

The close correspondence between this kind of thinking on international affairs and the progress of the American experiment is clear enough. As the British by their Act of Settlement had guarded against the threat of continental involvement presented by the Hanoverian connection, so the Americans severed their relation with the British crown and thus, presumably, the link with Europe's wars. Having exercised their right of self-determination, the thirteen colonies did in fact remove themselves from the state of nature by federalizing. A measure of popular control over foreign relations was provided, under the Constitution, by the division of responsibility for diplomatic and military matters between an elected executive and an elected legislative. To the advanced thinkers of Europe a removal of commercial barriers and an increase of commercial intercourse seemed highly desirable; to the new nation an expanded commerce was a matter of life and death and a forward commercial policy unavoidable.³

Yet if the broad lines of American practice inevitably followed European precepts, the origins of the new society were in certain respects unique. It had a definite starting point in time: it was born on a Fourth of July, in the latter part of the eighteenth century. The circumstances of its birth were such as to force the thinking of the era deep into the national subconscious; this thinking was validated by the most conclusive of proofs, that of musket and ball. By 1782 an uncompromising theory of politics, universally applicable, had been married to the stubborn fact of military success. The cause of all mankind had produced its sacred texts, its propaganda, and its apostles, and had been sanctified by the blood of martyrs. All this gave to the new nation an origin more akin to those of the great missionary religions than to those of other nations, whose beginnings were lost in the distant past.

The parallel was not unnoticed by contemporaries. In a poem of 1778 celebrating *The Prospect of Peace* which arose with the conclusion of the French Alliance, Joel Barlow compared America's

³ Felix Gilbert, "The English Background of American Isolationism in the Eighteenth Century," 1 *William and Mary Quarterly*, 138-60; *idem*, "The 'New Diplomacy' of the Eighteenth Century," 4 *World Politics*, 1-38; *idem*, *To the Farewell Address* (Princeton, 1961). J. F. Rippy and Angie Debo, "The Historical Background of the American Policy of Isolation," 9 *Smith College Studies in History*, 71-165; P. A. Varg, *Foreign Policies of the Founding Fathers* (Michigan State, 1963), pp. 1-10.

new birth of freedom to the star seen over Bethlehem, and looked forward to the second coming:

So eastern kings shall view th'unclouded day
Rise in the West and streak its golden way:
That signal spoke a Saviour's humble birth,
This speaks his long and glorious reign on earth!⁴

One quite natural result of all this was the growth of an American hagiography and the apotheosis of the revolutionary generation. Another was the development of an enduring confidence in the universal applicability of the fathers' counsel. Americans, someone has said, talk with their nation's founders as if they were still alive. The first years of independence witnessed the development of a body of doctrine which would persist from the period of primitive origination into very different times and circumstances and would provide, for both domestic aspiration and the conduct of foreign affairs, the frame of reference within which subsequent generations of Americans would maneuver in response to the recurrent crises of human existence.

2. *The Prospects of Futurity*

The views of the revolutionary generation have of course been given their due share of attention by later ages, but this attention has been increasingly concentrated on the utterances of the makers of governmental policy. Since the War for Independence was among other things a first step in a continuing effort to escape from the stream of European history, and was followed by neutrality in the French Revolution, by abrogation of the French Alliance, and by efforts to settle problems of neutral rights by novel methods of peaceful coercion, the conclusions which flow from this political approach have inevitably an isolationist bias. As the aim in constitution-making was to insulate the citizen from the enemy within, the power of the state, so in foreign policy it was to insulate him from the threat posed by the great monarchies of Europe. Political isolationism was thus the external counterpart of the Bill of Rights, seeking to limit the capabilities of governments in the interest of the liberties of individuals. This attempt at insulation, it should be noted,

⁴ Joel Barlow, *The Prospect of Peace: A Poetical Composition Delivered in Yale College, at the Public Examination of the Candidates for the Degree of Bachelor of Arts; July 23, 1778* (New Haven, 1778).

was functional rather than geographical in nature, aiming at protection from the arbitrary exercise of European power rather than at separation from Europeans.

But in so undergoverned and underadministered a country, where many of what were elsewhere considered powers of government were reserved to the people, the political texts tell only a part of the story. They do, it is true, point the way toward the desired mixture of national political disentanglement and individual commercial forwardness: to Paine the fact that Europe was America's market for trade made partial connections with particular European countries undesirable; to Washington the great rule of conduct was to extend commercial relations with foreign nations while avoiding political involvement; in the same breath Jefferson called for commerce with all and entangling alliances with none. Clearly, secession from the European political system did not involve secession from the human race. Nevertheless, the revolution of 1776 had gone far beyond the mere gaining of political independence and creation of a successor government: as the inscription on the seal proclaimed, it had inaugurated a new era. In this new dispensation the limitation of the powers of government opened up new areas for individual activity, abroad as well as at home, and minimized the distinction between foreign and domestic affairs. In such circumstances the anticipated relationships between Americans and their fellow men across the seas, if politically negligible, had other far-reaching implications. For evidence as to the nature of these hoped-for relationships one must go beyond the speeches and writings of the statesmen to a consideration of the literary sources of the day.

It was a Scot, not an American, who observed that if he could make a nation's songs he cared not who made her laws, but the Scots, too, had been concerned with problems of alien rule. Sermons as well as songs were important in late-eighteenth-century America, and while the politicians were busy with war-making and constitution-making and lawmaking, poets and preachers were working out the ecumenical meanings of the American experience and charting the course of the "new American Æra." Freer to aspire than those in responsible official position, they could lift their eyes above the day-to-day struggle for survival and discern the mission of America,

The task, for angels great, in early youth
To lead whole nations in the walks of truth,

Shed the bright beams of knowledge on the mind,
For social compact harmonize mankind.⁵

The destiny of America, it appeared, was to lead the way into the future peaceful world of free individuals and federalized states by political innovation, the expansion of commerce, and scientific development.

Just as European believers in the idea of progress, rejecting what had gone before, came to concern themselves increasingly with the prospects of their posterity, so Americans, rebelling against Europe, looked forward to the ages yet to come. Since the history of the past was but that of the crimes and follies of mankind, the history of the future took on increasing meaning. Such anticipations received literary expression as early as 1771 in *The Rising Glory of America*, an epic poem composed by two members of the graduating class of Princeton, Philip Freneau and Hugh Henry Brackenridge. Twelve years later, with revolution accomplished and peace approaching, Ezra Stiles, the president of Yale, embraced the theme in a notable election sermon entitled *The United States Elevated to Glory and Honor*.

Looking back at the development of the American settlements, and in particular at the epochal events of recent years, Stiles saw the present condition of "God's American Israel" as the fulfillment of the vision of Noah and the realization of Deuteronomy 26:19: "to make thee high above all nations which he hath made, in praise, and in name, and in honour; and that thou mayest be an holy people unto the Lord thy God." Looking to the future, he foresaw a population growing to fill the continent, and a society based on liberty, a wide diffusion of property, a purified Christianity, and a democratic polity. On this continent the arts, transplanted from Europe and Asia, would flourish in greater perfection and with augmented luster; from it ships would circle the globe, bringing back the riches of the Indies and "illuminating the world with TRUTH and LIBERTY." Here, in America, lay the future. The world would never be the same again.⁶

This was the authentic American dream. But Stiles was of the older generation, and it was three younger sons of Yale—Timothy

⁵ Joel Barlow, *The Vision of Columbus, A Poem in Nine Books* (Hartford, 1787), p. 204.

⁶ Ezra Stiles, *The United States Elevated to Glory and Honor* (New Haven, 1783), pp. 7, 69.

Dwight of the class of 1769, David Humphreys of the class of 1771, and Joel Barlow of the class of 1778—who were to become pre-eminent among the patriotic visionaries of the first years of independence. All had begun to write before Stiles spoke: as a chaplain in the revolutionary army Dwight had already embodied the vision in his song "Columbia," as had Barlow in his Yale commencement poem on *The Prospect of Peace* and Humphreys in his "Poem on the Happiness of America." And as the years went by, in work after work illumined by their belief that the American Revolution had ushered in a new golden age, the three set forth their hopes for the future of their country and of the world.

Although deeply concerned with the creation of a national literature, these Connecticut Wits were no closet scholars. Counting as they did among their activities the study of divinity and service in the Revolution, commercial ventures and diplomatic missions, the administration of a college, speculation in western lands, and travel throughout the Western world, they came close to epitomizing the experience of their generation. After serving in the Revolution as Washington's military secretary, Humphreys lived out a useful life as diplomat, and as pioneer in efforts to improve American agricultural and industrial techniques. Following a distinguished career in the ministry, Dwight expired in the odor of sanctity as president of Yale, while Barlow, after a notable life on three continents, died on the frozen plains of Poland while on a diplomatic mission for the Madison administration. Like their lives, their politics were diverse; for Humphreys became a firm Federalist and Dwight a fierce one, while Barlow developed into an equally radical democrat. But despite all differences, much remained common to their thought and to their aspirations for their country's future. And if the thinking of such very worldly philosophers seems visionary, it is but the greater testimony to the power of the vision.⁷

So far as the fundamental nature of the "new American Æra" was concerned, it seemed most easily understood when contrasted with all that had gone before. It was of course possible to give credit to the European philosophers who had created the intellectual climate of freedom:

In Europe's realms a school of sages trace
The expanding dawn that waits the Reasoning Race; . . .

⁷ Leon Howard, *The Connecticut Wits* (Chicago, 1943).

Of these the first, the Gallic sages stand,
And urge their king to lift an aiding hand.⁸

"Great Louis" himself could be described as an apostle of self-determination, and praised for espousing "the liberal, universal cause," but the end result of both Gallic thought and Gallic action was to bring into existence a society almost wholly different from that which gave it birth: new as opposed to old, American as opposed to European, commercial not military, virile not decadent, free not slave.

Mark modern Europe with her feudal codes,
Serfs, villains, vassals, nobles, kings, and gods,
All slaves of different grades

Too much of Europe, here transplanted o'er
Nursed feudal feelings on your tented shore,
Brought sable serfs from Afric.⁹

And again,

Ah then, thou favor'd land, thyself rever!
 Look not to Europe for examples just
 Of order, manners, customs, doctrines, laws, . . .
 Thrice wretched lands! where wealth and splendour glow,
 And want, and misery, in dire contrast show; . . .
 There, in sad realms of desolating war,
 Fell Despotism ascends his iron car
 One wide Aceldama the region lies, . . .

See this glad world remote from every foe,
From Europe's mischiefs, and from Europe's woe! . . .
 Here Truth, and Virtue, doom'd no more to roam,
Pilgrims in eastern climes, shall find their home; . . .

See the wide realm in equal shares possess'd!
How few the rich, or poor! How many bless'd!¹⁰

The trouble with Europe, quite simply, was that it had a past. History, as Barlow and the others read it, taught that the Ages of

⁸ Joel Barlow, *The Columbiad, A Poem* (Philadelphia, 1807), vii, lines 13-14, 33-34.

⁹ Barlow, *Columbiad*, viii, lines 377-79, 383-85.

¹⁰ Timothy Dwight, *Greenfield Hill* (New York, 1794), i, lines 233-35; vii, lines 177-78, 287-88, 299, 87-88, 77-78, 126-27. Speaking on the Fourth of July, 1821, J. Q. Adams referred to "that Aceldama, the European world." W. H. Seward, *Life and Public Services of John Quincy Adams* (Auburn, N.Y., 1849), p. 132.

Hierarchy and Chivalry had imposed on that unhappy continent a feudal system and a state church, the one intended to establish order but perverted into a system for the control of power by the idle, the other the most powerful engine of state for the debasement of human nature. These survivals of a Gothic age had successfully perpetuated "the aristocratical principle, that men must be governed by fraud," so that although natural enmity did not exist and no popular offensive war had been waged since the conquest of the Sabines, wars remained an effective part of the machinery for the subjection of the individual. It was the triumph of America to have removed these shackles of tyranny and superstition. The disappearance of "Fell Despotism," the ending of the slavery of degree, the abolition of the established church, would free "the Reasoning Race" and bring science and genius westward to a new and better home. In contrast to the violent history of Europe,

A new creation waits the western shore,
And reason triumphs o'er the pride of power.

If the trouble with Europe was history, in America history would have another chance.¹¹

This removal of the historic restraints on the individual was fundamental. To an age that subscribed to the psychology of Locke and that saw causal connection between elevated foliage and the neck of the amiable giraffe, environment was all. Society itself was the cause of all crimes; the perfectibility of man was a truth of practical and universal importance; the individual was perfectible by education, and "nations are educated like individual infants. They are what they are taught to be."

To Barlow the whole art of politics lay in the substitution of moral for physical force. Evils could be abolished and men restrained from injuring each other by the elimination of the forms through which oppression had historically worked. Institutionally, this presupposed governments founded on the equality of the individual and on free elections. The primary object of such a government was to provide an environment suitable to individual development: by frugality to maintain allegiance and avoid the oppressive engine of the public debt, by improvement of land and water communications to unite dispersed settlements in common enterprise, and by education to ful-

¹¹ Joel Barlow, *Advice to the Privileged Orders* (London and Paris, 1792-93), I, 21-24, 48, 58, 69-70; II, 90-91; *The Prospect of Peace*.

fill the freeman's "right of being taught the management of the power to which he is born." So much would vindicate internal liberty; more was undesirable. As to the precise form that political institutions were to take, this was a matter to be decided by the people immediately concerned: "If the Algerines or the Hindoos were to shake off the yoke of despotism, and adopt ideas of equal liberty, they would that moment be in a condition to frame a better government for themselves, than could be framed for them by the most learned statesmen in the world."

If such an emphasis on self-determination seemed to promise fragmentation, and ran counter to the observable historic tendency toward the development of larger political units, a solution was at hand. This was the principle of federalism, which provided the answer to the administration of vast areas while maintaining the necessary close local connection between the people and their governments. In this, as in the fundamental matter of local government, the American experience lit the way, and when revolution next broke out Barlow urged the French to subdivide their land and federate with the other revolutionary republics in a United States of Europe. For nations, as for individuals, absolute independence was a chimera, but federalizing would make for equity within and for security without. Only with the world organized as a league of peoples would the plans for perpetual peace ever work.

Each land shall imitate, each nation join
The well-based brotherhood, the league divine,
Extend its empire with the circling sun,
And band the peopled globe beneath its federal zone.¹²

Such, in the realm of politics, were the simple universal answers which America offered to the world:

Based on its rock of Right your empire lies,
On walls of wisdom let the fabric rise;
Preserve your principles, their force unfold,
Let nations prove them and let kings behold.
EQUALITY, your first firm-grounded stand;
Then FREE ELECTION; then YOUR FEDERAL BAND;

¹² Joel Barlow, *A Letter to the National Convention of France* (New York, [1793]), pp. 20, 31-53, 55, 58-62; *Letters from Paris* (London, 1800), pp. 41-44, 48-50; *Oration Delivered at Washington, July Fourth, 1809* (Washington, 1809), pp. 6, 9-10; *Columbiad*, IX, lines 701-4.

This holy Triad should forever shine
 The great compendium of all rights divine, . . .
 Till men shall wonder (in these codes inured)
 How wars were made, how tyrants were endured.¹³

This would perhaps take time, yet even Dwight thought it possible that kings would some day "esteem it more desirable to tread the pleasing, beneficial walks of science and justice, than to sacrifice thousands of lives, and millions of treasure, to secure the possession of islands or deserts, designed by Providence as an inheritance for serpents and owls." During the Revolution the successes of Hyder Ali against the British in India had seemed encouraging, while Barlow, at a later date, observing with pleasure that the "honest and industrious" French mobs were working out the answers to the problems that history had inflicted on their country, foresaw further improvement as those "formerly dukes and marquisses are now exalted to farmers, manufacturers, and merchants." Belief in the inevitability of progress was strong, whether in the lay terms of the rationalists or the chiliastic ones of the divines. "It is the tendency of human affairs," wrote Dwight, "to be constantly progressing towards what may be termed natural perfection," and he saw in the American Revolution, which had produced the first consenting government and a society without an established church and friendly to genius, an event directly related to the coming millennium. "Could stupid heathens, or hardened Jews, sit silent and unmoved, under such mighty interpositions as those, by which Providence hath distinguished this land?"¹⁴

Mighty the interpositions surely were; local in significance they certainly were not. Neither believers in reason nor believers in God could conceive of the American Revolution as a revolution for one country only. "America," wrote Humphreys, "after having been concealed for so many ages from the rest of the world, was probably discovered, in the maturity of time, to become the theater for displaying the illustrious designs of Providence, in its dispensations to the human race."

All former empires rose, the work of guilt,
 On conquest, blood, or usurpation built:

¹³ Barlow, *Columbiad*, VIII, lines 395-406.

¹⁴ [Timothy Dwight], *A Sermon, preached at Northampton, on the twenty-eighth of November, 1781* (Hartford, n.d.); Barlow, *Advice*, I, 8n., 47.

But we, taught wisdom by their woes and crimes,
 Fraught with their lore, and born to better times;
 Our constitutions formed on freedom's base,
 Which all the blessings of all lands embrace;
 Embrace humanity's extended cause,
 A world our empire, for a world our laws.¹⁵

The commencement of the "new American Æra" had thus brought a new birth of freedom, and a society founded upon the self-evident truths. A political framework designed to secure the unalienable rights had been erected on freedom's base. "Annuit Coeptis" had been written across the top of the seal in acknowledgment of the mighty interpositions: "He has favored our undertaking." But the dispensation intended for the human race encompassed only the thirteen states, and under the favoring eye of Providence the federal pyramid remained incomplete. Doubtless the tendency of human affairs to progress toward natural perfection had been demonstrated, but there was still some distance to go. It was fortunate that a chief mechanism for this progress had also been provided by the Deity. This mechanism was an expanded commerce.

Timothy Dwight, who did not consider himself a rationalist, thought that the increase of commercial intercourse would expand the mind, lessen prejudice, confer reciprocal benefits, and bring about improved ideas of civil polity. Barlow, who welcomed the label, held that a perfect liberty of commerce was an indubitable right of man. "It has long been the opinion of the Author," he wrote, "that such a state of peace and happiness as is foretold in scripture and commonly called the millennial period, may rationally be expected to be introduced without a miracle." The civilizing of the world was a matter of three principal stages: the population of its various parts, the development of mutual knowledge on the part of the various nations, and the increase of their "imaginary wants . . . in order to inspire a passion for commerce." The progress of discovery indicated that the second stage was nearing completion, and with the opening of the third would come an accelerated progress toward natural perfection: "The spirit of commerce is happily calculated by the Author of wisdom to open an amicable intercourse between all countries, to soften the horrors of war, to enlarge the field of science and specula-

¹⁵ David Humphreys, "Poem on the Future Glory of America," *Miscellaneous Works* (New York, 1804), p. 47; "Poem on the Happiness of America," *ibid.*, p. 30.

tion, and to assimilate the manners, feelings, and languages of all nations."¹⁶

Here was the Physiocratic view of commerce raised to a higher American power, by necessity as well as by inclination. Commercial restriction had been a principal cause of revolutionary agitation. The opening of the ports and the decision for independence had been in large measure forced upon the colonists by the economic paralysis of the winter of 1775-76: only as "Free and Independent States," able to establish commerce and contract alliances, could the colonies hope to acquire the means of resistance. And while independence could be won by war and confirmed by treaty, survival required the speedy development of new relationships with the outer world to replace those lost on departure from the British Empire.

This was more easily said than done, for although philosophers might celebrate the sovereign virtues of commerce, kings were not yet philosophers and the European world still ran on reason of state. Some Americans cherished, with Humphreys, the hope that the costs of independence would be but slight and formal:

Albion! Columbia! soon forget the past! . . .
Let those be friends whom kindred blood allies,
With language, laws', religion's holiest ties!
Yes, mighty Albion! scorning low intrigues,
With young Columbia form commercial leagues.¹⁷

To some in England—to Pitt and Shelburne, Adam Smith and Francis Baring—such views seemed reasonable, but in the end more traditional counsels prevailed. Trade with Britain and her possessions could be had only on British terms, and the West Indies remained closed to American shipping. With other nations, too, commercial treaties came but slowly: the forays of Algerine corsairs inhibited the Mediterranean trade, and with the outbreak of war in Europe in 1793 the Age of Commerce, with its rational institutions as worked out in America, was brought into violent contact with the European powers, survivals of the Ages of Chivalry and Hierarchy. It seemed, indeed, that before commerce could réorder the world in the interests of peace the world had somehow to be reordered in the interests of commerce.

¹⁶ [Dwight], *Sermon preached at Northampton*; Barlow, *Letters from Paris*, I, 9-10; *Vision*, pp. 242-43n.

¹⁷ Humphreys, "Poem on Happiness," *Works*, p. 40.

During the Revolution the prospect of the Armed Neutrality had offered hope:

Europe's pacific powers their counsels join
The laws of trade to settle and define.
The imperial Moscovite around him draws
Each Baltic state to join the righteous cause;
Whose arm'd Neutrality the way prepares
To check the ravages of future wars;
Till by degree the wasting sword shall cease,
And commerce lead to universal peace.¹⁸

But the attempt of 1794 to revive this institution proved abortive in the face of British determination and spreading conflict. The "imperial Moscovite" and the Baltic powers soon had troubles enough of their own, and other means seemed needed to vindicate the "liberal main."

Two obvious, if opposing, courses presented themselves. To Humphreys, who felt that "a defense on the water is our most natural, most necessary, and most efficacious defense," and who as diplomat found himself preoccupied with the problem of the Barbary pirates, naval construction and a campaign to free the Mediterranean seemed the answer.

Where lives the nation, fraught with such resource,
Such vast materials for a naval force?
Where grow so rife, the iron, masts, and spars,
The hemp, the timber, and the daring tars?

With the pirates out of the way the navy would still remain, a useful weapon for the maintenance of neutral rights:

Then should far other pirates rove the main,
To plunder urg'd by sateless lust of gain;
Rise, fathers of our councils! trade protect,
Make warring pow'rs our neutral rights respect;
To vengeance rous'd by many a corsair-crime,
Resume in wrath an attitude sublime;

¹⁸ Barlow, *Columbiad*, VII, lines 101-8. See also his *Poem, Spoken at Yale College, September 12, 1781* (Hartford, 1781); *Vision*, p. 183.

And make, as far as heav'ns dread thunder rolls,
Our naval thunder shake the sea-girt poles.¹⁹

But Barlow, in France, seeing in a navy the "terrible scourge of maritime nations . . . [and] the ruin of every nation that has hitherto adopted it," had other views. Opposed to entering so suicidal a competition, he urged economic reprisal against the European powers by sequestration of debts, together with a thoroughgoing reformation of international law in the interests of the trading neutrals to "vindicate our commercial liberty." America should take the lead in the creation of an international "unarmed neutrality" with authority to inflict commercial punishment for commercial violence and to maintain, by collective economic sanctions, the freedom of the seas.²⁰

The world is no respecter of logic, and both of these courses were adopted by the United States. On the one hand a navy was created; on the other the reform of international law in the interests of the trading neutral became historic American policy. That this apparently fundamental opposition was thus subject to compromise derives from the common presuppositions of the two proposals: both contemplated international rather than unilateral action; both were based on the fundamental assumption that the interests of the inhabitants of the United States were in harmony with the interests of mankind. It was to be a rationalist, not a mercantilist, navy. Its purpose was not to command the seas but to free them. "It is time," wrote Humphreys, the navalist, that "the ocean should be made what heaven intended it, an open highway for all mankind."²¹

In such an intellectual climate, where the abiding realities are the individual and mankind and where commerce is the mediator, the lines between domestic and foreign policy and between private and public action are blurred. As believers in minimum government, the founders were necessarily isolationist in matters concerning the intercourse of states. On the level of the individual, however, and in matters concerning trade, they were fiercely internationalist. America, wrote Barlow, "ought not to have any other political intercourse abroad, but what relates to commerce," but this was a large "but." Reluctant even in the face of dire necessity to conclude a political alliance with France, the Congress had nonetheless been eager

¹⁹ Humphreys, "Thoughts on the Necessity of Maintaining a Navy," *Works*, p. 85; "Poem on Happiness," *ibid.*, p. 41; "Future Glory," *ibid.*, p. 61.

²⁰ Barlow, *Letters from Paris*, pp. 10-15, 23-24, 85-92, 101-16.

²¹ Humphreys, "Thoughts on a Navy," *Works*, p. 88.

to expand commercial relations by treaty. This attitude, made plain in the Plan of 1776 for commercial treaties with foreign powers, was spelled out in the Treaty of Amity and Commerce with France, which John Quincy Adams later described as "the corner stone for all our subsequent transactions of intercourse with foreign nations."²²

Commerce was thus not only the key to the advancement of civilization: in more immediate terms it was essential to the survival of the American experiment. Since the cause of humanity and the national future were both at stake, the propagation of commerce was doubly the duty of Americans. "Awake, Columbians," wrote Humphreys, concluding his "Poem on the Future Glory of the United States,"

Progressive splendors spread o'er ev'ry clime!
Till your blest offspring, countless as the stars,
In open ocean quench the torch of wars:
With God-like aim, in one firm union bind
The common good and int'rest of mankind;
Unbar the gates of commerce for their race,
And build the gen'ral peace on freedom's broadest base.

If this was the aspiration of a visionary, it was the aspiration of one who was also soldier, diplomat, and man of affairs, and other practical men dreamed the same dream. The commissioners of 1785, appointed to negotiate a treaty of commerce with Prussia, saw themselves acting to unite the nations in a peaceful world by the "total emancipation of commerce."²³

Thus far, in its concern with individual freedom, a peaceful world, and the importance of commerce, the American vision was at one with the stream of advanced European thought. Yet there were variations of emphasis. The *philosophes* had concerned themselves principally with the internal perfection of the state; having perfected theirs but finding themselves still economically dependent on the outer world, the Americans placed greater stress on commercial expansion and international order. Equally a result of local conditions was another aspect of the American Enlightenment: the peculiar importance given to the advancement and application of science as a prime means for improving the condition of man.

²² Barlow, *Letters from Paris*, p. 10; Adams to R. C. Anderson, *Writings*, vii, 460; Gilbert, "New Diplomacy," p. 28.

²³ Humphreys, "Future Glory," *Works*, p. 65; Gilbert, "New Diplomacy," p. 31.

A comparison of two leading figures of the age should make this difference clear: as between Voltaire and Franklin there could be little question who was the American. Europeans, for more than a century, had been widely preoccupied with problems of natural philosophy, and this concern had been reflected in the colonies with sufficiently solid results to permit pride in the accomplishments of Franklin, Rittenhouse, Bushnell, and others. But whereas the great European successes had been in theoretical science and in the extension of the new scientific method to political thinking, Americans hungered for the scientific end products which could be employed in social amelioration. The fear that social progress would suffer had led Barlow to regret the effects of the Revolution on "Neglected Science," while Dwight looked forward to the development of new arts and sciences by American genius. On the outposts of Western civilization, where the Americans were engaged in subduing a trackless wilderness, the abstract concerns of European philosophers had been transmuted into a strong preoccupation with better methods for doing the work of the world. The pursuit of happiness cried out for mechanization, for new tools, new weapons, new methods of transportation, and their development presupposed the advancement of

Knowledge, the wise Republic's standing force,
 Subjecting all things, with resistless course; . . .
 See strong invention engines strange devise,
 And ope the mysteries of earth, seas, and skies.

Only let education be provided for science as well as for virtue. Then Franklin and the others would prove but forerunners, and

. . . crowds, around them, join the glorious strife,
 And ease the load that lies on human life.²⁴

Married to a contempt for the lessons of history and to a firm environmentalism, this belief in the omnipotence of applied knowledge early brought forth the American confidence that problems apparently insoluble in human terms could be resolved by reformulation with mechanic aids. This, in a sense, was what had already been done politically through the process of constitution-writing, but the atti-

²⁴ Barlow, *Prospect of Peace; Poem, Spoken at Yale College*. [Dwight], *Sermon preached at Northampton; Greenfield Hill*, vii, lines 403-4, 409-10, 435-36.

tude went beyond politics. Thus Humphreys could envisage West Indian slavery falling victim to the exploitation of the sugar maple,

. . . the dulcet tree

Whose substituted sweets one slave may free.

And Barlow, late in life, despairing of ever eliminating British control of the seas by law or treaty, saw in the submarine invented by Fulton a device that "carried in itself the eventual destruction of naval tyranny," and urged a vigorous development program upon his government.²⁵

In no area was the importance of the application of science to society greater than in the field of transportation. The question of internal improvements, indeed, formed the domestic counterpart to that reformation of international law which would make the open ocean a highway for mankind. To Barlow, roads, bridges, and canals were not only of commercial and economic importance, but "ought likewise to be regarded in a moral and political light." When urging his French friends to establish a United States of Europe, he postulated a general government whose powers were limited to the conduct of external relations and to such defined common causes as roads, canals, and commerce. In his vision of the future, he saw as specific items in that progress "which draws for mutual succour man to man," canals which would cut the isthmuses of Suez and Panama, and would link the Hudson with the Ohio and Lake Superior with the Mackenzie. Dwight too foresaw the days when

. . . public bliss, from public hands, shall flow,
 And patriot works from patriot feelings grow.
 See Appian ways across the New World run! . . .
 See long canals on earth's great convex bend!
 Join unknown realms, and distant oceans blend.²⁶

In America, at least, the importance of improving communications so as to foster commerce and cement the federal structure was indisputable. Inevitably, the surprising omission from the Federal Constitution of any specific power so to contribute to public

²⁵ Humphreys, "Poem on Industry," *Works*, p. 99; Barlow, *Oration*, pp. 13-14; Adrienne Koch, *Power, Morals, and the Founding Fathers* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1961), pp. 128-31.

²⁶ Barlow, *Oration*, p. 7; *Letters from Paris*, pp. 49-50; *Vision*, pp. 246-47; *Columbiad*, x, lines 203-38. Dwight, *Greenfield Hill*, vii, lines 351-53, 355-56.

bliss gave rise to one of the most enduring constitutional controversies in American history. But the poets were wiser than the politicians, and if the frame of government was deficient in this regard, a full appreciation of the importance of technology to the advancement of society shone clearly in contemporary thought. Barlow had dedicated the *Columbiad*, the epic by which he hoped to be remembered, to Robert Fulton, and one can perhaps say that the most meaningful unwritten work in the history of American literature was one which they projected jointly: "The Canal: a Poem on the Application of Physical Science to Political Economy in Four Books."²⁷

As with America's political innovations and the expansion of commerce, the promise of applied science was universal. What America developed, humanity would share. The ingenuity so important to progress at home would help expand commercial contacts abroad, and the export of new techniques would further stimulate the mutually beneficent influence of expanding trade. So Humphreys, in his "Poem on the Happiness of America," would

Bid from the shore a philanthropic band,
The torch of science glowing in their hand,
O'er trackless waves extend their daring toils,
To find and bless a thousand peopled isles.
Not lur'd to blood by domination's lust,
The pride of conquest, or of gold the thirst;
Not armed by impious zeal with burning brands,
To scatter flames and ruin round their strands;
Bid them to wilder'd men new lights impart,
Heav'n's noblest gifts, with every useful art.²⁸

Such were the universal implications of the "new American Æra." Since man was perfectible and environment was all, the rationalist word that had been made flesh in America proclaimed itself to all nations. History, as a later product of the Enlightenment was to observe, was bunk; the dead hand of the past had been exorcised and the future was in the hands of the present. Education, both of men and of nations, could make all new, and America was to be educator to the world. Individual equality and free election, the foundation stones of her society, ensured the rights of man and guaranteed both

²⁷ Howard, *Connecticut Wits*, p. 307.

²⁸ Humphreys, "Poem on Happiness," *Works*, p. 42.

local self-determination and a government which would be servant, not master. The federal principle provided the means to the harmonious cooperation of numerous sovereignties and permitted indefinite growth. Expanding commerce would foster amicable intercourse; advancing science would lighten the burdens of mankind. As the great Secretary of State was later to point out, the Declaration of Independence and the Treaty of Commerce with France, the bases of domestic and foreign policy, were "parts of one and the same system."²⁹ America neither stopped at the water's edge nor pointed solely west.

Many and various were the means by which the gospel would be spread. Kings, as Dwight hoped, might profit by the example and learn to tread the paths of progress. Commerce would assimilate the nations. Neighboring colonies of the Old World powers would find themselves subject to the magnetic American example of liberty, frugality, and happiness. Distant realms would receive the glad tidings as future generations of Americans

In freedom's cause unconquerably bold, . . .
Brave the dread powers, that eastern monarchs boast,
Explore all climes, enlighten every coast;
Till arts and laws, in one great system bind,
By leagues of peace, the labours of mankind.³⁰

Westward expansion and the establishment of the transcontinental republic would speed the work of the Western world,

. . . by heaven designed,
Th' example bright, to renovate mankind.
Soon shall thy sons across the mainland roam;
And claim, on far Pacific shores, their home;
Their rule, religion, manners, arts, convey,
And spread their freedom to the Asian sea
Then to new climes the bliss shall trace its way,
And Tartar deserts hail the rising day;
From the long torpor startled China wake;
Her chains of misery rous'd Peruvia break;
Man link to man, with bosom bosom twine;
And one great bond the house of Adam join.

²⁹ Adams to R. C. Anderson, *Writings*, vii, 460.

³⁰ [Dwight], *Sermon preached at Northampton*. Barlow, *Letters from Paris*, pp. 66, 79-80; *Vision*, p. 146.

For Europe, as compared with startled China, the hopes were less immediately sanguine. On that small continent, covered with the detritus of the Ages of Chivalry and Hierarchy, were powerful and dangerous monarchies certain to resist all change.

Yet there, even there, Columbia's bliss shall spring,
Rous'd from dull sleep, astonished Europe sing, . . .
Thus, thro' all climes, shall Freedom's bliss extend,
The world renew, and death, and bondage, end.

The American vision ends only with a federal world and a liberated humanity, as

The mask of priesthood and the mace of kings,
Lie trampled in the dust.³¹

3. *America and the Outer World*

How far did the posture which Americans actually assumed toward the outer world conform to this body of doctrine?

From the time of the Treaty of Amity and Commerce with France the foreign policy of the government was a commercial one, the fundamental question of independence alone excepted. Commercial treaties with other countries were eagerly sought, following the liberal most-favored-nation principles laid down in the Plan of 1776, and if in Europe these were forthcoming only from the smaller nations, this fact merely confirmed the belief that the great states were managed in the interests of the rulers rather than the ruled. Territorial expansion itself was in great part a function of commerce: the Mississippi question, which led to the purchase of an empire to gain a riverbank, was fundamentally a question of exports and not of land; as the acquisition of New Orleans freed the mouth of the Mississippi, so that of the Floridas opened the exit from the Gulf; the line of the Oregon settlement and the boundary of the Mexican cession were in large measure determined by the geography of the Pacific coast, the location of Pacific harbors, and the promise of Pacific Ocean commerce.

Beyond all this there was at once begun a vigorous effort to generate commerce with the lesser-known parts of the world. In this effort to explore all climes and try all ports, nothing was heard of the

³¹ Dwight, *Greenfield Hill*, II, lines 705-10, 735-40; VII, lines 303-4, 311-12. Barlow, *Columbiad*, x, lines 600-601.

concept of the two spheres, a concept which in any event was more a reflection of contemporary cartographic techniques than of convictions about the nature of the world. More accurately, the earth was conceived of as comprising four principal parts—Europe, Asia, Africa, and America—of which the first, unhappily, had succeeded in extending its dominion in various degrees over the others.³² But this was a dominion which Americans were in no way inclined to concede, least of all in matters of commerce. As American shipping circled the globe, the government moved with it in the establishment of pioneering treaty arrangements, in Barbary and Turkey, in Muscat and Siam, and ultimately to the openings of Japan and Korea.

In practice, therefore, as well as in theory, foreign intercourse remained in large measure an affair of individuals, and the development both of policy and of its instruments conformed to this fact. Ministers, not ambassadors, and as few of these as possible, were dispatched abroad, while emphasis was laid on the expansion of consular representation. The Army was developed as a frontier police and as an engineering force, designed to protect and improve the national estate. The Navy, abjuring the role of makeweight of Europe in America as well as the European rank of admiral, evolved into an institution for the protection of commerce and for the advancement of science through hydrographic work and exploration.

The corollary to the forward commercial policy, and the necessary consequence of a government divested in theory and devoid in practice of the coercive apparatus of the great mercantilist states, was a policy of no political entanglement. This meant, among other things, a policy of no war; for as all but War Hawks, to whom the conquest of Canada was a mere matter of marching, were fully aware, war with great powers was the greatest entanglement of all. So periods of increasing European pressure brought more active efforts at disengagement, as in Jay's Treaty, in the liquidation of the French Alliance, or in Clay's attempts to create an inter-American system as

³² Early-nineteenth-century atlases conventionally showed the world in a stereographic or "globular" projection, with hemispheres dividing at 20°W and 160°E; Mercator worlds, although growing in popularity as the century wore on, were long subordinated to the hemispheric presentation. See, e.g., *Carey's General Atlas* (Philadelphia, 1796); A. Arrowsmith and Lewis, *New and Elegant General Atlas* (Boston, 1805); John Pinkerton, *A Modern Atlas* (Philadelphia, 1818); H. S. Tanner, *A New Universal Atlas* (Philadelphia, 1836). Political reality, as opposed to cartographic convention, emerges in the four-part world described by Hamilton in *Federalist* XI.

counterpoise to the Holy Alliance. So also, when a generation of European warfare made it seem that commerce might prove more the great entangler than the great pacifier, efforts to solve the problem remained chiefly in the commercial realm: economic measures of embargo and nonintercourse and, these failing, commercial warfare carried out both by the Navy of the government and by the citizen's navy, the privateers. Not even when faced with the phenomenon of popular revolution would the government adopt a forward policy. Well-wisher to the freedom of all peoples from the time of Hyder Ali's revolt in India, the United States remained, despite a near approach to a more positive policy in 1823, "vindicator only of her own."³³

With the ending of the great European wars the government returned to its original task of opening the doors for individual enterprise and of securing for its citizens that liberty of commerce which was one of the indisputable rights of man. The American ship of state remained a merchantman, the need for commercial links and for the earnings of the merchant marine remained undiminished, and the forty-five years that followed the Treaty of Ghent witnessed the great age of American shipping. With the ships went individuals, seeking out new trade, selling their technical skills to all in whom "imaginary wants" existed or could be created, as volunteers striking blows for freedom on all continents, and as missionaries carrying the gospel and the healing arts.

It is, of course, always dangerous to impose a structure on the past, but a summary view of the American attitude toward the world may perhaps be hazarded: hope that the dangerous power of the European monarchies might be contained, and in time eroded, by the spread of enlightened ideas and of popular revolution; popular sympathy for and individual assistance to those desirous of throwing off or of resisting the imposition of alien control; efforts to integrate into the liberating network of commerce those non-European societies which, having escaped the heritage of barbarism and religion, were presumed to be more amenable to the counsels of pure reason. The government was to hold back, the individual to go forward, but the responsibility of both was to lead, by example and precept, toward the better world.

³³ J. Q. Adams, Fourth of July Oration, 1821, in Seward, *Life*, p. 132; Gilbert, *Farewell Address*, pp. 68, 71.

To the Shores of Tripoli

1. *The Commerce of the Mediterranean*

THE WORLD on which the Americans looked out from their scattered coastal settlements gave little evidence of justifying the optimism of the patriotic visionaries. Alone of all its civilizations, that of Europe, against which they had just revolted, had harnessed the energy requisite to outward expansion, and although this process had just received its first setback, it was still sufficiently impressive. To the north the new nation was bordered by the territories of the King of England; westward across the Mississippi and southward from the Floridas to the deserts of Patagonia the continent was subject to the King of Spain. If the new American Æra had in fact commenced, it was not to be proven by the American map.

Yet while the powers of the Old World were still dominant in the New, and controlled in addition the Indian subcontinent and many of the isles of the sea, much of the globe remained untouched, hostile or indifferent to the progress of Western civilization. From the Sahara to the Cape, interior Africa remained a mystery. The vast Pacific had just begun to yield its secrets to the explorations of Captain Cook. In the Orient, beyond the Spice Islands, China still slept in satisfied isolation. Except for the Dutch peephole at Nagasaki, Japan was unknown territory. Although the maritime powers of Europe had subjected the Americas from Hudson's Bay to Cape Horn, Europe herself remained small, compressed by the Moslem conquests of centuries before. The Balkans were still the property of the Turkish sultan; the Mediterranean remained a frontier between two civilizations. From the Atlantic to the Isthmus of Suez, the African shore lay in the hands of Moslem potentates, formally if doubtfully subordinate to the Sultan at Constantinople.

If one looked at this world in terms of Barlow's concept of the progress of civilization, it appeared indeed to fit his description. Although its parts were populated, the development of mutual knowledge remained incomplete, while the third stage, the increase of man's imaginary wants in order to develop a passion for trade, had been only very imperfectly begun. In much of Europe these wants