frustrations felt by many Federalists in Washington. On Christmas Eve of 1803, after the purchase of Louisiana and the beginning of the assault upon the Judiciary, Timothy Pickering began to seek support beyond the walls of his rooming house, sending a feeler to a "dear friend," Richard Peters of Pennsylvania. He suggested the creation of "a new confederacy, exempt from the corrupt and corrupting influence and oppression of the aristocratic Democrats of the South." Pickering was confident that the future was with him: "There will be—and our children at farthest will see it—a separation. The white and black population will mark the boundary." But the response of Judge Peters was a disappointment. Pickering complained that his schemes were "too strong for the latitude of Pennsylvania."[106]

Toward the end of January, Pickering tried again. He dispatched a letter to George Cabot, describing in candor and detail his plans for a "northern confederacy" of New Jersey, New York, New England, and Canada, to be established with the backing of Great Britain. So confident was Pickering of his rectitude that he carefully made copies of his correspondence and preserved them for posterity.[107]

Two weeks later, on February 14, 1804, Cabot carefully composed a reply which, despite its conciliatory tone, was clearly negative. He argued that secession was impracticable for two reasons. First, the disease which Pickering wished to cure, democracy, had already infected New England. Second, assuming that amputation might still be the remedy, a knife was not at hand. "There is no energy in the federal party," he wrote. A few days after the dispatch of this letter, Cabot added in a brief note that Ames, Parsons, and Higginson all agreed with him. Higginson himself wrote, "I have seen your letters to Mr. Cabot and Mr. Lyman on the question of separation, which is a very delicate and important one. Considered in the abstract we all agree there can be no doubt of its being desirable, but of the expediency of attempting it or *discussing it even* at this moment we all very much doubt."[108]

[106] Pickering to Peters, Dec. 24, 1803, to Cabot, Jan. 29, 1804, Pickering Papers.

[107] Pickering to Cabot, Jan. 29, 1804, *ibid.* See also Plumer to Thomas W. Thompson, Feb. 1, to James Sheafe, Feb. 22, to Jedidiah Morse, Mar. 10, 1804, Plumer Papers, Lib. Cong.

[108] Cabot to Pickering, Feb. 14, the same, n.d. [rec. Mar. 9], Ames to Pickering, Apr. 28, Higginson to Pickering, Mar. 17, 1804, Pickering Papers. Henry Adams's

Only one of Pickering's correspondents supported him—Theodore Lyman of Waltham, an acquaintance but not an intimate friend of the Essexmen. And Lyman told Pickering that he was unable to find Federalists who were willing to discuss disunion, much less to endorse it. "There are few among my acquaintances with whom I could on that subject freely converse," he wrote. "There may be more ready than I am aware of, and that are kept back under an impression that they are more singular in their opinion than they really are."[109]

Cabot's and Higginson's letters, which Henry Adams has published, leave the impression that these gentlemen found disunion desirable but unattainable. But a letter which Adams did not publish suggests that their talk of the abstract desirability of secession was an empty concession to Pickering, which softened their refusal to co-operate with him. Ten days after Cabot wrote his first letter to Pickering he sent a confidential note to Rufus King: "An *experiment* has been suggested by some of our friends, to which I object that it is impracticable, and, if practicable, would be ineffectual. The thing proposed is obvious and natural, but it would now be thought too bold, and would be fatal to its advocates as public men; yet the time *may* soon come when it will be demanded by the people of North and East, and then it will unavoidably take place. I am not satisfied that the thing itself is to be desired. My habitual opinions have been always strongly against it; and I do not see, in the present mismanagement, motives for changing my opinion."[110]

With the coming of spring, in 1804, the conspiracy melted away. Pickering's efforts to revive it were invariably unsuccessful, not because the "Essex Junto" was in a state of "inert perversity," but because Federalists such as George Cabot actively sought to keep their wayward friend out of mischief. The Great Embargo, for example, might have sustained the northern confederacy scheme more effectively than the Louisiana Purchase. In October 1808, Cabot wrote to Pickering, "I have seen from several quarters letters expressing apprehensions that a disunion of the States is meditated by the Federalists. Some Federalists have been made to believe that there was a foundation for these insinuations,

version of the Higginson letter, which makes Higginson appear more favorable to secession, is inaccurate. *Documents,* 361-362; Lodge, *Cabot,* 453-454.

[109] Lyman to Pickering, Feb. 29, 1804, Pickering Papers. See the negative response of Sheafe to Plumer, Mar. 7, 1804, Plumer Papers.

[110] Cabot to King, Mar. 12, 1804, in Lodge, *Cabot,* 345.

and the Democrats at the southward are using this story to deter men from acting with the Federalists. I think, therefore, it will be well to pass some very decided resolution on the importance of maintaining the union inviolate under every trial."[111]

The second disunion movement in New England was more substantial and much more dangerous. It was not really a conspiracy in any meaningful sense, but a grass roots movement, a popular upheaval, which began as a response to the economic policies of Jefferson's administrations and ironically flourished best among Jefferson's "chosen people," the yeomanry of the Connecticut Valley.[112] Although this movement began independently of young Federalist leaders in Boston, they saw an opportunity in it, an issue to be turned to partisan advantage. Harrison Gray Otis described their game in a letter to Josiah Quincy: "This temper, you are sensible, must not be extinguished for want of sympathy, nor permitted to burst forth into imprudent excess," he declared. As early as 1808, Otis contemplated a convention in Hartford "for the purpose of providing some mode of relief that may not be *inconsistent with the union of these states.*"[113]

With few exceptions, disunion was never the object of young Federalist leaders in New England. They wished merely to play upon sectional loyalties for political purposes. Party organs in New England—the *Palladium,* the *Courant,* and others—printed many inflammatory pieces but few which were genuinely secessionist.[114]

[111] Cabot to Pickering, Mar. 12, 20, Oct. 5, 1808, Pickering Papers. See Ames to Pickering, Dec. 2, 1805, Pickering to Samuel Putnam, Feb. 4, to Caleb Strong, Oct. 12, 1814, in H. Adams, ed., *Documents,* 391-398; and Morison, *Otis,* II, 10, 88. After 1804 Pickering was *persona non grata* at the "headquarters of good principles." See Cabot to Pickering, Aug. 10, 1808, in Lodge, *Cabot,* 397.

[112] George Gibbs to Wolcott, July 30, 1812, Wolcott Papers, Lib. Cong.; Noah Webster to Daniel Webster, Sept. 6, 1834, Webster Papers, Lib. Cong.; Joseph L. Lyman to Noah Webster, Jan. 15, 1814, Webster Papers, N. Y. Pub. Lib.; Morison, *Otis,* II, 78-109; Edwin C. Rozwenc, "Caleb Strong: The Last of the River Gods," in *The Northampton Book* . . . (Northampton, Mass., 1954), 71. For disunionist sentiment in coastal areas, see Labaree, *Patriots and Partisans,* 154-168; "Who are the Federal Leaders in Bucksport," 1812, Broadsides, Am. Antiq. Soc., Worcester, Mass.; Bentley, *Diary,* III, 352.

[113] Otis to Rutledge, Dec. 15, 1808, Rutledge Papers; Otis to Quincy, Dec. 15, 1808, in Morison, *Otis,* II, 7; but note the more belligerent tone of Harrison Gray Otis to Rutledge, Jan. 3, 1809, Rutledge Papers.

[114] *Connecticut Courant* (Hartford), June 23, 1800; *New England Palladium* (Boston), Nov. 9, 1804; Mar. 28, Sept. 16, Nov. 29, 1808; Aug. 1, 1809; Mar. 29, July 21, Aug. 7, 1812; Sept. 6, 23, 1814.

But the appeal to sectional pride was more successful than its sponsors may have wished. Otis noted in December 1808 that "the spirit of the yeomanry in this state is raising to a point which will require restraint rather than the excitement of those who are supposed to influence and lead them." The initiative passed to the people. The young Federalists suddenly found themselves in the dangerous position of a rider thrown and dragged behind his horse that he had spurred once too often.[115]

The simile is inexact, for the young Federalists never entirely lost control. In 1814 after two years of war, they called the famous meeting at Hartford, and managed to keep a firm grip upon its proceedings. Most of the Essex clique were gone by 1814—Ames, Dana, Jackson, Lowell, Parsons, and Tracy were dead; Goodhue and Higginson were in seclusion. Only four of the old Essexmen still had their wits about them—Pickering, Cabot, Dane, and Thorndike.

Pickering, who favored disunion, opposed the Hartford Convention because he knew that it would "end in smoke."[116] Cabot and Dane, who had "withdrawn from public life," and had not been "in any political situation for many years before," emerged from their retirement in order to attend. There can be no doubt as to their motives. Cabot made clear his position in conversation with Christopher Gore. According to the latter, Cabot "laughed very heartily at his going to Hartford, and says he was prevailed upon to take the journey, merely because they declared an absolute determination, in all men of standing in the community not to go, unless he went, and that a measure of the Sort, was necessary to allay the ferment and prevent a crisis . . . He expressed his unaltered conviction, that the worst of evils would be a dissolution of the Union."[117]

[115] Otis to Rutledge, Dec. 15, 1808, Jan. 3, 1809, Rutledge Papers; Morison, *Otis,* II, 4-6.

[116] In the first month of the War of 1812, Pickering thought he saw a chance to revive his conspiracy. With the support of a young Federalist, John Lowell, Jr., he organized a mass meeting in Essex County and issued a call for a state convention. Nothing happened. All that is known of this episode comes from the testimony of Pickering himself. Whether Pickering was blocked by the Essexmen or the young Federalists, this was the end of his secessionist shenanigans. *New England Palladium,* July 24, 31, Aug. 7, 1812; Pickering to Lowell, Nov. 7, 1814, in Lodge, *Cabot,* 539-541; Pickering to Samuel Putnam, Feb. 4, 1814, Pickering Papers; Morison, *Otis,* II, 87-88.

[117] [Theodore Lyman], *A Short Account of the Hartford Convention . . .* (Boston, 1823), 19; Gore to King, Apr. 11, 1815, in King, *Rufus King,* V, 476. See Pickering to Lowell, Nov. 7, 1814, Pickering Papers.

Dane was dragged out of his study in much the same way. "Do not be afraid," he said to a moderate as he prepared to go to Hartford, "somebody must go to prevent mischief." When he returned to his study, he continued to edit his monumental *Abridgement of American Law,* in which he declared, "As the union of our States, on republican principles throughout the whole, are essential to that union, the author often takes occasion to notice and enforce those principles; and, of course, to select largely from those laws and constitutions best calculated to bind the states together on *federal and republican principles.* He can hardly realize that one sister state in this union ought to view another as a *foreign* state."[118]

The position of the only other Essexman still active in 1814, Israel Thorndike, is problematical. The "Boston rebel," John Lowell, Jr., wrote of the Hartford Convention, "It is to be regretted that we had not chosen two or three such persons as Daniel Sargent, William Sullivan and Colonel Thorndike. I do not know that we have among the delegates a single bold and ardent man." But in April 1814, Thorndike wrote to Otis that, notwithstanding party policy, he was in favor of subscribing to government securities. It is inconceivable that this hardheaded businessman would have wished to invest in a government which he was plotting to destroy. From this fact it would appear that Thorndike, too, was a moderate, and that all of the surviving Essexmen but Pickering were unionists in 1814.[119]

In conclusion, the standard interpretation of the "Essex Junto" is a myth which bears little relation to reality. More specifically, it is three myths rolled into one.

First, the men generally assumed to be the leaders of the Essex Junto were not selfish, pliant timeservers who were consistent only in a steady

[118] Dane, *American Law,* IX, preface. See Lowell to Pickering, Dec. 3, 1814, Pickering Papers; Austin Bryant to William Cullen Bryant, Jan. 25, 1815, in Parke Godwin, *The Life and Works of William Cullen Bryant,* I (New York, 1883), 133; A. C. Hanson to Robert Goodloe Harper, Jan. 13, 1815, Hanson Papers, Hall of Records, Annapolis; John Stanly to William Gaston, Nov. 11, 1814, William Davie to Gaston, Feb. 4, 1815, Gaston Papers, South. Hist. Coll.; and Blackwell P. Robinson, *William R. Davie* (Chapel Hill, 1957), 390. For the mission of Otis, Sullivan, and Perkins to the Capitol, see S. E. Morison, "The Massachusetts Embassy to Washington, 1815," Mass. Hist. Soc., *Procs.,* XLVIII (Boston, 1915), 343-351.

[119] Lowell to Pickering, Dec. 3, 1814, Pickering Papers; Thorndike to Otis, Apr. 23, 1814, Otis Papers. See Forbes, *Thorndike,* 116.

attachment to immediate interests, but reactionary idealists whose careers were shaped by an inflexible attachment to ancient principles in a world of swift and sudden change. The nature of their principles has been generally misunderstood. These eighteenth-century merchants have been confused with nineteenth-century businessmen who lived and worked after the ascendancy of Jefferson and Adam Smith.

Second, although there was an Essex Junto which appears to have dominated the politics of its home county during the 1770's, it did not at any time control Massachusetts, or Massachusetts Federalism. Before 1796, the Essexmen were only a part of a faction which was itself a minority in the state, unable to break the hegemony of Hancock and Samuel Adams. After 1796, the Essexmen were, for the most part, in retirement. A Federalist party was created and controlled by younger men, whose political values and purposes were considerably different.

Third, the Essex Junto was not the dynamic of disunion in New England. Except for the abortive secessionist scheme which Pickering hatched in a Washington boarding house (and which the Essexmen opposed together with other Federalists), New England secessionism was never a conspiracy, in any meaningful sense. It was a popular upheaval, a democratic phenomenon which flourished among the farmers of the Connecticut Valley. The influence of the Essexmen, except Pickering, went into the balance against it. The imagined depravity of the Essex Junto, and the specter of its power, are indeed "conjured phantoms," myths which became realities only because so many statesmen and scholars believed in them.